AuntieWork: Protecting the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit of Our Jicarilla Apache Girls

by

Haeyalyn Rae Muniz (*Jicarilla Apache*)

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Dissertation Committee:
Michelle M. Jacob (Yakama), Chair
Leilani Sabzalian (Alutiiq), Core Member
Amanda Tachiné (Diné), Core Member
Lana Lopesi (Sāmoa), Institutional Representative

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Haeyalyn Rae Muniz

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Title: AuntieWork: Protecting the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit of Our Jicarilla Apache Girls

Native American and Indigenous women are a critical component in the lives of Jicarilla Apache girls. Jicarilla Apache mentors provide guidance drawn from real-world experience, Elder teachings, cultural values, and their own aunties. This study examines how Jicarilla Apache women, aka "Aunties," engage in AuntieWork to show up and protect, educate, advocate for, and support Native girls. Six Jicarilla Apache aunties who work for the Jicarilla Apache Nation were selected as participants for their service to youth and the wider community across education, behavioral health, community health, public safety, and law. Using Indigenous Feminist Theory, I highlight the importance of ceremonies, matrilineal systems, spiritual practices that connect us to the natural world, and the reclamation of Jicarilla Apache ways of being, decolonizing, healing, and cultural resurgence. The 'Auntie-Way' offers Auntie-ing as a lived methodology for collecting and analyzing the voices, experiences, and perspectives of Jicarilla Apache women. I use storytelling to collect stories and lived experiences of daily interactions, relationships, struggles, and empowerment through in-depth conversation, placing the experiences of Native women at the heart of the process. These stories and lived experiences of Jicarilla Apache aunties center relationships, advocacy, and action to mentor young girls. Reclaiming the vital role of Native American women within the community can regenerate traditional practices, nurture and support the growth of our youth, carry forward Elder teachings, and re-story the lived experiences of being a Jicarilla Apache female. This study emphasizes the need for mentorship,

healthy relationships, the shared knowledge of our ceremonies, songs, and language, and a mentorship program.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Haeyalyn Rae Muniz

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
University of New Mexico
Washington State University Vancouver

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, Critical and Sociocultural Studies in Education, 2026, University of Oregon
Doctor of Education, Native American Leadership in Education, 2022, University of New Mexico
Business Administration, 2018, University of New Mexico
Human Development, 2012, Washington State University Vancouver
Business Administration, Concentration in Operations Management, 2012, Washington State University Vancouver

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Education Specialist, Jicarilla Apache Department of Education, Jicarilla Apache Nation, 2026-Present

Program Coordinator, Sapsik'^{w}wałá Teacher Education Program, University of Oregon, 2024-2025

Education Specialist, Jicarilla Apache Department of Education, Jicarilla Apache Nation, 2017-2021

PUBLICATIONS:

Journal Articles

Jacob, M. M., Livermore, W. K., Sabzalian, L., Anderson, R., Sutterlict, T. G., **Muniz, H. R.,** &

Beavert, T. V. R. (2025). "You can't cram for this kind of education": Centering Indigenous Elder pedagogy to reclaim respectful and socially just education. *Theory Into Practice*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2025.2453353

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An Intergenerational Indigenous Language Education Case Study: Developing Ichishkíin Teaching Resources Sustains Community Cultural Life. *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 12:42-51.

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lived experiences: Voices from Native women scholars in New Mexico. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2024.2411992

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Belone, D., & Higgins, C. (2020) Storied Sketches: Making Meaning of Culture's Role in Teaching. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 32*(1). pp. 125-137. http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/

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DEDICATION

To my niece, we are blessed with your presence, laughter, love, and spirit.

To my boys, I love you.

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beech'ee: aunt



Photo: Haeyalyn and her niece.

Chapter 1

Aunt-roduction (Khubchandani, 2022)

Native and Indigenous aunties play different roles in our lives. They can teach generations about life, culture, and traditions. The term auntie holds a special meaning among Indigenous people. Our relationships with Native and Indigenous Aunties are a vital part of our lives. They model necessary teachings, listen and hold our secrets, and are fierce protectors. These fierce, strong women inspire us; they laugh and cry with us. Aunties help us find the strength and courage to be our best selves (Jacob, 2020). Exploring the heartwork, activism, teachings, and beauty of Native and Indigenous Aunties creates a way for us to think about kinship, healing, advocacy, love, community, and mentorship. These acts of love, protection, and guidance are "AuntieWork." AuntieWork creates a unique bond between Aunties or Auntie figures and child/ren, teenagers, and adults. These unique bonds are a precious blessing. Indigenous Aunties often step in and show up as a second parent. Sometimes, Indigenous Aunties are not even our Aunties but take us in as family.

The term "Native Auntie" can take on different meanings within and across Indian Country. For this study, "Auntie" is used to describe an individual who provides mentorship, guidance, love, and acts as a protector. Aunties are human, they are good, not so good, and

sometimes complex. They are interconnected with the land, our history, our people, and our community. Pivoting to mentorship as an Indigenous auntie is a critical action for empowering and inspiring young Native girls, women, and Elders. It is essential to understand the importance of becoming a mentor, mentoring, and the action of mentorship, and it is "AuntieWork." Native and Indigenous Aunties come from a long line of strong women and move with matrilineal knowledge shaped by their various experiences and different walks of life. AuntieWork is experience-grounded in the teachings of cultural values and practices from Elders, women, kinship, and community. The genealogy and intimate connections from those Native and Indigenous women in our lives shape our worldview, leadership, identity, stewardship, and motherhood. Lopesi and McDonald (2024) share through their own personal experiences, voices, and actions that genealogical knowledge is grounded in cultural protocols and contexts that are unique to our own ways of life and relational practices. Lopesi's lifework beautifully demonstrates that our history, education, and way of knowing are deeply rooted in underlying protocol and tribal ethics. Traditional teachings on life, emotions, the body, the spirit, and culture are beautiful and empowering. These teachings begin early and are carried out through socialization and interaction with the land through practice. This knowledge and act of doing has been carried forward from generation to generation and strengthens our identity, teaches us ceremonies, and maintains the use of our Native language. As women, these generational teachings are essential. Those who have come before us, our Elders, grandmothers, and aunties, demonstrate social collective learning, storytelling, and transferring oral traditions. These practices teach us about our bodies, ceremonies, relationality, connection to Mother Earth, and the sacredness of the female Native life cycle.

The focus of this study is both critical and personal to me. I am Jicarilla Apache, Llanero. I grew up on the Jicarilla Apache reservation. I am a mother, auntie, and scholar. I have two beautiful Jicarilla Apache sons. My father is Hubert H. Muniz (Jicarilla Apache). I am grateful for his teachings and practices of Jicarilla Apache knowledge, love, compassion, kindness, giving back, respect, relationality, and strength. It is with a deep appreciation that these teachings guide me through this dissertation process.

Dáda (Jicarilla Apache Word for Dad): Thank You

My dad and his teachings are an important part of my life, now more than ever. My dad has a good heart. He has been through a lot and has given my family the strength and support we need to keep moving forward. He grew up on the Jicarilla Apache reservation, is a fluent speaker of the Jicarilla Apache language, and honors the importance of family, having been raised by strong and beautiful Jicarilla Apache women. He is funny, can be very serious, listens when he acts like he is not, and is a storyteller. I call him for advice, to share good news, or if I feel lost or frustrated and need to cry – he has always been there to listen. He is a visionary leader, and throughout his life, he has worked with BIA Forestry as Director of Utilities and served on the Jicarilla Apache Legislative Council. He is grounded relationally, in our Jicarilla Apache ways of land and spirituality. My dad's knowledge and teachings were passed to him from his mother. Now, I watch my dad and his interactions with his sister(s) as they speak Jicarilla Apache to one another and demonstrate respect, unspoken teachings, and love. As I reflect on these relationships and interactions, I draw out the Jicarilla Apache values that guide my work and life: respect, honoring relationships, community, land, helping others and giving back, and the relational and spiritual interconnectedness. It is also worth noting that these teachings and relationships are embedded with acts of kindness, gender balance, harmony, joy,

love, healing, giving, leadership, and wellness, emphasizing the role of Indigenous women, who are vital to the larger values that we, as Native and Indigenous women and people, uphold.

As I have gotten older, I appreciate our time together, including trips to attend basketball or volleyball games for my niece and lunch or dinner with my dad, my niece, and me. If we are not on road trips or attending events, I usually stop by to talk and vent or provide updates on what I have been navigating in life. The father-daughter relationship is growing, and for me, this is healing. While there are times I struggle to make time to stop by and visit, I do try my best to check in on him and update him on what I am doing at work or how my coursework and writing are coming along. The importance of slowing down to enjoy the present moment means more time to have lunch or dinner with him and my niece, more time to go out of town and listen to the stories he shares. I am grateful for the support, encouragement, and love that my dad provides.

Self-Reflection.

I have had to engage in a lot of self-reflection for this topic. Moreover, it was not easy because there were events in my life that resulted in me navigating the world away from home, family, and tribal community; however, as I look back, I realize I was never alone. I always had support systems and relationships that were essential for my growth as a Jicarilla Apache female. I always had friends who became family and community across Indian country. My life, just like that of other Native and Indigenous women, is unique and probably similar to other Native women across generations. Analyzing my own life is never an easy process; however, understanding and leveraging intersectionality and reflexivity can guide us toward mobilization and greater solidarities in social justice (Tachiné et al., 2022). However, it is necessary to understand where I am now and how the support and teachings from different

Native and Indigenous Aunties have shaped my thinking and behavior as a Jicarilla Apache woman. Most notably, it is important to identify those who have supported, cared for, and loved me throughout this life. In doing so, I can carry forward these teachings to help my own people and provide guidance to our Jicarilla Apache girls and women.

While I rarely talk about my biological mother, she and I did not have the best relationship, and there were seldom times in my life when she was present in body and mind to offer positive guidance.

Aunties In My Life

Growing up within the colonial boundaries of the reservation, I learned about human development, health and wellness, motherhood, and my place in the world as a Jicarilla Apache woman from my grandmother, my maternal uncle's wife, and other strong Jicarilla Apache women from my community. From the women within my own family, I did not have Jicarilla Apache Aunties who 'showed up' for me. On a deeper personal level, much of my education and guidance in social-emotional and physical development as a Jicarilla Apache female came from my female cousins, classmates, and best friends. I highlight these relationships because they created a sense of belonging, support, emotional wellness, navigating the world at different stages of my life, and the beauty of being a Jicarilla Apache woman. We were a small class, but we looked out for one another. Together, we survived. We always looked out for one another, ensuring we had a place to stay, keeping each other safe, and simply trying to make it through the day.

Beyond high school and those in my family and my hometown, I have had a strong network of Aunties who have shown up as community aunties, educators, leaders, and Indigenous Aunties from other tribes. Some of these aunties may not see themselves in this light,

but they provide guidance and love as part of our survival and responsibility, not only for me but for generations. Positioning myself in connection with this topic is personal for several reasons. While I did have women in my family teaching me and supporting my growth and development, specific topics were never discussed, such as settler/colonial/hetero-patriarchal violence and oppression that occurs within our communities, healthy relationships, etc. We are not taught to think this way or be aware. Life on the reservation is beautiful and challenging, but when friends and family surround us, many times, we are just living with the land, our community, and our cultural norms. This can look like checking on grandma to see if she needs anything, making sure there is enough firewood for the winter, helping cousins cook for dinner, or sitting with your dad in the living room watching basketball games with your niece and talking about life. While there is so much beauty, strength, and cultural traditions from our communities and people, the hard reality is that the impact of colonization, assimilation, and its violent legacies impacts our daily lives in a multitude of ways. As Native American and Indigenous girls and women, we are targeted, objectified, and have to navigate gendered spaces as a result of hetero-patriarchal colonialism. Our intimate gendered connection to the land and the ongoing legacy of elimination and conquest of colonial ideologies and practices have created an intersection of race, gender, and marginalization.

It has taken some time for me to understand, appreciate, and express gratitude to those Native American and Indigenous Women-Aunties in my life who supported me. My Ph.D. program at the University of Oregon was one of personal growth, unlearning to relearn, connecting with a beautiful and supportive Native and Indigenous community on campus, and fostering relationships that, from day one, were with classmates and are now family. However, more importantly, it is the lived experiences, my one-on-one interactions with Native and

Indigenous faculty and staff who have demonstrated the beauty of mentorship, Native and Indigenous hubs on campus thriving with brilliance, joy, love, and helping one another, sharing Native and Indigenous knowledge and practices filled with ways to reclaim, regenerate, and honor our ways of being, and creating safe spaces where we can all be our authentic selves.

Sometimes, we are taught to be silent regarding the good and the bad. However, silence is harmful in some instances. I can also identify the lack of support, education, and mentorship throughout the lifecycle of being a Jicarilla Apache woman from those in my tribal community. Nevertheless, I was not alone because Native and Indigenous Aunties can show up in different forms, such as a coach, an advisor, a professor, a CEO of a company, a Tribal College President, or a community leader. During my adolescent years, I felt a lack of support, but this meant I had to find my community and Auntie's support. It also provided me with an understanding of what I needed to do to help others – just like those Aunties who gave, no matter what, kind words, a safe place to stay, or welcomed me into a community of Indigenous scholars at a white university. I also had to reflect on the actions of those around me who helped me understand this, even though I didn't realize it at the time. My grandparents were involved in culture and language, always helping and giving back to the community. My dad, who is an important person in my life, provided guidance and support to many. He also influenced those he worked with through positive reinforcement and work mentorship. When I worked at the Utility Authority, many of the workers told me stories of my dad and how he always supported them and was a good leader and supervisor.

A huge shift in my thinking and actions occurred when my niece was born. She is precious, and her energy is beautiful. Her spirit and being are curious, silly, loving, kind, and intuitive, and she is a blessing. Being a Jicarilla Apache Auntie has changed me and softened

my spirit. I am a boy mom who knows football, scooters, baseball, Cub Scouts, bikes, and cars. However, she teaches me how to view the world differently. I am learning daily and try to be as loving, nurturing, and supportive as I can as she grows. We have meaningful conversations about school, her development, success in basketball, tryouts, and volleyball, rifts with besties, and emotional support talks when she is feeling down. I also try to connect her with resources from our hometown, as I cannot be there physically. Because her world is connected to her friends, I try to be as supportive as I can of her relationships, acknowledging that being a Native Auntie is not only about blood because AuntieWork extends beyond that (Lopesi & MacDonald, 2024). Heartwork, support, and mentorship should extend to all Native girls and women. For example, out-of-town trips to Albuquerque with my niece and her friends are always an adventure filled with stories, shared experiences, emotions, silliness and laughter, shopping, and food. These times allow us to talk, share stories, offer advice and guidance, and emphasize who they are as Jicarilla Apache girls.

Today, our young Native girls face complex challenges and are among the most vulnerable populations across the globe. Settler colonialism is ongoing, and it takes on many contemporary forms, violently moving, erasing, harming, and attacking them. As an Auntie, I have become more aware that not much has changed since I was younger (or maybe it has because colonial acts of violence have erased and destroyed so much of our Indigenous experiences, truth, and being)– the legacy of colonialism is ever present and still violently imposed on othered, non-white, LGBTQ2+ bodies (de Finney et al., 2019). With this in mind, there is a need to support and educate young Jicarilla Apache girls holistically. In order to understand how we can educate, support, and protect young Native girls, I decided to focus on Native and Indigenous Aunties and the way they show up for Native

girls. My most recent work with Jicarilla has given me insight into what is needed, resources, and capabilities for the education, support, and protection of Jicarilla Apache girls. Currently, there are limited support systems within my tribal community that provide services, mentorship, health and wellness, and gender and safety education or workshops for Jicarilla Apache girls/youth. I hope that this study will build capacity to foster solidarity and create a starting point (Tachiné et al., 2022) for Indigenous Aunties to act and be present for Native girls and future generations.

Problem Statement

Native American girls and women endure ongoing and intersecting forms of traumatic violence, which is connected to colonial values and ideologies, moving to silence, erasure, and exploitation (de Finney, 2014). The legacy of colonialism continues to impose erasure, racism, violence, and hetero-patriarchy practices. The history of Native American people has been erased and silenced, and dominant voices from the Western world have ensured that we are things of the past and no longer exist. Through forced assimilation, we have lost the teachings of our Jicarilla Apache ancestors and what it means in relation to the social, cultural, and political context of our being and existence, as Jicarilla Apache girls and women. The teachings of ceremonies, our knowledge system, and language and culture are slipping away. It is from our ceremonies, songs, and relationships to the land and all living entities that we know and understand how to live in this world with one another. The impact of colonialism has disrupted the well-being of the individual and the community – disconnecting us from gathering to help one another, giving back and sharing, the transfer of knowledge and teachings, and ensuring a viable, sustainable future.

Background

Many tribes lived with and honored matrilineal systems. Those tribes with patrilineal systems were more egalitarian (Liddell et al., 2021). Native women held positions such as leaders, protectors, and knowledge holders of cultural values. Native women have a rich history within their communities. Before colonization, many tribes were egalitarian with specific gender roles. In addition to being caretakers and gatherers, women were healers and educators. The acknowledgment and honoring of women's roles are essential to the tribe's well-being. Matrilineal tribes traced lineage through the female line of descent. The head of the household and decision-making power was with the women; cultural teachings and practices were passed to daughters, and relationships and social life were centered around the mother's side of the family. However, settler-colonialism has had a significant impact on matrilineal systems. Colonialism and Christian values, Western ideologies, and perspectives on gender roles and societal structures suppressed matrilineal kinship systems. The impact of colonialism and assimilation on Native American individuals and communities was devastating. Healthy family units were torn apart, children were forcefully removed from their families and communities, and Native American and Indigenous women were targets, as they are the ones who create life, nurture, and teach.

Federal Policy and Elimination.

Colonization brought patriarchy and racism that radically transformed the gender roles and experiences of Native American women and reduced their economic and political status. Systems of oppression construct our reality; they shape our experiences and influence the way we interact and categorize one another. Since colonization, the role of Jicarilla Apache women has shifted, and many experience oppression through gender violence, racism, sexism,

and class oppression. Sadly, these very oppressive behaviors and violent practices that destroy our way of life are adopted by many women. The history of imperialism and colonialism is violent. Colonial relationships are racial, gendered, and sexualized. "Gender and sexuality are intrinsic to the colonization of Indigenous people and the promulgation of European modernity by settlers" (Morgensen, 2012, p. 3). Examining the lived experiences of Indigenous girls must focus on those members of sovereign tribal nations that are contained within a colonial state (de Finney, 2010). It is here that we live with everyday social constructs, practices of structural and institutional oppression, and racialized-gendered-sexual violence.

Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy

Colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism are overlapping systems of oppression that exploit and subjugate Native people and land. They work simultaneously, reinforcing economic exploitation, political dominance, and cultural assimilation. The expansion of White society and capitalism across Native Land or 'North America' led to the systematic dispossession and forced removal of Native Americans from their ancestral lands. This expansion was justified by the ideology of "Manifest Destiny" and fueled by the desire to acquire land for economic development and the extraction of natural resources- the growth of white capitalist societies relied on the seizure of Native land. Settlers saw land as private property to be bought, sold, and exploited for profit.

European colonizers imposed patriarchal structures that undermine/d the important status of Native and Indigenous women over their resources, sexuality, and political power. Imposed patriarchal norms, including treaty agreements and ownership of land, were established through Native men. Patriarchy has oppressed Native and Indigenous women in many ways, including undermining matrilineal values, internalizing patriarchal beliefs, gender violence, erasing

Indigenous knowledge systems and their teachings, and the historical oppression of Native women, contributing to social and health disparities.

Gender Violence

"Over the last five centuries, colonization has caused the 'diaspora' or forced dissolution of Indigenous cultures and communities across North America" (Cajete, 2015, p. 57). The loss of community has had devastating effects across generations of Native families and communities. The establishment of tribal nations, tribal governmental structures, and communities is embedded with American ideologies that perpetuate colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism. Arvin et al. (2013) discuss settler colonialism as a still-existing power structure. Settler colonial ideologies and practices continue to erode tribal sovereignty, undermine social resistance, perpetuate oppression, disrupt traditional gender roles, and sustain heteropatriarchy behaviors that perpetuate violence against women and those who are part of the LGBTQ community. "Settler colonialism is a persistent social and political formation in which newcomers/colonizers/settlers come to a place, claim it as their own, and do whatever it takes to disappear the Indigenous people that are there" (Arvin et al., 2013, p. 13). Because settler colonialism is a structure, not an event (Wolfe, 2006), it works simultaneously with other colonial modes of extraction and exploitation; therefore. If we think of this settler colonialism as an event, it creates the illusion that this ongoing violence is in the past. It is a multi-fronted project, not contained in a period of time, impacting Native and Indigenous people in a multitude of ways (Arvin et al., 2013). Strategies of US settler colonialism include genocide, containment, blood quantum, settler claims of indigeneity, eroticism, and justification of violence. These strategies currently impact our people, communities, and tribes by replacing our traditional teaching and practices.

Settler Colonialism is Gendered

Western gender ideals and binaries replaced Indigenous ways of living gender, producing the naturalization of heteropatriarchy. A binary construct of gender was a means of maintaining heteropatriarchal norms, nationalism, and capitalism. These violent forces destroy communities and families by removing kin and eliminating family units, preventing healthy, meaningful relationships, and manifesting through depressive symptoms. Colonization, erasure, and elimination of Native women strengthen patriarchal societies (de Finney, 2015). Colonial violence that Native girls and women experience stems from the colonial invasion of land and space that is rooted in a colonial patriarchal mindset to conquer. These experiences are the effects of colonial systems that are racialized, sexualized, gendered, and classed, which normalized gendered violence and perpetuated dangerous "norms" for Native girls (de Finney, 2015).

Understanding our ways of being and traditional practices are essential to who we are as Indigenous women. My grandma always told me that we carry our Indigenous knowledge and ways of who we are as a people with us from the time we are in the womb. The knowledge and memory of these practices live within us (Lopesi & MacDonald, 2024). We must regenerate these cultural and ceremonial practices, as it is who we are as Native and Indigenous women. Reconnecting with culture and language helps us understand the significance of puberty ceremonies, connect to spirituality and medicine, ancestor knowledge, our connection to the land, and our relationality to the world around us and one another. It is healing.

Purpose and Significance of this Study

In this study, I proposed lived experiences and stories from Jicarilla Apache Aunties as a methodology. According to Kovach (2010), as our world is relational, stories act as active agents,

helping to build knowledge, reveal how colonial legacies and their violence permeate our community, and provide ways for healing.

While the initial intent focused on how Native Aunties show up in the lives of Jicarilla Apache girls, deeper issues have surfaced related to this study. Throughout the course of this study, there is evidence of Jicarilla Apache Aunties advocating, educating, sharing cultural knowledge, and extending a hand to help the girls in our community and families in hopes of helping my own community look inward to help others, which involves cultivating self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation to provide genuine support. Addressing one's own limitations, biases, and need for self-care when projecting personal issues. With the findings With the findings of this study, I hope to inform and ignite action to reflect on our actions, behaviors, and voice. The way we show up for our Jicarilla Apache girls and adolescents will impact them for the rest of their lives. The relationships we form are the lifelines for healthy futures, strengthening identities, transferring knowledge, and giving them a sense of belonging and purpose.

From the time of our creation into existence, Jicarilla Apache people have had ways of understanding the world, and it is through our relationships with the world around us that we learn, grow, reciprocate, nurture, and love – just as the world and nature are cyclical, so is our transitioning of life. Storytelling or narrative is a tool. It is a way to envision other existences outside our current ones; it is a way to dream and create visions of other realities. These experiences and multiple realities of truth help deepen our understanding of decolonization, resistance (Simpson, 2016), and futurity from the perspectives of Jicarilla Apache women.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature: Native American and Indigenous Aunties

In this chapter, I provided a review of the literature on key areas affecting Native American women as role models and mentors: colonialism and assimilation, auntie teachings, the reclamation of cultural and traditional practices, and healing and wellness.

Auntie-ing as a Verb

"*...Auntie-ing has something powerful and important to teach all of us*" (Jacob, 2020, p. 13).

Historical practices have provided a communal, shared responsibility for teaching Native children and youth. Grandmas, aunties, mothers, and extended kin of matrilineal tribes share responsibility for decision-making and the overall well-being of children and families, and play a significant role in the broader community. Native American and Indigenous Aunties have a wealth of intergenerational knowledge. They provide guidance, support, and care for young Native girls to develop a positive cultural identity and self-esteem/confidence and practice healthy lifestyles.

As Native women, we are resilient, share knowledge, embrace one another with love, and actively work to strengthen our people and embody resistance. The aunties who have come before us teach us how to reconnect with our ancestral knowledge, honor the teachings of our Elders, and help us love on the path toward healing. Our aunties, mothers, and grandmas have experienced and survived trauma, many still have the capability to show us love, compassion, and healing and to dream for a better future for ourselves, others, and communities (Minthorn et al., 2021).

Native and Indigenous Aunties are fierce, loving, and protective. Auntie-ing is grounded in powerful teachings that carry lessons embedded with power, love, resistance, and

awesomeness (Jacob, 2020). Aunties provide guidance and a safe place to be free to express emotions only in the way that they can. Our Native Aunties are beautiful and loud and strong; they demonstrate the compassion and strength we need. Regan (2022) discussed the importance of Indigenous aunties and how the seeds of love they plant are nourished by cultural teachings, guidance, resilience, and support for identity. In many instances, Native aunties love and protect just as a mother does.

Impact of Native American and Indigenous Aunties that Show-up

Actions are important. Meaningful engagement is critical and vital to counter historical trauma, systemic inequalities, fostering resiliency, cultural preservation, and strengthening identity among our Native American girls. As adults, we must demonstrate care, compassion, and support beyond words. Investing in the lives of Native youth is investing in our Tribe's future. When we show up well for our young girls, nieces, sisters, and so on, our presence is felt, and the impact can be beautiful. When we fail to show up, the impact can be huge. Native American girls face many challenges, from education to disproportionately high rates of violence, poverty, and poor health outcomes due to systemic inequalities and oppressive structures rooted in colonialism. The intersectionality of discrimination based on gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status creates complex challenges. Being present for our Native American girls is an act of resistance against ongoing forces of genocide, assimilation, and erasure.

Native Aunties can show up for their well-being, education, development, and leadership through culturally grounded programs, activities, mentorship, and caregiving. While each relationship will have its own unique challenges based on the student/girl's needs, our presence and guidance can foster a sense of belonging and connectedness. Investing in the future of our Native American girls demands we “show up” to be involved in their everyday lives. Showing up

is being present. Showing up can look different across Native County. It can mean showing up for school- or sports-related events, during a crisis, for a ceremony, or to help prepare for college.

When I show up for my niece, I notice she is aware of my presence and has my full attention. I can catch a glimpse of a small smile, a side look, or even a glow from her lively spirit. Whether it's for a volleyball game or a moment when she needs to talk to me about stressful events, my presence empowers her and makes her feel supported. Watching her grow and flourish keeps my heart happy, and I will do my best to keep showing up for her. But what What happens if we, as Native Aunties, cannot show up? What happens if we don't have it in us to be the best we can for our young Native girls? Many times, this is a reality, and many times our Native girls do the best they can to survive without us, without guidance, without compassion, and often times feeling unloved. People can only show up to meet you as deeply as they have met and understand themselves.

Native American and Indigenous Women

Native Aunties and their experiences are multifaceted. Native Aunties are human beings shaped by a multitude of rich, varied factors, such as values, cultures, and traditions; social and community connections (or lack thereof); and structural and systemic obstacles; however, it is important to remember that every Native woman's experience is unique. Shawn Wilson (2008) writes about Indigenous psychology, examining how people think, their epistemologies, how these shape their actions, and how they affect their world. Throughout this study and probably part of my work in education, leadership, etc. I am always curious to understand how people make sense of their surroundings and what influences their decisions, especially as we think about the topic of mentorship, empowering, supporting, and protecting our own, our own

families, our Elders, those who are special to us, and our tribal communities.

Understanding human beings is complex. If we look at only the "good and bad," we are simplifying the world and categorizing human nature into two distinct and, many times, opposing aspects such as body and soul, good and evil, or male and female. While this division of two opposing aspects can be explored in various contexts, it can potentially be dangerous, leading to incorrect interpretations and understandings while distorting the complex nature of the human experience, especially that of Native American women.

Beyond the Dichotomy

Simple categorization often deviates from the complexity of being human while creating a belief that everything, even human behavior, can be placed into two categories, suggesting that life is a mere duality. The danger is that it does not create space for complexities, in-betweenness, grayness, beauty, messiness, and paradoxes (Tachine et al., 2022). It also maintains the oppression of Native American people. LaRocque (2010) argues that the "civ/sav" dichotomy is a binary that stems from political and religious views, depicting a superiority of the white-skinned European settler as "civilized," while the Native, who is nomadic and lives off the land, brave and wild, defending their homelands, is viewed as "savage."

Sabzalian (2019) discusses the Civ-Sav dichotomy and goes on to say that the dehumanization of the Native through their portrayal as "savages" was a deliberate strategy used by European colonizers and the U.S. government to justify violence, conquest, and the taking of land, and systemic oppression. Treating Native people as less than human was the pervasive attitude underpinning colonial policies. Seeing Native people as savages or not human made it easier to justify policies of extermination, forced removal, and genocide.

Indigenous knowledge systems include ontology, cosmology, and axiology, and are deeply rooted in holistic worldviews in which everything is interconnected and interdependent. A holistic understanding of the world encompasses values and ethics that guide action and shape how individuals and communities interact with the world around them. Western philosophy, scientific knowledge, and sacred vs. secular occupy privileged spots while Native and Indigenous knowledge systems are considered inferior. Just as our knowledge systems demonstrate relationships with the human and more-than-human, they mirror human thought and behavior by modeling holistic relationships, as we are integral components of a larger living ecosystem. These systems mirror human social structures through principles of respect, reciprocity, relationality, responsibility, and kinship, emphasizing community collaboration over individualism or competition to ensure collective well-being and environmental sustainability.

Self, Bias, Values, and Perspective

Looking inward is not easy; however, understanding 'self' is important as our biases, perspectives, and values may hinder our ability to show up with kindness, love, and support. And more importantly, unlearning absence, silence, [only] anger, shame, fear, or helplessness, and re-learn discourse and practices of healing, love, being present, trust, and helping one another. Recognizing that many of us move through this world and space with emotions and inherent teachings of settler colonialism often begins with self-awareness (Minthorn et al., 2021). Biases, or prejudice toward or against something, someone, or a group of people, often result from a combination of cognitive, social, environmental, and cultural factors, as well as systemic factors, which emerge as attitudes and beliefs.

A mentor's own values can be a barrier due to personal biases, which may impact their ability to adapt, understand, and meet the needs of our youth, or to show up for youth. They may offer biased guidance, fail to truly listen, or support-empower-care for the Native girl based on their own definition of wellness or success rather than understanding the needs of the student/youth. Harmful behaviors and high rates of victimization among Native American women are primarily rooted in historical trauma, colonization, and systemic issues. As we begin to understand how this impacts us as Native and Indigenous women, we begin to see behaviors such as manipulation, silence, territoriality, bullying, constant yelling, and so on. We must also turn to the values of our own families and the way we relate to one another, as these influence how we interact with others. Community values also play a key role in shaping who we are. Societal norms can curate behaviors, leading to inauthenticity. Becoming meaningful performative behavior often involves sacrificing individuality for societal approval.

While lived experiences are invaluable and rich, complex sources of data, we also need to remember that, yes, our voices and stories are important, but so are the voices of our youth. Embracing vulnerability – admitting biases and uncomfortable truths is critical for mitigating systemic biases and fostering inclusion. "Being vulnerable means to see the humanity in others and oneself and engage in actions that foster an ethic of care" (Nelson, 2021, p. 9).

What shapes our understanding of Native Aunties?

Social constructs of Native Aunties have long been created and shaped by ingrained societal, cultural, and historical factors, which include traditional gender roles, media, education, and family beliefs and practices. Our perceptions are maintained and reinforced by structural, social, and religious influences, often perpetuating stereotypes. These perceptions shape our

reality and our behaviors toward Native women, impacting their roles, identities, and experiences. Stereotypes impact our ability to see beyond the constructed behaviors and an ever-changing reality. In fact, gender stereotypes impact behaviors, decisions, and actions toward that group of people. Social movements and human rights advocates have begun to voice the strengths and beauty of Native American women – challenging stereotypes and perceptions that Indigenous women are inferior, sexually available, easy victims, and other damaging narratives.

Today's stereotypes of Native American women typically manifest as hypersexualized or subservient caricatures in media of pop culture. Common stereotypes include: the Indian princess, the squaw, and the drunken Indian. These harmful stereotypes, specifically the hyper-sexualized 'squaw' or 'Pocahontas, directly fuel high rates of violence, murder, and systemic neglect and invisibility, positioning women as disposable, subhuman, or consenting victims. The impact and lived reality, rooted in colonial violence, are caricatures, a lack of police action, discrimination, increased chances of trafficking, psychological and emotional harm, and Today, we see Native Auntie stereotypes which often depict Native women as 'deadly,' 'loud, laughing, and wearing just big beaded Native earrings. I guess maybe, depending on the generation, you also have those Native Aunties who are stuck in the 70s and 80s, still using their nicknames for everyone, acting young and hip, laughing loudly, and using rez slang like "Yeeeeh" or "Yannah" while shoving the person they are talking with.

While society constructs some stereotypes of Native American Aunties as funny and cool, other stereotypes are harmful for Native American women, for example, portraying them as sexual objects and promiscuous. Harmful stereotypes of Native American women can be dangerous and have real-world consequences, contributing to high rates of violence,

sexualization, objectification, submissiveness, and, in many cases, embody derogatory views such as the “squaw” myth, dirty, or uncivilized.

Containment and Reservation Walls

Colonialism and its colonial borders have impacted Tribes, tribal communities, and families in a multitude of ways. The colonial project aims to eliminate and eradicate the Native through various methods such as US assimilation policies, land dispossession, blood-quantum, Native citizenship, religious convergence, child abductions, and resocialization with the use of Indian boarding schools (Wolf, 2006).

Wolfe (2006) discusses the logic of elimination, in which White settlers invade an area, with the “specific formation of settler societies and the desire to retain that specificity” (p. 401). The elimination then turns inward, strategically through containment. The Native then perpetuates not just violence but elimination, which includes a range of strategies from erasure, dismantling Indigenous knowledge systems, silencing Native languages and cultural practices, and lateral violence. In doing so, the logic of elimination is embedded in the core settler idea of the colony's ongoing operations.

Containment, then, is a core component of settler colonialism, eliminating political and social structures, such as matrilineal and gender-egalitarian systems, and replacing them with patriarchal values, individualistic practices, and surveillance and control. The long-lasting and ongoing impact includes breakdown of relationships and family structures, creating systemic inequalities and oppression, perpetuating intergenerational trauma, and lateral violence.

Hauntings

Tuck and Ree (2012) asked: “But why hauntings?” (p. 643). Well, because pain, hurt, and suffering linger in the place we call home, despite the beautiful land of our home base, it is still a

colonial space and within its borders manifests both the colonial violence and harm, and the honoring of relational practices with Jicarilla Apache presence. The ever-present and often ignored violence against Native women lingers and moves between and throughout generations of Jicarilla Apache.

While this study only focuses and tells certain lived experiences, and moves of untelling of certain parts, I want to highlight the strength of Native women – Jicarilla Apache Aunties - and deeply rooted connection to our epistemologies, ontology and relational practices as Jicarilla Apache women – it is through our ceremonies, spirituality, and matrilineal societies-practices that we unsettle settler colonial relations, strengthen identity, and embrace desire of making and remaking reality and future (Tuck & Ree, 2013). The lived experience of Jicarilla Apache women is unique, read differently, and realities are constantly shifting (Goeman, 2013). Traveling bodies of Jicarilla Apache women are bringing multiple perspectives of Jicarilla Apache families or clans from Mundo, Horse Lake, Hole in the Rock, or Coracus. Some Jicarilla Apache bodies travel with the heaviness and residue of cartographies of dispossession while navigating violence, power struggles, and [in]visibility. War comes in many forms, yet we consistently engage with the oppressive structure, unwillingly and unknowingly, moving across time and space.

"Settler colonialism is the management of those who have been made killable, once and future ghosts—those that had been destroyed, but also those that are generated in every generation" (Tuck & Ree, 2013, p. 642). The lived experiences of Jicarilla Apache bodies are not only shifting and changing, but also creating new outcomes. Intersectionality, thus, shapes us as layered bodies, but have we been taught to ignore, be silent, and actively suppress.

Morrill et al. (2016) explain that "haunting is mattering," meaning that things which are seemingly absent or in the past still have a material presence and significant impact on the present. While Indigenous bodies are impacted by conceptualization and material constructions (Goeman, 2013; Laws, 1997), both settler colonial spaces and contained spaces often mirror one another, becoming normative geographies of imagination, forgotten, or erased. Settler colonial ongoing horror is persistent despite its invisibility, but does this process move us toward decolonization as a way to interrupt the settler colonial nation-state and its relations to land, or are we too entangled in resettlement (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Auntie's Teachings Across the Life Cycle

The life span of Native people is impacted by historical and social contexts that shape every aspect of development; these factors "are associated with adolescents' perceived life chances and aspirations and pose culturally specific risk and protective factors" (Whitbeck et al., 2009, p. 12). Creating space and opportunities for Jicarilla/Native girls to generate thoughts of being in relation to land and with the land is an important part of the self. Simpson (2014) describes this thought and 'theory' as "generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice and within each family, community, and generation of people" (p. 7). She explains that Indigenous epistemology is interconnected kinetically with land, culture, community, and relations.

While this study focuses on how Aunties show up for young Native girls, these relationships and interactions of love, protection, healing, and advocacy are reciprocal. This means that our Auntie's health and wellness are centered on the cycle of life in relation to puberty, reproductive and sexual health (Schmitt, n.d.), and safety and self-awareness. Because

Aunties have gone through different stages of life, they can help Native girls understand different life cycle stages, regulate emotions, and maintain wellness, such as:

- Spiritual Wellness and Connectedness. Reclaiming cultural practices and traditions helps us reconnect with the importance of children and how "they carry forward our beliefs, cultures, strengths, and traditions for future generations" (Center for Indigenous Health, n.d.).
- Mental Health Wellness and the Mind. Traditional healing practice involved cultural practices, storytelling, and deep listening centered on "the relationships among emotions, beliefs, and behaviors, and identifying and expressing emotions" (Bigfoot & Schmidt, 2010, p. 850).
- Physical Wellness and the Body. Traditional knowledge and practices of healthy bodies include but are not limited to food, physical activity or movement of the body, rest, and overall knowledge of health throughout the life course (Secatero, 2017).
- Emotional Wellness and Heart. Embracing social-emotional learning allows us to reclaim and relearn how to manage emotions, set positive goals, demonstrate empathy for others, and foster decision-making skills. Reclaiming emotions allows us to draw strength from traditional values and knowledge as we navigate settler colonialism on a path toward healing (Minthorn et al., 2021).
- Safety and awareness of Self. Creating knowledge and critical consciousness about resistance and resurgence requires us to be aware of what is happening and how to maneuver and intentionally refuse creation and assertion in relation to land and community (de Finney, 2015).

Elder Knowledge and Matriarchal Systems

Native Elders embody traditional knowledge and wisdom. Our Elders bring teachings through stories that serve as guides and are embodied in oral traditions, connecting our histories, values, and practices that lead to health and sustainability. Indigenous stories are full of traditions and life experiences, and "are done with a compassionate mind and love for others" (Archibald, 2008, p. 2). This form of knowledge has been passed from one generation to the next. Ancestral knowledge comes with life experiences, kinship, and community. The reawakening of Indigenous matriarchal systems and their power values the role of women and girls with human and more than human relatives. Within these societies, women held multifaceted roles that underscored their vital role, fostering a strong sense of community rooted in close maternal relationships. Matrilineal kinship maintains the balance between women and men, as women are bearers of life, healers, and protectors of Mother Earth. These women were held with great respect and were pivotal for health, strong systems, and communities.

Collective Work of Matriarchs

The work we do calls for love and rage (Flowers, 2015) to come together for the Indigenous love we have for our people and our ways of life; yet rage that is put into a production force for change to create anticolonial projects of resurgence and Indigenous feminist grammar that re-story possible futures. Futures of reclamation and healing through our matrilineal societies and connection to Mother Earth must be at the foundation of our values, beliefs, and cultural practices – part of our everyday lives. Newcomb (1995) states that "restoring a living culture to its rightful place on Mother Earth" and "to restore a people to a spiritual way of life, in sacred relationship with their ancestral lands without external interference" (p. 3). This work calls for the collective work of matriarchs and 'rematriation' because Indigenous feminism

holds a special meaning for Indigenous women, as we are concerned with the sovereignty of bodies and for Indigenous people (Ross, 2009).

Reciprocal Connections and Relationships

Healthy and meaningful relationships are essential for young Jicarilla Apache girls. Relationships are central for connections and Indigenous learning processes and are the cornerstone of Indigenous communities; through these relationships, we understand what it means to be related to place, people, and tribe (Cajete, 2015). Relationships are part of our everyday life; whether it be family, friends, school, or dating, it is crucial to understand the dynamics of healthy relationships as they impact every facet of life. Awareness and understanding of relationship dynamics can help us navigate challenges effectively, create opportunities for empowerment, and demonstrate compassion, kindness, and love in our engagements. Healthy relationships instill concepts and practices of strong boundaries. Establishing boundaries is necessary for safety and wellness; it is also about respecting yourself. Exercising sovereignty of self, body, and relationships allows us to enact self-determination, values, and ethics for our bodies (Simpson, 2017).

Native and Indigenous Auntie Mentorship

Mentoring plays a crucial role in the social, emotional, and physical development, as well as the academic success of Native American youth (nationalmentorshipcenter.org, 2019; Jacob, 2020; Shotton, Oosahwe, Cintrón, 2007; Tachine, 2022). Mentorship is a powerful way to facilitate intergenerational exchange, reclaim cultural values, preserve traditional practices, create new pathways, and heal. A mentor in the life of Native youth is critical for providing guidance and support, and for demonstrating positive examples of being a good relative. Native

adults, particularly Native aunties, influence the lives of their family members through cultural influence, modeled behavior, community engagement, and social responsibility.

Similar but not. Intergenerational teaching and learning can provide meaningful lessons about managing emotions, tribal workforce, navigating different family dynamics, and everyday life experiences. Native Aunties often shape our lives, and sometimes without knowing it, through unspoken words, actions, and behaviors, and sometimes direct communication. All forms of communication shape a child's development in how to understand, express, and interact with the world around them. These forms

Becoming A Mentor

What does it take to become a mentor? How do we approach the topic of becoming mentors through training? Maybe we are mentors or in a mentoring role, and we do not even realize we are influencing the minds and development of the youth we interact with. Mentoring Native youth/girls is holistic, focusing on the spiritual, mental, social, and physical well-being, and is rooted in care, healing, support, and traditional and cultural teachings (Secatero, 2015; Muniz & Montoya, 2024).

Mentors guide and protect us with words of wisdom, speak up for us in times of need, and sometimes help us see our worth, but as adults, we may be in survival mode or not fully ready to confront our own trauma and embark on the healing process. Our actions and behaviors as adults influence and impact those around us. Effective mentoring can improve academic outcomes, health and wellness, interpersonal strengths, and social relationships (mentoring.org/mentoring-impact, n.d.). Native and Indigenous mentorship is often based on respectful and reciprocal relationships (Muniz & Montoya, 2024). Mentorship is a meaningful way to support Native girls in their personal, educational, and social

development. Having a relative who can help with questions for the mind, body, and spirit is good medicine (wernative.org). These relationships recognize one another's sociocultural context and experiences. Healthy relationships can offer a culturally grounded system of support guided by Elders, Aunties, kin, and trusted adults in the community. Often, the women from our communities understand the complexities of being a Jicarilla Apache girl-womxn. These women and Aunties understand our way of life at home in our communities; they embody the same culture, medicine, and strength. Culture is medicine, it is prevention, and it is essential to strengthen the identity of young Native girls.

Beyond the connection to community and kinship is the connection to other Native and Indigenous girls and women (Forsythe, 2023) from other tribal communities. These Aunties can create a network of support and embody crucial advice. Native Aunties are like-minded people with similar experiences to help navigate and overcome challenging situations. Many challenges face our Native girls today, such as violence, cycles of addiction, disrupted families, and intergenerational abuse and trauma. Informed and meaningful mentorship can connect our young Native girls to culture and traditional knowledge that is a protective factor and incorporates vital information about the safety of self, suicide prevention, mental health, sexual health, dating and relationships, bullying, and substance use and abuse (healthynativeyouth.org). Having a trusted Auntie who can help with life, coping skills, coming of age, life transitions, school pressures, and family is vital as young girls transition into adulthood to become leaders, mothers, caretakers, and Aunties for future generations.

Reclaiming Culture, Traditional Practices, and Connection to Land

Historical trauma impacts the health and well-being of Indigenous people; Indigenous youth are experiencing intergenerational historical trauma that stems from the dispossession of

land, cultural loss, and early loss of loved ones (Riley et al., 2022), settler colonialism, and oppressive structures. As we understand the impact of colonialism on land, our people, and our cultural traditions, only then can we work towards reclaiming our traditions and cultural teachings from the land. The natural environment and her teachings nourish Indigenous people; "it is the mind of reality shaping the stories of time and space" (Marker, 2018, p. 1). We must constantly maintain our connection to land which creates wellness, balance, and harmony. These relational practices provide guidance in life, just as we are to maintain our relationship with community and kin (Kovach, 2010).

Embodied practices of 'land as pedagogy' have always been part of our lives as Indigenous people; the disconnect occurred through US federal policy, colonization, assimilation, and settler colonialism. Native and Indigenous intelligence is grounded in community, kinship, and Elders; our teachings model how to interact and engage in deeper meanings of all elements of creation (Simpson, 2017, p. 160). Life's learning journey is grounded in one's intimate relationship with entities beyond the self. "We are the land, and the land is mother to us all" (Allen, 1992, p. 147). Maintaining balance and harmony among humans and non-humans requires transference and acquiring cultural values and knowledge because "codes of behaviour are essential and are embedded in cultural practices" (Archibald, 2008, p. 11).

Native American Women and Girls – Reclaiming Identity

Native American women and girls are strengthening their identity in unique and beautiful ways, such as reclaiming their traditions, sharing and learning their Native languages, fighting for their rights, connecting to Mother Earth, and passing on cultural knowledge through story, ceremony, traditional practices, and leadership. Reclaiming Indigenous identity is a process that

can involve learning about and connecting with one's culture and traditional practices. It also involves actively learning the history of our people and the vital role of women. Auntie-work requires us to actively engage in Indigenous processes to rebalance gender roles through activism, redefine success on our own terms, mobilize for the right to protection and equality, and recover matrilineal societies (Miller, 2020). Auntie-work is an act of resistance and resurgence, drawing on strength and knowledge from our communities and matrilineal societies. In doing so, they position themselves to create change by opening new pathways for young girls and women toward healing and better mental health. Harjo (2019) argues that "everyone carries the power to act" (p. 38) because Native bodies carry ancestral knowledge, memories, encoded language, and culture of people; we embody experiences, strength, and capacities to move toward healing.

Native languages are a vital part of our cultural identity. They connect us to our origin stories, community history, Indigenous philosophy, and ancestor knowledge. Our languages are more than a way to communicate; they are our lifeline to the natural world and are one of many ways to learn and experience culture (Nicholas, 2009). Native languages help reconnect us with our cultures and traditions. Our languages carry the knowledge of the land, provide a deeper understanding of cultural traditions, and require active participation to act, think, and feel Native. Lee (2009) states that the relationship between Native languages and identity is complex. Native youth may recognize the importance of culture and language but may not fully understand the connection between their Native language and their sense of self and identity.

Traditional teachings and the traditions of puberty ceremonies are beautiful and empowering. The stories and teachers from our ancestors are passed from generation to generation. Honoring the teachings of our ancestors, Elders, grandmothers, and aunties through

collective learning, stories, and oral traditions provides a way to share knowledge about our bodies and menstrual cycles. Creation stories teach us that we are connected to the creation of Earth, as we came to be from her. Our connection, knowledge, and strength are then linked to matrilineal ways of being and societies. The teachings of puberty ceremonies are interconnected to cultural practices, language, and community wellness. During these powerful and spiritual times, we honor womanhood and motherhood through the teachings of Mother Earth, just as our mothers and grandmothers have. The beauty of the earth, water, and lakes is the nourishment and strength needed as Native and Indigenous girls and women; her power to create is the bloodline that joins us as one (Simpson, 2011). As our Mother creates and sustains us, she has gifted us the ability to create life, nurture, regenerate, and renew. Understanding our ways of being and traditional practices is essential to who we are as Native and Indigenous women. My grandma always told me that we carry our Indigenous knowledge and ways of who we are as a people with us from the time we are in the womb. From my grandmother's teachings and those before her, we embody a deep sense of responsibility for kinship. This kinship responsibility "relays a culture, an identity, and a sense of belonging essential to my life" (Wilson, 1998, p. 27; Tachiné et al., 2022). The knowledge and memory of these practices live within us.

Forward Thinking - Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit

"It is important that we as Grandmothers, Mothers, and Aunties come together as women to help and support these young women" (Simpson, 2011, p. 36). For many Native women, caretaking and love and support are part of our everyday actions. As Native and Indigenous women, we are responsible for protecting, teaching, and transferring knowledge (joy, love, safety, support) throughout the generations, just as our ancestors did. Many of us are raised with knowledge about the land and how it sustains us. As women, we develop, mature, and transition.

"When our young women understand this, they will understand their seasons, cycles, and moods. They will understand that they are sacred and beautiful. They will understand that they must care for themselves and that they are the mothers to generations yet to be born" (Simpson, 2011, p. 37). Regeneration of new healthy cycles and imagining new futures are embedded in our ways of being and knowing. Our cultural teachings tell us that futures are "not just survival but for thrivance" (Tachiné & Thomas, 2023, p. 46).

Examining ways in which Native and Indigenous Aunties educate and support Native girls and women to live a good life, be safe, love themselves, make good decisions, and create new opportunities for the future is essential, as these are future mothers, leaders, educators, and caretakers. These relationships are undoubtedly interconnected with the wellness of Native families, communities, and tribal nations. Just as our ways of being and knowledge are interconnected, so are how we are cared for, taught/educated, and nurtured. Our minds, bodies, hearts, and spirits need love, guidance, nourishment, and safety to dream, desire, and embody change. Change is possible, but we cannot do it alone. It becomes problematic when you are left alone to navigate the world because the very family or community that is supposed to support you, love you, and nurture you is the one inflicting harm, perpetuating settler colonial violence, and remaining silent on some issues. Mentorship, educators, and AuntieWork are crucial for Native girls who lack the support they need. We must learn to speak up and work in ways that support others – to educate, to love, to show compassion and support, to empower, and to create possibilities and opportunities for the future of our people (Million, 2009). We cannot wait and be silent anymore. Decolonizing praxis is "living as a creative act. Self-determination, consent, kindness, and freedom practiced in all our relationships" (Simpson, 2017, p. 5). Disrupting colonial settler violence and instead living kindness, love, and honoring relationships, "practices

replicated over and over" (Simpson, 2017, p. 5) with new narratives that create hope for our young girls, women, and tribe.

History of Settler Colonialism and Gender Violence

The history of settler colonialism is violent and gendered. Settler colonialism is ongoing and not in the past. I will use the term provided by Arvin et al. (2013) to discuss and examine 'settler colonialism' as a social and political formation where settlers and colonizers come to a place, claim it, take what they want, exploit, and kill the land and the people on it. The matrix of imperialism and settler colonialism is complex. Attempting to disrupt and act unspeakable acts of violence, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and rape, call on us to examine the history of gendered violence.

Indigenous Bodies and Objectification

Indigenous women experience sexual violence and exploitation at disproportionate rates. Examining Indigenous girls – must be focused on those members of sovereign tribal nations that are contained within a colonial state (de Finney, 2010). It is here that we live everyday social constructs, practices of structural and institutional oppression, and racialized-gendered-sexualized violence have become the structured norm. Under colonial rule, Indigenous girls and women have always been constructed as sexual objects (de Finney, 2017). Historically, the colonial project intrinsically linked Indigenous bodies to land, something to be conquered and exploited.

Christian Values and the Unclean Savage Girl

Religious and cultural differences were part of global domination and invasion. "Many traditional tribal gender values and practices have been lost or damaged through assimilation (particularly Christian assimilation)" (Deer, 2015, p. 20). Federal Indian

Boarding Schools' forced assimilation practices resulted in cultural genocide and domesticity of Native girls. A greater emphasis was placed on girls to ensure they would be good wives, keep an orderly home, and prevent them from reverting to their savage ways. (Howerton, 2021; Lomawaima, 1993). Indian boarding schools were established and operated by Christian missionaries. According to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition data (n.d.), the US government did not act independently; in fact, many Indigenous boarding schools were maintained by missionaries whose goal was to assimilate Indigenous children into a Christian American society. "Colonial control over relationships, gender expression, and sexuality was surveilled and monitored through the church, residential and day schools, and Indian agents" (Simpson, 2017, p. 191).

Indian boarding school experiences have had devastating impacts on Native American individuals, families, communities, and tribal nations. Stripping anything of Indigenous culture and identity meant cutting off hair, which symbolizes strength for many tribes – cutting of hair was for ceremonial purposes during mourning, changing their names to reflect more American or Christian, and many names were chosen from the bible – Indigenous names were given during ceremony usually after birth and connects us to our people, our clans, interconnected with our matrilineal societies and genealogy. Cruelty and punishment were a daily occurrence that accompanied strictly controlled environments where Indigenous children were to be obedient and subordinate to male authorities. Indigenous children were physically and sexually abused, put in isolation, and subjected to alienation, humiliation, and violence. Isolating children from family, from support, from nurture, from love – has devastatingly wounded the soul (Smith, 2021) of many Native American children. The term of such traumas that have manifested throughout space and time is known as soul wound, which refers to historical and contemporary

violence, oppression, and discrimination among Native American women (Walters & Simoni, 2002; Duran et al., 1998).

Federal education policies and practices were gendered and motivated by strict sex segregation and by the Victorian "cult of domesticity" (Lomawaima, 1993). "Domesticity training for Indian girls was a clear surface manifestation of the gender-and-race-defined fault lines segregating American society at the turn of the century" (Lomawaima, 1993, p. 227; Howerton, 2021; Devens, 1992). Religious beliefs outside of Indigenous knowledge systems about the body, gender, sexuality, and menstruation differed. Christianity viewed the topic of menstruation as dirty and unclean, and their own values and tenets viewed menstruation as a curse. Christian values, beliefs, and practices were forced upon Indigenous children, creating a place of fear, shame, and silence about being Indigenous, about their own bodies, and their identities. Years of forced assimilation, isolation from family and communities, and colonial violence within Indian boarding schools have resulted in patriarchal-Christian narratives of unclean savages. "The consequences of silencing menstrual narratives and presenting menstruation as 'unclean,' 'an embarrassment,' and in some cases demonic" (Murphy, 2013, p. 64), and a curse which has created hostility, shame, and lost vocabulary and practices for our cultural values and practices as Indigenous women. Christian ideologies and their doctrines are founded on male hierarchies and view women as property. Sadly, these hauntings of violent processes of federal, state, and institutionalized sanctioned (Tachiné & Nicolazzo, 2022) assimilation tactics have moved through the generations. These ideologies and practices are fundamentally racist, gendered, and strategic in the elimination of Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural values, which go against our traditional practices, which are at the heart of our ways of life and being.

Sexual Violence as a Weapon

Sexual violence against Indigenous women and girls has been used as a tool of heteropatriarchy and colonialism in order to control, eliminate, and attack the identity and bodies of Indigenous women and girls. “Gender and sexuality are intrinsic to the colonization of indigenous people and the promulgation of European modernity by settlers…” (Morgensen, 2012, p. 3). Indigenous women experience sexual violence and exploitation at disproportionate rates. According to a 2010 report on Violence against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men, more than half of Native women (56%) have experienced sexual violence (Rosay, 2016). In a 2000 report from the U.S. Department of Justice, it is reported that Native women are 2.5 times more likely to experience rape than other women in the nation. While sexual violence disproportionally affects all women, sexual violence against Indigenous women occurs within the context of settler colonialism.

Gender violence does not affect Indigenous women and men in the same way, this attack is on her identity as a woman and as a Native (Smith, 2005). Under colonial rule, Indigenous girls and women have always been constructed as sexual objects (de Finney, 2017). Historically, the colonial project intrinsically linked Indigenous bodies to land, something to be conquered and exploited. The connection between Indigenous bodies and land, specifically Indigenous women’s bodies is the desire to conquer and obtain-maintain power. Smith and Ross (2004) argue that Indigenous “bodies have become marked as inherently ‘dirty’ through the colonial process. They are then considered sexually violable and ‘rapeable,’ and by extension” (p. 1; Smith, 1999). Native people are not seen as humans, or ‘real’ people. Patriarchy disregards nature and Indigenous bodies as sacred and instead it seeks to control both. This ongoing settler colonial violence has been detrimental for Indigenous women and girls.

Murdered Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)

Violence against Indigenous women and girls is a longstanding issue that has culminated in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). The Murdered Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) crisis is attributed to forced colonialization, historical and intergenerational trauma, racism, and sexual objectification of Indigenous women and girls (A Snapshot, n.d.; Reclaiming Power and Place, n.d.). MMIWG is deeply rooted in colonization and genocide. These violent attacks are not only aimed at Indigenous women and girls, but they are also an ongoing attack on tribal sovereignty by colonial power and structures. This contemporary existential threat to Indigenous people and communities is dangerously rising. However, this is not the only issue presenting a challenge in the fight to protect our Indigenous women and girls.

Colonial Practices that Perpetuate Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls

Root causes for violence against Indigenous women and girls are colonial structures and policies (Reclaiming Power and Place, n.d.). These root causes have resulted in race-based genocide, harmful and violent ideologies of Indigenous women and girls, the Indian Act, the Indian Relocation Act, and residential-Indian boarding schools (nativehope.org, n.d.; Tribal Nations & The United States, n.d.). The dismantling of traditional tribal systems and the forced removal of Indigenous people from their land resulted in many members of tribes becoming isolated from their communities, racialized, and discriminated against. Violent colonial encounters were part of a larger strategy of conquest. These strategies included processes that were intentional to eradicate, replace, and destroy Indigenous people's knowledge systems, while undermining the important role and play of women and girls within these societies.

Relocation and Assimilation

The negative impact of the Indian Relocation Act and U.S. federal policies ripples across generations of Indigenous people. Forced relocation meant Indigenous people were moved to urban areas across the nation. The Indian Relocation Act was created to train Native Americans for vocational schools. The aim was to encourage Native Americans to leave their communities, reservations, and traditional homelands to join the general population and assimilate into mainstream society. As a result, many Native Americans do not reside on tribal reservations; in fact, only 22% of Native Americans live on tribal lands (2010 U.S. Census). The program had devastating long-term effects, such as job and housing discrimination, segregation contributing to poverty and homelessness. These devastating effects, combined with historical intergenerational trauma, have resulted in risk factors stemming from colonial violence and its legacies. These same factors directly contribute to the ongoing crisis of MMIWG. In fact, many Indigenous women who fall victim to predatory behaviors are often discriminated against by society and authorities by being labeled as a dirty Indian, a drunk, or a runaway.

Jurisdiction and Law Enforcement

Jurisdictional barriers affecting social justice and the need for legislation is affected by the complex relationship between the Indigenous tribes and the U.S. federal government. Major factors contributing to the MMIWG crisis are the jurisdictional issues for prosecution and failure to serve and protect by law enforcement agencies. Tribes fundamentally are Nation-states within larger colonial borders. Federally recognized tribes are recognized as Tribal Nations with their own distinct governments to regulate, support health and wellness, and protect the welfare of their own people. The complex political relationship with the U.S. government does have limitations (Reclaiming Power and Place, n.d.), which serve as huge barriers and a lack of legal

protection for the safety of Indigenous women and girls. The U.S. Government has a federal trust responsibility to assist tribes with the health, welfare, and safety of its members. Overwhelmingly, a majority of perpetrators who commit crimes of violence against Indigenous women and girls are non-Indigenous people. According to a 2021 report from the National Congress of American Indian Policy Research Center, ninety-six percent of American Indian/Alaska Native women experience sexual assault at the hands of a non-Native perpetrator. Federal Indian law is a maze of injustice (U.S. Civil Rights Act and Protection of Native Women, n.d.). Perpetrators who committed heinous acts of sexual violence and assault face little consequences for their crimes. The federal government's failure to assist and fulfill its trust responsibility in protecting Indigenous women and girls with limited federal prosecutions of perpetrators (Rosay, 2016). On the ground, the failure of law enforcement authorities to effectively address the ongoing crisis of MMIWG results in under-protection of Native women and how many have been subjugated and abused at the hands of law enforcement officers (Dhillon, 2015). Police violence circulates in various ways and networks within the settler nation-state power structure, which include police brutality, failure to protect Indigenous girls and women, structural inequalities that endanger Native girls and women, and ill-conceived policies at the tribal level, state, and federal levels. The primary role of law enforcement is to respond and protect through unbiased, professional investigations; failure to do so leads to silence and, in some cases, a failed police response (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2022).

Silent Crisis

Knowing that colonization is a structure means we must account for these events as part of an ongoing issue of violence, which is "all created under the same destructive logic" (Reclaiming Power and Place, n.d., p. 233). These structures at play are still-existing structures

that target Indigenous women and girls. Violence against Indigenous women and girls is contained under the settler colonial imaginary- and "the absence of adequate response to MMIWG cases is rooted in systemic, institutional failures" (Walker and Foley, n.d.), which brings awareness to this crisis, the need to change federal laws and policies, holding Law Enforcement Agencies and other governmental agencies accountable. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the murder rates for American Indian and Alaska Native women living on tribal reservations are more than ten times the national average (Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis, n.d.; Bachman et al., 2008). This crisis affects Indigenous women and girls both on and off the reservation. The lack of representative and meaningful data has made it difficult to track the rates of violence on reservations and in urban areas. Accurate data doesn't exist and is directly associated with a misunderstanding of the ongoing MMIWG crisis and a lack of attention, thereby perpetuating silence and erasure. With little to no data and media attention, the silent crisis remains silent and creates a false perception that violence against Indigenous women and girls is not an issue. Media is a powerful tool for communication and plays a large role in facilitating racial, class, and gender ideologies (Louie, 2017; Jiwani, 2006). The lack of attention and media coverage on the MMIWG crisis is a direct result of racial relations, socioeconomic status, systemic racism, and biases.

MMIWG Data Crisis

According to the Indian Urban Native Health Institute, there were 5,712 reports of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls, while only 116 of them were logged into the Department of Justice database. In the midst of this ongoing crisis, there is a lack of clear, concise data from government agencies. There is currently no comprehensive database at the state and federal level specifically designed to collect data on MMIWG. The lack of

awareness, failed responses of law enforcement agencies, lack of priority and accountability, policing, and the ongoing colonial violence are major factors in the ongoing MMIWG crisis (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2022).

Healing, Cultural Resurgence, and Wellbeing

The murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls is an ongoing crisis against Indigenous women and girls. It is one of most alarming and horrific aspects of violence committed against Indigenous women and girls. The long-standing crisis of MMIWG is a result of historical and intergenerational trauma caused by settler colonialism. In a response to MMIWG, grassroots efforts of Indigenous activists, scholars, and communities have begun to unsettle colonial violence and oppressive structures. Community-based efforts call for justice and healing aim to raise awareness that address the lack of response to violence committed against Indigenous women and girls, when a woman-girl go missing, policy development, and collaborate to empower and ignite new ways of learning together. Indigenous activists and leaders have started to create sacred spaces for honoring and remember Indigenous women and girls who have been taken too early. This new connection of engagement allows family members, loved ones, and community to gather and grieve. These community events are organized to create awareness, initiate conversations, and expand involvement. At the center of these community-based events are inclusivity, respect, honoring life, and relational practices that allow organizers to build momentum and continue the fight to protect our Indigenous women and girls.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this study, relationships are the foundational element of all living creations. “Beech'ee” is the Jicarilla Apache word for aunt. In this study, Jicarilla Apache aunties honor and focus on their relationships with those women in our community who have protected them, loved them, shown compassion, and taken the time out to teach - it is the action of doing and being an auntie that demonstrates an epistemology. It is the relationship with a Beech’ee (Jicarilla Apache word for Aunt) that is essential to the individual Jicarilla Apache. These relationships are essential to our being as Jicarilla Apache girls, teens, and women. Relationality is important across Indigenous communities – “We could not be without being in relationship with everything that surrounds us and is within us” (Wilson, 2008, p. 112). It is the relationships between human and more-than-human, and the intimate web of connections that move us into being and becoming. The formation of these relationships is essential to continue being Jicarilla Apache.

Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

Indigenous epistemology and ontology highlight the existence of multiple truths. The relationship one has with an object brings reality to life. Then, the aunt-niece relationship becomes reality through intentional, consistent engagement; the bond is lived through shared experiences and communication, involving the co-construction of knowledge, where trust and reciprocal interaction come into being. One can say that it is the relationship, or set of relationships, which is reality. The ongoing creation of an experience in relation to a form, object, or entity is the process of relationships. Reality, then, is in the relationship one has with their truth; therefore, there are multiple truths. Through these relationships, knowledge is transferred and shared.

Wilson (2008) states,

> An Indigenous paradigm comes from the foundational belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, not just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation.

Indigenous epistemology is built on the relationship between things, including our knowledge systems, our relationship with our culture, our language, our understanding of the world, our history, and our spirituality. Indigenous ontology is the ongoing process of relationships that create our multiple truths and realities. As Jicarilla Apache, our creation, cosmos, knowledge system, ceremonies, songs, and worldview are relational. Our reality is our relationships.

Relationality

Existence is understood and brought into existence by connection to all elements – land, water, sky, animals, plants, people, and more than human. Our own Jicarilla Apache language has more verbs than nouns; it is the act of doing or the actions of the thing or object. The object or thing then is not named, but it is described in a way that informs us about what it is doing or what it is used for.

I remember having several conversations with my grandmother about her role in creating our Jicarilla Apache dictionary. Our relationship was love and comfort. She was my go-to, my comfort, and always there to teach me. I would ask her what the word for this is in Jicarilla. She often got quiet, and you could see her thinking. Her reply was the same for many of these questions. She would tell me that we don't have a word for that in Jicarilla. We talk about what we are doing when we are working with the thing, or if we are creating, moving, or how we work with one another.

Embodied Teachings from Gochoo, Tsoyee, and Dáda (Jicarilla Apache Words for Grandma, Grandpa, and Dad, respectively)

As a Jicarilla Apache woman, my first teachers were my grandparents. Through their everyday teachings, I grew with an understanding of respect for one another, traditional gender roles, and traditional teachings. My grandparents were from the boarding school era, and their resistance allowed them to maintain our Jicarilla Apache language and cultural teachings. My grandmother often shared how her aunt raised and cared for her while she was forced to live in a sanitarium due to contracting tuberculosis as a young girl. While she had a rough childhood and upbringing, she was proud to be Jicarilla Apache and to reflect on the experiences that shaped her into the strong and giving woman she was. She loved being outdoors, embracing all the natural beauty, loved her friends and family, and loved teaching and writing in our Jicarilla Apache language. Grandma was a lifelong learner who taught herself to write in the Jicarilla Apache language and to create language materials. She earned an honorary doctorate in linguistics from the University of New Mexico for creating, with two other Jicarilla Apache women, a large-scale dictionary for the Jicarilla Apache language, titled *Dictionary of Jicarilla Apache Abáachi Mizaa Ilkee' Siijai*. My grandmother was a Jicarilla Apache language teacher, and her lifework demonstrated love, compassion, interconnectedness with the world around us, and a commitment to giving back to our Jicarilla Apache people.

My grandpa was very traditional, despite his choice to remain a member of the Reformed Church. He was very patient and wise, and he loved to help others. He was one of our Jicarilla Apache Elders sent or forced to go to an Indian Boarding School as a child, yet he lived with a good heart. My grandpa worked with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Land Operations for the Jicarilla Apache Nation. His knowledge was rooted in our Jicarilla Apache knowledge system

and ways of being. He worked with leather and whittled wood, and when I moved away from the reservation after graduation, he would call me every other day to talk. My grandfather's actions and knowledge taught me kindness, patience, and the Jicarilla Apache embodied practices of sharing and supporting one another.

I shared a little about my dad early in chapter 1. I want to focus on how his love, guidance, and teachings have helped me throughout my life. Hardship and beautiful experiences are nothing new for us on the reservation. Too often, we encounter negativity and struggle daily. But, with age, gained knowledge, and truly reflecting on what it means to be Jicarilla Apache, I find myself not only understanding the decisions my dad has made throughout his life, his love for family, and his transformative leadership, but I am also grateful he shows up and has never given up. It is necessary to identify and acknowledge the joy, love, and harmony within our everyday lives. My dad is great! It is the laughter, humor, sarcasm, safety, wisdom, and strength that I love about him. It is the unspoken love built on actions, it is the active ongoing caregiving, it is the storytelling of connection to land and those that have come before us, it is the practices of our spiritual ways of existence as Jicarilla Apache, it is a pat on the back and a hug to express how proud he is of whatever goal we reach. The teachings of my dad have shown me how to demonstrate compassion, take meaningful actions to support the tribe as a whole, stay connected to cultural practices and spirituality, and recognize that Indigenous praxis is vital to the individual and the tribe.

The intimate connection among all three people who hold special places in my heart is their lives as Jicarilla Apache, their love, and their dedication to help others. Moving through this world can harden any soul, but some embrace adversity as a source of growth and maintain resilience without cynicism. Grounded in ways of our Jicarilla Apache knowledge system and

practices, have embodied relational practices of kinship, reciprocity, and a shared responsibility between humans and more-than-human relatives; provided relational teachings and guidance to live beautifully as Jicarilla Apache. Their teachings have gifted me with an understanding of the embedded meaning of storytelling, with growth, support, and love, and have helped me see and practice our ways of being Jicarilla Apache. It is my turn to give back and help others. It is my turn to help support our tribal members. I understand it is my responsibility to contribute to the collective with the sustainability and well-being of my tribe (as well as other tribal nations). These teachings and values have always guided me through life, and now as a scholar. I don't look at it as work because culturally, this is what we are supposed to do. If anything, it is heartwork because I love my Jicarilla Apache people. The teachings I have shared here are the basis for my methodology as a scholar. In the sections below, I describe how my work is connected to the broader literature on Indigenous methodologies.

Indigenous Storywork as a Methodology

For this study, I used Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008) as a methodology. I employed the practice of traditional Indigenous storytelling as a research method, collecting and analyzing stories from Jicarilla Apache Aunties to gain insights into cultural knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. Indigenous storytelling is a traditional way of teaching and learning central to Indigenous knowledge systems and cultures. Stories hold knowledge and are active agents of relational practices, pivotal in understanding a phenomenon better (Kovach, 2010). Stories carry responsibility and respect for a cultural learning process, serving as powerful vessels that pass on teachings and practices.

The lived experiences of Jicarilla Apache Aunties and their first-person narratives are political acts that challenge dominant stories and histories. These narratives are crucial for future

generations of Jicarilla Apache girls and women, as they provide a counter-narrative to settler-colonial histories. The lived experiences of Jicarilla Apache Aunties can empower Indigenous women by acknowledging their strength and resilience, reclaiming and regenerating cultural heritage and knowledge, and serving as a source of identity and inspiration, particularly in the context of settler colonialism, historical marginalization, and ongoing issues like violence against Indigenous women.

Indigenous feminist theory and storytelling are interconnected in several ways, including reclaiming stories that decolonize analytical approaches, creating context to analyze complex experiences of gender, race, and culture, and relationality, and the interconnectedness of humans and more-than-humans, used to empower and achieve social justice. This study used and honored an 'In-Relations Methodological' approach (Tachiné & Nicolazzo, 2022) to gain a deeper understanding of becoming, being, and the act of Auntie-ing. Tachiné & Nicolazzo (2022) provide an approach of interconnectedness that pauses, explores, and honors being in relations with one another, just as our knowledge systems, culture and language, traditional practices, land, waterways, and more-than-human beings. The use of 'In-Relations' provides a way to understand and examine interconnected relationships that bring us "closer to the intimacies of relationality and visions of otherwise worlds that create living textiles of past, present and future worlds" (Tachiné & Nicolazzo, 2022, pp. 4-5) of Jicarilla Apache aunties and how they 'show-up' for Jicarilla Apache girls. The heart of this study aims to understand how the work of Native and Indigenous women influences and strengthens the identity and well-being of Jicarilla Apache girls. Jicarilla Apache Auntie-work is essential as it is fluid and transformational. These stories and lessons from Jicarilla Apache Aunties can hold meaning about the world, our relationships – good and bad, laughter, family, and unspoken

trauma and healing. Auntie-ing is always in motion and evolving to create safe spaces, cultivate growth and wisdom, foster and nurture relationships, and ignite action through Indigenous Auntie praxis for social justice. These rich and powerful acts are grounded in strong and healthy relationships, Elder teachings, and traditional cultural values, and through the support and guidance of kin-family-friends-communities – matrilineal systems.

Auntie-ing as a Lived Methodology

This study embraced "Auntie-ing" as a lived methodology (Sherwood & Jacob, 2022). Honoring the work of Dr. Michelle Jacob (2020), The Auntie Way gifts us with a methodology on the importance of "Auntie-ing" as a verb through listening, guiding, and helping. Lived methodology provides a way to emphasize our teachings, Indigenous intelligence, practices, stories, and ethics (Simpson, 2017). Lived methodology prioritizes understanding the direct, personal experiences of individuals, placing the perspectives of those who have 'lived' through specific situations at the heart of the research process. It uses storytelling, drawing on in-depth conversations from semi-structured interviews and participant observation, to capture their knowledge, insights, and meanings. Lived experiences translate into understanding how Auntie-ing looks 'on the ground' in our communities and families, in the workplace, and as part of decolonizing efforts (Jacob, 2020) for pathways to Jicarilla Apache survivance, rebirth, and regeneration. Examining the actions and lives of Jicarilla Apache Aunties requires us to do so through the context of settler colonialism. Negotiating the complex social, political, economic, racialized, and gendered realities of making change is not always an easy linear process. The beautifully woven threads of our ways of being, such as traditional knowledge, cultural values, spirituality, Elder teachings, and so on, not only guide us in certain areas of life but rather emerge

through our daily interactions, our relationships, our heartwork, and are contextualized in the day-to-day life experiences of our people (Cajete, 2005).

"Auntie-ing" then is the reclamation of connection to land, sovereignty, empowerment, and creating social change. Examining the lived experiences of Jicarilla Apache Aunties through their actions and voices through everyday acts of resistance. Auntie-ing in action can be on the front lines, challenging erasure, taking meaningful, responsible actions, and living individually and collaboratively with care and kindness. The narratives and experiences of Jicarilla Apache Aunties help create visibility and highlight the positive influence they have on the lives of young Jicarilla Apache girls. Auntie-ing is a state of being, an action, and a verb. Auntie-ing takes on many forms (Sherwood & Jacob, 2022). For many of us, our aunties showed kindness, provided guidance, and gave unconditional love. These relationships have provided us with the guidance, mentorship, and teachings we need as Native and Indigenous women. Over time, many of us have become aunties, transitioning into that role within our own families, community kinship, and, in some situations, as academic aunties. Thinking with Yakama scholar Michelle Jacob, I will use key values from *The Auntie Way* (Jacob, 2020) as a framework for contextualizing the ongoing life-heart-work of Indigenous women, which aims to decolonize, ignite action, and celebrate lessons of love, healing, and wellness.

Auntie-ing as a Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework provided an understanding of the different realities constructed throughout this study. This framework guides my research questions by providing a structured overview of the relationships, which I then use to develop my study's interview guide, essentially acting as a rez dirt-roadmap that ensures it aligns with Indigenous Feminist

theory and the overall purpose of my study. The key values within this framework helped develop focused and meaningful semi-structured questions and identify the 'relationship' and interconnectedness between each. The framework listed below aligns with my perception of how Aunties show-up for young Native girls to strengthen and improve their identity and well-being:

1. **Kinship:** Kinship is foundational for the overall well-being of Indigenous communities. Strong family relationships are essential for a sense of connection, care, and to counter the transmission of historical trauma. Our kinship is rooted in land and place (Jacob, 2013; Sherwood & Jacob, 2022). We develop a sense of identity, cultural practices, and values through our kinship systems. It is within the family and the larger tribal community that cultural knowledge is taught. Kinship is a system that defines the roles and responsibilities of the family and the tribe. It establishes behavior and how we treat one another and relate to our surroundings.

Family can include immediate family members such as mom, dad, uncles, aunties, or grandparents. Each family is unique. Family and community support are essential for the positive, healthy growth of our young Jicarilla Apache girls throughout their lifespans. Families- extended families- and the larger community are essential for the development of healthy minds, bodies, and spirits. Jicarilla Apache girls need healthy kinship systems. They must also be supported socially, emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

2. **Auntie Love and Kindness:** In our hearts and actions, as Jicarilla Apache aunties, the love we demonstrate looks like many things. It is showing up to basketball and volleyball games to cheer you on. It comforts you as you move through the world, afraid or unsure. Or it is a conversation about the safety of self, fighting with friends, or adolescent growth. Native love is essential for our young Native girls. "NativeLove" encourages

youth to reclaim what healthy love is and empowers them to define healthy relationships for themselves to promote non-violent, respectful, and safe relationships for youth, families, communities, and tribal nations" (niwrc.org/nativelove, n.d.).

Love, however, specifically Native love can take many forms. This love must be voiced, demonstrated, and sometimes – openly discussed and stressed to our youth. It can look like caring for one another, friends and family, love for your reservation, togetherness, kindness, and involvement (Sabzalian, 2019). Native love, as a protective factor in promoting positive youth development, is critical during early adolescence. Love takes different forms and looks like different interactions; it can be an unspoken action from family through teaching, support, or healthy family gatherings. We must also talk about self-love. "Self-love means accepting yourself exactly where you are in life at this moment, with compassion, love, and understanding" (wernative.org, n.d.). Understanding that self-love can be easy to think about, but practicing loving ourselves is not always easy. It means we speak, think, and treat "self" with kindness, respect, and forgiveness, just as we would with our besties. Cultivating the capacity to unlearn colonial violence and reclaim cultural practices, the strength of community, the power of the collective, and Native love.

3. **Indigenous Auntie Praxis:** Praxis, agency, and presence provide foundational elements for Indigenous AuntieWork, focusing on decolonization, social justice, sovereignty, and empowerment. Indigenous Auntie Praxis aims to support young Native girls through action. Auntie-work is a form of Indigenous feminist praxis that is informed by cultural values, love, mentorship, and activism addressing settler colonial violence against Native girls. The love, protection, nurturing, and reclaiming of the power and sacredness of Native girls is at the forefront of Auntie-work. The intersection of colonial power

dynamics, gender constructs, objectification, and erasure has manifested into historical ongoing violent practices like forced assimilation, sexual violence, marginalization, exploitation, and lack of protection.

Native and Indigenous Aunties carry wisdom and experiences that give them firsthand knowledge of how to navigate a sometimes rugged but beautiful world. These strong and beautiful women were once young Native girls trying to survive and grow. This knowledge carries over to restoring safety for Native girls and providing guidance and support during different phases of their lives. Providing culturally sensitive support through meaningful relationships, mentorship, and programs that address their unique needs is crucial. Understanding the importance of communal experiences reclaims traditional cosmologies and epistemologies, providing us with a lens of futurity and a way to create a future that our Native girls want and need. As leaders, educators, and community builders we recognize collective power, the ways we produce knowledge and activate it to serve the needs of our people. Indigenous knowledge is embodied within us and constructed within social relations and Indigenous processes. Indigenous knowledge production is carried within and by the mind, body, and spirit of Native and Indigenous Aunties.

4. **Intergenerational Healing:** Indigenous healing processes should be specific to the needs and experiences of tribes and their communities. Understanding intergenerational trauma requires various approaches such as culturally grounded interventions focusing on the needs and strengths of the community. The importance of insider perspective is directly connected to Indigenous knowledge passed down through generations. History, social, political, economic, and gender intersections provide a basis for understanding how to provide guidance and healing across generations. Native and Indigenous Aunties have a

variety of connections, including connections with the land and water, connection to culture, health, and so on. These connections are essential physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. Reconnecting with cultural values and traditional teachings can help develop a sense of identity and belonging and provide ways to include Indigenous healing practices such as reclaiming ancestral knowledge, practicing ceremonies, Native language learning, reconnecting with land and her teachings.

Restoring relationships with family, community, and tribes is essential in healing and wellness. Elder teachings can help foster intergenerational relationships with Native girls. Key elements central to developing healthy relationships include trust, honesty, respect, and patience. While family dynamics differ, it is important to keep in mind that connection to our cultural values disrupts and restores the legacy of colonial violence and chaos that have disconnected us from honoring family and the need to support one another.

Theoretical Framework

Indigenous feminism centers the strength and beauty of Indigenous women and is an ongoing act of resistance to settler colonialism, patriarchy, colonial violence, and its power relationships (Ross, 2009; Goeman, 2013). Indigenous feminism allows multiple paradigms to coexist (Wilson, 2008) to understand and examine the lived experiences of women in the context of settler colonialism as they relate to heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism (Arvin et al., 2013). For this study, I will used Indigenous feminist theory as a theoretical framework that unsettles and refuses colonialism and colonial Nation states and instead focuses on decolonization and draws on (reconnects, reclaims, rematriates) traditional practices, cultural values, Indigenous knowledge systems – to eradicate gender violence, rebuild foundational ways

of life for Indigenous communities and fight for human rights (Arvin, 2019; Goeman, 2013; Ross, 2009; Trask, 1999).

Using an Indigenous Feminist theory to examine the historical and political context of ongoing settler colonialism as it impacts Native girls and women provides us with a framework, critical analysis, and Indigenous praxis that is grounded in empowerment, sovereignty, self-determination, and the protection of Indigenous women (Saranillio, 2015; Ross, 2009; Stanley, 1984; Trask, 1996; Ogden; 2010). Because "settler colonialism is a historically created system of power that aims to expropriate Indigenous territories and eliminate mode of production in order to replace Indigenous people with settlers who are discursively constituted as superior and thus more deserving over these contested lands and resources" (Saranillio, 2015, p. 248), we must examine the impact and lived experiences of Indigenous women in the context of settler colonialism through tracing and mapping of settler colonialism—past, present, and future. This study and its findings will contribute to the work carried out by Indigenous women scholars.

Questions Guiding this Study

The overarching research questions for this study focus on the importance of Native American and Indigenous women (Aunties). The research questions that guide this study and are the basis for my interview guide are:

- In what ways do Jicarilla Apache Aunties show up to protect and heal the mind, body, and spirit of Jicarilla Apache girls?
    a. How did Jicarilla Apache Aunties show up in your life?
    b. How do Jicarilla Apache Aunties show up to protect young Native girls and disrupt gender violence?

- How have Elder teachings, matrilineal systems, and mentorship influenced their lives and Auntie-work?
- How do Jicarilla Apache Aunties influence new possible futures for generations to come?

Site of Study

The study site for my dissertation was the community of Dulce, New Mexico, located within the reservation boundaries of the Jicarilla Apache Nation. The Jicarilla Apache Nation is located in northern New Mexico near the Colorado border. The landscape of the Jicarilla Apache Nation is beautiful and full of mountains and mesas, where you will find a combination of cattle ranges, small ponds, sagebrush, and valleys of forest filled with aspen, cedar, oak, pinon, and pine trees.

Research Participants

The research participants for this study included multigenerational Jicarilla Apache women (Aunties and self-identifying Aunties) in various fields related to education, behavioral health, language and culture, and mentorship. Each participant's life-heart work directly connects with our young Jicarilla Apache girls' heart, mind, body, and spirit, as all these elements of being are connected and represent well-being. The participants were recruited from the Jicarilla Apache Nation. I selected five to seven participants through purposive sampling, which supports the recruitment and intentional selection (Creswell, 2009) of participants for Auntie-work from various fields of work. I created a recruitment document outlining eligibility criteria, which was to be submitted with my paperwork for IRB approval. This document was used throughout my recruitment efforts until I had five to seven Jicarilla Apache aunties.

Eligibility criteria include:

- Jicarilla Apache member
- Jicarilla Apache woman (or identifies as)
- Works in education, leadership, behavioral health, language and culture, and mentorship
- Age: 18+

After IRB approval, I will begin recruitment of Jicarilla Apache aunties. Upon my first visit and initial introduction, I provided a copy of the recruitment document. During this recruitment conversation, I asked if they had any suggestions for other possible Aunties.

Informed-Consent: Indigenous Ethical Practices and Community Engagement

Before recruiting Jicarilla Apache Aunties for this study, I obtained consent from the Jicarilla Apache Legislative Council through a resolution. Jicarilla Apache President. The approval of my study acknowledged research conducted within the boundaries of the Jicarilla Apache Nation and which included Jicarilla Apache members as participants. This requirement from the university honors the Jicarilla Apache Nation's sovereignty and gives the President authority to monitor or ask questions about research practices within the community. Relationship building and trust (Kovach, 2010) are essential parts of the preparation process before engaging in the research itself, therefore demonstrating by honoring the collection of generational knowledge, stories, and lived experiences.

The tribal resolution was received and was attached with my required documents for the University of Oregon's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Obtaining informed consent should be a requirement even if there is no tribal IRB in place. The initial act of weaving our everyday practices guided by cultural protocol, values, and practices provides guidance and protocol to conduct research in a good [ethical] way.

Commitment to Relational Rigor

Relational rigor guides us throughout the process, before we even begin engaging with current and new relationships, humans, stories, knowledge, and community. Relational rigor is grounded in trust, respect, accountability, consent, and reciprocity (Ahenakew, 2016; 2019; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Kovach, 2010; Mika, n.d.; Tachiné & Nicolazzo). Conducting research in a good way ensures the research is culturally sensitive, respectful of tribal sovereignty, actively involves community members in the design and execution of the study, prioritizes relationships, their voices, and knowledge, and acknowledges the unique cultural context of the Native community involved.

Sharing and Giving Back the Findings from My Study

The findings from this study will be disseminated in several ways. I will meet and share my study and its findings with the Jicarilla Apache Nation's President and Vice President, Legislative Council, and key tribal departments such as the Jicarilla Apache Department of Education, Jicarilla Behavioral Health Department, Department of Youth, and Jicarilla Apache Cultural Affairs. Sharing and giving back are Native and Indigenous ways of life that emphasize relationality, reciprocity, and honoring the collective (Kovah, 2010; Lopez & Tachiné, 2021; Tachiné & Nicolazzo, 2022; Smith, 2021). Sharing is not separate from the process of knowledge production. In fact, to share means to be in community, honoring relationships, story, voice, and action, creating closeness for learning, again and again (Tachiné & Nicolazzo, 2022). Sharing and giving back create space and practice for relationship building (Wilson, 2008), the transmission of knowledge through generations, and the highlighting of the teachings of my own Jicarilla Apache grandparents and father.

Indigenous Women Interviews as Data

The voice, story, and lived experiences of Indigenous women are data. Native and Indigenous women's interviews as data provide culturally grounded experiences, share traditional and cultural knowledge, demonstrate relational practices of accountability, and disrupt the intentional and strategic erasure of Native and Indigenous women in higher education, leadership positions, and scholarship. Within this study, the voices and lived experiences of Indigenous women emphasize the critical role of women in our tribes and communities. These narratives can help expand our understanding of "Auntie-ing" the intimate connections across the generations, and their power and influence in strengthening Native youth identities and wellness. Their stories are responses to a situation, their stories are from bodies filled with emotions, filled with social agency (Million, 2009). "Telling our own story is a way to 'remember to remember' who we are and to honor the special life we have been given. To remember is also a way to re-know and reclaim a part of our lives." (Cajete, 2015, p. 241). Beyond the data – these experiences highlighted the cultural values, beauty, grace, and strength of Jicarilla Apache Aunties.

Methods of Data Collection & Sampling

I conducted audio-recorded one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Jicarilla Apache Aunties for this study. I used audio taping to ensure that each participant's voice, story, laughter, and words are recorded and correctly transcribed. I also kept field notes of my interactions and interviews, which were used to gain insight into cultural practices, collective work, dreams, and aspirations (Kovach, 2009), and other observations made during the research process. These notes were taken on my laptop and on a notepad throughout this study. As this study is situated in a relational approach, field notes were written down and provided 'at the

moment' to provide rich context and understanding, allowing for later analysis and interpretation. Field notes, as a tool for reflexivity, can potentially identify biases or assumptions that might affect my understanding of the situation. As a Jicarilla Apache woman, writing down feelings, emotions, and 'felt' (Million, 2009) impact is crucial when analyzing historical trauma and social injustices. It can help me process the emotional narratives of community members and grasp the lived experiences of women from my tribal community while reflecting on my own positionality. The field notes were stored on my laptop with a strong password, and I only had access.

Sampling

To study the experiences of Jicarilla Apache Aunties, I utilized snowball sampling by initially contacting a few known individuals in the community and then asking them to refer Jicarilla Apache Aunties they knew who may fit the research criteria. I have identified two potential participants whom I contacted to begin with.

Data Collection Process

Using storytelling sessions, I conducted one to two one-on-one semi-structured interviews per Auntie, and I estimate each interview lasted roughly 90 minutes. Each Jicarilla Apache Auntie received an interview guide before our first meeting. The interview guide was shared prior to the first interview, either in person or by email.

One-on-One Semi-structured Interview Process:

1. Contact Jicarilla Apache Aunties in person (at their homes or places of employment) or by phone to schedule the first interview session.
2. I shared the interview guide with each Jicarilla Apache Auntie.

3. The first interview covered formalities of introductions and set and started audio recordings of semi-structured interviews. We scheduled a second interview session at the end of this interview.
4. The second interview was a one-on-one semi-structured interview. Approaching storytelling sessions with care and patience means following the protocol of honoring and maintaining relationships during interviews, rather than just extracting information and moving on. This session also allows further exploration of intersectional complexities, verifying information, addressing potential biases, and editing perspectives that may change.
5. The third interview was optional.
6. The third one-on-one semi-structured interview is optional, respecting the boundaries of the participant. At the end of this interview, I provided an overview of my next steps. I provided each Jicarilla Apache Auntie with the option to receive an emailed copy of the transcribed interviews for their review. The purpose of providing participants with transcripts of their interviews is to verify the accuracy of the recorded conversation, ensure that their words are represented correctly, and allow them to correct any errors or clarify points made during the interviews. This practice provides an opportunity to get to know one another and create a consensual working approach (Lightning, 1992; Tachiné, 2017).

Data Analysis

For my study, I employed an Indigenous data analysis method grounded in cultural context, lived experiences, and stories (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008; Yunkaportra & Moodi, 2021) of the Jicarilla Apache women. This approach facilitated the

exploration of the meaning and significance of Auntie-ing, seeking to describe the phenomena of Jicarilla Apache Auntie experiences of actions, education, advocacy, protection, guidance, and love for our Jicarilla Apache girls. The nuanced Indigenous contexts of Auntie-work provided a communal worldview that highlights empowerment, social justice, strength and beauty, gender violence, and the sovereignty of the body and tribes.

After completing all interviews, I transcribed all audio recordings and identified themes from participant responses to interview questions, bringing to light cultural orientation, subjectivity, a set of values, and multiple traditions of knowledge and ways of being (Smith, 2021). While analyzing participant stories, I identified patterns, themes, and meanings within their experiences that speak to my research questions. Placing Jicarilla Apache Aunties' stories at the heart and center of my analysis disrupts Western research practices and unsettles colonial narratives (Tachine, 2018).

My analysis honors the importance of relationships. Emphasizing relational accountability requires that I examine all relations. This ensures that data analysis and interpretations align with Jicarilla Apache cultural values, knowledge system, and ways of being. The lived experiences and narratives of Jicarilla Apache women
are cyclical and reciprocal relationships of mentorship and nurturing of the next generations. Reciprocal relationships can be cyclical and include many different contexts, such as social interactions, development, traditional practices, and human and more-than-human relationships (Tachiné & Thomas, 2023). My analysis of Auntie-work revealed complex stories and narratives of strength, oppression, and praxis, highlighting decolonization, relationality, and sovereignty as core tenets.

Chapter 4

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork

In this chapter, I will analyze and discuss emerging themes and patterns from the stories and lived experiences collected during Jicarilla Apache interviews. The Jicarilla Apache aunties in this study share memories, stories, and lived experiences of their own aunties, as well as their roles as aunties to young girls. Jicarilla Apache aunties are everywhere: they work at the tribal building, coach, are retired, and greet us as we are out on errands. Jicarilla Apache aunties demonstrate care, compassion, support, and share teachings. Some aunties teach us about the origins and purpose of basket making, how to navigate first-year college, how to listen when there are fights between best friends, and even how to make a ribbon skirt for an upcoming event. On occasion, we have that rugged Native and Indigenous auntie who is the black sheep of the family or seems to have a messy life. But to our youth, we are the perfect auntie regardless, as long as we show up.

The stories of power and wisdom emerged and were shared by Jicarilla Apache women, aka Aunties, who are experts in Auntie-ing. Drawing on my amazing mentor, Dr. Michelle M. Jacob (Yakama), I will use her definition of "The Auntie Way" (2020) to celebrate stories, actions, and love from my own community's Aunties. Jacob writes,

> The Auntie Way is the very best of what I see my Aunties over the years giving to me, to find the strength and courage to be my best self, or at least to try. And the understanding and patience to know it is ok to fail. That failure is part of learning and growing; it expands our ability to love and care, if we allow it (p. 12).

Indigenous feminist theories provide a framework, critical analysis, and Indigenous praxis that are grounded in the empowerment of Indigenous women, sovereignty, self-

determination, and the protection of Indigenous women. In this chapter, I analyze qualitative interview data to describe how the work, lived experiences, and strength of Jicarilla Apache Aunties are intimately connected through genealogy, ceremony, relationality, and regeneration. My research thus contributes to Indigenous feminism's intersectionality and draws from and honors the work, activism, and Indigenous brilliance of Indigenous women scholars such as Mishuana Goeman (2013), Michelle Jacob (2020, 2013), Leanne Simpson (2017, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2011), and Laura Harjo (2019). I analyze how our everyday practices unsettle, resist, decolonize, and heal. The work that Jicarilla Apache aunties do, AuntieWork, is relational, reconnecting and reclaiming traditional practices while honoring the cultural values and knowledge systems of the Jicarilla Apache. To gain a better understanding of our Jicarilla Apache knowledge systems, I turn to our ceremonies, such as the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), which provide insight into how we exist and live in this world. Our creation story, songs, medicine, and traditional practices include and interconnect our being with the natural world around us, honoring relationships & kinships, relationality, being stewards of Mother Earth, sharing and giving back, and community wellness.

Jicarilla Apache Aunties

The Jicarilla Apache women who participated in my study are amazing. Each brings so much energy, love, and wisdom with Jicarilla Apache beauty, intelligence, and action. In this section, I introduce six Jicarilla Apache Aunties. I invited them to participate in my project because they are Jicarilla Apache women who work in the community, serving Jicarilla Apache girls in the areas of education, youth services and programs, advocacy, policy and regulations, safety, legal and regulatory standards, public safety, and wellness.

Participant A

Participant A was surprised when I approached her about participating in my research study. When she isn't smiling, which seems to be a rare thing, she can look like a very serious person. She is a lively spirit. She loves to talk, laugh, and smile. Her energy radiates positivity, which is a wonderful attribute for mentoring young girls. This auntie scheduled our first interview in the evening at her workplace. I remember feeling rushed, and since I had just gotten off work, our interview started on time. I walked into her office and looked around. She had set up our interview, so we faced one another. We sat across from one another with a table between us. It felt very formal. I introduced myself, stated the purpose of my study, and thanked her for taking the time out of her busy day to meet with me. I prepared the audio recorder and reminded her that we could stop at any time and that if she needed me to repeat a question, she should ask. We started with the first questions on the interview guide. She started talking, and she started to smile and laugh as she spoke. I felt the formality fade, and the conversation seemed to flow. I immediately began to identify patterns and themes that emerged as she spoke because she provided a lot of details. She is actually a great storyteller. From her narrative, the first emerging theme was kinship.

Before our first interview began, Participant A seemed enthusiastic about participating in my study. She shared that after reading the interview guide, she was thinking about what to share. After my introduction, I discussed the importance of her stories and experiences. I said, "Bringing forward your voice and your experiences will help me through analysis and support my overarching research questions." Participant A replied,

> When I was reading it, I was making myself think. When I was reading it, and I was cooking and washing dishes, I was like thinking about in my memory, when,

> you know, when I was younger, and all the time that I remember, you know, I mean certain things. And it was like, no one ever asked me that before, but it was good, you know, because sometimes when you don't hear a question, often, that's where sometimes, like how my grandparents always told me, sometimes that opens up a question you don't think about.

We hadn't even started getting into the interview yet, and she was already centering family teachings. This was great!

Participant B

I knew I wanted to recruit Participant B for this study because of her work and achievements. I walked into her office to see how she was doing. During our conversation, I mentioned my study and expressed interest in interviewing her as a participant. She told me to bring the Consent Form next time we visit. I agreed. She contacted me via text and stated she was available to meet; she was busy with other things but could meet regardless. So, I grabbed my backpack, audio recorder, notebook, and pen, and left in a hurry to meet her. It was in the evening and at a neutral meeting place. I walked into the building, and she was meeting with other people. I sat and waited; we all talked and joked about our day. Eventually, the others left, and we sat at a table across from one another.

As we moved into the interview, what stood out to me most was Participant B's honesty and love for her aunt, despite her aunt's imperfections. I asked Participant B, "Think of several aunties in your life, why did they stand out to you, and what did they teach you?" She replied,

> My favorite aunt was Lena (pseudonym). The trauma she carried ran deep, like a wound that never healed. But my aunt was tough — fierce even. There were moments when she became my hero, showing up out of nowhere when I needed

her most. Our talks were private, sacred even, filled with secrets and tears. She taught me that if I had to cry, to cry alone, because alone, nobody could judge me. The love we have for those imperfectly-perfect Jicarilla Apache aunties is beautiful.

Participant C

Participant C is a lifelong friend, and one I consider a best friend. She actually started off as a community Auntie for me. She was a good friend of my mom. She has been present and showed up for me throughout my life for the happy, sad, and joyous times. She works in our community, and in her position, she has been an advocate, teacher, protector, and an empowering presence for youth, both boys and girls. She is a mother, daughter, grandmother, and an Auntie.

Scheduling conflicts due to busy schedules and wearing many hats made it difficult to find time for an interview. Participant C called me while I was at work. She informed me that she had time to meet for an interview between this and that while heading to the tribal building. I scrambled to find my audio recorder and notepad. I quickly checked the battery level of my audio recorder, and it was drained. I remember feeling panicked, but the firefighters at work gave me new batteries. I probably looked frazzled to them as I rummaged through my backpack to get a 'consent form' and my interview guide. She seemed not to pay attention to my messiness. I was excited to finally meet with her. We had scheduled several interviews, but the timing never seemed right. And we kept rescheduling. At last, our interview took place in my vehicle outside my workplace.

I gave my introduction and focus of study, and I informed her that if we can get through as many questions as possible, that would be great, and we can always meet again. She agreed.

During our interview, I began to notice a pattern that highlighted ‘leadership,’ whether it was sharing a story of older aunties’ actions in a way that positioned them as leaders or focusing on the need to provide opportunities for our young girls to become educated, the need for lived experiences for growth, and women's futurity as leaders.

During our interview, I was moved when Participant C mentioned ‘leaders’ as we progressed. It is wonderful to witness our older Jicarilla Apache aunties looking at the future for our Jicarilla Apache girls. I asked her, “So, when you talk about it's been this way for a long time, have there been any new opportunities, or what are the constraints that keep us from working together to empower, protect, and educate young girls?” She replied,

> You need good leaders to understand what's going on in the real world. I'm not saying these leaders don't know, but there are a few that are in question as far as trying to understand what goes on in the real world and coming back and trying to have the tribe prosper in some way. But the young ladies, I feel, need to see outside of the reservation lines.

Experience is key; just as hands-on learning provides a way to attain knowledge we may not have here in our tribal community. Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork can help provide the opportunities our girls need.

Participant D

Participant D is cool, silly, focused, and leads with heart. She is a mother, partner, daughter, and community auntie. I have known her for a long time, and I love her. As an educator and community auntie, Participant D is a great friend of mine and one whom I consider a sister.

When I approached Participant D to recruit her for my study, I texted her to let her know I was outside her program. She came out, and we sat and talked. I hadn't seen her in quite some time, as I had barely arrived back in Dulce, NM. We sat and talked, hopping from topic to topic with five minutes to catch up. Then, I asked her, provided her with my research consent form, explained what my research was about, and she agreed. I was so excited that she agreed. I got her email address and told her I would email her the interview guide before our first interview. We kept trying to coordinate an interview, but due to her busy schedule, we had difficulty setting aside time. At this point, I carried a copy of my research consent form, audio recorder, a small notepad, and a pen in my handbag – ready to go at a moment's notice. Eventually, we met for our first interview. I introduced myself, my research focus, and reminded her that at any time we can talk about a topic if I did not ask and she felt it was important. She is humble. She does not see herself as a mentor, a leader, or beautiful and strong. She is. She is all this and more.

One of the first questions I asked Participant D was: "So, do you consider yourself a native Auntie in that way, in terms of teaching and guiding the youth?" She replied,

> I would like to I'm, I mean, I, I would like to think I am, but also I don't know if I'm doing it justice to be able to call myself one. But like my girls, I'll teach them what I know, but it's not much, and a lot of it is I'm still learning stuff to be able to teach them that, or I'm still seeking it to be able to teach them that.

Too often, our own Jicarilla Apache women do not see their beauty and strength. After our interview, she told me that if I need anything during this time, she is here for me, and that if I have any more questions or need help, I can come to her. Throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing process, she regularly checked in on me, asked how my writing was coming along, and cheered me on. I respected this and accepted her words and sincerity. Jicarilla Apache

women need to support Jicarilla Apache women. Honoring and respecting these relations can then extend beyond and to our youth.

Participant E

I saw Participant E at the Tribal Building while I was dropping off some documents for a purchase order. She was sitting on the couches outside the Jicarilla Apache Legislative Council Chambers. I waved at her, and she waved back. I walked over, and we chatted for a bit, and then I handed her my Interview Guide, explained my study, and asked if she would be interested in participating. She agreed and gave me her contact information. We texted back and forth throughout the day to coordinate an interview date, time, and location. It was agreed upon that I would accommodate her schedule, and it was difficult to find time between meetings and work duties. Several scheduled interviews never took place because she had last-minute meetings or had to be present for work duties. When I arrived at her work, I checked in and waited for about ten minutes. I checked my audio recorder. Her staff informed me that she was ready to meet with me. As soon as I walked into her office, she smiled. She always seemed to be smiling when I saw her. She is approachable, calm, and professional. We chatted for a few minutes before the interview, laughing and talking about our busy lives. I started with an introduction and focused on my research study.

Her stories and experiences include language that creates family and support, and she is always calm and thoughtful about what we do as women. She focuses on the strength, importance, and presence of being a Jicarilla Apache woman.

What stood out most to me in Participant E's interview was her focus on culture and the connection to Jicarilla Apache kinship. I asked her, "What point do we start hitting the

breakdown when they don't have the older generation teachings anymore? Are there some families already there?" She replied,

> Yeah, because I could say now stepping out of the actual Auntie to the community. Okay, when I step out as an auntie at work and with my girls, the females I'm around, there's a different dynamic there. Because when I go in here, I talk to my ladies, and I tell them, well, you know, there's some of these things, like, I'll tell them, I know I can't, why? You know you can't wash a female's clothes with the men's clothes. Why? And you should know this. They're not taught any part of that. So, when I come here, and it's crazy because they won't tell me when I'm talking to them with like, other ladies, eventually, if we get into it, because I've gotten into these deep conversations with them in regard to cultural, the way I'm taught, and I compare. And then they share stories and cultural teachings they were given.

Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing takes many forms to build trust, teach, foster relationships for belonging, strengthen identity, and more. I respect that she makes the effort to focus on healing among the Jicarilla Apache girls and women she works with.

Participant F

She is a mother, a daughter, a grandmother, and an Auntie. I followed her to her house, arrived, parked, and she brought out two lawn chairs, and so we sat outside her house. It was a nice, chilly day, with sunshine and a cool breeze. When we sat down, our chairs were somewhat facing one another, but more like side by side. She took out a pack of cigarettes, removed one, lit it, and started smoking. I quickly turned on my audio recorder, then started my introduction and focus of study, and had my interview guide with me. She smiles a lot when she speaks.

The pattern that emerged as she started to talk about was her positive outlook on creating, renewing, and building. Different responses throughout our interview stood out to me, but her answer to how she shows up was great! Seeing, knowing, and believing in yourself and the actions you take to be there for young people as they need us is a good approach to have when thinking about how we show up. Their needs will be different, and so we have to be. Her view on life is always positive and upbeat. But the speed at which she thinks and talks is worth watching, as you can see creativity and intensity in the way she talks about teaching and learning.

As we discussed how she shows up for our Jicarilla Apache girls, Participant F's stories always revealed a web of interconnectedness. I asked her, "My research focuses on how native aunties Empower, protect, educate, mentor , and advocate for Jicarilla Apache girls. In what ways do you show up?" She replied, "I show up in all those ways, in every single identity and identifiable way." Her experiences were rich with teachings from her family. She always brought teaching and knowledge back to relationships. These familial and communal relationships provided a web of interconnectedness articulated through lived experiences, land, culture, and all things as a Jicarilla Apache woman.

These Jicarilla Apache Aunties and their AuntieWork contribute to narratives that counter colonial violence and are essential for centering Indigenous sovereignty, challenging historical misconceptions, and preserving cultural, political, and spiritual knowledge. These stories and actions serve as powerful tools of 'survivance, which combine survival and resistance to challenge stereotypes, document the lived experiences of Jicarilla Apache love, resilience, and advocate for the wellness of our Jicarilla Apache girls, traditional practices, and honoring Jicarilla Apache women through reawakening matriarchal systems.

That One Auntie…

In this section, I analyze and discuss Jicarilla Apache auntie stories and experiences that highlight 'that one auntie' that we all know. Jicarilla Apache participants were asked to identify an important auntie and why they are special to them. Jicarilla Apache participants shared stories of their special auntie, absent aunties, and community aunties. Jicarilla Apache participants highlighted the complexity yet strength of Jicarilla Apache aunties. They paint an image of Jicarilla Apache women who are funny, beautiful, rugged, laugh too loudly, non-existent, calm, storytellers, maybe dysfunctional, and often our second mothers. Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing is what our young girls, families, and community need to start reclaiming a healthy tribe. In the Jicarilla Apache community, "Auntie" holds different meanings for people, whether it be a biological relative, someone adopted into the family, someone who has become part of the family, or someone in the community; regardless of the role, this title often accompanies respect, love, and care. Jicarilla Apache Aunties provide emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual guidance. Some families also see these women as mothers, which highlights their critical role within the family structure. In the eyes of some young Jicarilla Apache girl, we are their perfect Jicarilla Apache Auntie. They see us the way we show up. They see us caring for children in the family, cooking, working, going to school, sewing ribbon skirts, cheering them on at sporting events, and talking to them about puberty or dating. Michelle M. Jacob's (Yakama) The Auntie Way book explores the perfect auntie, capturing our hearts and minds with snippets of what our Rez Aunties are like and the lives they lead. One paragraph speaks volumes – Dr. Jacob goes on to explain that the Perfect Auntie takes youth to teach, support, and guide. She says that these perfect Rez Aunties help youth cope with the latest heartbreak, accidents in life, a best friend's suicide, the latest round of abuse at home, dealing

with the relapse of substance abuse, or when a young one lashes out because the world is just too heavy (Jacob, 2020). These too-real-life rez events often affect our Jicarilla Apache girls. Our young girls deserve support in navigating this tough world. With prayer, Elder teachings, and the strength of our Jicarilla Apache ancestors, Jicarilla Apache Aunties have wisdom and love to help us feel better.

That being said, what are Native American Aunties? Indigenous feminist theory centers decolonization and sovereignty, emphasizing the restoration of traditional roles for Native and Indigenous women as nurturers and leaders. Traditional roles of the Jicarilla Apache are positioned as nurturers, leaders, and healers. The work of Mishuana Goeman positions Native women at the center of how our Tribal Nations have been mapped; therefore, their voices, histories, and lived experiences are critical in understanding their realities. Goeman's objective is to chart the efforts of Native Women and demonstrate the power of stories, sharing how they define themselves and their communities, "understanding the process that have defined our current spatialities in order to sustain vibrant Native futures" (2013, p. 99). Acknowledging the power of story, Indigenous praxis, and epistemologies, we materialize social relations and begin to reflect and understand the deeper meaning of how Jicarilla Apache aunties construct our ways of life and our identities by weaving together traditional teachings and practices, community responsibility, and decolonial actions to resist colonial narratives. Participants in my study described Jicarilla Apache women, aka "Aunties," as strong, wise in relation to experiences, and also focused on the term 'auntie' as an adopted term that could mean women we look up to or are used in a derogatory way. The history of colonialism and its ongoing legacies of violence continue to portray Native American and Indigenous women as objects. However, the realities and experiences of Jicarilla Apache

aunties and the community must provide us with a point of analysis to better understand not only the impact of colonial violence on the body, mind, and spirit but also the sharing of knowledge that adds to the "'happenings' that affects us now" (Million, 2009, p. 73). These stories and experiences provide narratives that help us understand how to show up to support, empower, and educate young Jicarilla Apache girls. Auntie-ing is the groundwork that looks like counseling for youth in crisis, coordinating department support for youth conferences, making time for the quiet kid who feels invisible, or making sure our young girls have a safe place to stay and food to eat. Knowing that Jicarilla Apache Aunties are human and perfectly imperfect, we can appreciate and love them for the relationships we share, the way they show up, how they protect us despite not advocating for themselves, and for creating memories that will have a huge impact on us. Initially, Participant B was busy wearing all the hats she does, so she typed out her responses to the questions in my interview guide and emailed them to me. I did receive the email, but I also just skimmed the Word document, as I was still planning to meet with her. Our conversations are always deep, filled with humor and insight, so there was no way I was going to let her email me her responses instead of sitting down and talking. When I asked her what a Native Auntie is and who they are, she asked if I received her email. I smiled. I said, "I did," and waited for her to answer the question. She started off with,

> I think native aunties can be described as a group of women who display some type of strength for what their life means, survival, love, empathy, and imperfection altogether that make a woman with her own personal experiences because her own personal experiences in life, her upbringing, is what she has to offer you when she becomes an aunt, because she's not. Maybe some aunts aren't built with motherly instincts because they don't have children of

> their own, but some aren’t, and some aren't the best mothers either before they become aunts. So, I think that it all depends on their upbringing and their personal experiences and what they can provide, because I think of an aunt as second nature to a mom, in a way that if you don't have your mom, the next best thing if you don't have a grandma, is an aunt.

Throughout this study, I’ve often sat and reflected on my life and on those in my community: those Aunties who show love, those who aren’t auntie material at all, and those who have faced hardships in life and don’t have the capacity to show up at all. But what do we mean by Jicarilla Apache auntie, and who are our Jicarilla Apache aunties, and what have Jicarilla Apache aunties done for Jicarilla Apache girls and the community? Looking deeper at the actions of Jicarilla Apache taken up as “Auntie-ing”, we focus on the relationships they take up with the world around them, how they interact with youth, with families, with leadership, and other women. Sherwood and Jacob (2022), building an understanding of “Auntie-ing” as active praxis, caretaking relations, and accountable to Native and Indigenous bodies. Auntie-ing is informed through our lived experiences of ceremony, collective gathering for shared knowledge, our histories, love, laughter, and relations. Situating Auntie-ing on the front lines breaks confinement and situates our movement spaces in interconnected relation to land, moving within the web of relationships across past, present, and future (Wilson, 2008; Goeman, 2017; Sherwood & Jacob, 2022). Jicarilla Apache Aunties carry ancestral knowledge and lived experiences, we also see them struggle, succeed, learn, and bring forth wisdom that helps us be the best we can be. With a combination of lived experiences, cultural values, good heart and intention, knowledge, and open-mindedness, Jicarilla Apache aunties can actively lead for change.

Thinking about what our Jicarilla Apache Aunties have done for young girls requires us to understand the influences that shape their decisions to mentor or engage in AuntieWork. Auntie wisdom doesn't necessarily have an age range, but for some, like Participant C, she considers Native Aunties those from the older generation who live a traditional lifestyle. She referenced age and knowledge when discussing who Native American aunties are. She said, "Native aunties are probably, I would say, ranging from like mid-40s and up, and they should have traditional knowledge." I wondered whether she had provided an age range, as those aunties in her life were indeed older. Often, an auntie as a mentor is defined by mentoring abilities, wisdom from experience, and an emphasis on community leadership and care. Regardless of what we imagine an auntie to be, none of us has THE perfect Jicarilla Apache auntie, but in the lives of our Jicarilla Apache girls, nieces, or community members, we are THE perfect Jicarilla Apache auntie, the mythical one. "The mythical one woman who does everything flawlessly can solve everyone's problems" (Jacob, 2020, p. 846).

As Jicarilla Apache women, even if we are flawed, rugged, or mythical, as long as we show up, our Jicarilla Apache girls feel valued and supported. Participant F talked about the term itself, but then went on to define it. She stated,

> I think Native aunties is just a term that I kind of adopted across Indian country. Because just to it, I don't know, it's used widely, I guess you could say, but for me, my definition would be, I'm an aunt. I have nieces and am proud and hold them high. Hold it in high regard!

When I asked her what she meant by a term used widely, she went on to say,

> I hear it all the time. Native aunties. It's used in derogatory but it's also used as far as positive, positive as far as my, all my native aunties, I'm

> collectively owning the sister people that I work with today, whether it's on a board, whether it's in another state, whether it's in regards to some of the conferences that we attend, to all the ladies, native ladies, we automatically gravitate and claim each other as you're part of I'm part of you Today. They're like, 'What is yours, what's yours? What tribe are you from? I'm telling them Jicarilla Apache, oh, today I'm Jicarilla too. I'm your auntie, relative, you know?' And it's, it's more commonly used in those terms as, like, a friendly, it's always welcoming.

Participant F's statement demonstrates the understanding of ongoing colonial violence against women, but in the same breath, she quickly pivoted to explain the social relationships and the collective power of Native women, which directly supports the way we live as we carry out our traditional practices to invite, share, and love all Indigenous bodies. Racial and demeaning slurs perpetuate the dehumanization of Native women through objectification or disparagement, often implying they are disposable, low-value, or sexual objects. But through voice and story, Participant C's words and actions are reclaiming and act to redefine these colonial narratives and reclaim Indigenous women's identities, further supporting the importance of core values/framework of Indigenous feminism as it focuses on decolonization, dismantling intersectional violence against Native women. Jicarilla Apache narratives provide stories of complexities that explore and honor the realities of community engagement and a shared social responsibility, which are foundational values (Shotton & Minthorn, 2020) of Jicarilla Apache knowledge systems and cultural values.

I wasn't surprised when she went on to say the term Native Auntie is used derogatorily. She stated, "Native Auntie Slayer? Like, how many people kind of use it in general? I've heard it

used commonly in the community by members." This just reminded me of what people learn on TV or social media. I do like that Participant A spoke to the different kinds of Aunties across Indian Country. She talked about community aunties, blood relatives, and those who have taken us in as family, even if they are not family. We somehow become family, older aunties, and those aunties who are special to us are given respect. I, too, am aware of the derogatory use of the term, it is actually overused even by within own communities. While I am all for Native humor sometimes, it does go too far and contribute to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes by erasing contemporary identities, acting as verbal lateral oppression. I like how she expanded on genealogy and the intimate web of connections that bind us as Native and Indigenous women. Indigenous feminist theory draws on holistic knowledge systems with a worldview of interconnected relationships. This system is intergenerational and place-based, centering the interconnectedness of all living things, including land, spirituality, and humanity. Grounded in responsibility, reciprocity, and respect, with an understanding that humans are part of nature. Simpson (2016) asserts that as we are not merely distinct entities apart from the collectives, instead, "Individuals are hubs of networks. When an individual is hurt, then the system is out of balance" (pg. 26), and our ways of life, ancestral knowledge, and systems provide us with insight and ways of problem solving. Focusing on the regeneration of healthy systems and communities creates a generation of healthy individuals who have Indigenous thought and intelligence to create different [generative] processes and conditions that rebuild our Jicarilla Apache community. The collection of collective knowledge and lived experiences among Jicarilla Apache women is powerful. It is the collective power and knowledge for nation-building as we gather, organize, and mobilize, and give birth to our collective resurgence (Simpson, 2016, p. 23). Whether a gathering of Native American and Indigenous women

or a local collective of Jicarilla Apache women, they provide valuable information to global Indigenous communities, sharing cultural knowledge across generations.

Participant A shared that, through her family's teachings, she has special aunties who are like her mom. Indigenous feminism connects matrilineal systems by centering the restoration of traditional structures and systems where women hold authority, pass down lineage, and ensure the transfer of knowledge. According to Indigenous Feminist theory, the reawakening of these systems is a decolonial act to dismantle imposed patriarchal structures, violence, and restore balance and community. Participant A's story and statement reaffirm the traditional family practices and importance of relationships among Jicarilla Apache women, reinforcing the need to reclaim traditional practices. She said,

> Native Aunties is like how I was taught throughout my life with my family: we were always taught that your aunties are like your moms. You know, they're the second people that come into your life. So, when your mom isn't around, you have another mom. They help take care of you. They help you, just like how mom does.

Participants D and E shared similar statements and placed an emphasis on the importance of matrilineal systems with the view of aunties and women in their lives. Participant D stated,

> I feel like they're any and all females in your family. I mean, not necessarily. It could be your sister, it could be your mother, your grandma. I feel like all the females in your family, to me, should kind of guide you in like a womanly kind of way.

And for some, this is okay! Some of us may not have women who are subjected to a single role in our lives, perhaps your mother or grandmother wears different hats, provides support, and shows up as a mentor in addition to a certain biological kinship. Participant E giggled and said, well,

> A Native Auntie, first, would be my sisters; I have a number of sisters, and I am an auntie because of the births of my nephews and nieces. My mom's sisters and cousins. I consider them aunties. That's where I get the term Auntie from, the way I identify as an auntie, or like, how I guess I see him, is someone who is an extended mom, you know, you're like mom in her mom's absence, in their mom's absence. So, if they need anything as far as money, an ear, a different ear to listen to.

Family dynamics and practices are important because not every family sees their mom's siblings as other moms. Participant E's family is close, and even the extended family is close, so as she explained how big her family is and all the 'aunties,' I smiled because I could already envision the teachings, support, and conversations when they all gather.

Family values and practices shape our way of thinking and how we honor and treat women in our family, primarily through modeling. When families practice shared responsibilities and foster open communication, they teach that women are important and valued. Participant A also grew up in a family that honored women and the auntie as another mom. Participant A shared that she refers to some of her mom's sisters as 'mom.' She said, "They help you, just like how mom does. If I hold them with high respect, I call them mom. These aunties are more of a second mom, someone who takes care of you just like a mom does." The status of mom-Aunties can often signify a deep, secure, and loving relationship. Participant A is also an

auntie. “When my sibling is not around, they’ll be like ‘MOM!’ and I know they are talking to me because they show me respect as a second mom to them.” While not every Native family may practice this, or have Jicarilla Apache aunties, Aunties can be people you are close with. Participant A went on to share that she has cousins who call her mom, ‘Mom’, and other cousins who do not call her Aunties, “Mom.’ She shared, “It just kind of depends on who you have that real strong connection and bond with.” These relationships reflect a deep-rooted, traditional kinship structure that ensures every child is supported, loved, and connected.

Jicarilla Apache untie practices of love, support, and protection look different but seem to be similar when you sit and observe their actions with youth, community, family members, and one another. But you will see that many of our Aunties are complex, unique, and trying to navigate the world, too. Participants shared their experiences and stories of aunties in their lives who showed up for them, providing guidance in different ways. Throughout our lives, we grow up with family, friends, and community, but there is often one or two Jicarilla Apache Aunties who stand out to us, those whom we favor or have a deep respect for. But what is it about this particular auntie? Why is she so special? It could be the way she understands us or the way she doesn’t get angry; instead, she laughs with us, listens, and makes us feel safe.

Jicarilla Apache participants were asked if they had a special auntie who stood out to them. What makes us gravitate toward one or a handful of women for support? What is the connection? I often struggled with writing because there were feelings and emotions of happiness, sadness, and empathy that surfaced when I had to write about the pain and hurt that emerged from some of the stories. But realistically, what connects us to a particular family member, Auntie? We all have the good, bad, and complicated aunties, but what is it about that one or two particular aunties that makes us feel safe and supported? Participant B’s discussion

about an auntie who stood out to her. She talked about several aunties, but it was one in particular that she spoke of with deep sincerity. She stated,

> Well, I think Lily (pseudonym), we shared a lot of secrets, and my own dysfunction, just a lot of pain that I endured. She was always there, like, we would discuss different things and have like different topics, and we just she shared a lot of my secrets and pain that I endured abuse growing up, and she didn't just knew how to talk to you, and I remember telling me, 'Don't let men make you feel bad, and don't let a man make you feel like you don't have power.

These conversations can help Jicarilla Apache girls understand consent, respect, and emotional safety. Open dialogue can empower teens to not only ask questions and feel safe talking about sex and other topics, but it can also build social skills, navigate intense emotions, and help them recognize signs of unhealthy or abusive relationships. A connection to a particular Jicarilla Apache auntie is because of the relationships created with Jicarilla Apache girls, even if they are imperfect, they give and share with their heart and spirit.

The Imperfect-Perfect Aunt

In this section, I analyze and discuss findings from Jicarilla Apache participant interviews that emerged and connected us to the imperfect-perfect Jicarilla Apache auntie. Jicarilla Apache aunties share stories and experience of intimacy and a web of interconnectedness of systems and relationships that are not always healthy.

Growing up on the rez, Jicarilla Apache aunties often witness life's hardships firsthand. Some of us grow up in alcoholic households, or maybe we have teen mothers who haven't quite matured yet and live out their glory days instead of being a mom, or sometimes our homes are full of abuse and secrets. As youth, we are simply trying to survive, often taking care of siblings,

finding a safe place to stay, and showing up at school when we can. The abuse and neglect often stem from historical trauma – cumulative, intergenerational emotional and psychological damage as a direct effect of colonialism, forced assimilation and relocation, and systemic violence. These deep wounds are referred to as 'soul wound' (Duran, 2019; Smith, 2021) from colonial atrocities, which are detrimental to Native women. This trauma shows up in forms of high rates of violence, PTSD, health disparities, mental health crises, family disruption, and substance use. Our aunties are somewhere in this web of strained relationships, joy, disconnect, and survivance. Despite carrying their own trauma, many Jicarilla Apache Aunties do act as protectors and guides by utilizing cultural, spiritual, and traditional practices. While these wounds are often multilayered, it is important to understand that, as Aunties, we can either perpetuate them or confront this historical and intergenerational trauma with multifaceted healing strategies that focus on self-determined practices of healing (Wirihana & Smith, 2014; Te Atawahai o Te Ao: Independent Māori Institute for Environment & Health, 2019).

Indigenous feminist theory approaches healing as a collective, decolonial act that merges personal recovery with structural resistance against colonial patriarchal violence. Reclaiming traditional, land-based practices and medicine with traditional ancestral knowledge centering healing through relationships rather than individual recovery alone. Also, critical awareness means teaching young Jicarilla Apache girls to name and understand settler colonialism, deconstructing the normalization of colonial violence, and recognizing the strength in sovereignty and activism.

Some Jicarilla Apache unties don't have their lives together, but that is okay, because beyond the not-so-perfect lifestyle is an Auntie who comes through, no matter the struggle. Participant B was asked what Native Aunties are, and while she responded, she happened to

mention the word “imperfection.” I asked her to explain what she meant by "imperfection.” She went on to say, “My favorite aunt, my mom’s sister, her life was messy, very messy. Her life was full of hurt, she displayed it for everyone. She wore her shame on the outside.” We may all know an auntie like this or have an auntie like this, the ones who are amazing and beautiful but turn to substances to cope and numb the pain. The trauma we carry into adulthood gets heavy, and sometimes these aunties often struggle to heal and move the world with invisible scars. The intergenerational trauma moves from generation to generation. And yet, some of these aunties still show up for us, and sometimes they don’t because maybe they did not have people there to support them, or the trauma was too deep.

Women in our communities have survived many forms of violence, yet continue to move forward as mothers, aunties, and productive community members. To date, we have Jicarilla Apache women who struggle with shame, move and live in silence from the effects of abuse, are forced to give up their children, and so on. For many, it is a struggle to show up for young Jicarilla Apache girls; others manage to show up regardless of how much hurt, shame, and violence they have been subjected to. Growing up in our community, we have to understand that life is messy and no one is perfect. We also need to remember not to judge, as many factors, both internal and external, have shaped us. While we may not be fully aware of the terms or academic language, there are aunties who understand what works to keep them safe and may know how to apply this in real-world situations to encourage or offer advice to protect our young girls. Knowledge, education, and awareness shape us; what hurts us and how we project our own biases and prejudices onto one another are not always taught.

As I sat and listened to Participant B talk about her favorite messy Aunt, her story eventually came full circle. Her aunt was raised in an abusive home, placed in the dorm,

then adopted out. Her person and soul were wounded due to various forms of abuse. As a result, she drank to cope, she constantly ran from her ghosts; however, when she was needed, she showed up as the cool, protective Aunt. In her own way, she made sure Participant B was safe. Participant B shared how her favorite messy aunt would tell her, "I'll make sure you're safe, I'll make sure nothing happens to you." Eventually, the messy lifestyle caught up to her, Participant B said, "At the end of her life, she was sober; it was too late for her health-wise, but she remained that person you could still go talk to. She kept your secrets. You could still laugh with her." While tragic and heartbreaking, what I respected was that Participant B's auntie did not perpetuate the cycle of abuse, shame, or neglect onto her. Maybe she did hurt people through self-destruction behaviors, but sometimes our aunties are like that.

Indigenous feminist theory actively works to reclaim systems of relationships, traditional practices of connection, teachings, and support. Deep conversations with Jicarilla Apache Aunties can help us process life events, behaviors, and emotions. Auntie-ing provides us with those Jicarilla Apache Aunties who teach us, Indigenous love inward. Flowers (2015) discusses the importance of decolonial emotional responses. Auntie-ing helps young girls develop decolonial responses that involve validating, reclaiming, and centering emotions such as rage, grief, and joy that have been marginalized or suppressed by colonial, Western-centric structures. Embracing vulnerability, admitting fear, and moving from colonization to decolonization engage embodied practices that heal intergenerational trauma. Participant B reinforced this need in her statement and shared that her aunt was not perfect but still helped her process her thoughts. We talked about how, as children and adolescents, this is vital to their growth. During adolescence, the brain undergoes significant changes that are responsible for

self-control and decision-making. When they have people to guide them through these phases of life, they can navigate and manage impulsive behaviors and understand the consequences.

The Absent Auntie

In this section, I analyze and discuss stories and experiences from interviews with Jicarilla Apache participants. The absent Jicarilla Apache auntie is either absent by choice or absent for other reasons. During interviews, Jicarilla Apache aunties shared stories of their experiences with the absent Jicarilla Apache auntie, whether emotionally, physically, or spiritually. Sadly, some Jicarilla Apache women are not auntie material and simply do not show up, other times, they are absent because they are missing. Missing or absent Aunties can take on a different meaning, either related to the ongoing missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) crisis or an auntie who is simply not present for whatever reason. As discussed in Chapter 2, MMIWG is an ongoing crisis of violence against Native American and Indigenous girls and women. Our Indigenous women and girls face many challenges across Turtle Island, including high rates of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and murder rates 10 times higher than the national average (wernative.org). In our community, there are several departments that create awareness of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and MMIW. Fewer departments provide services for victims and survivors.

Indigenous feminist theory emphasizes collective land-based and decolonial approaches that connect individual recovery to dismantling colonial structures, cultural reclaiming, and sovereignty, and addresses the trauma rooted in settler-colonialism, emphasizing the restoration of cultural and traditional practices and land rather than focusing solely on the individual. Auntie-ing then aims to reawaken and regenerate matriarchal values, teachings, and practices interwoven with spirituality, self-care, and collective wellness. According to this theory, healing

is rooted in culturally caring, reconnecting our women to traditional knowledge and practices through healthy relationships within community networks while incorporating spiritual practices. This can look like smudging, walking circles, participating in memorial walks, advocating for policy change, providing peer support, and creating safe spaces with advocacy groups that connect to addiction recovery. Self-care is an act of resistance, protecting the mind, body, and spirituality against the ongoing impacts of colonialism.

Of the participants who agreed to be interviewed, one spoke specifically about MMIWG. Participant B shared how she worked with Jicarilla Apache women within our community, and through these interactions, she was able to listen to their stories, provide counseling and guidance, but more importantly, help find ways to heal. She said, "They carry a lot, and they were carrying it for so long. They were all suppressed with secrets." The MMIWG Crisis is real, and our girls and women are affected in many ways. Through community work, she shared stories of how she was supported through listening, prayer, awareness-raising, and advocacy for violence against Native American women. As she spoke of women never coming home, she went on to say that even if these women are physically with us, they may come home as part of them has died a long time ago. The wounds and trauma of rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and substance abuse often go unreported, and/or the offender is not prosecuted or serves little time for the crimes committed. Participant B talked about how some of these women are physically present but never return home, they are just a shell of a person.

Too often, we have absent Aunties in our lives as Native American girls and women. Some families may have small family units, some families may not be close, and some families may not have aunties involved in the lives of young Jicarilla Apache girls. Remembering can be painful, or sometimes we survive as part of a community, where we don't

feel pain but instead experience emotional disconnect. During our interview, Participant D did not have an answer when asked to name several aunties and what they taught her. I quickly followed up by saying it's perfectly fine to say you didn't have any aunties. And that I had difficulty identifying Jicarilla Apache Aunties in my life that were there for me within my family, but it was the Indigenous aunties from different Tribes and at different points in my life that showed up. While Participant D did not specifically mention any Jicarilla Apache aunties, she stated that her older sister was there for her. She shared, "I learned a lot of what I needed to learn from my older sister, because my mom wouldn't teach me anything."

Calm Auntie That Never Yells – Conversations, Support, and Gentle Reminders

In this section, I discuss stories and experiences from Jicarilla Apache auntie interviews that honor the actions and support of the calm Jicarilla Apache auntie. They shared how the calm Jicarilla Apache Auntie that I steady is collective and mostly non-judgmental. She is the auntie who, no matter what the circumstances, remains poised, uses gentle guidance, and maybe even humor, and is patient like no other. I kept trying to think if I had come across an auntie like this, and I have. My calm aunties were Native American and Indigenous academic aunties. It is a blessing to be around people who have a calm presence, provide positive reinforcement, and are dependable. Jicarilla Apache aunties radiated as they spoke of how these aunties make your day better, helping you see the beauty and positivity in the world, even if you can't or don't want to, for whatever reason. The calmness is also contagious; it can make you feel at ease, which means safety. With their low reactivity and slow movement, we often connect better, know it's okay to share, feel accepted, and not be judged.

The restoration of traditional gender roles reframes Indigenous culture as matriarchal or AuntieWork, referring to power, blending calmness with immense resilience, community

caretaking, and providing for the future. Thinking with theory, 'calm aunties' embody stabilizing forces representing leadership and nurturers that serve as anchors, mentors, and protectors. The understanding and concept are a decolonial approach that prioritizes kinship, self-sovereignty, and the restoration of gender balance by challenging patriarchal colonial structures. In *Dancing on Turtle's Back* (2011), Leanne Simpson shows us that balance and harmony are embodied knowledge, more so than our knowledge systems, teachings, and practices. "We can access this vast body of knowledge through our cultures by singing, dancing, fasting, dreaming, visioning, participating in ceremony, appreciating with Elders, practicing our lifeways and living our knowledge, by watching, listening, and reflecting in a good way" (Simpson, 2011, p. 42). The calmness then becomes a way of knowing of regulation, of connection to land, of honoring teachings, and of making meaning of their existence. To know and understand balance and harmony, we engage with traditional practices and our knowledge systems, carrying the essences of kinship, clans, community self, and attributes. To teach our children in our daily lives, we must live a good life.

Stories shared from Jicarilla Apache aunties were both about aunties who were there for them or about the role they play as aunties to family and kin. Participant E shared that many of her siblings' children often turn to her for support because she is always calm, doesn't get upset, and never yells. She said, "My youngest told me that so and so needed to talk because they don't want to go to their mom, or else it'll end up in yelling or someone getting upset, then the conversation stops." I can see how the youth would want to talk to Participant E. She is strong, assertive when she speaks, but also very reserved and thoughtful. I grew up with some of Participant E's family, and many of her female cousins are also very easygoing and calm. These Aunties are rational and patient, and when youth need adults to be intentional and choose to

pause before reacting, this can help youth avoid panic and manage emotions through self-regulation.

The calm auntie can show up in our lives unexpectedly, maybe when we need a gentle reminder of our roles and health, or an energizing talk to help us get back on track. Participant F talked about aunties in her life who are always there by sharing, “I have several aunties that have always been my advocate for what I do in my community, as my profession and as a person, you know, as a mom, they're always there. They've always been honest, and they've always been consistent, consistently on me.” She followed up with a story about life lessons and how her aunt gently reminded her of her responsibilities before she left the house. And then she said, “And that's kind of how they guide and it's not, it's not to be mean, it's not to you know, but it's also to remind you, you still hold responsibility that's first and foremost, your home, your health, your kids, you know, that's first, and that's how it's relayed to me.” Profound gentleness and kindness are a strength and “permeates our culture and is expressed through countless words, stories, and teachings” (Simpson, 2011, p. 58). Gentleness is power and demonstrates one who is in turn with themselves and heart knowledge and heartwork. Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is always in motion, working to decolonize and provide guidance with Jicarilla Apache compassion.

Participant B shared her story of a calm auntie. Growing up, she lived with her uncle and his wife, Selena (pseudonym), for a couple of years. Her aunt was more like a mom to her. She shared,

> She was mom to me, she was that mom, the house was clean. She used to wear her skirts around the house, her dresses, and an apron every day. I learned to wear an apron. I used to cook, clean, and do everything in an apron. And she used to

> make her own aprons, so she had the house, like, clean all the time. And when my uncle came home, I was like, Oh, we had breakfast, lunch, and dinner, like, you know, she was that woman. All the bills were squared away in a portfolio.

These lessons are important for youth and teens, as they help them bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world challenges. It can also boost confidence. She continued to talk about her own home and mom, but mostly about her uncle and aunt. Lessons about life, keeping a home, and financial responsibility were instilled early on, more importantly, those who take the time to show us how to learn these skills leave a lasting impact on our memories and lives. Memory of social relations is a kin-space-time envelope that reminds me to be joyful in my interactions with kin. Kin-space-time envelopes provide an advertisement for how to be in the world (Harjo, 2019, p. 28). Memory connects us through space and time, it is a shaping force, it encompasses historical and Indigenous thought, and it is active.

Learning through doing is the best way our young girls and teens learn. It requires hands-on, so we create meaning from the experiences and opportunities given to us. It's like muscle memory. When adults take the time to show us step by step, our bodies, memories, and psyches absorb the energy, movement, and teachings. Indigenous feminist theory Participant B talked about financial literacy, but also how her aunt taught her to bake, earn money from sales, and create a savings account, "And so, I remember her teaching me how to bake. We would learn how to cook, and she taught me how to cook, and started learning how to bake different things from scratch." The excitement and happiness radiated from Participant B as she talked about this memory. The details of the interactions and lessons were sharp as she stated, "And I was young, but I would sell like cupcakes and banana bread and pop and sometimes Frito pies, whatever I remember making, like $200 a night, and show my baking skills and how it made sales." During

these times, opportunities for talks and lessons can occur. It's not always about the adult or ignoring the child and letting the child run everything alone. This story is also about how consistent her aunt was in her life and how she focused on Participant B. Our young girls and teens need that attention and time with adults – for reciprocal learning and meaningful interactions. From this, she learned how to cook, keep a clean house, bake, save and manage money, and use a checking account and a checkbook. These essential life skills help foster responsibility, self-care, and resiliency. These are skills that can be taught early on, as young Jicarilla Apache girls will carry them into adulthood, including creating budgets, doing laundry, adopting healthy living habits, basic home maintenance, and managing personal appointments. The movement of bodies, the interactions, the dance, is a system of care (Harjo, 2019), evoking memories and emotions, reconnecting us with kin, and may be something our future relatives can enact. Drawing upon the envelopes that hold memories of resilience, emotions, and trauma helps us understand possibilities.

Tribal Community Aunties

In this section, I discuss stories and lived experiences from interviews with Jicarilla Apache aunties that honor the work of Jicarilla Apache community aunties. These Jicarilla Apache community aunties are often the ones we turn to for guidance or support, whether or not you are blood-related. As aunties in small communities, we have these precious women whom you tend to gravitate toward. These Jicarilla Apache aunties are special. Maybe they grew up with your mom or were accepted into the family back in the day, or maybe they helped raise you because all our family kinship grew up together, creating memories and stories. Some of these aunties are funny and like to joke. Have you ever had one of those Jicarilla Apache Aunties whose laughter is contagious? Whose laughter is magical and alive and possibly carries stories of

its own? Sure, you do. I bet you know several Aunties who laugh like no other. Aunties who laugh and share stories are fun, happy, and love to joke, and more importantly, they know how to make you feel better and reassure you that it's going to be okay. Some Jicarilla Apache aunties are fierce and know how to stand their ground, which makes you feel safe and protected, yet you know not to misbehave or else they will correct you with a stern conversation. On the other hand, many young girls either have small families, no close kin bonds, or simply have missing aunties; either way, we still have community aunties. A few participants did not directly identify a particular auntie but instead spoke about Jicarilla Apache women who demonstrated ways of being Jicarilla Apache, whether they worked in a Tribal department or volunteered their time.

Traditional practices of community Auntie-ing include serving as vital kinship systems in which Native women provide guidance, nurture, and cultural transmission, thereby drawing on key components of the Indigenous feminist framework. Indigenous feminism isn't just about 'women' rights,' it is about reclaiming the sacredness of Native American and Indigenous women (Gunn Allen, 1986, Kuokkanen, 2012). Throughout this study, several participants discussed the importance of Jicarilla Apache community aunties and the role of women in our community. However, the older participants in this study recall interactions with older Aunties who shared their knowledge and emphasized teaching our Jicarilla Apache ways to the community. Participant C talked about how she went to her mom for questions related to cultural practices, and her family practices our traditions, but there were community aunties to help reinforce or teach Jicarilla Apache ways of being. She did share that, growing up, there were Jicarilla Apache ladies who worked for the Arts and Crafts and used to go to the schools to facilitate culture classes. She shared,

> One of the older ladies was a tutor; she and another lady, along with several others, participated in the school for culture classes, teaching us basket weaving, beadwork, and the significance of the basket, with certain criteria for what to do and what not to do.

I asked her, "What was it that stood out to you about these ladies?" She replied, "They talk about our own culture and also show us how to make a basket from start to finish." The gradual decrease in basket making and in the number of basket makers is due to several factors: boarding school, the loss of Elders with knowledge of meaning and skill, and the time-intensive nature of basketry. Those women who participated in these workshops and teachings were gifted something extraordinary. Today, there are not many Jicarilla Apache aunties who teach youth the story, meaning, and skills of basketry, despite its significance to our ceremonies. The teachings of basket making can also be taken up as Native art and restorative practices for youth, merging traditional wisdom with modern designs, community-based justice, giving our young girls and teens a way to focus on healing, accountability, and cultural connection rather than punitive practices. These programs can use storytelling to address trauma and strengthen Jicarilla Apache identity, especially as we lose the few who practice basketry and know the stories and purpose behind our baskets.

While some participants learned about cultural practices, others shared stories about the collective work of community aunties across space. For example, Participant F opened the conversation to all the aunties she works with in the community,

> All my Native aunties, I'm collectively owning the sister-people I work with today, whether it's in another states, whether it's in regard to some of the

> conferences we attend, to all the Native ladies that we automatically gravitate and claim each other, as your part of it too and I'm part of you today.

Her view of the collective is welcomed and appreciated, as we do have a collective of Native aunties who show up in different ways and spaces. She shared that the community of aunties we have includes workers, moms, grandmas, and Aunties.

She shared,

> I've seen a lot of positive influences with ladies because of where I work. I work with all you know, from the ground all the way up, there are some that welcome you into their space and to what their projects are doing, I see it that way. You know, they're always welcoming. But traditional culture and traditions are different. I think culture is more of being Native American in this tribal community that we live in, yeah. And then the culture part of it is, like your Aunts, like you get a lot of influence on them, positive and traditional teachings.

The gathering of Jicarilla Apache women is powerful and beautiful, working together in harmony for the greater good. The power of Jicarilla Apache aunties is collective action against issues like injustice(s), structural oppression, and rebuilding through policy change, program development, and advocacy. AuntieWork provides voice and action to challenge the status quo and work to improve health, education, and community operations. Applying Indigenous feminist theory, 'community aunties' are rooted in sovereignty, kinship, and stewardship. Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill (2013) argue that Native women carry the experiences and knowledge to resist heteropatriarchal systems working toward decolonization within their own communities and beyond. Auntie-ing within the tribe is a community-driven

practice that includes mentorship and a protective role. These actions also regenerate Jicarilla Apache knowledge. The collective of Jicarilla Apache aunties is rich in history, experience, and compassion. “Communities have what they need at their disposal; everyday community practices are deep, rich, and meaningful” (Harjo, 2019, p. 3). For generations, Jicarilla Apache women have served as community aunties extending teachings, support, and care to non-biological or extended community members, acting as a “village” to care for children and support families. These community practices are grounded in Jicarilla Apache knowledge that centers relationships. Participant A also shared her experiences interacting with tribal community aunties, which made me smile. She happened to mention my grandma, Grandma Phone. She talked about how we don’t have an older generation of aunties who laugh, tease, and teach you about the old days and our ways as Jicarilla Apache women. Participant A shared a memory,

> I remember when the older generation of Aunties used to sit around a table, talk Jicarilla Apache, and share stories and traditions. The most precious memory that I remember is when they were sitting in the classroom, and they had a small table, and they all had coffee. They were sitting there, talking, giggling, and everything, in Jicarilla.

Participant A is correct, we don’t see this anymore. We have very few opportunities to see the older generation of women sit together and talk, laugh, and share stories. On occasion, the Cultural Affairs department will host an event to gather the Elders for breakfast, but we don’t see or experience the laughter and voices of Jicarilla Apache Elders talking our language. We may soon reach a moment when our youth will no longer get to experience the beauty. Teachings from our Elders and older aunties ground our actions, they challenge us to carry out embodied

teachings daily, and these teachings are gifted pedagogies to counter the harms of settler colonialism (Jacob et al., 2025; Beavert, 2019). These teachings are generative ways of knowing and being which help us renew, restore, and honor all our relations. Participant A talked about how, during these times, they would ask you about the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast). "So, you know, they wanted someone to really explain to me what the purpose of everything was, what's going to happen in the days. Why do we do this? Why? Why this? Why that?" She remembers sitting there with her family as they asked her what she thought would happen during her Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast). She shared how they talked about her using yucca and how this is a very important and sacred time for a young girl. She went on to say that the older community aunties spoke to her about prayers, songs, and rules. Participant A stated that she was asked about the dos and don'ts during the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast). She said she was asked, "'Do you know the rules?' And then I was like, No, I don't know my rules. So, she started telling me the rules first, yeah, after she laid down the rules, what I can't do. And then after that, that's when the other grandmas were telling me." We don't have these kinds of tribal community aunties anymore, the ones who gather to talk to youth or those who openly share teachings. Very few of our older community aunties are no longer with us, and many of the aunties now do not speak the Jicarilla Apache language or know our Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast).

Auntie teachings are essential; if we had calm aunties, consistent aunties, or even those stern community aunties to talk to us about life and how to be good Jicarilla Apache, we might have more young girls who know our ways of life and teachings. Harjo (2019) speaks to the acts in which we recognize ways of knowledge production. Recognizing how we engage with power, honor it, and carry it out in our day-to-day activities allows us to practice it within the

community, producing maps for the next world. Participant A recognizes the importance of teaching and needed practices in the community. She said, “If we had an auntie that talked with them the way our aunties do, or the way we were taught, or the way some families interact, I think that a lot of our kids would be different.” She went on about how many of our youth don’t have supportive families or aunties who show up for them. “Sometimes when they don't have their aunties there, they don't have that supportive person like that. I think that's where the younger ones have it in them, that's where they go to look for it. Oh, okay, they look for it in a different way. They don't go to you and ask you. They won't do that.” Her work allows her to be there for youth, and she talked about how amazing our children are, and when you least expect it, she shared,

> They'll slowly creep up on you, and at least expect it, where they start telling you about themselves and their stories, and for you to get to know who they are, you know. And that's where I think that they find that aunt or that comfort person, that’s where they’re like, well, maybe she can teach me, you know. Just think of how strong our younger ones could be.

She went on to say that we have to be there for our youth and be available when they need us, and even if we think they don’t – they do. Community aunties don’t always show up in our offices or workplace, sometimes they show up for our ceremonies, gatherings for blessings, and traditional practices. Participant F shared a story of attending a Bear Dance and how one of the older ladies took the lead. She talked about how the older lady invited 20 to 25 women to her home to learn how to make a basket for the Bear Dance. She shared,

> She said that at my house tonight, you guys can meet me there at six. Come to my house. I'm going to show you how to put together the basket for the bear

> dance. I'm going to show you, so you guys need to learn this because you might be in charge of it one day. I'm not going to be here forever.

We talked more, and I was not aware that the basket for the Bear Dance had to be given to you. There are rules to follow, and not just anyone can make this particular basket. I sat and listened to her talk, and despite the Elder woman's invitation, Participant F was the only one who showed up at her house to learn. She stated, "So I went, and I got there at six, and nobody showed up. She said, 'Well, let's have coffee. I said, 'Okay.' And at seven she said, "Well, let's just start.' I don't think anybody's going to show up, so you're the only one here." The meaning and power behind that story are both beautiful and heartbreaking. To have the opportunity to learn something that is sacred to us, yet at the same time, only Participant F showed up. Learning is reciprocal, and, as we all understand, we are losing our ways as Jicarilla Apache women. It is important to note that we have a responsibility to maintain our identity and ways of life as Jicarilla Apache people. Placing your body in the actions of dance, basketmaking, or pottery making is an act of political resistance, it is an act of futurity (Harjo, 2019, p. 191). The practice of building relationships with one another plants a seed of hope, creates lived experiences, and decolonial praxis centering Jicarilla Apache knowledge, learning, and traditional practices. I sat and listened to Participant F talk about the older lady and was grateful that we still have the very few who are trying to pass on our knowledge through doing. In this instance, showing up for our young girls, means we have to show up to learn from our aunties, community aunties, and from our Elder aunties.

Summary

Our lives are filled with Native Aunties who are part of our journey for a lifetime, who come into our lives and leave as quickly as they enter, and some who adopt us because that's the

Native way. Whatever the reason, we all have a story about a Native American woman who has shown up in our lives for support, comfort, or to teach us how to be better relatives. Aunties have different ways of showing us how much they believe in us through gestures, glances, and words (Jacob, 2020) – and believe it or not, our youth need a push to be the best they can be. Understanding and acknowledging that Aunties come from different backgrounds, may have been raised with one parent or by grandparents or grandma, some carry baggage and trauma but stills show-up, some grow up on the rez and then move away but eventually return, and some plant roots in the tribal community and are lifers; no matter what the story, Native Aunties have so much to share and give back.

Mentoring

In this section, I discussed Jicarilla Apache aunties as mentors. From Jicarilla Apache auntie interviews, stories, and lived experiences, and how our Jicarilla Apache girls watch us. Jicarilla Apache auntie's stories and experiences demonstrated the importance of mentoring for Jicarilla Apache girls. Through mentoring, they provide a network of interconnected relationships with human and more than human. It is trust-based, reciprocal, and holistic. Native mentorship is holistic (Secatero, 2015), providing guidance, support, and teachings that nurture the mind, body, and spirit. As Jicarilla Apache aunties, we are mentors, we provide guidance and support in numerous ways. And Auntie-ing mentorship is relational. Key aspects of Indigenous feminist theory are relationships, relationality, and interconnectedness. The matrilineal system of support that Jicarilla Apache Aunties centers relationships, regenerative knowledge and practices, protection of self, decolonizing praxis, and the reclaiming and connecting of our young girls to our knowledge system as Jicarilla Apache women. While the goal is to ensure we are showing up for our young Jicarilla Apache girls, we must also

commit to challenging and unsettling oppressive structures and pushing back against containment through our collective development of "Auntie-ing practices" (Sherwood & Jacob, 2022). As Jicarilla Apache women, we create relationships that are essential for youth to foster positive mental, emotional, and social development. These relationships provide a foundation of support, trust, and companionship and are fundamental to a child's holistic well-being as they grow up.

Holistic wellbeing is based on the premise that each person finds identity, purpose, and meaning through relationships and connections to community, the natural world, and cultural values (Secatero, 2017). This holistic approach can be integrated into the daily lives of our Jicarilla Apache girls and focuses on physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, and social well-being. Teaching our girls about physical well-being focuses on caring for, respecting, and advocating for their bodies. Key components and practices of physical well-being include healthy eating and balanced lifestyles, fitness, health care, and healthy boundaries that honor self-safety. Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is holistic, and mentoring emerges through support & guidance, cultural gatherings, intergenerational teachings, ceremonial practices, deep understanding, storytelling, and Indigenous praxis. For Jicarilla Apache women, revitalizing and honoring Gok'éé (Jicarilla Apache word for Kinship) is an effective way to teach and foster understanding of love, care, and respect for one's family and community. For some, their active roles in the lives of youth are not seen as mentorship, they see this work as what we are supposed to be doing. In fact, many women are actively engaged with youth and are stepping up to be advocates, protectors, or to provide guidance during rough times, a traditional practice across generations.

To better understand and support Jicarilla Apache women in serving as mentors, we must first unlearn to relearn, meaning we must identify our own trauma and work on healing. We must also acknowledge the essential role we play in connecting our Jicarilla Apache girls to traditional practices, reclaiming cultural values, and promoting healthy lives. AuntieWork is the heart, love, and compassion we put into mentoring. Mentoring means we show up for our community beyond our immediate family. When asked what role Native Aunties have in the community, Participant D responded, "I feel like they serve as mentors for young girls, whether they're related or not. A lot of the time, I notice kids come from like, broken homes or raised by grandparents or, you know, so I feel like aunties are kind of an important part of that." Showing up as a mentor for young girls in our community can create a new pathway in life, provide hope, or serve as a lifeline.

Our Girls Watch Us

Native American youth are deeply observant, they listen, they learn, and are shaped early on by those around them. A child's early learning is shaped through relationships with adults and peers, instilling behavior, character, and values. These interactions are foundational for future development. Behaviors do speak louder than words. In small communities, behaviors strongly influence youth by creating an environment in which social norms, peer actions, and adult modeling directly shape development. Social relationships and multigenerational networks, including peers, family, kinship, and community, affect youth risk and resilience.

Jicarilla Apache aunties hold different roles within the community, and small communities often mean we are familiar with who is who, or that our parents grew up together, and we not only live in the community but also learn from one another and live in this place. Simpson (2015) examines a much deeper, complex meaning of the place where we all live and

work together in her chapter, 'A Gendered Analysis of Sovereignty. In this chapter, Simpson refers to self-determination as the maintenance of our relationships and maintaining balance, care, sharing, and nurture of the natural world around us and the "spiritual, emotional, and intellectual space that spans back seven generations and that spans forward seven generations" (p. 479). Understanding we are responsible for our own bodies is critical because the consciousness then is interconnected with obligation to kinship and keeping them safe with an understanding that our bodies are sovereign – safe from violence, and this includes teaching youth to understand the sovereignty of the body and the land.

Growing up in the community, I've often heard the phrase, "You know, she's an old Abáachi (Apache), that's just how they are." But without realizing it or reflecting on our actions, this Abáachi (Apache) behavior is a culmination of various factors that, if not checked, can be harmful. Recently, my work, interactions, and conversations in the community have led to more discussions about the behaviors of the older generation within our Tribal community. Being an older, strong Abáachi (Apache) is not supposed to be rude behavior, it is not supposed to be disrespectful, it is not talking down on or yelling as a form of communication, nor is it getting defensive when being held accountable. That is learned negative behavior, it is harmful, it is toxic, and is rooted in unhealed historical intergenerational trauma, such as loss of cultural identity/land/language, inability to form healthy relationships, boarding school survivors, and ongoing impact.

Some Jicarilla Apache women working in our communities are abrasive toward others. But what was concerning was this behavior : laziness, rudeness, a lack of real-world experience, and contentment with how our community operates. When we think about being in a small

community, and how we influence one another, how behaviors influence one another, whether directly or indirectly, our behaviors matter. Adult behaviors shape and influence youth. Our behavior is often a direct reflection of our beliefs, inner values, self-image, and character. Participant E discussed Auntie's behaviors, especially those involving who work with youth and young girls. She stated, “This lady, mind you, worked around children for many years. And she yelled! We all know she is a yeller, but it seems like people just ignored her.” She talked about how this makes our kids and students feel. Whether you are at an event, at the school, or at the tribal department, our kids do not need to be yelled at. This kind of yelling behavior is deeper, and when people in our community do not correct it, it is often interpreted as approval, which can cause the behavior to persist or become normalized. If not corrected early on, the individual may not learn to regulate emotions or to interact respectfully with others. Participant E said that this yelling behavior is often passed on to family members, if not directly to their children. She was annoyed that no one in the workplace seemed to say anything about the yelling. She said, “It wasn't until I started pointing this out, and how it’s not okay, then other people, ladies, her workers , and staff coworkers noticed, let's not yell. Yelling or raising their voice, either way, it’s still a negative.”

Our girls watch us when we work, when we are home, and when we are out in public! Participant F shared how the teachings she received from her family and aunties give her guidance and a steady focus when she feels challenged as a Jicarilla Apache woman. She talked about how we need to be vocal and speak out about these issues, as these are the same issues that will challenge our youth. She mentioned that, as a Jicarilla Apache woman in her field, she is treated differently and always has to be knowledgeable, especially in front of men who are deemed experts in their field. She shared, “I mean, that's like, that's kind of how society is

already. That's how society is in general. My ways around it, and the ways to get through it, are on my own, whether it's having to do with a work site and there are engineers and forensic engineers." Being confident and knowledgeable is important, our youth see this and will know they can do it too! She added, "You know, when you go talk to people, when you're going into a room, if you have a meeting, you're the most knowledgeable there. You know, you have to participate. Your voice matters, you know." Showing our youth that they can be supervisors, directors, and leaders in whatever career they choose to excel in is always important! It allows them to dream and set goals.

By demonstrating leadership in the workplace and community, our young girls and teens can disrupt negative stereotypes. Jicarilla Apache women-aunties can model confident decision-making, foster inclusiveness, and cultivate a network of women supporting women and girls. Participant D talked about women in education within the community and how many of us are moms, partners, and holding key positions in the tribe to make change. She went on to say that we need to talk with our young girls about their futures and how they can pursue careers, get an education, and be good people, and that showing our girls they have a choice is important. She stated, "I think that's just the way the future is headed. We have more opportunities as women now." It's a choice, but we have to show our girls they do have choices and show them, not just our own children, but to the youth in our community. She talked about how our community needs a mentorship program.

She stated,

> Even though I wasn't brought up in an abusive, you know, alcohol or drunk at home, it could have been one or two ways. I could have been, you know, a drunk because my mom didn't have mom issues. I could have been real, like distant, with

> my own kids, but I took it to mean I was going to be the change. My kids aren't going to feel the same way that my mom, you know, made me feel. I want to make sure each of my kids and other kids is pushed, is pushed to graduate, pushed to do better, pushed to want more for themselves.

Participant D talked about the importance of being a good role model for our young girls,

> I think I try to be a good role model. I've been majorly exposed to the youth just with working here. I feel like I tried to carry myself like you're always being watched, and that's something that you learn here. You're always being watched. You're always the kids are always listening. So, I try to just portray myself as someone I would want them to eventually become or look up to, not just my own kids. It's like everybody is kind of watching you like these kids especially.

In knowing this, we have to be aware of our own actions, behaviors, and how we treat one another. The difficulty of living in a small community means that we have the 'everyone knows everyone' mentality, and that can both hinder the way we show up for youth. Regardless of the reasons for the lack of mentors or mentorship programs, youth will find an adult they look up to and learn from, or they will connect with peers rather than adults. Participant D stated, "I feel like the younger people, they're always seeking to look up to somebody and whatever's in their view or in their reach. I feel like that becomes their norm, you know. If so and so is doing it, I love so and so, therefore it must not be that bad." If we have good, bad, or complicated aunties, they will influence youth regardless.

Jicarilla Apache unties who have complicated lives either draw us in or influence our decision not to be like that. Participant B shared that she often observed her aunt in relationships. She stated,

> The guy came to pick her up, and he was trying to court her, which you don't see today, and he was doing that to her, opened the door for her, did all the right things, and that's what I saw. And I saw her happy and calm, and they were having a good conversation.

She talked about the trauma her aunt had, and a genuine partner who was nice, a little too nice, was not for her, so her aunt wouldn't stay. What we see often conditions us and shows us how to love and what relationships look like. Adult relationships shape and establish fundamental patterns for attachment, communication, and conflict resolution. Healthy relationships foster secure attachments and healthy skills, while dysfunctional interactions and dynamics often lead to replicated patterns of poor boundaries, community, or insecurity. She went on to say,

> It was from abuse. It was from alcoholism, and it brought so much imperfection in her life. It was very messy, and it was very dramatic for her, but she always had a smile. And when I would come around, or any of us would, the kids, she would change, she would lighten up, get happy.

Early experiences with caregivers and what we observe as youth shape blueprints and templates for how children approach trust and intimacy later in life. In support of this discussion and early life experiences, Participant D stated that,

> I still feel like young girls look up to whatever family member, auntie, or female figure they do, regardless of what that person represents or how they put themselves out there. I feel like just, you know, being in the community, and at

> work, kids get so excited because it's just their attention on them. You know? It's like they don't care. Or I don't know if they realize the type of person that they're looking up to is maybe not an ideal mentor type person. But I feel like they still do. They still seek that, you know, I don't know, validation or just that attention from somebody, regardless of how they're portrayed, you know.

Holistic Care and Knowledge

Mentoring Native youth must be holistic and understand the interconnectedness of spiritual, mental, social, and physical well-being factors (Secatero, 2015). Whether we are Jicarilla Apache aunties or girls, we all experience human development and undergo changes throughout our lives. What doesn't change is that we must care for our physical bodies, ground ourselves in spiritual practices, maintain and improve coping skills, and positively interact with our community while showing respect for ourselves and others.

Knowing and understanding academic education, and holistically supporting and teaching our young girls, can make a huge difference in the paths they choose. Participant D said, "I think there's a fine line between educating them, because you're teaching them what the school wants them to learn, you know, but like, the holistic approach would be, they're not necessarily teaching you mental health in the school, you know, unless you're really needing that." As aunties, we know that showing up to mentor young girls and teens is holistic, supporting their mental, social, physical, and emotional well-being. Each area of wellness is interconnected, and each must be nurtured to maintain balance and health. Participant D shared, "I think it's kind of a motherly thing, too, you know, just their mental clarity, never giving up, you know, nobody touches your body, you know, just certain things, like, beyond just education." Talking to Jicarilla Apache girls about development and all it entails helps normalize

change, reduce anxiety, and foster confidence. Key topics we can talk to our youth about include physical changes such as growth spurts, acne, and body hair, hormonal impacts on emotions, and what to expect before and during menstruation. These discussions can also include correcting anatomical terms, proper hygiene, and proactively providing hygiene products.

Participant B's conversation about working with Jicarilla Apache youth, young girls, adults, and mentors must be supported by training and a structured program to be effective. Teaching youth about self-development, decision-making, and behaviors should not be delivered through lectures or PowerPoint presentations, but rather through group learning, events, and actions. Participant B beamed with joy as she talked about how engaged the youth were when working with them,

> I love to teach that course, and it's about transitioning. So, I really loved it because it talked about constant transition. So like, when you're a kid, when you're a baby, or you're real needy, and then your toddler across the lifespan, yep, okay, and then it goes all the way into, like, pre-teen, teen development, body development, but it, it focuses on the mind, concept of transition, okay, so, and then it kind of teaches them responsibility. Well, why do I feel this way? It's because I'm having to have more responsibility, and why? Why do things feel unfair? It's because now I have more responsibilities, and now I want these things, but in order to obtain them, I have to understand this part of the process, and it's transitioning, you know, adolescence.

Social Mentorship

Social well-being focuses on our ability to form healthy, meaningful relationships and engage in meaningful interactions with others across a variety of cultural contexts. Our kids are

beautiful, amazing, intelligent, and strong, but these skills, abilities, and knowledge have to be nurtured, they have to be loved and talked to, and we have to help them along the way. Participant A shared a story about her work and one particular young girl. A young girl who was quiet, always covered her face, and never said anything. Participant A began talking to her by asking her name, but she said nothing. She tried to get her to share stories or ask about school, but she did nothing. The girl fought her on everything, but she remained quiet. Participant A kept assigning her tasks and talking with her about how the day was going and what they would do next. By the end of summer, the girl opened up. She shared, "I think it was almost the end of the summer, that's where she started opening up." Participant A stated that the girl said she was antisocial and didn't like to be around people. She stated, "Sometimes you have to give people a chance for them to get to know you. It just takes time to build trust. Yeah, and it was probably because of how she was raised. When you have a big family, you know where you feel forgotten." Participant A went on to share that she told the young girl that she is important and having her around is nice: "My door is always open, and you're more than welcome to come back. And she smiled."

Safe and healthy relationships are foundational to social wellbeing. These relationships and connections are the cornerstone of health and well-being. They are built on trust and respect and provide emotional support. These interactions and relationships have a significant impact on behavior and promote positive development, acting as protective factors against risky behaviors and distress, and improving long-term mental health. Connectedness with family, peers, and community provides a sense of support, belonging, and being cared for.

Mental Wellness and Mentorship

Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing can help foster the skills needed to process and regulate emotions and promote healthy psychological coping skills for everyday life stressors. Fostering healthy relationships and building trust can provide a stable, supportive environment where youth can openly express how they feel and have those feelings validated. We need to ensure they feel seen, heard, loved, and respected. Just like us, Jicarilla Apache aunties, and our young girls and teens, we have bad days. In her work, Participant C encounters young girls, big emotions, and the ways we can help them manage their mental health together. She talked about the good days and bad days our young girls encounter, and what helps the girls is being there for them, listening, "A lot of open communication, and then just being positive for them." Traditional practices of respectful listening can help Jicarilla Apache girls feel supported, seen, and validated.

Participant A shared a story above, and the young girl she didn't give up on is now older, and they are good friends. She focused on being reliable and consistent. She shared, "Through consistent support and seeing her, she just started opening up on her own. She comes to visit at my work or asks if I'm home. She'll tell me what's going on with her, I guess just to vent or something." Having a trusted, supportive mentor, adult, friend, or auntie to confide in significantly improves mental health, providing safe spaces for emotional expression. These relationships and conversations boost emotional regulation and self-esteem, build resilience, and help Native youth manage stress and navigate challenges. Participant A stated that these cases where youth are struggling to be involved or seen are common in our community, and working with young girls and youth, she's noticed that other younger kids are like that. She said,

> They come wanting to be heard, seen, and noticed. Our kids have feelings. With the young kids, it's like you have to really work to gain their trust or work slowly to help them know they can trust you and come to you, so they open up.

Young girls and teens do struggle sometimes and face their own challenges, which can require adult support and guidance with emotions, stress, and mental health issues. Key reasons as to why some adults misunderstand youth mental health are generational gaps and misconceptions, not recognizing modern challenges, dismissal and minimization, or a lack of knowledge, or feeling ashamed that their child is struggling. Participant A stated,

> I noticed that a lot of the younger ones, it makes me feel like these kids, parents should have the time to sit here with their kids, or either that sometimes I feel like they're lost and that they're trying to find their way, but here, but here they can't, they can't find their way, because here they feel misunderstood, or either that they feel like they don't know where they're going, and no one's not there, explaining things to them and making them understand these things.

She shared how she has learned to recognize when a young girl or teenager needs to talk or support,

> I'll give up my lunchtime and stuff just to sit here and give them that time. And you know, sometimes I'll sit, and I'll cry with them. I'll cry with them. They'll sit here, and they'll cry with me, too. Being vulnerable builds trust through humility, emotional exposure, and sharing life lessons. Our youth need to know they are human, as we are, so they know it is okay to cry, talk, laugh, make mistakes, and apologize.

These lessons demonstrate authentic connections and support resilience against intergenerational trauma. During these times, we can approach mistakes and acknowledge them, practice active listening without judgment, rather than maintain a strict 'we don't talk about it' persona.

Spiritual Mentorship

Drawing on Dr. Secatero's (Dine) use of spiritual well-being, this takes on the meanings of a sense of relatedness, connectedness, purpose in life, and relations with more than human. Teaching ways of our ceremony, cultural practices, and medicine is passed onto us from our families, grandparents, Elders, and aunties. These teachings are passed from generation to generation to help us know who we are as Jicarilla Apache people. Participant E stated that while she does not get the opportunity to speak to youth about our culture and traditional teachings, she does teach her nieces and nephews and her own children. She shared, "So, when I'm with them, I've shown them what bone medicine looks like, and they've seen the wild parsley, wild carrots, and wild onions." These teachings show us and help us understand our medicine and where to look for it. They teach us how to look and identify food; this is what Mother Earth gives us to sustain life. These teachings are gifts; our spiritual teachings and beliefs are gifts passed to us to help us understand the world. Participant F talked about stories and meanings behind stories, "I have stories, there's a lot of ways I've been gifted, you know, as far as teachings." As Jicarilla Apache people, our strength and wellness come from our spiritual practices, medicine, and connection to the natural world around us. Jicarilla Apache aunties support the spiritual wellness of Jicarilla Apache girls by teaching them practices of prayer, smudging, talking circles, and ceremony.

Physical Mentorship

Our physical health and wellness impact the rest of our well-being. Caring for our physical self is not always an easy task, whether we are exercising, getting enough sleep, or eating a well-balanced diet. Participant C worked with girls who focused on physical fitness. She explained that being a mentor and helping girls focus on their bodies also included good practices in other areas of their lives, such as family relationships and academics, as well as ensuring they are healthy overall. Adolescents often feel pressured to be thin from the media, peers, and parents, which can increase body dissatisfaction and high rates of unhealthy dieting. This is often fueled by social media and social constructs of what beauty is supposed to look like; it is directly linked to weight and self-worth, increasing chances of eating disorders, depression, and long-term issues with body image. From her years of working with youth, she understands the importance of showing up and consistency. Participant C shared "that the consistency of being there for them reinforced healthy lifestyles and eventually the girls would be on time, eat healthy, rest, and learn to take care of themselves." In addition to school, peer relationships, sports, and so on, supporting young girls isn't a one-time conversation; it means going Auntie-ing by checking in with the girls and ensuring they know they have someone to count on.

Summary

Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing is essential in the lives of our Jicarilla Apache girls. Mentoring can take many forms, but being present is key to fostering healthy, consistent relationships. Through our family dynamics, education, lived experiences, and imperfect-perfect lives, we embody ancestral knowledge and cultural values that guide our choices, behaviors, and actions. Being present is a choice, it is also a cultural responsibility. Jicarilla Apache presence is

Indigenous praxis; it actively engages and creates meaningful interactions that support the heart, mind, body, and spirit. These actions reclaim traditional practices and networks of matriarchal systems that actively center decolonization, sovereignty, cultural values, and human rights, restoring traditional gender roles and maintaining harmony and balance. In the next chapter, Chapter 5, I will analyze and discuss shared Jicarilla Apache auntie stories and lived experiences, focusing on the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), Jicarilla Apache cultural values, community wellness, and healing praxis.

Chapter 5

Teachings for Jicarilla Apache Women and Community: Centering Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast)

In this chapter, I provide an analysis and discussion of emerging themes and patterns from stories gathered during interviews with Jicarilla Apache aunties, focusing on how AuntieWork is an important healing method. I build upon the previous chapter's findings by examining the ways in which Jicarilla Apache aunties teach and demonstrate cultural values, strengthening the identity of Jicarilla Apache girls, which aims to restore and regenerate traditional practices for the well-being of Jicarilla Apache girls and the community. The Jicarilla Apache aunties in this study share memories and lived experiences of learning the importance of our traditions, values, and cultural heritage, passed down through generations by the Jicarilla Apache people. Interview data provide insight into aunties' work in nurturing Jicarilla Apache girls and supporting and strengthening their cultural identity. Yet at the same time, Jicarilla Apache aunties are coming to realize that, through reciprocal relationships, they have a responsibility to teach Jicarilla Apache girls about spiritual teachings and to value language and culture. Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork serves as a crucial method for transmitting these teachings, reclaiming traditional practices, preserving heritage, and ensuring that Jicarilla Apache girls have access to opportunities to learn our ways as Jicarilla Apache women.

I describe Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing as an Indigenous feminist theory that draws from Jicarilla cultural teachings where matriarchal systems gather in preparation for a girl's puberty feast; in this process, we celebrate and honor the Jicarilla Apache girl, share food- ensuring everyone has enough, and honor the transformation of regenerative practices with land and relations. My work to describe and analyze Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing builds on previous

work celebrating Aunties in Native American and Indigenous communities (Jacob, 2020). In my research, I found that showing up may look different for Jicarilla Apache Aunties, but it allows Jicarilla Apache girls to see who surrounds them and offers hope, love, and patience. Understanding the power of the collective work that the Jicarilla Apache do helps our Jicarilla Apache girls to shine. Through everyday practices, Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing can be a means protecting Jicarilla Apache bodies and rebuilding relations to regenerate community building that refuses settler colonial logics.

Cultural Values

In this section, I analyze and discuss patterns and themes that emphasize the importance of learning, teaching, and understanding that traditional ways of life are embodied through everyday experiences and the teachings of what many Tribal Elders refer to as the "old ways". The 'old ways' are the "Indian ways of life" which imply cooking on an open fire, bathing in the river, sleeping on the ground, children learning ways of life from grandparents, and "to how things were long ago" (Beavert, 2017, p. 215). Jicarilla Apache participants were asked what their Jicarilla Apache aunties taught them. Jicarilla Apache participants shared stories of their auntie teachings passed through kinship systems, among women within their families, and through community aunties.

Jicarilla Apache knowledge systems shape our identities and worldviews and provide guidance through ceremony, songs, and creation stories on how we live in relation to the world, humans, and more-than-human beings. Our knowledge systems have been passed down from one generation to the next through relationships. Through relationships, we learn what is right and what is wrong. Indigenous knowledge is grounded in beliefs that guide our actions, which

Wilson (2008) discusses as the way we view reality (our ontology), how we think or what we know about this reality (our epistemology), and our morals and ethics (our axiology).

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork provides us the opportunity to connect our girls with Jicarilla Apache ways of knowing and being. Without these teachings, our youth move through this world without purpose, believing and honoring our spiritual ways through ceremonial practices, songs, and learning our Jicarilla Apache language, which connects us to these ways. For example, Participant A talked about experiencing our ceremonies and not knowing or believing in the spiritual ways of our ways. She mentioned with the younger generations, selecting a Brave for the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) is not easy, "It's that when you pick someone young, they don't, they don't know the values of it or hear that they are not responsible enough to handle what is supposed to go into this." She went on to say that these teachings should be passed along early in life. Our youth need to be brought up with this knowledge, and we need to show them by getting them involved, as they will carry it into adulthood. She mentioned that nowadays, the generations interpret these teachings as lectures,

> Traditionally, you may think it's lecturing, but they're telling me this for a reason, and you've got to open your ears and listen. But after, when I get a good response, I get a bad response. And then when I sit there and hear about it, that's where sometimes I think about, like, what my grandparents and they used to say about the future. You know, I never thought about it until I was an adult, and I started seeing it on my own, where I'm like, dang, they were right.

Early exposure to ceremonies and traditional knowledge systems fosters a connection to the land, and Creator becomes a way of life rather than merely attending a ceremony once a year. Teachings, ethical decisions, and actions are practices of self- determination. These

teachings are to be taught at a young age, so 'living in a good way' is a long journey, and "wisdom is generated from the ground up" (Simpson, 2017, p. 189).

Strengthening Identity – A Reciprocal Relationship

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is reciprocal. Aunties influence the identities of young Jicarilla Apache girls, and vice versa. Unhealed trauma can show up for aunties in a variety of ways, just as it is impacting our young girls. But our young girls can also teach us- to be better humans – better caregivers – better parents – better to one another – and better aunties. Through connections to Jicarilla Apache Elder teachings, culture, language, and traditional practices, Aunties can offer unique teachings, and in doing so, "children learn to use their bodies to express their cultural identities and to honor the teachings of their elders" (Jacob, 2013, p. 502). Actively being involved and taking action to teach and provide knowledge about our ways and providing knowledge of 'ways of being' while grounding teachings in everyday acts of being, Jicarilla Apache is an Indigenous pedagogy, and it provides a process of articulating an embodied cultural revitalization directly connected to resistance, decolonization, and social change. How we mentor is impacted by various external and internal factors. Understanding ourselves, as Jicarilla Apache aunties, centering teachings from our older and Elder aunties is critical to this work.

Strengthening our Jicarilla Apache identity as women demands that we reconnect with our traditional roles within the community, learn and understand the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), and regenerate traditional practices, including cultural revitalization. This approach weaves theory and practice together, as Indigenous feminist theory is enacted in daily, traditional actions. Participant A always takes on conversations about our Jicarilla Apache Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) with the young girls she mentors. She shared that many of the youth she works with know very little about our puberty feast, if at all. She said,

> It's sad that some of the younger ones are just like, Well, I always hear it's too expensive. Yes, I understand that it is, you know, it is expensive. But at the same time, some of them are like, Oh, well, I don't know. My mom never took me. My mom never did it. Despite some parents or families being traditional and knowledgeable about our ceremonies, they don't always pass them on to their children or youth. We are a small community, and that means we are somewhat familiar with who has had a Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) or not, and I'll be like, well, your mom's traditional. So, you know, she grew the way I did. So how come I, your mom, didn't?

We discussed reasons why some families cannot hold a Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) and shared options, such as having a blessing performed in its place. Participant A talked about the conversations her grandparents had and how stories from the old ones foretold the Jicarilla Apache losing their way, so she feels the importance of talking to our young girls about the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast). She shared,

> Stories that my grandparents, they always talk about a time that where that where there's going to come, a time that where people are going to forget who their identity are, forget who they are, and forget what's important to them, or forget, like, why it's important for the ceremony wise, you know, so that's why, when I sit here and I talk to them about it.

Having a feast and going through the actions, teachings, and four days of prayers, songs, and guidance is renewal, change, and life; it is embedded with knowledge and how we are to live as Jicarilla Apache people.

Summary

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork means fostering relationships through trust, listening, calmness, and getting to know and understand your youth's personality, communication style, and learning style. Being mindful of our own behaviors as adults is key to providing safe spaces and fostering relationships. Aunties need to step up and actively be involved in the lives of Jicarilla Apache girls and teens. As Jicarilla Apache Aunties, it is our responsibility to check in on our young girls and, through these relationships of trust and safety, we can provide ways to support wellness, strengthen identity, and create spaces of inclusion and lived realities.

Community Wellness

In this section, I analyze and discuss the stories and lived experiences collected from Jicarilla Apache Aunties who navigate community wellness within the Jicarilla Apache community. Jicarilla Apache participants discussed ways in which members of the tribe support one another, disconnect, and the need for change.

Indigenous feminist theory provides us with a framework that aims to rebuild community while honoring the work and traditional roles of Native American and Indigenous women. Through decolonial work, reclaiming cultural values, traditional practices, and with Indigenous knowledge systems, the work, love, and care of Jicarilla Apache Aunties, beginning to imagine healing, starts the ongoing process of creation, an individual can begin "To see relationships across space and time" (Goeman, 2013, p. 3089), giving agency as it becomes a way to heal. Goeman (2013) asserts, "Families and communities have the ability to make choices, and it is this ability that allows for the tangibility of (re)mappings' healing significance and revolutionary power" (p. 3089). Community is where we live and learn together, and where we are taught what it means to be in relation. Relationships are the foundations of Indigenous

communities (Cajete, 2015). Wellness is relational; our mind, body, and spirit are connected. The interconnectedness of these areas is also connected to those around us, our community. As one area is hurt or wounded, it directly impacts and is felt everywhere else. Recognizing the current state of a Tribal community helps leaders, Elders, youth, and elected officials work to revitalize and renew a healthy way of living. Cajete's (Tewa) work provides insight into community building and traditional Indigenous education. His work focuses on the importance of the Indigenous community as sustaining culture, healthy life pathways, and overall wellness of the Tribe.

The violent nature of colonialism has resulted in long-lasting impacts on tribal communities, such as the catastrophic effects of violent land theft, forced assimilation, and disease. The result is a severe decrease in Native populations, loss of Native lands, destruction of culture, language, and traditions, and intergenerational trauma from Indian boarding schools.

For time immemorial, Native American peoples have had their own knowledge systems, strong community networks, and cultural traditions. Key aspects of loss and colonial legacies impact both the individual and the community in different ways. Individuals have experienced a loss of cultural identity, spiritual beliefs, and practices, which impacts balance and wellness. However, through my day-to-day interactions with friends, community members, and family, many experiences and stories focus on renewal, hope, and strength.

Loss of Indigenous Community

In this section, I discuss and analyze Jicarilla Apache auntie stories and lived experiences that emphasize the loss of community. Jicarilla Apache participants shared stories of families and community experiences where many of our youth struggle to know or be taught our cultural teachings and traditional practices, the impact of Indian boarding schools, navigating challenges

alone, and oppressive structures. Jicarilla Apache auntie stories turn abstract trauma into shared, tangible experiences. These narratives create a sense of place and collective memory, documenting the destruction of social fabric, mourning lost spaces, and providing a platform for advocacy, healing, and resilience.

The impact of colonization has been detrimental to Indigenous people, "causing forced dissolution of Native cultures and communities" (Cajete, 2015, p. 93). The loss of the Indigenous community reflects the family units within our tribe. The history of the Jicarilla Apache is that clans and families spread out through the land. When people talk about where their traditional clans and families were located, they will tell you, for example, Caracos, Horse Lake, the Southern Part of the reservation, or the Stinking Lake area. This is why family dynamics and how their values shape the individual and our larger community. Family provides teachings and actions that shape who we are and instill culture and language in us. Using an Indigenous feminist framework, I center **matriarchal** leadership, land-based practices, and holistic health to challenge oppressive structures and promote collective healing. Reclaiming the vital role and work of women in our tribal community focuses on hope, healing, belonging, meaning, and purpose. Traditional gender roles of Jicarilla Apache women challenge and disrupt settler colonial structures, from the ground up through Jicarilla Apache bodies. Simpson (2016) describes how generated knowledge is reached "through the combination of emotion and intellectual knowledge within the kinetics of our place-based practices, as mitigated through our bodies, minds, and spirits" (p. 38). The internal work, then, is making meaning of our actions and the way we live. It is Jicarilla Apache bodies dancing, singing, collecting chokecherries, providing meat from a hunt, and creating traditions that generate my reality.

Choice is personal. Will I choose to center Jicarilla Apache thought and intelligence? As a Jicarilla Apache auntie, will I bring Jicarilla Apache ways of being into my life, the lives of our Jicarilla Apache girls, homes, and community? If our homes and those residing in them value Western American individualistic values, English-only practices, then these ways of living and practices will shape us, our actions, and how we live in relation to all living entities. Participant A stated,

> I think a lot of it has to come from within the home, but also from traditional values. You know, because, like when you kind of think of it, when we go through our ceremonies and stuff like that, we were always told, with our grandparents in them, that the ceremony is supposed to help shape you into a different person. So, when you're at the end, you become a strong, outgoing person. Because, like when I was young, I was like, My daughter, that's where I was just like this little girl, you know, I was like a little mouse, and I didn't want to be in the spotlight. I was more like, I'd rather be in the back, you know. But after going through my ceremony and going through this, it really taught me how to find my voice and how to come.

Navigating the world alone means we learn on our own, reaching out to those who can teach us. The lack of cultural teachings regarding Jicarilla Apache knowledge, traditions, and language has profound effects on native youth and communities. This is part of the ongoing colonization and cultural erasure, leaving Jicarilla Apache girls feeling alienated and disrupting the transmission of traditional knowledge. We shouldn't navigate the world alone as adults or children. When asked about human development as a girl, motherhood, and whether she was given guidance growing up? Participant D said,

> In my own personal thing, there are a lot of things I had to learn myself, like I have a very active, supportive mother, but I had to learn a lot of things from my older sister, and then when she was gone, it was, you're going to have to learn this on your own, you know. It's what I'm supposed to teach them, you know, I have to teach them everything, at least in my eyes, like being a mom. But I don't think I had a lot of support for Auntie, maybe growing up when I was a kid, but it was mostly watching us play, not necessarily teaching us anything. Okay? And until my grandma passed away, she would teach us, you know, certain things. But it wasn't; I don't think it was as much as maybe it could have been.

Participant E talked about the lingering effects of the Indian boarding school and how her mom and her mother's siblings were raised without family or compassion; instead, there was constant yelling. She stated, "They were raised in boarding schools. Those kids were yelled at. Those kids were yelled at to get up, yelled at to go to sleep, eat your food, put your pajamas on, take your medicine, wash your face, wash your hands." She explained how generations of Jicarilla Apache people are still affected today, yet her mom found within herself the strength to heal rather than perpetuate the harm. Unhealed trauma surfaces in many ways, but when our behavior as Jicarilla Apache aunties is unhealthy and harmful, it is our responsibility to look at ourselves and be accountable to not harm others. She went on to say that her mom mentioned how the older generation of women still live and carry the trauma, and yet so many of our Jicarilla Apache women who went through horrendous experiences found ways to unlearn these behaviors that could hurt their own children and families. She shared,

> But the generational trauma of that woman is evident, and she was probably raised like that from her parents, so she's seen it, and that's probably where she got

> it, because my mom, the way she broke it in our household, was she said we don't yell or take it out on our children or grandchildren, and she didn't.

While it takes a village, sometimes the village teaches us, or in this case, does not teach us, and our Jicarilla Apache community, Jicarilla Apache participants shared openly that we struggle to be that village. While we are fortunate as Jicarilla Apache people to have the resources we do have, this has led to a sense of entitlement. The structure of the tribe and its operations have created a dependency that has moved us away from traditional sustainability practices. Participant E focused on the wants and desires, shifting from envisioning a future and healthy lifestyle to what will you give me if I do this? She said,

> And yet you're still going to ask, What am I giving you? What do you get a paycheck for? But as a person, I don't go to a personal level. So, it's that they've gotten so used to handouts that their generation now, of the women looking forward, the forecast is giving me a less unless we figure out how to teach our girls and women to work and live, not expect a handout.

Colonization profoundly disrupted our Jicarilla Apache community, deliberately targeting our Jicarilla Apache women. In doing so, it dismantled matrilineal power structures and enforced patriarchal norms through violence and forced assimilation. Colonial systems changed the status of women. Traditional gender roles and practices centered Jicarilla Apache women as leaders, nurturers, and healers. The status and role of Jicarilla Apache clanship are passed down to the children among the Jicarilla Apache people. If a mother is Red Clan, Llanero, then the child is also. As the young Jicarilla Apache male prepares for ceremonies such as Go-Jii-Ya (Jicarilla Apache footrace, which takes place in September), the boy is accepted and begins to learn from the men, as the Jicarilla Apache footrace is carried out only by men. The young

Jicarilla Apache male will sit with the men, get painted, receive prayers and blessings, and run for his Jicarilla Apache mother's clan. Yet, today, we are losing our practice of being good Jicarilla Apache relatives by failing to acknowledge or honor Jicarilla Apache women in our community, despite acknowledging that children are born into the Clans of their Jicarilla Apache mother for our traditional foot races, Go-Jii-Ya (Jicarilla Apache footrace, which takes place in September). Participant E stated,

> You know, we don't have a place in our community where we recognize women. We don't, you know, right now, like I even told you, in our societies, it's crazy, because the boys run for their mom, right? Culturally, they run for their mom, okay? But in our community, when and how do they recognize mothers and females? They don't.

She isn't wrong. In fact, we hardly recognize and empower women within our community. As we sat and talked during the interview, we discussed the ways our tribe does not recognize or honor our own women. This part of the interview stirred emotions as she got serious. She said,

> They recognize veterans. They recognize Elders. They recognize ex-presidents, ex-councilmen, but they never recognize a woman or give a 'thank you' to the women. You can go to Mescalero and see the stuff they do for women. 'Thank you, women!'. You're a Mescalero Apache woman. They thank moms, t's a big thing. Mescalero is always thanking their women and moms in our community. They know that without them, we wouldn't have the generations of more Mescalero Apache. Not in Jicarilla though, we don't do that here.

I asked why she thinks it is like this here in our own community. She replied, "Why is it because we live with the same mentality that a female is not a chief." The violence against Native and

Indigenous women is rooted in colonialism and the conquest of land. Only one participant spoke about MMIWG. When I asked Participant B about her familiarity with MMIWG, she talked about her work and how she was more actively informed to understand how to provide assistance and support. Participant B talked about the shame, hurt, and pain within our Jicarilla Apache community. She shared,

> I've been trying to get involved in that corner. But it's very interesting, because elders have a lot to talk about too, with just back then, like back in the 60s, lot of our, lot of our women were really, really bad alcoholics, and they were either learned it from their mothers, and they have stories that I got to learn that this big old, railroad that goes all the way through Lumberton, yeah, there's they call it the weeping trail. Did you know that? And I asked them, Why do guys call it that? And they talk about it in Apache, but they say that a lot of women were either raped walking to the bar in Lumberton, on that road, on that in the ditch, there's a trail, and they talked about like, seeing just like different, like, like a jewelry piece or like pieces on that trail, but they didn't like that trail, they all and I've heard the story from more than one woman and talk about just horrible things.

My heart was sad after hearing this. I know that, historically, as a tribe, we have endured a lot and we have achieved early economic stability. We have experienced growth and stagnation, but I have never heard of the Weeping Trail. I do know that as a community, we have a lot of secrets. But hearing this and listening to the stories of pain and hurt and the impact not only on Jicarilla Apache women but also on the long-term impact on the community and the generations after.

But the Jicarilla Auntie-ing can provide support and ways to heal. The collection of collective powers that provide a way for us to learn, live, and carry forward our traditions is fading. Reawakening Jicarilla Apache matriarchal systems, centering collaboration, relationality, and regeneration, opposing patriarchal structures. One way Jicarilla Apache aunties focus on supporting learning is by cultivating safe spaces for Jicarilla Apache girls and women to gather, dedicated to honoring self-identity, cultural knowledge, and support. Putting differences aside is critical, acknowledging that we are a tribe of different clans and knowledge, but still Jicarilla Apache people, working together to reclaim, teach, and survive.

Safe space for learning, free of judgment; learning through doing; and instilling traditions may be a thing of the past. Participant F shared,

> I think a space where some of these traditions can be taught, because, coming from stories from my mom, she says, 'long time ago, this is how we did it.' My mom was there; my aunt was there. My this was there. There are all those ones that aren't here anymore.

Many of us are consciously aware that, as a tribe, we have various clans that lived out on the land in different areas, and that their practices and beliefs about who we are as Jicarilla Apache vary. She went on to say,

> You know, my grandma was there, all these things. So, when I tell the stories, I tell them that I don't know the tradition, just know ways are kind of expressed or taught that way, because we have the difference in our dynamic, our dynamics of our community, this is how they do it. This is how these guys do it. This is how they do it. You know, we don't do it like that. So, I think it's not wrong, because they're probably right.

As adults, we are beginning to openly acknowledge and share the history of our Jicarilla Apache people, and the different ways our clans and families practice medicine and spirituality. There are differences, yet we are one tribe and a people. She went on to say,

> There's something that the people from Stone Lake didn't do or do that my people from the Hole in the Rock don't do, or, you know, Caracas or stuff like that. But it's, it's all, I think the reinforcement is, what we're missing is the importance and value of you as a woman and your being, your body, yourself, your spirit, you know, all these things. I don't know if there's, I think that might also be going into the part of education, the awareness of yourself, as far as mental health, okay, behavioral health stuff, because it's okay for you to feel sad. It's okay for you to find it's okay for you. We're not taught that.

Yes, we are a tribe with various clans, and this shapes who we are as a tribe and people, but our stories, songs, and ceremonies focus on relationality, spiritual wellness, honoring and stewarding the land – respect for life in all its forms are part of these teachings. Harjo (2019) writes that 'renegotiating knowledge' is necessary as times change, and through Elder teachings, she learned that the songs and medicine can shift to meet our current needs. Regenerating traditional knowledge demands that we, as Jicarilla Apache Aunties [and people], come to understand that we need to renegotiate how our knowledge is carried forward, and reclaimed. If we take up Auntie-ing, we will restore balance, maintain harmony, and support community wellness.

Summary

The relationship between the Jicarilla Apache people and the natural environment is foundational for wellness. The separation of our people from our traditional home territories through forced relocation resulted in loss, trauma, and grief. The loss of our connection to our

homelands has affected our interconnectedness with our Jicarilla Apache knowledge systems, traditional practices, and disconnected kinship, affecting the mind, body, and spirit of all Jicarilla Apache people. The impact of colonization on the Jicarilla Apache community has negative effects on individuals, families, and the community as a whole. Community is a web of intimate relations and practices, rich in history, vibrant culture, and Jicarilla Apache love, yet the effects of colonization have led to dysfunctional behaviors, loss of cultural teachings, poverty, and other forms of loss.

Chaos Within

In this section, I analyze and discuss stories and the lived experiences of Jicarilla Apache aunties that speak to the chaos within our lives, families, and community. Jicarilla Apache aunties shared the different ways colonial violence manifests, resulting in harmful behaviors.

Despite the impact of US policies, those forcing relocation failed to recognize mobility and the community's ability to care for one another. Settler colonial ideologies and values have replaced many of our traditional ways of life. During an interview, Participant B talked about the disconnect we are experiencing as Jicarilla Apache people: “It’s disgusting, the disconnect within our own Tribe for each other.” Many of our people are not connected to culture, to being brought up to know and practice respect. Participant B discussed the issues affecting individuals, families, and our community. She stressed,

> They’re not learning, and I don't know if I shared it with you before, but this generation needs critical thinking skills, generalized instruction on how to do this or do that, and to learn to get along with one another even if there are differences.

In our community, there are patterns of behaviors where 'yelling' as a form of communication is deemed 'acceptable.' While many of us know that 'yelling' instead of approaching a conversation calmly, levelheaded, and with a level of professionalism. That isn't often the case in our community. And no one seems to say anything; instead, we remain silent. Participant F also spoke about those who yell and stated that she is reminded by women in her family not to yell at one another or at children. Her mom often talked about the impact of boarding school and the cruelty they experienced. Her mother was a boarding school survivor and would often say, "Don't raise your voice. You don't yell at us. I was always yelled at when I was in the boarding school. I don't yell at my kids, so she goes, and my mom never yelled at my dad or me." I asked her whether the women in our community ever reflect on this or are aware of their own behavior. She replied, "I think only a few do." She went on to say her mom talks about the lack of connection with compassion and love. She told her mom's stories and experiences taught her to change her behavior and to be mindful of how she raises her kids, nieces, and nephews. Her mom often shares the emotional and physical harm she experienced at the Indian boarding schools,

> We were pulled from our parents. We didn't hug the matrons. We could no longer hug our mom and dad, because by the time we got home after being in the boarding schools all these years, and we got home to go, yeah, we hugged our mom and our dads, but we didn't get a morning hug and stuff from our mom and dads because we were at the boarding schools. So, they kind of lost that connection, even their touch. You know how a human touch, especially from your mom or your dad, your sibling, is a whole lot different than when you can't know, like a non-family member, a matron, or I think it's just the generational trauma

> that was caused. It's amazing how it influenced me, because I, like I said, if the ladies, when I finally voiced my analytical observation, of what I heard at that time. I was like, and then they finally snap, wow. She does yell a lot. She does raise her voice a lot. She's not talking, she's yelling.

In addition to yelling, Participant C talked about the hate and grudges that people hold on to, and then it's passed on to our kids, so they, too, begin to hate and hold grudges that may not even directly affect them. She discussed how there is no middle ground or way to get past the disagreement, whether it is about sports, education, programs, or helping our children. She stated, "There's no apology. There's no 'hey, can we come to an agreement?' Did you mean what you said?" When silence and privacy are founded in historical patriarchal control, well, we see people turning a blind eye to the injustice and mistreatment of women and children. Participant C said,

> I think the thing here is just the family ties. I think a lot of people don't like you overstepping your boundaries and go into their personal business because it's probably a lot more complicated than what that individual is going through or what it appears to be. I think that's one of the things that a lot of these people like to stay private for their own reasoning, and they don't like you to involve yourself with what's going on in their home.

Invisibility happens without us realizing we are perpetuating the harm. Participant F said, "We don't think about our aunts, we don't think about this group." If a native woman is not given the tools necessary to thrive, they will often struggle as an adult to reach out and be a mentor and to teach young girls about being a Jicarilla Apache female. She went on to say, "There are a lot

of experiences where I work that I feel that the tribe could have more influence or more advocacy for them."

Jicarilla Apache girls and women are targets of colonial violence. Participant B talked about predatory behaviors and the objectification of our girls and teens. I asked her if she knew of any programs or services that talk about the safety of self and MMIWG, as we do have predators in town that target young girls and teens, whether by checking them out, dating, or targeting them for sex. Participant B acknowledged that there is a problem with predatory behaviors, both by our own people and non-tribals, "Yes, and then when I say predatory, these are people that aren't natives. And it's not trying to be prejudiced towards another, different type of ethnic group. But the reality is, these people are men and women who are taking our women." Sexual abuse, grooming, and trafficking in our community seems to be out-of-sight, outta mind.

Our Jicarilla Apache community serves as a vital hub where knowledge systems thrive through intergenerational transmission, storytelling, and place-based connections to land. It is a place where we gather, laugh, and share through everyday acts. It is a place and setting that provides for learning and traditional Indigenous education. AuntieWork also provides networks of Jicarilla Apache aunties who are willing to teach, provide guidance, and act as hubs for ideas, resources, role models, and human connection. These practices and ways of Jicarilla Apache aunties take up the work of Indigenous feminist theory by regenerating and reawakening ways that have been taken from us. The human. Cajete (2015) explains that "community is the natural context of human life" (p.53). It is multi-dimensional, and as social beings, we all live in relation to one another. Our survival depends on the health and well-being of individuals, which is intimately interwoven with our communities. Participant F discussed the lack of safe

spaces and support for all women, not just young girls. She explained that there are services and programs, but they have specific focuses and are limited to what they offer.

Our Jicarilla Apache community aunties witness the effects of community loss. Participant B talked about how the dysfunction of the family is often too much, or external factors are heavy, or there is a lack of support systems, and we see our girls and teens struggle or act out. She stated,

> I had a girl who was a cutter, and I worked with four girls who displayed suicidal tendencies. The girls that I'm talking about were cutters, and they would cut their wrists. They had scars on their wrists, they had scars on their thighs, and one of them had scars on their calf. I noticed it right away.

I asked how she approached these situations, and she replied,

> I did a lot of different things, like, um, social work, a social work approach, opening up conversation with them, and just making small talk about myself as an example, leading them, making them comfortable enough to share, and sharing first and then sharing with them. Yeah, and like we, I had, I knew I had to earn their trust.

Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing on the frontlines means we are witnesses to the chaos within our community and the effects of colonialism. Jicarilla Apache aunties can counter these harmful actions by demonstrating the care and concern of our kinship systems and teachings of strength. These relationships are foundational and critical when youth are in crisis. Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing means responding to youth in dire need of support.

This is Our Home and Our Community

In this section, I will analyze and discuss the stories and lived experiences of Jicarilla Apache participants, which honor the place we all live together, through our relationships, and help us understand that our daily interactions are complex.

While there is conversation about Jicarilla Apache families from different areas, ultimately, despite differences in cultural beliefs and ceremonial practices, our creation, spiritual practices, and tribal ceremonial practices are similar at their core. Matriarchal systems honor and practice an interconnected web of relationships, respect, resistance, and individual self-determination. It is about restoring balance and honoring regenerative practices. Indigenous authors such as Laura Harjo and Michelle Jacob provide Indigenous community frameworks that identify critical factors needed for regenerating and reclaiming Indigenous knowledge systems, Elder teachings, storytelling as teaching, and collective/community Indigenous praxis. Acknowledging gaps, lost culture, and history calls for regenerating knowledge and the way we teach. (Harjo, 2019). We are to honor the lived and felt experiences of our Tribal communities. In doing so, it prioritizes the changing needs of the community and Jicarilla Apache values and ways of being, transforming them into new manifestations and a new understanding of their applications.

How do we re-create communities that practice respectful relationships with relatives, land, and all creations? Educating present and future generations, centering relationships through community-based education, empowerment, and based on our own cultural values and principles. We must creatively resist, unsettle colonial practices, and create healthy tribal individuals, families, and communities. Living in relation to one another is reciprocal in nature. I asked Participant B what the young girls she worked with taught her. It took her a minute to

think about the question, but she emphasized that our youth would find someone to learn from; they turn to someone, regardless of whether that influence is good or bad. She said, “I think that today's society is anything goes, and if you're not going to teach your kids these ground rules, or you don't want to instill values, then somebody else will do it for sure.”

Teachings from Jicarilla Apache Elders can provide us with a connection to the past, present, and future. There are still Jicarilla Apache aunties who carry knowledge from our Elders – they have stories about creation, Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), and living with our Mother Earth. Without these teachings as tools and resources to build healthy communities, we will continue on the path we are on. Participant C focused on the loss of Elders and its impact on our way of life. She stated,

> I just think that within the Dulce community, there needs to be a lot of change. And I don't see it coming anytime soon. From any aspect of our government to the individuals to our healthcare, there's a lot that needs to happen within our community, within our school system, within our culture, and our language. We need to preserve a lot of things from the people who are still alive today and willing to share them and record them. Because we know that there's going to be a time when we are going to be losing a lot of those Elders that we still have, who still have some knowledge of what the Jicarilla stands for.

And as we lose these Elders and their knowledge, very little is being passed on.

Summary

At the core of who we are as Jicarilla Apache women, as a people, is relationships. We all share a living space, traditional ways of life, language(s), ceremonies, and connection to land and the spiritual world. The complexity of our ways of life and the relationships we have is important

to understand if we are going to build a healthy nation. Moving forward, we must live together in a good way that honors relationships and responsibilities, fosters deep respect for one another and for the tribe, and works toward collective self-determination. These practices include land, animals, plants, and water – as they are interconnected with our mind, body, spirit, and heart.

Regenerating Jicarilla Apache Knowledge and Traditional Practices

In this section, I analyze and discuss stories and lived experiences from Jicarilla Apache interviews that emerged as what I describe as AuntieWork. Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is a form of resistance to settler colonial logics. Settler colonial logics are structural frameworks designed to eradicate and replace Native American and Indigenous populations with new settler societies. The underlying premise is land acquisition and resource extraction. Resistance emerges through the context of Jicarilla Apache theories, philosophy, and stories. Indigenous feminist theory emphasizes decolonization, cultural values, Indigenous knowledge systems, and traditional practices. In doing so, we center Jicarilla Apache practices, intelligence, and thought in our everyday acts of resistance. Utilizing storytelling, oral traditions, and ceremonial songs, these stories offer a framework for understanding the root causes of ongoing colonial harms in our community.

In Michelle Jacob's book, Yakama Rising (2013), she argues that Indigenous feminism is regenerating Indigenous knowledge, engaging in traditional practices, and doing decolonial work. Each participant's stories and lived experiences align with and support the workings, foundation, and framework of this theory. Dr. Jacob highlights the importance of decolonizing praxis and how our actions and involvement in ceremony, dance, and song, as contained in cultural traditions, in fact embody contradictions and resist settler colonial violence. Embodied practices of cultural values and traditional teachings are acts of resistance. Through Jicarilla

Apache AuntieWork, we can create opportunities and cultural teachings that involve Jicarilla Apache bodies moving, learning, laughing, and growing. These practices are grounded in Jicarilla Apache ways, involving teachings, the sharing of knowledge, and doing, in which generations of Jicarilla Apache women and girls resist colonial logics of conquest, its violence, and erasure.

It is our ceremonial practice that teaches us how to live as good relatives in this world. For example, our Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) and listening to our Elders talk about the puberty ceremony in our Jicarilla Apache language are embedded with lessons and guidance, such as sharing & giving back, being a good relative, and community wellness. Embodiment calls on us to act now, despite our location, in our hometown community, city, or in another Tribe or Nation (Simpson, 2017). Engaging in critical conversations and everyday actions in our homes, workplaces, and communities helps us begin to think differently about what it means to be a Jicarilla Apache woman and girl.

Indigenous of being and knowing are holistic, relational with land and her teachings, and ceremonial practice. Regenerating Jicarilla Apache ancestral knowledge, ceremony, and medicine, and land teachings and stewardship. Jicarilla Apache ways of being and knowing honor the teachings from our ceremonies, embody knowledge passed to us by Elders, and come to life through action. These conversations, shared knowledge, and hands-on teaching involvement are critical ways that our Jicarilla Apache girls learn. Regenerating Jicarilla Apache knowledge is grounded in our everyday activities and interactions with one another. Auntiework allows us to regenerate Jicarilla Apache knowledge in different ways. Using an Indigenous feminist theory and Auntie-ing centers land-based learning, community-led care, and intergenerational wisdom to counter colonial logics and gendered violence. These systems

honor and celebrate Jicarilla Apache aunties' roles as knowledge keepers, challenging patriarchal, colonial, and heteronormative structures while restoring matriarchal systems and teachings, as well as reciprocal relationships with the natural world. Simpson (2017) argues that regeneration practices involve the regeneration of relationships. Jicarilla Apache auntie work is rooted in shared knowledge across generations through song, ceremony, and lived experiences. To unsettle and eliminate harmful colonial systems, Jicarilla Apache aunties need to be in constant motion in creating the network itself, a continual mode of regeneration.

AuntieWork and Storywork

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork provides learning through storywork. Archibald's (2008) storywork is holistic and embedded with interrelated principles. These principles provide a theoretical framework for making meaning from stories. Taking up the work of Archibald's storywork, Jicarilla Apache aunties can provide ways to teach Jicarilla Apache principles such as respect, relationality, reciprocity, and interrelatedness to unsettle colonial violence by centering the voices of Jicarilla Apache women, preserving histories, and creating counter-narratives that challenge dominant oppressive structures. The stories Participant A shared focused on relationships, intergenerational teachings, family values and practices, and the transition to womanhood. She shares her stories brilliantly while mentoring youth. Her joyful and delightful mood makes it easy for anyone to engage in story and laughter. In her stories, she often speaks about the men in her family and the roles they play in ceremony and community wellness. Whether they are working together to prepare for a Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) or for Go-Jii-Ya (Jicarilla Apache footrace, which takes place in September), each person understands their responsibility and contributes to the family and community. Emphasizing the balance of gender roles underscores the need to work together, respect one another, and be

valued. AuntieWork is understanding your responsibility (Simpson, 2011) to listen, participate, and pass on teachings. Participant F takes up this responsibility as she not only teaches her daughter, but as an auntie, she ensures this knowledge is passed on to her nieces and nephews, she shared,

> It's just the individual reaching out to their own family. You know, they have the barrier that was previously set there. And then that goes for advocacy. I think, as far as I do, I always try to do my best because that's how I was taught to mentor. My mom would say, listen, pay attention. This is what's going on. We're at ceremonies. We're preparing, or we're in the ceremony. You need to go down there and listen to what they're talking about. And like me, I have a daughter, so now she is learning and knows her responsibility.

Intergenerational teachings and actions that are active demonstrations foster skills through direct experience. This intergenerational transfer of knowledge is in the doing. AuntieWork is "oriented through movement spaces and place, auntie-ing on the front lines is an active relation-ing to our extended kin and land and is an essential node in critical networks of Native resurgence" (Sherwood & Jacob, 2022, p. 404). Grounding our own storying within the story of collective action, we do so by Indigenous thought, knowledges, and intelligences, and we can then begin to see Indigenous processes. When participant F is around her family, her responsibilities call her not only to learn but also to listen and become; they demand that she is now the one who is becoming Auntie. She shared,

> My mom called me. This is what's going on. You go over there. Who tells me what they say? So, I have to go over there, and I listen, because I'm presenting it to my mom. Then I come back and tell my mom, but my daughter's with me,

> okay? And I told her, this is what we do. This is how you do it. I don't know why. This is just how we do it. In our family, I have all my other aunties and even cousins my age or older sitting there for their moms. And our moms are at the table, but we're in the kitchen, so it's all generational teachings being passed on, and that's the way we do it in our family.

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is also actively teaching youth about healing medicine and how to find it. Our connection to land is life. Every turn, we are gifted with the essentials needed to survive and thrive, to give and receive love and compassion, and to grow into good Jicarilla Apache relatives. Wisdom generated from the ground up is for everyone. Jicarilla Apache realities provide ways of living through our epistemologies, ontologies, stories, and songs. Participant E knows how to identify and gather bone medicine. She shared,

> I was taught that by one of my aunties, and I was talking to a male who's in the, he's a he's in one of the Bear Clan societies. And he told me he was talking to me. And then he says, 'Well, you know the bone medicine?' I said, Yeah, I know what it is, what it looks like. And he goes, 'You know?' And I said, Yeah, my auntie showed my grandma and me because I was with my auntie and my grandma, and one of my aunties.

She went on to share a story about the aunties and grandmas taking the kids, all the cousins, to gather this medicine. She said, "They took my cousins and me out on the rez, and they said, 'This is what it looks like, how you dig it up, and what you do.' We dug it up, and to this day, that's actually when they need it." Her auntie and grandma also taught her and her cousins who to go to for the dress, who to go to for the stuff, who to go to for the inside of the tipi, and what they need to start a fire. They shared responsibility for both boys and girls and talked about

working together. I asked her whether her children knew, and who had taught them, and she said she did. She elaborated on the importance of intergenerational teachings, and all the little ones and grandkids are taught this because that's what they do in their family.

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is decolonial and regenerative. Auntie-ing can be challenging, as some families may not practice our ceremonies or even know about them due to ongoing colonial legacies. It has silenced these practices to ensure the adoption of Western norms. Sharing knowledge about our ceremonies and ways is critical for the renewal and regeneration of our knowledge systems and traditional practices. However, while we can actively teaching and inform our youth and young girls about these ceremonial ways, there may be barriers that we are familiar with – the 'our family does it this way, not that way' or blatantly disregarding the deeper purpose of 'ensuring our ways are passed on to the different generations' and instead 'that's not how we do it' and shutting down learning completely. Participant E talked about this and said,

> There's a barrier, the first barrier that I would have to do, and it's, I don't know if it's just, it's whether it's a barrier, or whether it's, that's my family, not your family, you know, because there's some families that you can go to who will gladly listen.

She talked about how her family practices sharing knowledge with other families, which is effective in understanding and transferring knowledge across generations, families, and clans within the tribe. She shared, "We share stuff. It's easy, easier to share in that circle around." This is a huge barrier within our tribal community; it even hinders collaboration for programs, services, and social events aimed at teaching our culture and language. Participant E also stressed the importance of gathering and listening,

> So that's a totally different situation, so we're now talking to different families. I can talk with them about stuff, and they'll listen, and we can talk, because when we help, it's actually sharing. We share stuff. Well, remember this, we were told this, and they remind us that we were told this.

Colonial logics thrive and are always in motion, working to eliminate Indigenous practices and societies to make way for new settler societies (Wolfe, 2006). However, Indigenous bodies are sites of resistance, as we have resisted being eliminated. Learning through the doing and community auntie knowledge-auntie work is resistance. The movement of the body itself is important; it creates or reconnects us with the Jicarilla Apache process. Participant F shared her experiences of basket making for ceremonial purposes. The older auntie started off with,

> This is how it's going to go. This is what you do. She brought out everything she needed, explained the basket to me, and explained the four days. She explained to me, you know, everything, everything in detail. And she showed me all the instruments; everything we needed was on the table right there in front of her. And this is what you do, you know. And she showed me how to, like, there's a thread. You get a long piece of thread, have beads in front of you, thread it, thread the beads on that, and you don't pick up. You don't. There's no design. You just thread the needle and pull the beads. And he's red, you know. She explained the rules. So, we did that. And she said, normally, you just use it like this, probably about this big, you know. So, we stretched it out to arm's length, tied it together in a circle, wound it, pulled it, and wound it again. And then that was one of the last things that went on the instruments for the basket. Oh, wow. And then, now, you

know. I said, Okay. She said, 'Now if anybody comes to me, I'm going to send them to you.' And I said, Okay.

Jicarilla Apache bodies are sites of regeneration, knowledge systems, and resistance. Our dance, of relations, of prayer, of love, is an act of resisting colonialism. Using our bodies is a way to contest colonial logics "that render Indigenous peoples vanished, silenced, and conquered" (Jacob, 2013, p. 228). Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is the act of refusal through presence, and it is how we teach our young girls to become "a site of rich meaningful contradiction" (Jacob, 2013, p. 234).

Practices of Resistance and Renewal and Decolonizing Praxis

In this section, I analyze and discuss stories and lived experiences shared by Jicarilla Apache aunties. From their stories, they discussed ways to create practices of resistance and renewal, and they themselves take on many forms of resistance and renewal.

Being back in my community with a new perspective and a sense of growth, and now with a study focused on Jicarilla Apache women and girls, has allowed me to ask questions about who we are as Jicarilla Apache people. More importantly, it has given me a different understanding and outlook on our way of life. In talking with community members, I have asked questions about our practices of resistance and renewal. Renewal happens through everyday acts and practices such as traditional parenting, speaking Native languages, and fostering community health. Indigenous feminist theory centers decolonization and regeneration with praxis. Jicarilla Apache decolonizing praxis is concerned with the power of creation and with "making power" (Jacob, 2013, p. 256). Jicarilla Apache auntie-ing reclaims Jicarilla Apache traditions, culture, health and harmony, languages, and communities.

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is a decolonial practice of Jicarilla Apache support and guidance, a step up that let's youth, families, and the community know you are there to support them. Through the teachings, demonstration, and action, our youth and community learn. As adults, we also have to verbalize, and our actions must demonstrate respect for one another, listening to one another, showing compassion for one another, and modeling behavior. Sherwood & Jacob (2022) discuss the importance of Auntie-ing on the frontlines, which are produced through bodies, histories, and tensions. Yet, they go on to talk about the "lens of flexibility" (p. 403), and by this I honor and affirm Jicarilla Apache brilliance, love, and mentorship within our communities, essentially on the frontlines as it involves direct engagement, building trust-based relationships with youth in the community, in classrooms, out on land, and in office spaces- acting as first point of contact fostering resiliency and support. Auntie-ing helps us learn the basic skills we need for life. Participant B learned through the doing, and by this, she shared, I mean, as children we aren't always told ahead of time but learn through the doing, that we are taught "do this, don't do that, the women do this because…". Participant B shared a memory of her aunties making koł bai (Jicarilla Apache word for a fermented corn drink) cooking. She starts off by saying,

> We're over here making koł bai (Jicarilla Apache word for a fermented corn drink). When it's time for you to come help cool it off, we'll call you, type of thing. And so, in our way, the girls shouldn't even be touching the teaspoon until you're a woman, because you're making it for a female's feast. So, we're not allowed to touch the corn, cool the corn, nothing, because we were little girls, so they made that clear to us.

Cultural teachings and lessons are learned through doing and reaffirm Jicarilla Apache belief in connectedness.

As Jicarilla Apache aunties, we take part in communal acts such as preparing the shade for camp, preparing traditional foods, and creating ceremonial times. During these times, we mentor younger generations through guidance from Jicarilla Apache Elders and older aunties. Participant C talked about how she remembers the aunties in her life and how they contributed to her growth and worldview. She said,

> The one that stood out is for Go-Jii-Ya. My aunt, Daisy (pseudonym), was making our shade when she stood out, and she and several other people from the area across from the White Clan. They were making soup and fried bread for people working on their shades, and they invited everyone working on their shades to come eat over there. And she told me it was going to be for three days, so we were out there for three days, stopping by each day to get a meal from them.

While I did not explicitly state the disconnect within our community, it has emerged in different ways. As a community, we also struggle to be kind to one another, help one another, and protect those within our community. Participant B's conversation pivoted to how she grew up with Jicarilla Apache aunties, yet despite being a small community, we struggle to empower and help one another. We are ever so lucky to find kindness in this world. Too many times, we notice yet maybe turn a blind eye to those who are struggling with substance abuse, domestic violence, or hardships. But it is not often that we offer help or kindness. I asked Participant B about what lessons she learned from her auntie, and she shared,

> I carry a lot of her attributes. Because as I got older, even when my kids were really little, it didn't matter who was hungry, like if I saw my cousin in town and

> she became an alcoholic, I helped her get a meal. Or I always had people in my car. It didn't matter if I was going to the store for lunch; they would be in my car, and I would take them home, and I would just cook for everybody. And I remember my husband getting mad at me one time, telling me, 'Quit feeding all the strays, and that boiled me.

But advocacy and critical consciousness are essential as we aim to address the immediate needs of our community. We talked more about this because it dug up emotions of anger, frustration, and empathy.

Decolonization is woven into the core of Indigenous feminism and emerges through Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork as cultural revitalization, re-awakening matrilineal systems, connecting with our knowledge systems, and sovereignty of the body. Cultural revitalization is the active, community-led process of restoring, strengthening, and reclaiming cultural practices, languages, and traditions (Jacob, 2013) that have been lost due to colonial violence. When we genuinely care about our Jicarilla Apache girls and are intentional with our actions, we help bring out the best in them because we want them to see how they shine and how amazing they are! Empowerment can foster superpowers (Jacob, 2020). Participant C stated, "I want them to be the best version of themselves. I want them to learn everything they can. I want them to know that they never have to stop learning. That was one of my biggest things." With encouragement, love, and support – and a consistent presence as aunties - we can help our youth and young girls harness their superpowers. She went on to share that we are all life learners, and learning does not have an age limit or a grade level. There is also learning and growth outside of school. She shared,

> It doesn't matter how old you are; you just keep learning and keep going. You know, I plan on going to school until I just can't anymore. And I just encourage that. That's what they should want to do, too, you know, don't just think, oh, high school. I just made it to high school, and then I'm done. That's just a new chapter that will start after that. So, because that was the mindset for some of my own kids at home, I just had to make sure I got a diploma. I just make sure I finish high school if I can, at least get a GED. And it's like, no, you're not done there. Don't limit yourself. I try to teach them safety. Just in general, like holistically protecting your mind, your body too!

AuntieWork understands that our way of life as Jicarilla Apache is relational. Indigenous feminist theory centers on relationality, emphasizing balance and the restoration of cultural values. Participant F shared, "What do they need to thrive? Holistically, everybody needs support. It's as simple as support. You know, your foundation, what's your foundation?" She stressed the importance of having a solid foundation and said,

> You know, there's stuff, and there's always time to learn, and it's always with conversation. But conversation has to be like this. You have to sit down, you have to talk and make time, but we don't know how to do that. Okay, yeah, and I think as young women, the foundation has to be there. It's so weird how many young ladies don't have that.

Relational accountability challenges settler colonial structures, kinship systems emphasize community caretaking and collective well-being (Cajete, 2015). Jicarilla Apache aunties have a responsibility for our youth, ensuring they are knowledgeable, caring, informed, strong, and well. She went on to say that not all youth and tribal members have support systems in our

community, “They might not have that support at home and with our kids. You know, within the community, young men also don't have that support.” Working in different career tracks allowed her to work with different groups of people and understand that we need more programs and services that inform and teach our youth about life. She shared stories of her work and the need to be involved by identifying needs and taking action to empower and teach. While creating something new, such as programs and services, is never easy for some people, it is worth doing when you have the opportunity. Participant F focused on a pilot program for youth and community members to gain practical skills, which creates a feeling of pride, belongingness, and the overall pathway to getting a job! The extreme demonstration of gratitude and appreciation from our youth and community members shows that when we take the time to help and give them things that they can feel accomplished in, it is long-lived.

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork means providing our youth with structure when it is lacking for their safety and protection. Indigenous people have the foundational full right to full exclusive control over their person, including psychological safety, choices, and autonomy. Indigenous feminist theory posits that the safety of self and the sovereignty of the body are fundamentally linked to land, decolonization, and resistance to heteropatriarchy and colonial political systems, encompassing individual, communal, and environmental well-being (Trask, 1996; Goeman, 2013; Arvin, 2019). Aunties can provide protective factors for youth through key teaching and strategies such as cultural empowerment, trauma-informed care, and practical skill-building to foster resilience against violence and exploitation. Youth need guidance! Participant B, who works directly with youth, shared her approach. She stated, “I empowered them by just teaching them structure and not giving up.” Structure provides essential support by offering consistent routines, clear expectations, and setting firm boundaries, teaching

self-regulation, decreasing impulsive actions, and replacing chaotic environments. Another example, when Participant B talked about the niece she supported, she referenced vaping and the lack of consequences. So, when her niece broke the rules, she decided the best thing for the girl was to stay consistent and not give her back to her mom after the rules had been clearly broken. She went on to say, “I could have given her back to her mom, and I didn't, and at the end, she cried. She finally got comfortable with the structure. She didn't want to go home.” While the girl reached out for her mom, every time she broke the rules, her mom simply wasn’t ready to parent her. Knowing her niece did not have a stable home life, she needed someone consistent and who would not give up on her. She said. “Mom was not in a good place, and I just told her, I'm sorry. And I kept her vapes. Oh, she did, cried a lot, and threw fits. And then, at the end, she broke them. I was really proud of her.”

We learn through the doing and grounded normativity (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016) - teaching from the ground up, tools of resistance look like teachings, acts of doing, empowerment, reconnecting to culture, talking about the importance of being Jicarilla Apache and knowing our ways, and love, laughter, and community. These teachings on how to live our lives in relation to the environment are critical, as we have generations growing up without instruction in womanhood, connection to cultural practices, and so on. Participant F focused on parenting styles among the younger generations and the challenges and knowledge at their fingertips. She stated,

> There are a lot of parents now, school-age girls that we're talking about, they have young parents, and the teaching and discipline from them is different than how I was raised, a generational change, and you can see it, and you can see it in

parenting, and you can see it in how they're growing and learning. Now.

Everybody can Google it.

She went on to say that while this may be helpful for having instant knowledge at your fingertips, as parents, aunties, and caregivers, we still need to remember that tangible skills are essential for our tribal community. She stated,

> I also think one thing that needs to be reinforced, if not encouraged. It is a trade school because they might not be able to attend a four-year college. School is not for everybody, but each person excels and has their own expertise that's already been given to them. You know, at birth, some people are just cooks. They just cook. Some schedules, some work with numbers, some, you know, all these things. And if we can't find that, we can help them excel and thrive in those areas. I think they will be successful.

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is building capacity to know we are responsible for showing up. Participant A stated,

> I have to be responsible for you. I'm going to be there for all of you guys. And you know, no matter what you know, just know that you can call me no matter what, if you need me there, I'll go there and get you if I'm in town. But if I'm not, I'll help you find something you know, and you know. And I think that's something that I think a lot of the kids don't have. Maybe that's why a lot of things are happening to our young kids, because they're misguided and they're not being they don't feel protected.

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork demonstrates wisdom through action, integrity, and alignment with core values. Participant B stated,

> I am a big believer in anything that you're going to tell somebody to do better. You'd better do better, yourself. You know you can't just expect them to listen to you, and so we would. I did a lot of hands on training with the staff, okay, but not only that, but I wanted them to feel comfortable enough if they were going to give like a test to the kids, if they were going to create curriculum, yeah, we learned it together, and I stood by them to learn it together so that they understood it's not just a directive, okay? Because when you provide the teamwork skills, and you're doing it alongside them, pretty soon, they're doing it on their own. So that was the approach that I took with them. It worked because then you kind of give them their independence.

Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing is reciprocal. When someone points out a flaw or harmful behavior, we may not always welcome it and may even get defensive. Navigating what is perceived as a personal attack, threat to their autonomy, or being misunderstood is never easy, but it needs to happen. While we hold youth accountable for their behavior and actions, we, too, as Aunties, must be accountable for our own. Participant E talked about how the young girls react defensively, but over time, through consistent communication and support, they begin to recognize their actions and may even appreciate you. She stated,

> They're different. Where you'll reach out to them and connect with them after building trust. They may reach out discreetly, or behind a closed door, or they'll write me a letter, and then they'll tell me, 'I hear you, Participant E. I apologize, but I just...' and I respond in the same discreet way, because that's just human behavior. Some can respond back in a crowded room with 20 other people watching, and some will wait till they're behind a closed door, and they'll

> approach you, and they'll still say, Hey, what's that like, discreet, or they're not confrontational. They'll go behind, and they'll write you a letter. They'll say, Participant E, I heard what you said. I want to let you know, thank you for saying it. I needed to hear it.

Participant B touched on "Auntie accountability of self" too, and pivoted to us, as aunties, and how situations we encounter teach us, and that it isn't easy. She stated,

> And so, it was hard, and for me, it was self-reflection too, because if my aunt Leia (pseudonym) were in the situation, and I was with my niece at that time, and we had similar upbringings. But for me, it was not allowed, I wouldn't dare introduce my own kids to how my upbringing was. So, do you think that, knowing that she was doing all these things and allowed to, did you voice that in terms of, like, advocating for maybe this should not be happening? Or I did. I just told her there are healthier ways. There are other ways, and I always told her, I said, don't, don't just think that you're at a roadblock, and this is the only avenue.

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is a choice. It is also a social and cultural responsibility. The work we do is difficult, unselfish, done with care, and essential for our Jicarilla Apache girls.

Summary

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is heartwork. It is intentional and meaningful, creating an intimate bond among Jicarilla Apache girls, families, and communities. The work we do as Jicarilla Apache women is for the future of all Jicarilla Apache people. Our experiences and practices of being Jicarilla Apache women are shaped by community relationships, family practices, and daily shared experiences within a small tribe. Our past, present, and future desire for happiness, continual healing, and a future. As we recognize our personal and community

practices of renewal and regeneration, we can begin to live a full life of good relationships, address deeply rooted trauma and grief, engage in ceremonial and spiritual practices, and reproduce Jicarilla Apache practices and life ways.

Chapter 6

Healing Praxis: Through and In Relations

In this chapter, I provide an analysis and discussion of stories and experiences shared during Jicarilla Apache participant interviews. I discuss how the women are centering healing praxis through Jicarilla Apache auntie relational practices. In previous chapters (Chapters 4 and 5), I provided an understanding of Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork, honoring the lived experiences of Jicarilla Apache women providing nurturing and cultural teachings. This chapter builds upon that work, describing how Jicarilla Apache auntie-ing is intergenerational, grounded in actions of what I describe as Jicarilla Apache healing.

Using Indigenous feminist theory provides a framework and tools for focusing on "felt knowledge," community-led caretaking, and restorative justice. The lived experiences and creation of a healing praxis for our own Jicarilla Apache community must address the history of our people. The history of the Jicarilla Apache is complex, multilayered, and rich with emotional knowledge. The work of Dian Million (2009) argues that the narratives and felt experiences of Indigenous women constitute personal testimony, serving as the heart of the struggle for Indigenous rights, sovereignty, and cultural survival. Jicarilla Apache auntie narratives are rich with emotions and feelings, which are ways of theorizing and knowing about healing and social change rooted in decolonial practices and Jicarilla Apache knowledge.

Healing is an ongoing process. We cannot heal alone. We heal through relationships, through connection to the earth, through conversations to process, with spiritual beliefs and practices, through laughter, and with love. We carry historical intergenerational trauma in the body and mind through a combination of biological, psychological, and social mechanisms passed down from generation to generation. Despite this heaviness, as Jicarilla Apache

people, we carry the tools and resources through our lineage, our kinship, and our communities- it is also through our language, culture, and ceremonial practices.

On this dissertation journey, I had to think about 'healing' and what it means for the individual Jicarilla Apache and the community. More importantly, what does it mean as we think about showing up for Jicarilla Apache girls? Through my day to day interactions and talks with family and loved ones, I have come to realize that healing can be returning home to our Tribal communities, learning to love yourself and all the imperfections, it is the time spent with dad and strengthening that relationship, it is learning to accept compliments and see our beauty and strength, it is losing a loved one and actively reaching out for support and comfort and choosing not to self-isolate, and it is choosing to see the beauty and gifts we are given every day.

Healing, then, as it relates to this study and mentoring, is twofold. First, understanding our own trauma and healing as Jicarilla Apache Aunties. The second is helping Jicarilla Apache girls and teens identify and build protective factors that move them toward healing through Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork. Healing can be scary, misunderstood, or a way of being that we may not think about. Many times, we are in survival mode, the trauma is just too intense, or we may feel there is no way out and no one to help. Healing means facing our trauma, our hurt, and sometimes asking for help. Embracing vulnerability is essential for healing; it acts as a pathway for deeper connections and trauma recovery by removing protective barriers.

Healthy Relationship – Love, Balance, and the Healing Process

In this section, I provide an analysis and discussion of shared stories and experiences of Jicarilla Apache participants. Jicarilla Apache aunties discuss healing praxis as a holistic, interconnected process that integrates culture, spirituality, and community to counteract historical intergenerational trauma and restore balance. Reclaiming the roles of Jicarilla Apache women

as protectors frames healing as an act of resistance and love, reclaiming their roles as caregivers, leaders, and keepers of life.

Looking into the past and understanding our story is critical on our way toward healing. "Families and communities have the ability that allows for the tangibility of (re)mappings' healing significance and revolutionary power" (Goeman, 2013, p. 3086). Centering traditional practices, decolonial praxis, cultural values, and sovereignty provides a strong foundation for rebuilding our Jicarilla Apache community. Healthy relationships are fundamentally linked to fostering respect, balance, and autonomy necessary for personal and collective well-being. Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork can foster healthy relationships that serve as a foundation for unlearning and reclaiming traditional Jicarilla Apache kinship systems. This is demonstrated through story and voice of Participant E. She talked about how close her family is and how they not only teach our ways as part of growth but also maintain respect for all genders and generations. Traditional healthy family dynamics provide us with safety, love, and support. "Families have always been an integral in how a tribal community functions, which speaks to the importance of family engagement in a system of care" (nicwa, n.d., p. 3). Traditional healthy family dynamics mirror the community by acting as smaller, foundational units that reflect, teach, and reinforce the broader community's values, traditions, and social structures. They serve as agents of socialization—training individuals in social norms. Children learn socialization, values, behaviors, and attitudes that they later bring into the community.

Participant E focused on Jicarilla Apache traditional kinship systems and practices that honor all gender roles, ensuring that balance featuring distinct responsibilities for men and women that are equally valued. It also brought together men and women, because our people are the strongest when working "Together to bring about healing for our people" (Jacob, 2013,

p. 109). As one who had teaching, support, and guidance from Jicarilla Apache women and men, I appreciate Participant E's focus on traditional gender roles. She shared stories of her uncles and women in the family, which align with Indigenous feminist theory and decolonial practices, and a critical understanding of how families work to maintain balance, including the important contributions of both women and men. She stated, "My family culture is having several grandpas and uncles who were responsible for ensuring everyone was safe and supported. The Pyramid of things, so they taught all these other guys, you know. So, now that they are gone, the younger ones are responsible." As she talked about her family, she shared that they practice intergenerational teachings of respect. She focused on how younger generations listen, show respect, and put their teachings into practices. These practices of intergenerational teaching are acts of resistance! She shared, "They do a lot of stuff just out of respect, culturally, out of respect for grandpa and all the uncles. They do stuff for us." As she continued to talk about how they all gather to help one another, I was surprised when Participant E mentioned the Pyramid model in relation to family dynamics. This approach supports social-emotional development, promotes positive family dynamics, fosters nurturing relationships, builds consistent routines, and fosters supportive environments. Leanne Simpson (2017) discusses emergent systems of relationality in which individuals have a high degree of self-determination, and children are held and honored with the same rights and responsibilities as adults. This is important for our Jicarilla Apache girls [and youth], to figure out their place and purpose, to understand their gifts and responsibilities through family relations and systems, through ceremony and reflection.

When the Jicarilla Apache girls do not have healthy family dynamics, the work is to begin building trust and relationships. Participant E works with youth of all ages, but what she focuses on is regenerative practices that require a higher degree of presence. Simpson

(2011) argues that ‘A Society of Presence’ reminds us of our ancestors' ways of life, they created Indigenous processes and circumstances to adapt: “They were constantly engaged in the act of creating” (p. 92). Creating regenerative healing practices requires us to engage with presence and process, which means sharing stories, singing, gathering, and doing. For example, promoting accountability among all Jicarilla Apache members, fostering self-forgiveness and forgiveness among one another, teaching healthy conflict-resolution skills, and rebuilding Jicarilla Apache family relationships. Establishing rapport involves listening without judgment and an authentic approach that prioritizes emotional safety through a culture of trust and respect. Participant E engages in conversations about her teachings, culture, and how she carries these teachings with her loved ones. She shared, “We sit, and we actually start talking. And I tell them, Well, my grandma said this. And I said, what about you guys? So I'll open it up. What did your grandma say?” The connection is ‘grandma’s teachings.’ Participant E focuses on something we probably all have been taught or know all too well, “You know, one of the main ones I always tell them is my grandma said, you don't go out at night. You close your curtains and stay inside when it gets dark; you don't go outside. How many of you were raised like that?”

Self-love also promotes accountability and self-awareness. Self-awareness allows individuals to recognize their emotions and behaviors and take accountability for their actions and outcomes. It is not easy to own the consequences of our choices, and we may not even openly admit we are in the wrong. Simpson (2011) highlights the importance of teaching our youth and women the ways of creating life, so that they know they are beautiful and sacred. She Simpson (2011) writes, “We do this for our young women so they will be guided by our Mother’s wisdom and so they will model themselves after this Earth” (p. 37). Having Jicarilla Apache aunties, we can trust enough to share with, who can help us understand

purpose, strong nations and tribes, and good and compassion, is critical. It also requires us aunties to be present and engage in talk, laughter, love, and the sharing of knowledge to process feelings and gain a new perspective. Participant E provides a listening ear and conversation that fosters self-reflection. She talked about the difficulty of change, as some of our girls have deeply rooted trauma, and it takes multiple support systems to effectively reach and provide for young girls, and went on to state, "So, it's making them think, making them think about approaching things differently." Participant F reinforced the support and vitality of healthy, positive relationships. She shared that during family gatherings, they talk about consequences and actions:

> During little get-togethers, if we're corrective, like, this is what happened, or this will happen to her. Remember, I was telling you, they're like, 'Come over here. Sit at the table. When this happens, you know what you should do. Don't do this. Don't do that. You're not supposed to do this. Don't go over there, you know?' And it's just guidance in a way that our family, we understand, we that's just kind of how we were raised by my mom and her siblings, her sisters, and even my uncles were like that.

Despite the close-knit family that some Jicarilla Apache aunties are part of, some are not so close, leaving many Jicarilla Apache girls to raise themselves, or raise one another through peer relationships, or learn as they go. Some of our Jicarilla Apache girls are raising themselves or raising one another through peer relationships. Participant F talked about girls and teens who have no guidance, no family support, or are ignored, and often stay silent and just survive. The support and healing start somewhere. Participant F's Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is steady, consistent, and insightful. She shared conversations she had with younger Jicarilla Apache girls.

Participant F understands many of the girls come from troubled homes, and stated, “They weren't raised by mom. So, whose mom then?” She shared that she would tell them they have people who love them, that they have mothers in some form. She said she would tell them,

> You have a mom; you have one mom. Every one of us was born from one mom. You have a mom, I said, and if you don't have one, I always, and I have to reiterate that, because a lot of them, as I said, weren't raised by their actual mom, so they put another mom there.

This is an example of where Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is vital, and those Jicarilla Apache community aunties can provide support. While some relationships are not as healthy as they could be, they still shape and influence the lives of our Jicarilla Apache girls. Aunties can influence grounding healing practices, remind the youth that there is hope and that we love them, and help create a new path, which may not be easy, but it’s a hand for support. The difficult part is choice and staying on the path. She went on to say that their moms were out partying and drinking or in jail, so they didn't have access to their mom because their mom was not good. She shared,

> So even that, and that's where I guess that ties, I guess, with accountability, because, like now, I try and make the ladies think of how you can get right with your kids. Keep that connection to your kids. How will the next generation know that they are loved and supported if we don’t try?

Jicarilla Apache Auntiework is cyclical and interconnected, and a call to action for all generations as they influence ‘someone.’ Our presence as Jicarilla Apache women is critical and personal. By inserting ourselves into stories, we take on the responsibility of sharing our gifts (Simpson, 2011) of language, knowledge, and teachings.

Learning to Love Who We Are

In this section, I provide analysis and discussion of stories shared by Jicarilla Apache participants who honor self and have identified the need to care for self, spiritually, mentally, and physically. Native-love is not just for our Jicarilla Apache people, families, and community, it also means loving who we are as Jicarilla Apache women.

Learning to love ourselves is no easy task. There may be many reasons why we don't love ourselves. Or maybe we love only some parts of who we are. Learning to love who we are is an ongoing journey of self-acceptance, with its good, bad, and complicated nature. Self-love can involve taking actions such as positive self-talk, setting firm boundaries, practicing self-care, and recognizing our worth. Thinking with theory, we are Jicarilla Apache women, we have been gifted with Jicarilla Apache knowledge, intelligence, and thought. It is our responsibility to live in a good way that honors the teachings, traditions, and values given to us with love (Simpson, 2011). Re-balancing self is grounded in Jicarilla Apache self-care, pray, hike, sit with nature, rinse off at the river, have a ceremony for blessing, and so on.

Healthy love is a topic worth exploring because growing up, we may have been shown or taught that toxic relationships are still love. Healthy love looks like loving our long hair, our profile, our body shape, our rez accent, our Indigenous humor, and our ways of being. Colonialism has long impacted how society sees Native women, but the work of Adrienne Keene (Cherokee) focuses on Native representation, education, and cultural appropriation. Through her work, she demonstrates the importance of representation. Native representation shifts historical and harmful stereotypes and moves toward authentic visuals and stories by Native American and Indigenous women writers, scholars, directors, and aunties! It (re)maps. This is vital for Jicarilla Apache girls to see strong Jicarilla Apache women, as it strengthens identity, instills Jicarilla

Apache pride, and empowers. It also reclaims cultural identities through cultural practices, fosters healthy behaviors, and promotes self-care. Jicarilla Apache aunties can serve as representatives for Jicarilla Apache girls.

Participant F was the only auntie to talk about self-care, and this is so important for Jicarilla Apache women. Healing praxis is self-care and recognizing all the many hats we wear, knowing that at some point we have to say no for personal reasons, health, or emotional protection, for spiritual wellness, and so on. Participant F shared, "I've learned myself like, I have my outlets, my outlets for myself, because it's not, it's not in town, like there's no department, there's no nothing that kind of promotes it, it's like self-care. So, I have self-care books." Knowing how to advocate for ourselves as Jicarilla Apache aunties is key to maintaining balance. As Jicarilla Apache women, we are nurturers and caretakers. Social expectations and conditioning create a way of thinking that we must juggle multiple roles, i.e., the mother, auntie, supervisor/director, employee/r, housekeeper, etc. The socialization and expectation of gender roles can lead to mental burnout, which eventually impacts our overall health. And it is okay to slow down and say no. Healthy boundaries are fine and good. Participant F said,

> Now I recognize it like, Oh, I'm tired. I just slept hard. I need to slow down. Now I can do that. But before I thought it was normal, like, I'm like, Oh, you're always supposed to be tired. You're always supposed to be burned out. You're always, no, it's not like that, and that was never taught to me, because we were always in survival mode.

As Jicarilla Aunties, the complexity of our lives isn't a secret, nor is it uncommon. Some Jicarilla Apache aunties are single parents, work, and are financially responsible for the home, vehicle, food, etc. Our Jicarilla Apache girls see our actions, the many hats, and our survival mode. And if

they look up to us as we hold on by a thread and continue to achieve or just get by, it then becomes normalized. They see the outcomes and achievements, and not so much the challenges of being a Jicarilla Apache woman, oppressive structures, or inequalities that we have to navigate on a daily basis.

Auntie Love (Jacob, 2020) focuses on helping you be the person you want to be. It proposes possibilities and provides ways to help when we are not around, so young girls can draw on our love, teachings, and guidance. Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork focuses on healing and on protecting, advocating for, and empowering our girls. Participant C started off by saying, " I think they need the love and the support from their elders, to their parents, to their aunts. And then to themselves. The ***love is where it starts***." She is absolutely correct; if we have girls who don't love themselves, the way we show up as Native aunties will fall short. Participant C shared that by working with our young girls, you can start to see who is vulnerable. She shared,

> If you can show them love, tell them, and guide them through. They're either going to listen to you or they're not. And I feel like if you can give that to the young girls at an early age and support them, good or bad, I think that they would be up there as leaders and show them that they can do something.

From the first moments of life, we are born into this world, and it is through our voice, touch, support, compassion, and love that vital elements like trust and secure attachment are built. Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing gives love, support, and guidance. Our Jicarilla Apache girls need support to love themselves and grow into their own personalities.

Spaces of Possibility and New Futures

In this section, I will analyze and discuss stories of possibility and new futures that emerged during Jicarilla Apache auntie interviews. Jicarilla Apache aunties can dream big

about new possibilities and a bright future for our Jicarilla Apache girls and community. With love, laughter, deep conversations, and empowerment, our girls can grow within ongoing support from Jicarilla Apache Aunties.

Indigenous feminism provides us with a way to [re]build foundational ways of life, healing, and communities. Healing from colonialism requires reconnecting with our Elder teachings, decolonization, centering relationships, and sovereignty. (Re)forming communities takes place through traditional practices in our everyday lives. Healing requires us to acknowledge and understand the impact of health and social problems related to the loss of land, genocide, assimilation, termination, and relocation, as this provides insight into the communal impact and long-term effects (Jacob, 2013). There are ways to begin to heal. It begins with relationships, with one another, with different generations, with land, and centering our Jicarilla Apache values. Minthorn (Kiowa Apache) (2026) shared,

> The centering of my Indigenous/tribal self has empowered me to honour my Ancestors, build intergenerational connections, and live my Indigenous values. These are all connected to an act and lesson of love – one that pushes against the colonial and systemic violence that was created to harm our Ancestors and families – to cultivate healing spaces that honour who we are.

As Jicarilla Apache aunties, we are stronger together. Gathering to help one another is healing through connections with one another, providing support, creating safe spaces and shared understanding, and building resistance through relationships of trust, wisdom, and support. During these times, helping one another is medicine; it is encoded in who we are as a people. Our stories, ceremonies, ontology, axiology, and epistemology center relationships. Together we are

powerful and affirm one another through practices of love, prayer, care, vulnerability, and resistance (Shotton et al., 2017).

Futurity takes on many forms, it is action-oriented. It is through the doing, the capability to love and to dream for a better future (Minthorn et al., 2021). Several participants talked about much-needed programs and services that focus on gathering, teaching, and empowering. Growing up in spaces where we may not receive connection, love, and support, or even stability and wellness from safe relationships, shows up later in our adult lives. Healing our wounds comes in the form of lived experiences, new opportunities, and new space. Feeling safe is necessary, as is fostering trust, providing ongoing support, and uplifting one another. Participant D talked about teaching our young girls skills that help them in life, "That is how it should be, to have a safe place to learn. Hands-on learning where our young girls feel safe asking questions and being shown how to acquire basic life skills like financial literacy, cooking, and allows them to learn without fear of being judged." Participant F shared the same sentiment by saying, "We want our young women to be resilient. They need to learn to put up with what comes their way. But there's nothing in the community, at the community level, that shows them how to navigate life, the good and the bad."

Participant D has big dreams for our young Jicarilla Apache girls. She discussed the education and career paths of our Jicarilla Apache girls, "Women can run things, we are child bearers, nurturers, and breadwinners all at the same time." This is powerful and also requires us to be there for our Jicarilla Apache girls, so they can see themselves in the future, beyond survivance of middle school, high school, and other colonial spaces, beyond the struggles of navigating gendered spaces. Participant D went on to say, "We have more opportunities as women now, and as long as the family is kind of or that individual is able to embrace that and not

just fall into whatever norm." I agree with Participant D. There are many opportunities and pathways for Jicarilla Apache girls to thrive, grow, and achieve; there are also challenges, but with strong, healthy relationships, guidance, and knowledge, our girls have a chance. Through Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork, Participant D shared how she provides guidance through her work, teaching, and as a community auntie. She stated, "I made the choice to be a different mom, I don't think she realizes how she made me feel." Too often, we have Jicarilla Apache girls going through situations of isolation, invisibility, and a lack of support, but with the work of Jicarilla Apache Aunties, they have a network of amazing and funny support systems. Participant F dreams big for our Jicarilla Apache girls, "I envision success. I envision positive, you know, all the positive ways. I envision them in college, I envision them educated. I envision them, you know, having a good life, being good, being kind, being humble." New possible futures require decolonial knowledge, transformational power, and concrete actions (Harjo, 2019). Harjo's (2019) book, Spiral to the Stars: Mvskoke Tools of Futurity, highlights Indigenous communities' diverse forms of knowledge and the development of wayfinding tools to create pathways for bright futures. Harjo takes up futurity in a way that allows us to dream, provides us with tools and resources, and helps us understand that we have the collective knowledge, acknowledgment of the community's abilities, and all the love relationships movement. The power and knowledge are with our own people, our community has the ability to create practices and activate-inactivated possibilities, to assert self-determination, to act upon, and to appropriate necessary spaces – for "futurity is a form of collective power, animated by responsibility to one another and to more-than-human entities, that nurtures, supports, and sustains" (Harjo, 2019, p. 216). It is based on concepts of kinship, Jicarilla Apache knowledge systems, and ceremonies; it is holistic.

Understanding that we can support our Jicarilla Apache girls in various ways through collective knowledge and collective action can provide a holistic approach that includes culturally responsive education and learning, strengthening relationships with the land, creating safe spaces for girls to lead, and fostering resilience by honoring physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being.

Planting Seeds of Futurity.

In this section, I analyze and discuss planting seeds of futurity, which emerged from interviews with Jicarilla Apache participants. Jicarilla Apache aunties shared visions and dreams for our Jicarilla Apache girls. These same aunties carry tools of futurity within them. The realization that we as Jicarilla Apache women carry knowledge and actions to sustain our communities and ourselves emerges in different ways and is both Jicarilla Apache Auntie work and decolonization.

Indigenous feminist theory and practice is renewal, it is acknowledging invocation of temporalities and energies of all entities to construct an imaginary that communities can practice across time and space constructed with Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork, community knowledge, kinship, and self-determination. Decolonizing praxis is a way of knowing that when our Jicarilla Apache aunties, girls, and community members are healthy, then "we can build movements with a gendered balance" (Jacob, 2013, p. 2165). Our ways as Jicarilla Apache aunties are deeply rooted in spirituality, matrilineal systems, and the resilience of Jicarilla Apache women.

Participant F always talked positively about the future of our young girls. Positivity and joy are contagious, but misery loves company, and many people in our community carry trauma and pain, so our aunties have big tasks and an uphill battle. Yet, it is important to stay focused on

passing this positive energy to our youth and girls. Future, then, becomes creativity emerging from "memory, instinct, and desire" (Harjo, 2019, p. 2428). Human connection, as practice, is foundational for mending trauma and isolation, and for allowing us to dream. Participant F shared, **"**But yeah, it's really good. I mean, I just think that there's a lot you can give kids, and the adults, they're just as enthused to want to learn if you give them an opportunity." I asked her if any of them had ever talked about the future? She replied,

> Future? Yeah, they do. So, we would do, like career-focused, and I guess what I mean is that when we're in survival mode, when we're just living day to day, or trying to get through hardships at home or in the community, we're just trying to make it.

Providing a healthy lens with essential tools to create a pathway to the goals they set for themselves is how we help your young girls and teens. Jicarilla Apache aunties need to be mindful that our Jicarilla Apache girls need to dream and dream big. And we can provide them with support and create opportunities for them to have choices, choices to grow healthy or go to school, or earn a skill and trade for employment. Having the choice as a Jicarilla Apache girl-teen-woman is a big deal. Participant D said,

> My mindset is centered around equality, that I mean, there are still men with old school mentality, but with the way the women are now, and the young girls are now. I don't think there's anything wrong with teaching young girls as an auntie that, you know, this is how it should be, or how do you, I mean, you have a safe spot. How would you want your household to be? How would you want to be portrayed in your community, or, you know, with your children and nieces? And I think there's just more opportunity, more choices now.

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork can open up possibilities for our Jicarilla Apache girls to sing, dance, celebrate, thrive, and grow.

Moving with Prayers and Blessings as the Sun Rises

In this section, I will analyze and discuss stories and lived experiences of Jicarilla Apache participants in interviews. Jicarilla Apache aunties shared beautiful stories of our Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), teachings, and the deeper meaning embedded in it.

Indigenous feminism and revitalization of the puberty ceremony. These ceremonies are intimately tied to Native feminism, which argues that puberty ceremonies are vital practices in the life of a female. The revitalization of the Jicarilla Apache girls' puberty ceremony is foundational to Jicarilla culture and its people. These ceremonies are empowering and transformative rituals that affirm the power of womanhood, strengthen community relationships, and honor the sacredness of menstruation. Puberty ceremonies are religious practices of transformation from girlhood into womanhood. Traditionally, puberty ceremonies began with the start of menarche. The onset of menstruation is a special time for Native American girls- this signals their coming of age and initiates their Rite of Passage, Puberty Ceremony, or "Coming of Age Ceremony." These rituals and ceremonies are spiritual and part of the well-being of the young girl, her family, and the larger community (Baldy, 2018). These ceremonies embody the teachings of creation stories through songs, connection to the natural world, spiritual practices, and the power of women as life-givers. These stories are in our stars, mountains, plants, hunting, gathering of medicine, and animal relatives. Participant B shared,

> In the coming-of-age feast, the grandmas and aunties were always there, talking to you in Jicarilla about getting dressed, because there is a proper way to start getting dressed, teaching the mother other women how to dress the maiden. There

> are always discussions about how to do this or that, how to dress the Brave, and the significance of everything. These teachings tell us the significance of putting up the tipi a certain way and why it faces the East, sitting down, the running in four directions, gathering of plants, and everything that happens throughout the four days.

As Jicarilla Apache aunties, we have a critical responsibility to learn and understand the importance of the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), even if we could not have one. It is essential, foundational, and interconnected with Jicarilla Apache philosophies, intelligence, and thought. To be Jicarilla Apache means to understand that our medicine, blessings, and ceremonies. To live in a good way is relational. Baldy (2018) writes,

> The young women who have participated in these ceremonies now carry with them the support of entire communities. These are the spaces that help us decolonize our bodies; they are the locations of decolonization, where we sing and dance together and where our young women embody our First People so that connection can never be severed (p. 3412).

Knowing and understanding that our ceremonies are to be carried out in our Jicarilla Apache language, as it is through our songs, the entirety of each ceremony, and spirituality that we are connected to the Creator, Mother Earth, and Ancestors. As a Jicarilla Apache auntie, being home has given me a sense of how close we are to losing our Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast). Various factors are pushing our ceremonies to the point of extinction: few Jicarilla Apache speakers, medicine not being passed on to the next person, an aging medicine man, a one-day Kéesda, and so on. Conversations with different people demonstrate that they, too, are

aware of what is happening and what we are losing. A question remains: What happens then? Perhaps now more than ever, our Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is so important.

A Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) is an important ceremony and one of power and spiritual blessings for both the Jicarilla Apache girl and the community. It is a time of transformation into womanhood, and life connections to Mother Earth and more than human beings. During this time, cultural values are taught. As Jicarilla Apache people, our puberty ceremony and songs honor animals and how they help us as Jicarilla Apache people, the earth as it regenerates and sustains us.

Traditional Teachings of Coming-of-Age Ceremonies: Power of Womanhood

In this section, I provide an analysis and discussion of stories and experiences shared by Jicarilla Apache aunties during interviews. Jicarilla Apache aunties shared stories of the creation of the buckskin dress, gathering as a collective of Jicarilla Apache aunties to prepare for the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), and a sacred time for teachings. Each story and experience shared by Jicarilla Apache aunties is unique, as some have been exposed to our way of life early on, while others have very little knowledge of the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast). The powerful stories, experiences, and memories provide ways to document our history, teachings, and lives as Jicarilla Apache women. AuntieWork in the context of the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) is the practical application of Indigenous feminist theory, it is the relationships of interconnectedness to the girl, to land, animal relatives, to the universe, it is the act of doing in preparation for a Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) from the moment a Jicarilla Apache girl begins her menstrual cycle to dancing all night in the tipi until the sunrises to the cleaning up and giving away any remaining food to those who helped, and moving from camp back home.

Matrilineal systems offer intergenerational teachings, providing essential knowledge for life. Gathering of Jicarilla Apache women in constant motion and creation of the buckskin, bone necklace, moccasins, and the shared teachings to nourish the mind, body, and spirit. These stories and lessons in the Jicarilla Apache context are shared values and wisdom meant to guide you throughout your life and shape your thoughts and actions. The power and beauty of these experiences are precious; the stories, teachings, and experiences of Jicarilla Apache aunties are unique yet intrinsically connected by ancestral knowledge and the language of those who have come before us. Participant F shared that she was gifted with the teachings of making the Ibáan (buckskin dress) for the girl. She stated that this gift was shared through a gathering of Jicarilla Apache women, cousins, and aunties, and as a time to teach others and pass on knowledge and stories about how to make the dress, its meaning, and future blessings. She stated, "This is how I was taught, by my mom and aunties. This is how I was shown by other Jicarilla Apache women in the community for the feast and the Bear Dance." Participant F shared stories of Jicarilla Apache Elder auntie teachings and understands her responsibility is to pass on this knowledge to generations of Jicarilla Apache girls and women.

Traditional teachings and the traditions of puberty ceremonies are beautiful and empowering. Honoring the teachings of our Jicarilla Apache ancestors, Elders, grandmothers, and aunties through collective learning, stories, and oral traditions provides a way to share knowledge about our bodies and menstrual cycles. Baldy (2018) talks about the work to revitalize a woman's ceremony and be mindful of the prayers for the individual and the community, about how we are to be a good person, those who support you, and your contributions to the ceremony- you are being appreciated for your contributions, "and that gives you value," (p. 3412) . It is not just the puberty ceremony itself that holds spiritual meaning

and power, but also the preparation for the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), the clothing, and the medicinal items used during the four days. Community is also involved through gathering, celebrating, getting dry corn from the girl, dancing in the tipi for four nights, eating together, talking with the medicine man, donating food, and contributions by cutting potatoes or making dough. Participant F shared that she was given instructions for making the buckskin dress for the girl. She shared,

And during this time, we had good talks about what the meaning of the dress is, what the purpose is, the positive side of it. Now, she's going to be strong. She's going to do good. She's going to have, you know, she's going to have a good education. Have a good mind on her head. All these things, when you're making it, you put a piece of yourself into it.

Participant C emphasized the importance of learning the Jicarilla Apache language for both everyday and ceremonial purposes. Loss of language among the Jicarilla Apache means, the medicine man is speaking our Jicarilla Apache language, while relatives translate into English for the girl and boy as they are dressed, told to run, and follow one another. Participant A is not a fluent speaker but is grateful she has older Jicarilla Apache aunties and grandmas who do speak our language. She talked about her experiences with her Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) and how her mom helped her prepare for it. Within her family, they have had several Kéesdas (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), she shared,

> I went through my feast. And we went through several feasts with my nieces and my nephews, my boys, being the men. But it’s teaching the knowledge about what happens and what to expect and how we all help, passing all that down is one of the things that is important for everyone to know.

She mentioned that her mom and some Elders in her family talk about how many people speak the Jicarilla Apache language and about its importance during the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), because the songs are sung by the Medicine man in our language. She said, “And right now, there's hardly anybody who knows fluent Jicarilla and speaks it. That's one of the things that we're losing.” The young women who have participated in the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) learn lessons for important moments in their lives, providing a foundation of Jicarilla Apache culture and epistemologies that honor and value women. These teachings tell us that, as Jicarilla Apache women, we are powerful and valued members of our culture and tribe. She went on to say,

> But I know in the coming-of-age feast what the grandmas were like who were in there when I was getting dressed. There are proper ways to start getting dressed. And how you dress the maiden. How you dress the male from start to finish. And the significance of everything that's in there. Within putting up the tipi. Sitting you down. The four days. What you can and can't do. But yeah, that's what I was taught.

According to interviews with Jicarilla Apache members, these teachings are happening less and less. Participant C said, “But it's very rare now that that even would happen. Feasts are not happening as much as they used to, and we have many young girls, so what does that tell you? People don’t know or don’t value our Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast).” It is the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache puberty feast) that houses our epistemologies to rebuild Jicarilla Apache futures.

Losing Our Ways

In this section, I will provide an analysis and discussion of stories and experiences of Jicarilla Apache Aunties who talk about losing our Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast).

I was fortunate to have had a Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast). I wish every Jicarilla Apache girl could have her Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast). Today, many girls may not be able to have their Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) due to the loss of ceremonial practices and cultural values, loss of identity, loss of spiritual beliefs, and the dwindling number of medicine men. The history and impact of US policies, Indian boarding schools, and ongoing colonization and erasure of the Jicarilla Apache culture, language, and ceremony, our Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) ceremony is on the brink of disappearing. The lingering impact of harsh policies set forth to destroy Native American societies and culture set its sights on attacking spirituality and belief systems (Baldy, 2018). Recently, many girls have been asking for blessings in place of a Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) and even practicing a Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) in a single day.

Participant A shared her experience of her feast and discussed the songs, the creation story, and the importance of this ceremony as a Jicarilla Apache female. Participant C, who works with the community and supports youth through Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork, shared that our youth struggle to belong and are not being taught who we are as Jicarilla Apache women. She sounded sad when she said,

> Our moms and aunties are the ones who are supposed to teach us and share stories of our people, which help us understand our place in the world. When it stops, our people will forget who they are and their identity, what is important to them, like

> our medicine and our language, and why it's important for the ceremonies to take place.

She went on to say that she feels responsible for sharing the teachings passed down to her and for talking with young Jicarilla Apache girls about their roles and responsibilities. Baldy (2018) writes, "cultural ceremonies demonstrate an emphasis on self-determination that stress not only community but also individual responsibility and choice" (p. 17). Choice is powerful. Choice is personal. It also means we must follow our hearts. Unlike Participant A, Participant D didn't have a Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) or those around her to teach her. She shared how her mom didn't teach her much about periods or transitioning into being a woman. She stated,

> Well, I mean, we took a health class in elementary school. The first time I got my period, my mom was at work. I was a latchkey kid. I would just let myself into the house. She was so busy and swamped at work that she was like, she was just, well, you know what to do, right? You know where the stuff is.
>
> And I'm like, Yeah, kind of, I guess, wanting a little bit more acknowledgment of like, oh my gosh, you know what's happening, my little girl, but that's it. And then we didn't talk about it.

Despite not having a feast, Participant D is an amazing Jicarilla Apache community auntie. She is respectful, compassionate, supportive, empowers young Jicarilla Apache girls, and leads with the heart. The time of change and transition is powerful, not so much about the physical change alone, but the time during a Jicarilla Apache girl's life where there is responsibility. Conversations with Jicarilla Apache aunties reveal that different families have different practices, yet there are deeply embedded similarities and spiritual beliefs that connect us as people.

Participant A said, “Every family does it differently, but everything that we all do comes to one thing, you know, one connection for you to mold yourself into a strong woman at the end, you know?” When she works with young girls, she tells stories and draws connections to help them understand. She shared,

> Sometimes it makes them think, because here, that's where they're like, one now, I want to know, is that how it goes? You know? I mean, a lot of those things are things I think a lot of the aunties, grandmas, and moms have to really stay strong with all the kids, and really make them understand that.

Stepping up and being relationally accountable to our Jicarilla Apache girls is essential, as it not only prepares them for life, but living it day to day is important for spiritually – our songs, our medicine, our prayers. Over the years of working with youth and young girls, Participant A has noticed that more of our youth are raised without a belief system. She said, “But some of the kids, I noticed that they're starting to become non-believers. There are some kids who don’t believe in God, they don't believe in tradition, they don't believe in anything. And I'm all like, where's your faith?” As we spoke about losing our language, ceremonies, and identity as Jicarilla Apache, she went on to share that those of us who don’t know our ways are lost. She stated, “If you don't know who you are, you're one of those kinds of Apache that wait like this for a dividend, and you don't know who you are.”

After discussing relational accountability, we moved on to the role of Elders, adults, aunties, and the larger community. We agreed that all Jicarilla Apache people are responsible for teaching our youth about our ways, how we are responsible for all things of creation (Baldy, 2018). We continued to talk about where, within the generations, our knowledge dwindles. It is

carried with our remaining Elders and older generations. While there are handfuls and pockets of younger people actively learning, there needs to be greater participation from Elders.

She stated,

> I think a lot of like, our older elderly, yeah, I think they need to make time, like, really make time to really bring our generation, the younger generation. Together, and even like us, older, mid people that we should, you know, get together with them and make them understand why these things are important.

Ceremonial Teachings that Guide Us

Jicarilla Apache aunties share stories and experiences that center their Auntie-ing as vessels receiving ceremonial teachings and carrying them out through open discussion and hands-on learning. Our Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) provides wisdom from origin stories, gendered teachings embedded in prayers and songs, and a Jicarilla Apache knowledge system, with processes that support Jicarilla Apache women. These innate teachings of life, philosophical teachings, and epistemologies are Native feminisms, meaning, our Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) is our Jicarilla Apache feminisms of self-determination and decolonization. The teachings of puberty ceremonies are interconnected to cultural practices, language, and community wellness. Creation stories teach us that we are connected to the creation of Earth, that we came to be from her, and that we create with love (Simpson, 2011). Our connection, knowledge, and strength are then linked to matrilineal ways of being and societies. During these powerful and spiritual times, we honor womanhood and motherhood through the teachings of Mother Earth, just as our mothers and grandmothers have. The beauty of the earth, water, and lakes is the water of life that nourishes us; her power to create is the

bloodline that joins us as one (Simpson, 2011). As our mother creates and sustains us, she has gifted us with the ability to create life, nurture, regeneration, and renewal.

Participant A talked about preparing for her feast and how a group of older women from the community gathered to talk with her about knowing the rules, the Brave, and what he should know, but then they told me what I pray for. She shared,

> They told me, when you go through that, this is what you pray for, this is what you've got to think about. And they always told me, never think negatively in this ceremony, because here, this is for your lifespan, and that's when, and that's when they start telling me why we use the buffalo horn, why we use the corn, why we eat out of the shell? Why do we wear the dress that we wear? Why? Why are the colors? Why the beads, why the shells? Why do we use all those things? And finding out that a lot of the things we wear during it all serve a purpose throughout our lives.

We no longer have a collective of Elder and older Jicarilla Apache women and aunties to teach us. Many are gone. Yet, the Elder Jicarilla Apache community aunties speak a different language, they are of the 'old ways.' Knowing and understanding the importance of these teachings from both our Elder Aunties and our ceremonies is critical to accepting them as teachings and guidance rather than being lectured. She stated that she had heard youth talking about being lectured by older generations of Jicarilla Apache women; also, during this time, youth hardly ask questions. She went on about how her tribal department invited Elders to talk about the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) and Go-Jii-Ya (Jicarilla Apache Footrace, which takes place in September). Participant A talked about disconnect and said, "None of them really asked, like, Well, why? Why is this? Why is that? Then whenever you try to explain things to them,

they just look at you like you're talking a whole different language to them." There is a disconnect not only within the Jicarilla Apache community and among one another, but also in generational gaps and in how we communicate and think about teaching Jicarilla Apache girls. The transition and change bring us into spaces where there are bodies moving and dancing, which are spaces of decolonization. These ceremonial practices are epistemologies in real time, decolonization praxis aimed at rebuilding Jicarilla Apache futures. This connection to our ancestors and community is forever. Participant A said,

> They said, once you paint your face and you start going through, they told me, you are transforming yourself, and you're going to be a different person at the end, you're going to feel different. But that's where they told me: you are just going to pray for yourself, but they said, you've got to pray for your community. You've got to pray for, you know, everyone. You have to pray for the land. Pray for your people, and you know, and also pray for your food. Pray that your food would never, would never go down. Pray that your food will feed everyone, and that when they take it, it will bring them together as a family.

Our Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) was given to us as Jicarilla Apache, and its strength, power, and spiritual meaning build a stronger well-being while strengthening interpersonal relationships between genders. Our existence contributes to our entire way of life. Goeman (2013) argues that Native women are the foundation and at the center of how we imagine our Tribal nations and the world beyond our communities. As we engage with Indigenous epistemologies, Native women are central to cultural practices of renewal and regeneration and are imperative for rewriting our futures. Jicarilla Apache aunties and grandmas, they play a very big part in my life, but also they play a big part in the whole with the whole

nation, with all of us, Jicarilla women, that's what makes us strong. Reflecting within is part of decolonization; remembering the past is part of the process of imagining and creating new futures.

Summary

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is healing. Both the individual Jicarilla Apache auntie and the collective power of women in our community can provide a resurgence to begin the desire to heal and return to traditional ways of practice. AuntieWork within our community aims to support Jicarilla Apache girls by creating safe, culturally affirming spaces. Healing looks like walking into spaces where Jicarilla Apache girls are proud of who they are, learning to speak to one another in our Jicarilla Apache language- unafraid to make mistakes as they learn, laugh-talk-listen while learning from and with each other from an older Jicarilla Apache teacher, and hands on learning through Jicarilla Apache Auntie-ing to make a traditional Jicarilla Apache leather belt witnessing the accomplishment and 'all smiles' from Jicarilla Apache girls. Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is essential in the lives of our Jicarilla Apache girls.

Chapter 7

Summary and Implications

Jicarilla Apache Aunties play a vital role in the lives of our young girls and the wider community. Aunties are the ones we turn to when life gets difficult, when we need a shoulder to cry on, or when we have good news to share. Native aunties can provide so much more. Voices of Jicarilla Apache Aunties provide rich stories that are powerful and intertwine with politics, survival, and resistance, exploring themes of healing, relationships, teachings, community wellness, storytelling, challenging colonial structures through ancestor knowledge, land-based knowledge, interconnectedness, and love. Through laughter, busy schedules, kinship, friendship, aunting, and ongoing support for the community, and my research, we were able to come together and talk.

Understanding how we are positioned as Jicarilla Apache aunties means we must approach this work through an analysis of a particular and unique standpoint and experiences/narratives– a Native feminist theory and standpoint. We must examine the ways that look at 'survivance from a place of survivance' (Morrill, 2017, as cited in Sabzalian, 2019, p. 364). We must also consider the experiences of joy, desire, pain, and growth. Self-reflection is necessary to do this work; it is vital for growth and healing, it is vital for becoming and being mentors, it fosters self-awareness, allowing us to identify personal bias, unhealthy behaviors, emotions, and strengths. It ensures actions are meaningful, authentic, respectful, and aligned with community needs while reducing harm. Too many times, unhealthy people project hurt and anger onto others, perpetuating harm and violence.

Reclaiming love and defining love as empowering (Sabzalian, 2019) that is connected to (place) strength of self, of our people, and of our communities, love as part of the path toward

healing. There is strength and love within our communities and possibilities for new beginnings, possibilities for healing, and renewed beginnings. We must reclaim the foundation of development and sustainable reciprocal relationships (Simpson, 2011) – with self, with others, with land, with the non-human.

I defined Jicarilla Apache "Auntie" as a woman who cultivates love, support, guidance, and teaching for the Jicarilla Apache girl and the larger community. This woman's actions nourish the hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits of those around her. She is wise, rich in experience, and demonstrates resistance through practices of respect, deep listening, reciprocity, relationality, and attention to the injustices of colonialism. This "Auntie" is our community auntie, our family auntie, academic auntie, our beautiful, perfectly imperfect auntie, our real traditional auntie, our compassionate auntie, our calm auntie, and our cultural auntie. My definition and understanding of a Jicarilla Apache Auntie have not changed as a result of this research; this research enriches and further articulates the context and vital importance of AuntieWork in the lives of Jicarilla Apache girls.

Ethical and Cultural Responsibility

Jicarilla Apache Elders, adults, young adults, and even youth demonstrate what it means to help people in our community, share wisdom and knowledge, and be kind to one another. This allows us to understand that, as Jicarilla Apache people, it is our cultural responsibility to ensure that future generations are supported, heard, and advocated for. Through these teachings and actions, I have seen that the participants in my research carry forward this responsibility. Cultural responsibility is an unspoken way of knowing we are to help individuals, move through the world with respect for teachings we are gifted with and pass it on to those who are ready to receive it, positive work to make our community a better place to live, honor the living

environment that we are interconnected to, and consciously act to ensure our ways of life as Jicarilla Apache are sustainable and healthy.

Traditionally, the individual was taught responsibility early in life: responsibility to carry out certain roles within the tribe, responsibility passed down for ceremonial purposes, or responsibility to help the family. Children were instructed on how to gather food, hunt, take care of the horses, and identify medicine and plants. The Elders and adults were responsible for teaching children about ways of life, life skills, survival of the family and tribe, culture and language, cultural knowledge; training began at an early age. Our stories, songs, and ceremonies all provide us with knowledge and guidance on how to live in the world; they teach us about human evolution and the consequences of not following these teachings. "The decision then becomes the responsibility of the individual about his or her future and how he or she is going to live" (Beavert, 2019, p. 38). Our knowledge is then taught and shared across generations, and it should be done in our Native languages. When we are instructed in the Jicarilla Apache language to do this or that, we are immediately connected to the place and space where our culture is alive and communicates an interconnected web of relationships, life, spiritual, ancestor, action, and philosophical meaning that is mostly unseen, misunderstood, and unrecognized by non-Native people.

Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that we think about what decolonization wants. Knowing in our hearts that it is our responsibility to teach, instruct, and provide the gift of knowledge to our youth and across all generations is essential as we imagine new possible futures. While there is not one easy way or answer, it does require a deep understanding, a path into unfamiliarity, relinquishing settler futurity, and an unsettled one. While we have lost so much through colonization and forced assimilation, it begins with and through relationships; it begins with

teaching our children our culture and language; it begins with showing our children love, empathy, and kindness, as they will carry these teachings forward. It is our responsibility to teach our kids how to be good in this world. Through our teachings, knowledge, and shared practices, we are shaping their futures and our Tribe's future. “Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 35).

Re-thinking How We Understand “Education”

The colonial project has shaped our understanding and knowledge of what ‘education’ is supposed to entail. It is a contested concept influenced by political, economic, and expansionary factors. Globally, education and the empire are deeply intertwined, with school as a critical tool for colonial powers to impose cultural norms, manage racial differences, and create compliant citizens. US Education, deeply influenced by racial and gender hierarchies, was and is used to Americanize, foster citizenship, assimilate, maintain hierarchical structures, and solidify colonial power at home and abroad. Curricula and teaching methods reinforced white heteronormative masculinity and Western discourse. Early American education focused on institutions designed to facilitate Christian expansion and the appropriation of Indigenous lands. Schools aimed to cultivate a ‘good citizen’ who was loyal and obedient to the settler colonial nation state, erasing anything Indian, which included our cultures, languages, and traditional knowledge and practices.

While science, math, reading and literacy, and all the required core competencies are a form of education, so is transferring knowledge, guidance, and teaching youth how to regulate emotions, know tribal economics and governance, respecting Elders and one another, communication both receiving and transmission, to protect self with personal boundaries, coping with the loss of a loved one, dating and sex, healthy peer relationships, unhealthy relationships,

basic life skills like laundry, driving, cooking, and so much more. Equipping our Jicarilla Apache girls for daily life involves a combination of practical, hands-on skills with essential cognitive and emotional tools. These tools and knowledge include critical thinking, situational awareness, emergency preparedness, household maintenance, financial literacy, and resilience for navigating daily challenges.

The Jicarilla Apache Nation's education department and other departments can regenerate Jicarilla Apache knowledge through their programs and services. Honoring the work of Mvskoke scholar, Laura Harjo, our tribal community has the knowledge it needs to regenerate and reconnect us with our own ways of being. Harjo's (2019) work allows us to think, analyze, and appreciate the beauty of knowledge sharing within our own communities through a philosophical and practical framework that includes "este"-cate sovereignty, community knowledge, collective power, and emergence geographies (p. 194).

Importance of Safe Spaces

Creating safe spaces for our Jicarilla Apache girls to thrive, grow, and express themselves is critical for development and self-expression. It allows them to share, process, and feel supported. It also provides emotional and physical security, and one feels free from judgment and discrimination. Mentally, it can provide a way for the individual to be vulnerable, trust, and promote self-regulation. Sometimes, what we think are spaces of 'learning' and 'engagement' may not mean that support, love, and guidance are being shared. Jicarilla Apache girls face challenges we may be unaware of, which can result in stress, trauma, and peer pressure. Safe spaces are places where teens can share and reach out if they are in crisis. Proactively creating spaces where young girls and teens can build positive relationships and process their feelings supports emotional regulation and long-term healthy development. Positive

outcomes and emotional expression occur when teens feel safe talking about their feelings and sharing their day-to-day lives, allowing them to develop healthy coping mechanisms. In doing so, they learn to articulate their feelings, engage in healthy coping mechanisms, and not internalize their pain.

Jicarilla Apache community programs and services can focus on emotional expression in a variety of ways, such as art, journaling, and outdoor activities for group teamwork, or group therapy to help them learn more about self-regulation, managing emotions, and [re]connecting with their authentic selves. During these times, Jicarilla Apache women are demonstrating compassion and accountability, practicing empathy and calm, validating communication, building confidence, and mental resilience. Additionally, Jicarilla Apache girls will mirror these behaviors; therefore, it is important to understand that relationships built on respect, open communication, empowerment, and empathy form the foundation for the healthy development of Native girls.

These spaces can also provide a supportive environment where girls can talk about challenges and offer support to one another, discuss feelings and emotions, and access traditional healing practices. These relationships often develop deeper bonds, such as best friendships and sisterhood, giving girls a sense of belonging. These social families offer emotional support, trust, allow vulnerability, but more importantly, a bond that helps boost mood, comfort, and empowerment. Culturally thriving futures depend on reciprocal relationships. Knowing how to support youth through spatial learning is vital and requires us to look at how we approach these spaces, and critical work we take up as scholars, interrogating our practices and being aware of "adult-centric and maybe even anti-child" (Bang, 2020, p. 437) and situating these relationships and spaces that developed by adults usually per their perceptions, experiences, and knowledge-

also limitations. Therefore, it is a must that adults creating these spaces understand and practice respect, kindness, love, and patience. By centering healthy relationships, Indigenous structure, and relationality (Minthorn et al., 2021), youth establish a sense of community, knowing they have the choice to be involved and the ability to thrive.

Difficult but Important Conversations

Growing up on the rez can sometimes mean we know not to talk about certain things or ask questions about sensitive topics. Sometimes, it can mean we are champions of "silence." There are also times we are told, "that's just how it is," But how does that help shape our understanding of the world, the significance of a traditional story, or ceremonial practice, and so on? Talking with young girls about the challenges they face helps them process their thoughts and feelings and builds trust, safety, and critical thinking skills. Critical conversations are important for Native youth because they foster meaningful connections to the world around them, help them navigate complex issues, and promote collective self-awareness.

Communication is an interactive two-way process. It is reciprocal, involving active listening, verbal/nonverbal feedback, and a shared dialogue, not just lecturing. When we do not engage in meaningful active communication, children feel unheard, and this impacts their whole being. Their nervous system may shut down or enter a defensive state, leading to disengagement, emotional outbursts, or feelings of being unvalued. Ignored children often become adults who struggle with communication and engagement, or who feel they do not deserve attention, which can lead to low self-esteem and difficulty forming relationships. Failing to have difficult but important conversations occurs for many reasons, but may be the result of 'silence.' This seems to be a common practice in many tribal communities is silence. Silence is a complex issue often deeply rooted in factors such as shame, fear of retaliation, loyalty, trauma, guilt, or. On the other

hand, silence is a form of communication and emerges during uncertainty, deep listening, and is both a learned and a social construct. It can also be a way to heal.

Breaking the silence to educate our Native youth is important for several reasons, including building knowledge, fostering identity, and understanding the interconnectedness of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. As adults, mentors, and aunties, we can provide safe, non-judgmental spaces for Native girls to share their day-to-day realities, dreams, and challenges. These safe, trusted spaces provide opportunities for youth to discuss complex intersectional issues, including relationships, family dynamics, emotions, and academics. Native youth face significant challenges such as poverty, housing shortages, food and water insecurities, which are exacerbated by geographic isolation, historical land dispossession, lack of local resources, and so on. They also experience higher rates of suicide, bullying, substance abuse, lack of positive role models, and struggle with the loss of cultural identities. Systemic issues stemming from historical trauma, such as forced assimilation policies, lead to ongoing inequities, contributing to poor mental health, low academic achievement, and limited access to basic needs and healthcare services.

Reciprocal Learning and Growth

Learning is reciprocal. Listening and engaging in meaningful conversations can help children feel seen and heard. It also serves as invaluable mentorship, fostering critical life skills like problem-solving, offering a unique yet similar perspective, and wisdom that spans across generations. Youth can teach us different ways of living in the world. They can show us how to love, how to slow down and enjoy the present, how to problem-solve, and how to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves. It emphasizes a two-way exchange of knowledge and perspective. Reciprocal learning embodies Indigenous knowledge and practices grounded in mutual respect,

shared knowledge, supportive learning, and responsibility. The humanistic side of reciprocal learning is love, kindness, vulnerability, knowing you can share your story for life lessons, unlearning harmful ways, relearning emotions and empathy, and just being a good human.

Drawing on our own experiences, as Jicarilla Apache aunties provide authentic and foundational knowledge, but alone it can also restrict growth by creating a narrow, subjective viewpoint and missing the broader context and alternative perspectives. Therefore, it is critical to engage in active self-awareness to identify and reduce biases or prejudices that hinder the progress needed for collaboration in our students' well-being. How we actively move through the world and make decisions on behalf of the Tribe, and youth shape the future of learning, wellness, and outcomes for our students. It also reinforces the behaviors, attitudes, and values of how we live in these spaces, keeping in mind that our young girls watch us and learn from us.

My niece makes me a better person; therefore, I am always working on myself and learning to be kinder to myself. When we see the happiness, hear the laughter, and yeah, sometimes the challenges of your Jicarilla Apache girls struggle, be sad, or not fully understand a situation, well, that is where we come in to help them. Together we learn, together we grow, and together we can create positive long-term outcomes.

Navigating Gendered Spaces

Containment has allowed colonial legacies to manifest in ways that have seeped into present-day inequities, thereby closing off possibilities for collaboration and mobilization and restricting the imagination of other possibilities (Goeman, 2013). Why is it a struggle to empower within our own tribal communities? Isn’t that the overall goal: health, wellness, healing, and creating a sustainable future? Depending on whom you talk to, there is a common theme of working to improve the culture, social conditions, health, economy, and quality of life

of our own people. Yet, navigating gendered spaces is a thing. Because empowerment is directly connected to gender by fostering equal rights, agency, and opportunities for girls and women, it threatens Western ideology and patriarchal values and the structure. The process and violence are gendered as they rely on domination, reordering of space, land, and bodily autonomy to function. Within these spaces, settler colonialism imposes a strict, binary gender system targeting women and girls because their existence and traditional roles as nurturers, knowledge keepers/sharers, healers, and leaders challenge this imposed order.

Recognizing Self as An Agent of Change

Each Jicarilla Apache participant was born with strength and purpose, yet during a time when we are still feeling the impact of colonial legacies and the empire's policies, white chaos, and internalized lateral violence. This study has given me the opportunity to talk with some amazing, compassionate, resourceful, resilient, and self-reflective Jicarilla Apache women. Each story is filled with strength, beauty, sadness, secrets, and desires. I often find myself going to Elders for support, seeking clarification on a topic or culturally related question, and staying grounded. Through conversations, stories, and the hearing practices of ceremony in Jicarilla Apache, which were then translated into English, I was learning about who we are as Jicarilla Apache people, our struggles, our medicine, our power, and our self-determination. Simpson (2017) supports this learning and explains that these stories are a form of survival and return us to self-determination, knowing that change is within and that we do not need to be recognized from the outside. This way of living is full of community, love, thoughtfulness, and profound relationality. Understanding that we, as Jicarilla Apache Aunties, have the capacity to provide ways of learning from the ground up (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016) through everyday cultural practices, sharing and teaching Indigenous wisdom of the land, and re-

awakening matrilineal systems to ensure our ways of life as Jicarilla Apache women are passed on. We all play a role in nurturing, teaching, and guiding youth, which is easy to speak about, but quite another to put into practice. We all know someone else who can do the job, who can be pointed out to show up, someone who can get out there and make it happen. Yet shifting the mindset to self isn't always practical or easy. How do we really shift the focus to ourselves when maybe it calls for us to be self-aware, which can mean identifying our unique skills, experiences, both good, bad, and complicated, communicating without lecturing or shaming, and the ability to love-listen-support. Our way of life as Jicarilla Apache women is through our relationships with place and land, shared knowledge, and practices of our modes of intelligence, which include our knowledge systems, holistic interconnectedness with the human and more-than-human, and the mind, body, spirit, and heart. For some reason, many Native women do not see themselves as someone who can make a change.

Implications

Honoring the voices, stories, and experiences of Native Women is critical. Recognizing their traditional role as life-givers, leaders, and knowledge holders, and celebrating their ongoing strength, resilience, wisdom, and power to nurture and lead their people and communities, is a responsibility we must take up as scholars. More importantly, this work and practice as scholars honor the healing of Native American and Indigenous women, "who bring balance and regenerative practices, and who are mothers of generations yet to be born" (Simpson, 2011, p. 37). The voices of Native women act as a form of resistance by challenging the erasure of Indigenous experiences, challenging colonial narratives, and disrupting the socially gendered constructed spaces.

It is the responsibility of the researcher to be aware and conscious of the history of violence and its ongoing erasure of anything Native, including our knowledge systems, ways of being and knowing, Elder teachings, Native women, and so on. As researchers, we ethically look beyond Native women's voices and experiences as simply data and acknowledge these women as humans. Engage in reflexivity as you begin to shape your frameworks, methods, and proposals. Ask yourself if this perpetuates the harm inflicted upon Native lives and communities. Will this work continue to be one of exploitation, exclusion, and harm? Academia has functioned as a tool of colonialism through discourse, research, and education to marginalize Indigenous knowledge, steal cultural property, and justify systemic oppression. Resist.

Limitations

This study is limited to a small but important sample of Jicarilla Apache women living on the reservation. All participants were identified through snowball sampling through in-person conversations. Small sample sizes allow the researcher to conduct intimate, in-depth interviews, yielding rich, detailed data and a story. Fewer participants also allow the researcher to reach data saturation quickly; however, this limits generalizability to the point that no new information is discovered. During the initial planning and development of my study, I was hopeful that many Jicarilla Apache women in my Tribal community would understand the importance of this work and agree to participate by sharing their voices and stories. Historical Western practices of research and exploitative actions, where the researcher has collected data for cultural misrepresentation, failed to share benefits, and personal gain, have resulted in a deep mistrust of those conducting research in our community. During the recruitment process, I noticed hesitation or polite redirection to a different topic. I knew from the first writing phase of my proposal that I wanted to include the voices and experiences of Jicarilla Apache girls. To me, these

stories provide a way for adults to see the importance of their experiences, presence, and needs. Due to time constraints and the small number of participants from the Tribal community, I was concerned about their confidentiality, as the participants who shared were part of my research study, and this information could reach the larger community. I had a mentor demonstrate and stress the importance of having student voices at the table; their voices are essential for student success, day-to-day support, mentorship, and shifting away from adult-centric paternalistic practices.

Implications for Theory, for Practice, and on Policy

The implications of my research for theory, for practice, and for policy are directly connected to the findings of my study. Implications for policy are directly connected to the findings. These themes include: Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), mentoring, community wellness, that one auntie, AuntieWork is resistance, and healing praxis. I will examine each theme as it either supports, challenges, informs, or extends the current theory I used. I will then discuss the implications for practice, any proposed policy, and changes impacting academic learning and curriculum at the tribal level.

Implications for Theory

To support my discussion of the implications of my study for theory, I will identify themes that began to emerge in conversations with Jicarilla Apache Aunties: resistance to settler-colonial logics, community wellness, and healing praxis. I will examine and discuss this theme alongside my data. I will also discuss how the voices and experiences of Jicarilla Apache aunties inform and extend the current theory used in my study. Finally, I will discuss the practical implications, indications, and suggestions arising from this study. I will then propose policies and changes that academic institutions need to implement based on the findings. For my study, I used

Indigenous feminist theory, which provided me with a framework, critical analysis, and Indigenous praxis that are grounded in the empowerment of Indigenous women, sovereignty, self-determination, and the protection of Indigenous women.

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Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast)

The Jicarilla Apache participants in my study discussed the importance of our Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) in the transition to womanhood. A puberty feast is a rite of passage and a ceremony practiced among the Jicarilla Apache. The Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast) holds significant meaning, as it is a time of power, renewal, blessings, community, reciprocal responsibility, and change. During interviews, Jicarilla Apache women openly stated whether they had a feast, did not have one, or merely had a blessing in its place. Our role as women provides us a place and space in the community to work together to maintain balance through gender roles, and revitalizing traditional roles within the community, through the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), we are Jicarilla Apache bodies and spirits interacting with the world around us through dance, song, and spirituality. It is an act of renewal, survival, and rebuilding, with the community's participation.

Mentoring

Participants talked about the different ways they show up for young people and how aunties in their lives provided guidance, support, and teachings on life, relationships, menstruation, substance abuse, self-care, and more. These teachings and guidance passed on through matrilineal practices can restore balance to the young girl and then be extended to the

community. Individual wellness situates wellness for the community. Decolonial practices disrupt Eurocentric, hierarchical power structures and instead cultivate reciprocal, culturally safe relationships that center on Jicarilla Apache traditions and on practicing decolonial love to support, guide, advocate for, and empower young girls.

Community Wellness

Wellness takes on many forms. It is spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional wellness. Throughout the course of study, participants shared stories of how they recognized students' need to be supported in mental health and the struggle of invisibility, trauma, substance abuse, suicide, etc. Wellness often begins with the individual. From the findings, there were conversations about MMIWG, the need for support groups and systems, and healing. Community wellness directly correlates with the individual, but the individual unit is interconnected with the system, which is life – it is through relationships she/he grows, is nurtured, guided, and loved; therefore, the reawakening of Jicarilla Apache matriarchal systems is essential to understand the interdependent ecosystems of personal, community, and world wellness.

AuntieWork is Resistance.

Jicarilla Apache AuntieWork is decolonizing, empowering, and relational. Native women have been leading the way in leadership, education, social support, and healing. It is about the relationships and reclaiming ways that honor and acknowledge women's sacredness. The Jicarilla Apache women in this study demonstrate, through their lives and work, how they engage in relationships, work, and services, and how they share cultural teachings to empower our youth. AuntieWork is vital to our health, wellness, and the reclaiming of our ways as Jicarilla Apache women. AuntieWork is praxis. It emphasizes the importance of cultural preservation, sovereignty, land rights, and, in this case, reconnection to land and community well-being.

Implications for Practice

Mentorship can establish and demonstrate healthy relationships, contribute to positive identity formation through relationships to land, community, culture, and language-genealogy. Native girlhood is part of the life cycle, and understanding how to teach, support, advocate, and protect our Native girls is essential for a healthy body, mind, and spirit. Many education systems and many tribal families and communities perpetuate invisibility, ignore holistic wellness, and perpetuate settler colonialism. Tribal programs and the services they provide can create critical consciousness, awareness, and education needed to develop a program that supports Jicarilla Apache/Native girl development, love, resurgence, and healing. "Indigenous mentoring emphasizes cultures, traditions, social and environmental factors, and, therefore, necessarily integrates cultural connections that fortify identity and cultural pride" (Booker, 2020, p. 1; Weinberger, 1999). Native mentors understand rez life, they understand our unspoken words and silence; more importantly, they are woven from the same fabric and laugh, celebrate, and sing our same songs, medicine, and successes.

These programs can provide a safe space for young girls to express emotions, learn about and ask questions about culture and language, receive peer support in navigating daily challenges, and develop skills and knowledge for leadership roles. Historical practices have provided a communal, shared responsibility for teaching Native children and youth. Grandma, aunties, mothers, and extended kinship of matrilineal systems share responsibility for decision-making and the well-being of children and families and play a significant role within the greater community. Native mentorship provides opportunities for young Native girls to develop a positive cultural identity, self-esteem/confidence, and practice healthy lifestyles. Native mentorship programs specifically designed for Native women and girls are centered on

matrilineal support from women and Native girlhood development, serving those in 4th through 12th grade. This older Jicarilla Apache/Native women to develop and foster meaningful relationships where both are learners, and to build trust, deep listening, and a sense of role/belongingness within the tribe.

Auntie's Love and Guidance

As Native women, we have endured gendered violence, loss, racism, and trauma. Our aunties, mothers, and grandmothers have experienced and survived trauma but still have the capability to show us love, compassion, and healing; and to dream for a better future for self, others, and communities (Minthorn, Montgomery, & Bill, 2021). The findings in this study demonstrate that with consistent support and empowerment from Aunties and healthy, positive relationships, our young people can thrive, feel a sense of belonging, strengthen their identity, and grow to feel valued, contributing to wellness and sustainable futures. Through their stories and experiences, they, too, have been guided and supported by incredible Jicarilla Apache Aunties and, in return, have given back to our own community and to young people across generations. Native aunties are fierce, loving, and protective. Auntie-ing is grounded in powerful teachings that carry important lessons embedded with power, love, resistance, and awesomeness (Jacob, 2020). Aunties provide guidance and a safe place to express emotions, only in ways that they can. Our Native Aunties are beautiful and loud and strong; they demonstrate the compassion and strength we need. Regan (2022) discussed the importance of Indigenous aunties and the seeds of love they plant, which are nourished by cultural teachings, guidance, resilience, and support for identity. In many instances, Native aunties love and protect just as mothers do.

Implications for Policy.

Policy Advocacy. Indigenous women leaders play a crucial role in advocating for legislation and policy changes at the local, national, and international levels to better protect Indigenous women from violence.

> A lack of urgency, transparency, and coordination has hampered our country's efforts to combat violence against American Indian and Alaska Native people. In partnership with the Justice Department and with extensive engagement with Tribes and other stakeholders, the Interior Department is marshaling our resources to finally address the crisis of violence against Indigenous people. -Secretary Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) (doi.gov, 2021).

Key legislation is needed to address violence against Native women and girls because current legal systems fall short of state and tribal standards. In 1995, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) became law, marking a recognition of the US government's responsibility for social change, the need for support services, and improved responses from the justice system (niwc.org, n.d.). While this legislation demonstrates an awareness of and need to address the violence against Native women and girls, statistics paint a different picture, and continued support is needed.

Tribal Legislation for The Jicarilla Apache Nation.

At the Tribal level, legislation to protect Native women and girls is vital as it impacts policy and practice within our community. Tribal legislation has been critical in addressing violence against women by allowing them to exercise their inherent sovereignty, manage their own affairs, protect culture and language, and ensure access to resources through a framework for self-governance. Additionally, it enables tribes to make decisions about their

communities' health, education, economic development, and land use, while maintaining a government-to-government relationship with the federal government, thereby effectively addressing issues unique to their tribal nations. Other key documents include constitutions and tribal codes. Per the definition provided by Tilden and Native American Rights Fund (n.d.), a tribal constitution is the "most fundamental act of tribal sovereignty, which is the adoption of a form of government that is an expression of your tribe's cultural identity, values, and beliefs" (p. 2).

Tribal codes serve as legal frameworks for a tribe's governance and outline the laws and regulations governing activities within their community and reservation. Tribal codes and laws can also help improve the safety of Native women and girls by improving training for law enforcement and court officers, improving evidence collection to increase conviction rates, providing new and better services for victims, developing prevention programs for alcohol and drug abuse, establishing a tribal police force representative of the population it serves, and implementing Indigenous justice-based approaches. The Jicarilla Apache Nation needs an 'Education Code' that defines standards of conduct to protect tribal sovereignty, including quality education, cultural preservation, and the welfare of tribal members. Additionally, tribal ordinances can be created to strengthen existing tribal codes. An underlying goal to support social justice in the fight against violence against Native women is to organize and mobilize to create change and create new laws and policy reform aimed at increasing the safety of Native women and girls (niwrc.org). Violence against Native women and girls is an ongoing crisis. We cannot have the same conversations over and over without action.

A tribal code of ethics is needed at the government level and can merge traditional spiritual values, such as respect for nature, Elders, and community, with modern legal standards

for governance, emphasizing honesty, integrity, fairness, and impartiality in conduct. This document can provide a foundation for checks and balances. This document can be developed to include wellness and education for the youth and community. While current documents define the duties and responsibilities of each branch, much of the language is outdated and focuses on protecting resources. To manage tribal lands and natural resources, protect and steward them, manage tribal funds, and conduct tribal affairs, we need a competent, well-educated workforce to continue protecting, developing, and sustaining the tribe.

Policy Supporting Education, Learning, Culture, and Wellness

Educational policies that directly address a child's unique learning needs and provide holistic support should be incorporated into tribal legislation. While New Mexico has key legislation, such as the Indian Education Act of New Mexico, there is no Jicarilla Apache legislation to support a child's learning and cultural wellness in the Nation's policy or code. This tribal legislation can provide more structure to support and empower the whole child, focusing on their social-emotional learning, healthy relationships, positive role models, and culture and language. While it is a state-developed document for public schools, the tribe can take the framework and update and add content to fit the needs of our Jicarilla Apache students and community. All participants in this study shared stories about the importance of fostering healthy relationships built on trust, compassion, and presence. Current tribal programs serving youth and families can be restructured to meet the needs of our young girls.

As tribal members, elected officials, educators, teachers, mothers, fathers, aunties, uncles, grandparents, and as human beings, we have an ethical and cultural responsibility to give back, share knowledge, mentor and empower our youth, be decent and caring human beings, be good role models, and actively engage in creating a healthy and sustainable future for our tribe.

Our contributions to the wellness of our young girls and teens are essential to the overall well-being and functioning. Tribal members and the tribe need to broaden their focus to include empowering, supporting, educating, advocating for, and protecting Jicarilla Apache girls and teens. This responsibility does not stop at land management, fiscal responsibility, peace and order, or maintaining the status quo of services and programs that have been in place for decades, as the needs of our people, land, and community are changing, and external and internal forces erode tribal culture, language, traditions, and sovereignty.

Further Questions and Future Research

During this study, both participants and I have learned new ways of thinking, recognizing needs within the community, encouraging one another, and developing ideas to support and improve health, wellness, and positive outcomes for our young Jicarilla Apache girls. Working in my own tribal community allows me to connect with a wide range of people. I also like to check in with different friends and family to learn more about the amazing work they are doing, plus, I do hope that they are in good health and good spirits. I did have the opportunity to meet with various community members to catch up and discuss work, life, and my school research. These conversations lead not only to the amazing work they are carrying out within tribal departments but also to questions that can be taken up in future research, manuscripts, or left for the individual and tribe.

Voice and Experience of Jicarilla Apache Girls

During interviews, half of the participants discussed work, life, and their interactions with Jicarilla Apache women across generations. Some of these stories were heart-wrenching, experiences of life-changing events, and their own aunties helped shape their world. But what I knew was missing was the voice, story, and experiences of our own Jicarilla Apache girls. While

these experiences are critical to this work and knowledge, it was best not to include them in this study. While I am a strong believer in including youth and their unique experiences, I did not want to risk the participants' confidentiality in my study.

Motivation of Being and Becoming a Mentor

First, an inquiry into the motivation of being and becoming a mentor. To gain a better understanding of what motivates an individual to mentor youth would provide a way for administrators of the tribe, program directors, and grant writers to develop a mentorship program. While motivations for mentoring are multifaceted, we can focus on preparing adults to mentor youth.

Losing Our Ways As Jicarilla Apache

As we enter a critical stage of losing ceremonial practices, including songs, prayers, and practices of the Kéesda (Jicarilla Apache Puberty Feast), what do we do when we lose the remaining generations of people who know the importance of our ways of being Jicarilla Apache? The discussion of losing our culture and language is taking place internally at all levels of the tribe, but what will it take for our community as a whole to act?

Mentoring both girls and boys

In this study, I focused on Jicarilla Apache women, showing up for Jicarilla Apache girls and teens. Mentoring in the lives of Native American youth is essential for healthy development, positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes. In this tribal community, we have many amazing Jicarilla Apache people in positive social and emotional roles as coaches, teachers, and program providers, and within each of these roles, they are mentoring both Jicarilla Apache boys and girls. They are insightful, self-reflective, learn and grow, share from their own experiences,

and are compassionate as they provide the different understanding and perspective needed to support Jicarilla Apache girls.

Conclusion

Understanding 'self' is not always an easy task. Jicarilla Apache aunties wear many hats. Self has a lifetime of experiences of love, pain, joy, laughter, and struggles. Our minds, hearts, spirits, and bodies carry memories and prayers, connecting our past, present, and future selves. But how do we begin to show up for our Jicarilla Apache girls if we have not been taught to care for one another, show empathy and compassion, or address our own truama that may prevent us from reaching out to help and for help. As Jicarilla Apache Aunties, we have a responsibility to show up for our young girls. Whether we realize it or not, we are influencing those around us, both good and bad, and also the in-between. Staying silent is unacceptable. Not being proactive and lack of involvement is unacceptable and perpetuating status quo. As I find the words to bring this study to a close, Audre Lorde's work comes to mind. "Your silence will not protect you" (Lorde, 1984, 2007, p. 30). The power of these words argues that we cannot remain silent in the face of injustice—whether it is racism, sexism, or homophobia—staying silent does not provide safety but rather gives oppression a place to thrive. Silence and a lack of action often go hand in hand, but in doing so, they cause internal negative consequences for the Jicarilla Apache girls, community wellness, and our future as a people.

We can't wait and be silent anymore. AuntieWork is decolonizing praxis is "living as a creative act. "Self-determination, consent, kindness, and freedom practiced in all our relationships" (Simpson, 2017, p. 5). Disrupting colonial settler violence and instead living kindness, love, and honoring relationships; "practices replicated over and over" (Simpson, 2017,

p. 5) with new narratives that include a positive future and create hope for our Jicarilla Apache girls/women and the tribe.

This dissertation was inspired not only by my own lived experiences but also by those of my niece, friends, family, and community. It has taken time to get to where I'm at in life, and I still have a lot to learn, but doing so with the love, support, and understanding of the important people in my life has given me different perspectives. It is my hope that this study provides insight for those Jicarilla Apache aunties who work with Jicarilla Apache girls in different capacities. It is the responsibility of the reader to make meaning of what has been written and the stories shared. It is also the responsibility of the Jicarilla Apache adult-auntie to heal so they may show up for the young Jicarilla Apache girls who need our support and guidance.

These stories are shared and honored in a way that supports Million's (2009) work, *Felt Theory*, which emphasizes storytelling and is rooted in Indigenous women's perspectives and experiences as a method of learning and understanding, highlighting affect as a way to feel and understand colonial histories and power of healing, and personal narratives to challenge colonial logics and narratives, and empower Tribal communities by acknowledging trauma and pain and knowing that healing and new futures are possible.

Appendix A: Interview Guide: Semi-structured Questions

Interview Guide: Semi-structured Questions

These questions were developed to engage participants in rich, meaningful interviews in which they can share stories about their experiences and knowledge, allowing me to collect Auntie data, which I will analyze to answer the overarching research questions guiding this study. This interview guide will be provided to participants prior to the first one-on-one interview.

Interview Guide: Semi-structured Questions

General Auntie Focus:

1. In your own words, share with me what an Auntie is or who Aunties are.
2. Who are some of the important Native women-Aunties in your life and why? Think of several Aunties in your life. Why do they stand out to you? What did they teach you?
3. My research focuses on how Native Aunties 'show up' in the lives of Jicarilla Apache girls. What does 'showing up' mean to you?
4. What role do Native Aunties play in their communities?
    a. How do they influence those around them (good, bad, or complicated)?

Jicarilla Apache Auntie-work:

5. Can you describe a project where you successfully advocated for the needs of Jicarilla Apache girls in your work?
6. Have you encountered challenges related to being a Native woman in your community or wider society?
7. Can you share any teachings and stories related to girlhood that were [gifted] shared with you?

Community:

8. What are some important teachings (good or bad or complicated) that Native Aunties might share with younger generations?
9. What challenges do Jicarilla Apache girls face within our community?

Jicarilla Apache Girls: Body, Heart, Mind, and Spirit:

10. In your view, what do Jicarilla Apache girls need to thrive with strong bodies, hearts, minds, and spirits?

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