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BRAVE HEART SOCIETY:  
AN ORAL HISTORY & REVIEW OF AN INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S  
SOCIETY

By

BROOK SPOTTED EAGLE

Bachelor of Arts, The Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA, 2009

Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of

Master of Arts in Anthropology

The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT

Summer 2013

Approved by:

Dr. Richard Sattler, Chair  
Department of Anthropology

Dr. Kimber Haddix McKay  
Department of Anthropology

Dr. Richmond L. Clow  
Native American Studies

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PREFACE.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>I. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Cultural Significance.....	3
Need for the Study.....	4
Individual Representation.....	6
<b>II. METHODS.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Ethnohistoric and Ethnographic Methods.....	9
Data Collection .....	10
Data Analysis Methods .....	13
<b>III. BACKGROUND AND HISTORY.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Systems of Dispossession: Devised Deprivation.....	16
Systematic Fragmentation: Fracturing a Collective Subjectivity.....	19
Patterned Echoes: 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Submission, Survival, and Struggle.....	23
Ihanktonwan into the Present.....	27
Red Rage.....	31
Invisible History: Sisters, Society, and Documentation.....	35
Brave Heart Society: The Need.....	39
<b>IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>43</b>
Indigenous Feminism: Deconstructing Western Definition.....	43
Red Pedagogy: Cultural Transformation, Continuity, and Awakening.....	44
Cultural Continuity.....	46
Cultural Transformation.....	47
Cultural Awakening.....	48
<b>V. INTERVIEW DATA AND ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>51</b>
Oral Histories: Lifeways Revealed.....	52
Unsettling Cycles: Raising Awareness.....	61
Western Disconnects and Clinical Approaches.....	71
Relationship Building: A Healthy Core for Healing .....	75
Calling the Spirit: Brave Heart Women’s Revival.....	78
Detraumatize: Decolonize.....	86
Brave Heart Girl-Culture: <i>Isnati Awica Dowanpi</i> .....	94
Outreach and Activities: A Brave Heart Family.....	105
Brave Heart Activism.....	113
Braving the Future within the Present.....	115
Funding: “We are Not a Program, We are an <i>Okodakiciye</i> .”.....	119

**VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS.....133**  
    Developmental Procedures.....133  
    Revitalization.....134  
    Brave Heart Significance.....135

**REFERENCES CITED.....139**

## LIST OF FIGURES

---

<b>Fig. 1:</b> Map of South Dakota and the Yankton Sioux Reservation.....	4
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This work was made possible through the generously shared knowledge and support of the *Cante Ohitika Okodakiciye* (Brave Heart Society). The oral historical knowledge supplied by Brave Heart members afforded the documenting of an otherwise undocumented history. This manuscript is dedicated to the past Dakota/Nakota/Lakota people who were misunderstood and misrepresented in past anthropological literature. *Pidamiye*.

Special thanks are due to Dr. Richard Sattler, Dr. Kimber Haddix McKay, and Dr. Richmond Clow of the University of Montana.

Without the contributions of this women's society and these individuals, this project would not have been possible. *Wopida tanka* (Thank you).

## PREFACE

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The purpose of this research as put forth in the scope of work by the Brave Heart Society's founding elders, is to document the cultural significance of the Brave Heart Society's revitalization and existence. Further, this report aims to compile existing data on the development and functions of the society, the challenges members face, and the society's future goals.

This study approaches this autochthonous collective as not only a treasured cultural resource, but also an important resource for Dakota/Nakota/Lakota family systems seeking trauma resolution. Please note that this paper does not claim to be a representation of the Brave Heart Society as a whole, as I am only one member of this collective. Rather, I hope that the findings of this project compiled from archival sources and contemporary interviews will inform other Indigenous groups interested in reconstructing cultural approaches to collective trauma resolution and the profound significance of cultural practice and spirituality within individual and collective processes of healing for Native groups in the present-day.

# I. Introduction

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*“A lot of our women are angry, we call it Red Rage” --- Faith Spotted Eagle,  
2004*

## Cultural Significance

This study examines the Brave Heart Society and the ways in which Brave Heart<sup>1</sup> collectively approaches trauma-healing outside of the programmatic structures of federally funded tribal systems. National statistics speak to the contemporary struggles impacting most US Indigenous<sup>2</sup> populations in the present-day. Such struggles are residual symptoms rooted in a long history of domination and US imperialism. These data indicate that most tribes have not fully recovered from federally imposed systems of deprivation. Within the context of the *Ihanktonwan* Dakota community in southeastern South Dakota, the nuanced ways in which trauma impedes development and community wellness is both realized and unrealized by community members. Additionally this small community lacks the available resources to adequately treat trauma through culturally tailored approaches and frameworks. Breaking existing intergenerational cycles of trauma requires both collective and individual action. More clinical approaches integrating cultural practice and spirituality are needed for US Indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> Brave Heart will be used in this study interchangeably with Brave Heart Society. The members of Brave Heart will also be called Brave Hearts, which refer to both female and male participants. The society has expanded and now includes family systems, hence the inclusion of male members.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this study Indigenous, Native, and Tribal members will be used interchangeably in reference to the collectives and individuals lineally tied to the autochthonous, pre-invasion, pre-colonial societies originating from the territories within present US nation-states.

populations, however such approaches should be developed by the respective populations in need.



**Figure 1: Map of South Dakota and Yankton Sioux Reservation (Courtesy of South Dakota Department of Tribal Relations.)**

The *Cante Ohitika Okodakiciye*<sup>3</sup> (Brave Heart Society) was revived in 1994 by Dakota/Nakota women as a means to address such structural issues resulting from historic trauma. This study seeks to identify and document how social change is occurring within Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota communities. In the context of this study, the significance of the Brave Heart Society's history has been documented per the voices of Brave Heart members. It is important that Indigenous populations have access to this information, as this study exhibits the culturally distinct strides one group is taking towards healing in relation to community development and wellness.

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<sup>3</sup> Brave Heart Society in the context of this paper refers to the women's society which is the revival of an historical women's society. This should not be confused with the historic Lakota warrior's society (Mails 1985). The two societies are derivative from different genders and bands within larger Dakota/Lakota/Nakota society.

Brave Heart systems of healing demonstrate multiple definitive forms of symbolic meaning. Such meanings aids in making sense of the social processes creating, negotiating, and assigning value to broader perspectives of community wellness. According to Susan Crate (2006: 164), an ethnic awakening occurs within social spaces centered on constructing and representing notions of a collective sense-of-self while distinct cultural practices are simultaneously reclaimed and preserved. In using culture to supply an understanding of how trauma has been woven into current Indigenous realities allows for a distinct grasp on how the loss of culture, language, spirituality, and practice have affected the collective *Ihanktonwan* mentality. In supplying a cultural filter to inform a contemporary sense-of-self, the Brave Heart Society equips members with the ability to better make sense of what has happened historically while offering culturally defined solutions to address present problems associated with this traumatic history.

### **Need for the Study**

The Brave Heart Society is a group contemporarily structured by distinct cultural principles of historical Dakota/Nakota/Lakota women's societies. The Brave Heart Society warrants examination, as it serves as one way Indigenous organizations can strategically address specific social issues impeding the wellness of Dakota/Nakota/Lakota communities per autochthonous methodologies. Brave Heart has recreated a system of support through the redevelopment of an Indigenous sisterhood. Brave Heart lends to the structure of Dakota/Nakota/Lakota tribal communities as a collective source of support within framed spiritual concepts of continuity to address contemporary social problems. Through its evolution,

the Brave Heart Society now lends a further contemporary Dakota/Nakota/Lakota female voice to wider international tribal politics, political events, tribal systems, and environmental justice movements.

The Brave Heart Society has grown into a force by employing the fertile cultural soil which often stimulates Indigenous movements, grassroots actions, and collective cohesiveness. Comprised of mostly Dakota/Nakota and Lakota members, the organization is a product of both cultural revitalization and cultural adaptations within the framework of what may be considered Indigenous feminism. Brave Heart's development was a direct response to the existing community issues present within Dakota/Nakota/Lakota communities. These social issues are often invisible to a larger US society. As such, this study seeks to expose the systematic consequences related to the history and continuation of US colonialism, domination, and discourse while simultaneously revealing how such consequences are being proactively addressed within *Ihanktonwan* territory.

Additionally, the historical tribal women's societies of the Great Plains are underrepresented within anthropological literature because historical female voices were marginalized in such literature until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, very little is known about women's societies, their past functions, and their variability. Though the information is lacking in this regard, the history has been preserved through primary oral systems of knowledge. Histories have been kept alive through family systems and storytelling and further used to define Brave Heart as a contemporary organization from the cultural roots embedded in oral accounts of the original Brave Heart Society. This study provides comprehensive documentation of oral knowledge regarding the original Brave Hearts and additional societies alike. This study seeks to

detail not only the revitalization of the contemporary Brave Heart Society, but also the significance behind why the redevelopment initially took place.

## **Individualized Representation**

The systematic repercussions US Indigenous population have survived are evidenced through their current political, economic, and social climates. However, adding insult to collective injury is that of societal invisibility. The histories and existence of US Indigenous groups are not widely sensed, seen, nor acknowledged outside of popular romanticized or disparaging imagery and stereotypical conceptualizations. Nevertheless US Indigenous populations continue to survive, and through the use of culture, Indigenous communities reclaim lifeways to further thrive in contemporary times. The current Indigenous social movements in motion reach across a transnational scale and are becoming difficult to ignore. In aims to call attention to Indigenous *self*-empowerment, this study seeks to expose one such movement occurring within Indian Country, as Brave Heart activism now reaches across transnational territories. This study centers on eroding Native invisibility within academic contexts by exposing the visibility of Brave Heart's development. Additionally, this study asserts the need for more multidimensional, Indigenous forms of analysis apart from the Western approaches dominating US anthropology. As such, this study employs a female Indigenous voice in hopes to deliver a deeper, multilayered perspective.

I am the sister, the daughter, and the granddaughter of a family system associated with the Brave Heart Society. In this study, I share information that has been translated through my

individual filter of understanding as a contemporary *Ihanktonwan* Dakota woman. The information that is outlined in this study is profoundly needed within anthropological literature. While my approach and perspective is one that is rare and underrepresented in this field, my research is done from an individualized angle which contradicts integral elements of my cultural values. Nonetheless, with the help of my society sisters and mothers this study represents a collaborative effort. While this study lends to anthropological literature, it must be stated that my perspective does not necessarily define the total perspective of the Brave Heart Society, as a collective. It is only what I can understand from my humble perspective as a women, a Dakota, and a student of anthropology.

## II. Methods

---

*"You don't have anything  
if you don't have the stories."  
--- Leslie Marmon Silko, 1977*

### **Ethnohistoric and Ethnographic Methods**

This study employs an ethnohistoric approach incorporating a significant ethnographic component to further structure analysis. Resources of historical documentation lend dimension to ethnography by contrasting interpretations of past practices with current perceptions of cultural practices (Carmack 1979:130). Given the past ethnohistoric accounts within anthropological literature and various other sources of non-anthropological observations, this paper provides an interpretation of past documentation relative to subjects relevant within this study.

This paper takes into account the ethnocentric and bias perspectives present in historical documentation, thus analyzing ethnohistoric interpretation will be approached with reservation. The documentation of Dakota/Nakota/Lakota women's societies and Native women in general lacks in regard to perspectives provided by women, thus documenting oral accounts of historical women's societies and their functions is employed through an ethnographic approach. The nature of this study seeks to explore Indigenous systematic approaches to address present social problems within a specific community. This study also strives to expose how such approaches employ cultural revival strategies, therefor demonstrating a presence of certain forms of cultural transmission and cultural continuity within current cultural practices. To understand the

reasoning behind why this collective has taken these particular actions, qualitative measures must be taken to gain access to deeper conceptualizations from varying tribal perspectives.

## **Data Collection**

Within the scope of an ethnohistoric approach, this study will be defined by resources available through media documentation, historical documentation, and archival record. Following in the conceptual framework of Cruikshank, when working from a combination of documentary and oral accounts, neither the oral nor the written version can be approached as historical evidence analyzed for facts. Combining these two kinds of accounts does not necessarily provide a synthesis or the “real story” (Cruikshank 1992:22).

Instead, both kinds of account have to be understood as *windows on the way the past is constructed and discussed in different contexts*, from the perspectives of actors enmeshed in culturally distinct networks of social relationships... The exercise here is less one of straightening out facts than of identifying how such distinct cognitive models may generate different kinds of social analysis, leading to *different interpretations of a given event*, one of which is included in *official history*, while the other is relegated to *collective memory*. [Cruikshank 1992:22, emphasis added]

The ethnographic interviews in this study afford oral data that when juxtaposed with the written record, yields access to alternative voices and subsequently, alternative interpretations of documented perspectives. As explained by Jan Vansina, oral data is “irreplaceable, not only because information would otherwise be lost, but because they are sources from the inside” (1985:197). Lending further to an insider perspective, oral data from this study has been interpreted, informed, and analyzed through the combination of the author’s position as a Brave Heart and training as an Indigenous decolonial anthropologist. In contextualizing this study from

an Indigenous decolonial perspective, I attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis shaped by an intimate understanding of culturally grounded processes that risk being lost within frameworks unaccustomed to the internal social structures of Dakota culture. Due to discomfort levels related to history and anthropology, the nature of the study was approached in a culturally concise manner so as to not draw further speculation associated with collecting information. Furthermore, racial sensitivities concerning certain topics in this study were managed by the author's emic perspective, as the potential barriers posed by gender, race, and culture referenced by Yow (2005:170-173) were curtailed by the author's acquaintance with not only the Brave Heart group, but also in relation to belonging to a collective subjectivity of tribal affiliation.

Ethnographic interviews for this study were conducted between April and May of 2013. Semi-structured interviews were designed to ascertain oral accounts of autochthonous, Indigenous women's societies and societal roles within current and historic Dakota/Nakota/Lakota structures. Additional focus was given to questions related to the revival of Brave Heart, the adaptation of society structure to address contemporary issues, and ceremonial practices and events provided by Brave Heart. Other interview questions focused on personal accounts concerning the driving reasons for involvement with Brave Heart functions, what it means to be a Brave Heart from informant perspectives, and perceptions surrounding how Brave Heart has impacted wider tribal and political structures. Interview selection for this study involved the qualitative research approach of respondent-driven sampling. Brave Heart Society consists of a small, distinct population founded on cohesive specific cultural ties to a common collective, thus consulting elders from Brave Heart were asked to suggest a frame of potential informants. Bernard (2011:147) regards respondent-driven sampling ineffective for larger population. The Brave Heart Society is a very small and hard-to-study population.

Accordingly a networking style of sampling was chosen to ensure the collection of sufficient data. Active participating Brave Hearts from various backgrounds and age groups were identified from initial contacts in which Bernard refers to as “seeds” (2011:149). Initial oral sources assisted in recruiting further oral sources leading to a diverse collection of data relevant to the Brave Heart Society’s existence. The two Brave Heart elders identified as potential advisors actively participated in consulting throughout the duration of this study.

Personal interviews with individual Brave Heart members were conducted on several occasions. The twelve participants interviewed were between the ages of 18 and 82, members of the Brave Heart Society, and members of either Dakota, Nakota or Lakota tribes. Given the growing expanse of Brave Heart in recent years, the organization is now intertribal, thus Brave Heart is no longer considered a Dakota/Nakota/Lakota women’s society. Further, Brave Heart includes the involvement of men and young boys in events and ceremonies from their defined roles as Indigenous males. As a result, the society has based many of its qualities as a family based orientated status of society which is led by older Dakota/Nakota/Lakota women. Pertaining to this study however, both male and female Brave Heart members were interviewed.

The interviews were conducted in the home of a Brave Heart elder which is a location often used to host Brave Heart functions. Depending on schedules and events, interviewees determined if the interviews were done alone with the interviewer. To avoid damaging rapport, the structural regulations of interview environments were kept flexible, nonetheless (Yow 2005:94 -95). Most interviews were conducted individually, either in person or via telephone, however due to the collective-based nature of the interview location, various members (particularly younger members) were present while elder Brave Hearts were interviewed. Interviews were audio recorded upon participants’ consent.

Informal semi-structured interview techniques were framed using an interview guide. Given that interviews only allowed one opportunity to interview individuals, the use of an interview guide ensured the collection of specific information across all interviews (Bernard 2011:158). The guide was structured in a manner deemed culturally respectful and appropriate, allowing room for participants to define and contour the interviews per their comfort-level (Yow 2005:96-95). Interview questions were approached in a manner which avoided the use of academic jargon (2005:99). The use of familiar culturally tailored communication techniques proved beneficial. The guide proved reliable in the collection of pertinent, comparable qualitative data essential for the analysis. The content of the interview guide was developed by the principle investigator of this study and further reviewed and approved by both University of Montana's Institutional Review Board and the Yankton Sioux Tribe's Cultural Committee and Business and Claims Committee.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

This study is explanatory by nature and is centered on qualitative measures, the use of statistical analysis and hypothesis testing were not relevant needs for the process of data analysis. The recorded interviews were transcribed, critically examined, and interpreted according to a standard discourse analysis approach (Bernard 2011:422). Direct quotations pertaining to the history of women's societies, the Brave Heart Society's history, functions, and current state, as well as future directions were analyzed to locate specific subjects to structure a collective narrative. In an interpretive approach to discourse analysis, quotations are laid out in text

followed by a commentary of analysis in the commenter's effort to bring forth a structural understanding (2011:423). Following Yow (2005:284), discourse analysis requires the inspecting of interview data, identifying themes within the data, and subsequently using recognized links between such themes to develop organizational schemes so as to structure the analysis of the data (2005:284).

The data analysis of this study depended on identifying shared narrative patterns, structures, and motifs present in the Brave Heart Society. The analysis of this study seeks to demonstrate how shared memories overlie a deeper level, influencing contemporary experiences through the complex structuring of historic memories (2005:285). Thus, the sole focus of this approach centers on employing narrative patterns and themes to foster documenting a fully vivid account of unique cultural experiences of lived realities structuring a collective existence (2005:286). The findings of this analysis is detailed in the respective data and analysis sections below.

### III. Background and History

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*“Women have been a footnote in [a] male-defined system. And if women are the footnote, then Aboriginal women are the footnote to the footnote.”*

-- Patricia Monture, as cited by Bolton, 2003

For the sake of clarity, social conditions concerning the Brave Heart Society must be contextualized in a manner that connects the contemporary state of a community with the history of an area in which Brave Heart functions within. The contemporary form of the Brave Heart Society was resurrected within the present homelands of the *Ihanktonwan* (Yankton Sioux). Though the Brave Heart Society is now considered an intertribal organization, the revival of Brave Heart has its roots embedded in both the cultural and local soils of *Inhanktonwan* territory. Understanding the current state of this community is imperative to contextualizing this study. This section centers on providing a historical timeline associated with early accounts of *Ihanktonwan* groups and the federal policies which shaped the lives of latter generations. The background of the *Ihanktonwan* is summarized in a manner which provides a relatively brief, yet comprehensive overview as a means to contextualize the current conditions of the *Ihanktonwan* so as to expose why an organization such as Brave Heart is direly needed today. Additionally, the organization is centered on cultural revival, healing, and activism. As a result, Brave Heart's functions are most importantly informed by cultural structures and practices inextricably woven from a distinctly defined, autochthonous, place-based subjectivity. Thus, autochthonous subjectivity, history, ceremony, and cultural practice are conceptually and spiritually informed by maintaining a relationship with our landscape, which houses our medicines for gathering and

the generational memories this collective refuses to forget. This section aims to afford a deeper layer of explanation correlating with systematic land-theft and cultural genocide. Brave Heart has developed a collective political voice and asserts an Indigenous right to cultivate a relationship with various land bases in order to nurture spiritual and cultural revival, regardless of existing jurisdictional conflicts. Within this scope, issues shaping history will be outlined and analyzed in the following sections.

This section centers on providing what documentation is available within anthropological literature associated with women's societies in Dakota/Nakota/Lakota groups. Very little has been historically documented about women's society, as much of the information available focuses predominately on warrior societies. This exposes the past anthropological tendencies to approach research from androcentric perspectives. Virtually no sources of anthropological records involving Dakota/Nakota/Lakota women's societies provide perspectives free of male-based influences. Therefore, a great deal of information about Native women remains undocumented, particularly in terms of information provided through the lens of Native women from past eras. Despite this gap, some information has been preserved from the early twentieth-century through the works of Clark Wissler (1912). This literature, along with other varying degrees of historical record, is further discussed in following sections. The discussion will be further provided from my perspective as a Native women with an extensive lived experience bound historically by lineal ties to culturally intact women relatives and ancestors.

### **Systems of Dispossession: Devised Deprivation**

The *Ihanktonwan* (People of the End Village) Dakota/Nakota are one of the seven major bands of the *Oceti Sakowin*<sup>4</sup> (Seven Council Fires). Bands of the *Oceti Sakowin* are located throughout present-day North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, Montana, and south-central Canada. However, historical bands of the *Ihanktonwan* migrated southwest from the woodlands in Minnesota into territories in present-day southeastern South Dakota, northeastern Nebraska, and western Iowa (Maroukis 2004:12). From the mid eighteenth-century until the reservation era began, the *Ihanktonwan* were more or less settled in what would be their permanent homelands.

By the 1860s Western expansion was well underway (Maroukis 2004: 14). Reservation systems were developed as a means to consolidate tribes within definitive borders so as to vacate tribal territorial lands for settler use. The *Oceti Sakowin* bands were not easily overcome or intimidated by military officials (Pommersheim 1995:18). Because intricate *Oceti* cultural place-based lifeways were inextricable from the buffalo, federal agencies understood well that the near extermination of the buffalo would not only deprive *Oceti* bands from economic stability, but also lead to the near extermination of the *Oceti* people overall. Consequently federal officials issued a massive buffalo hunt for profit and sport at a time buffalo were in high demand during the 1870s. By the 1880s the buffalo were virtually exterminated (Maroukis 2004:22).

Prior to the buffalo massacres, the *Ihanktonwan* had long been exposed to systematic deprivation per divisive tactics of US imperial domination. Desperation caused *Ihanktonwan* leaders to sign the treaty of 1858, which required surrendering ninety-six percent of the thirteen-million acres of *Ihanktonwan* territory in agreement that federal agencies would supply tribal

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<sup>4</sup> *Oceti Sakowin* will be used in this study interchangeably with *Oceti*.

resources to both ensure survival and improve *Ihanktonwan* livelihoods (Maroukis 2004:33-35). In 1859 the *Ihanktonwan* reservation was created in Charles Mix County in southeastern South Dakota. Advancing federal interests, the Dawes Act of 1887 introduced the concept of private property, dwindling treaty lands from 431,000 acres to 50,000 acres. *Ihanktonwan* household males were allotted 160 acres of land for agriculture while less acreage was allotted to single males. Further, white settlers married to *Ihanktonwan* wives were given preferential treatment allowing them 320 acres (2004: 84-85). The concept of Westernized gendered power differentials were thus introduced with the individualizing concept of private property.

Each allotment held a twenty-five year trust patent attached to each parcel of land, after which time land was transferrable to tribal member via a forced fee patent and “unrestricted ownership” (Maroukis 2004:85). Land began disappearing quickly, as much ended up sold during tax foreclosure auctions due to the inability for *Ihanktonwan* members to pay taxes (2004:85). Yet, much of the parcels of lands allotted to tribal members were marginal. Moreover, *Ihanktonwan* people did not know how farm in ways officials expected and also lacked the capital and ability to obtain credit to purchase farming equipment. By 1913, only a 135 *Ihanktonwan* were reportedly farming for themselves and a year later, 75 percent of the *Ihanktonwan* who had received forced fee-patents sold their land (2004:86). The Dawes Act was devised to stimulate fragmentation within both collectives and land base overall. Fragmentation is spatially visible by a checkerboarded reservation land base, a source of longstanding controversies concerning *Ihanktonwan* reservation boundaries.

The Dawes Act devastated the *Ihanktonwan* and bands reached deeper states of impoverishment. The Fort Laramie Treaty required federal agencies to provide provisions for the *Ihanktonwan* such as healthcare and education. With the mismanagement of federal agencies and

the structuring of federal policy, treaties were systematically broken. Desperation and impoverishment led the *Ihanktonwan* to accept payment for surplus allotment lands, a decision given to only male tribal members. Despite many reports of fraud, a total of 168,000 acres of lands were sold. By 1934, over 84 million acres of *Ihanktonwan* treaty lands were systematically taken, sold, or lost (Maroukis 2004:86).

### **Systematic Fragmentation: Fracturing a Collective Subjectivity**

As this era centered on advancing the genocide of autochthonous lifeways, missionizing supplied generational impacts per the policies systematically implemented by the Peace Policy during the 1860s. Religious institutions were granted semi-federal statuses and given financial support for missionization in *Ihanktonwan* territory via President Grant's Peace Policy (Rice 1994:156). Subsequently, *Ihanktonwan* children were the target population for political indoctrination in aims to solve the US "Indian problem" while the effects of Western indoctrination became internalized by older generations. Given that families severely lacked in available economic resources, boarding schools appeared as a means to afford basic necessities for Indigenous children to survive.

A first-hand account of the boarding school experience was provided through the auto-ethnographic works of *Zitkala Sa* (Getrude Bonnin) – an *Ihanktonwan* women born in 1876 who was also a colleague of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century ethnographer, Franz Boas. Native children were exposed to emotional, spiritual, and physical trauma within the confines of most boarding schools, however off-reservation schools in particular were especially guilty for extreme acts of

child-abuse and cruelty. The martial environment of schools were complete with drills, marching, total obedience, and a strict regimen of work (Maroukis 2004:65). Children were additionally forced to take English names and only allowed to speak in the English language. Westernized forms of gender roles were assigned through curriculums that implemented specific skill sets. Boys were taught about agriculture, animal husbandry, carpentry, and smithing. Girls were taught domestic skills. Native children were thus assimilated into the bottom of the socio-economic ladder (Maroukis 2004:65).

Cultural trauma was induced within the first two days of arrival when children were forced to cut their hair. Children were additionally subject to obscene rates of institutionalized sexual trauma by officials and faculty (2004:65). Such imposed forms of humiliation introduced a severe element of shame internalized by Indigenous children, introducing traumas that became lineally detrimental. Indigenous feminist scholar Andrea Smith (2004) argues that sexual violence is a devastating weapon of conquest. The patterns of sexual violence was a colonialist tool of patriarchal control. In this context, Western views held that Indigenous bodies were “dirty”, thus forms of sexual violence were justifiable. While Indigenous men suffered from sexual dehumanization, Indigenous women suffered sexual violence at a much higher extreme. In demonstrated accounts, numerous reports reveal that mutilating the genitals of Indigenous corpses was common practice for US soldiers. For example, Smith (2004:74) cites an account documented during the Sand Creek Massacre in which details how US soldiers cut out the private parts of Indigenous female bodies and either stretched them across their saddle-bows, or wore them over their hats. The same account further divulges that the sacred parts of Indigenous women were also hung from sticks for exhibition (2004:74). In considering that sexual violence

was used to dominate the bodies of Indigenous children, trends of conquest are nearly inconceivable.

*Ihanktonwan* children were often forced to allocate lateral forms of violence onto their peers as a means to issue discipline. These laterally violent forms of behavior were either praised or punished, depending on whether the said punishments deemed satisfactory by the standards of school officials (Maroukis 2004:65). Peer-on-peer violent punishments served as a gestation point for Indigenous victims to become victimizers. When considering current psychological studies centered on the neurological and emotional damages resulting from child-abuse (Augoustinos 1987; Brown and Finkelhor 1986), the rates of damage are immeasurable. Such injustices are now perennial burden carried by contemporary Indigenous communities. As Freire (1970:47) asserts, internalized oppression emerges after the oppressed absorb the nature of the oppressor and further, adopting the oppressor's guidelines which in turn produces an eventual fear of freedom. Thus, systems remain intact while effects are longstanding. Though the boarding school era lasted from the 1870s to the 1930s, cultural erasure, racism, and abuse continued throughout Catholic and Episcopalian boarding schools far beyond the 1930s.

This era centered on the methodical eradication of Native languages, culture, and systems of social control. The *Ihanktonwan* functioned as social and political systems inextricable from a complex, place-based spirituality. Native systems not only shaped conceptualizations of time, but also afforded exposure to neighboring bands and kinship relations during annual ceremonies. Dances and ceremonies, such as *Winwayang Wacipi* (Sundance), *Hanbdeceya* (Crying for a Vision), and *Inipi* (Sweat Ceremony), were central to the spiritual development structuring *Ihanktonwan* society. Because federal agencies aimed to destroy Native systems, all Indigenous ceremonial and non-ceremonial dancing place assimilation efforts at risk. By 1882, federal

agencies required approval for any form of dancing; permission was rarely granted (Rice 1994:155). However in 1889, federal agencies further condemned rituals and deemed such practices punishable through fines, imprisonment, hard labor, or withholding of rations (1994:156). Thus, Indigenous spirituality went underground and Sundances were held in secrecy on into the 1970s (Maroukis 2004:74).

The Major Crimes Act of 1885 additionally lent to tribal disestablishment, as the law limited the power of tribal court systems. The Major Crimes Act defined federal jurisdiction over seven major crimes on tribal land, although Congress has since amended the act to include sixteen additional crimes (Pommersheim 1995:81). The paternal trend of federal management was thus justified, reinforced, and continually revised through policies. Contemporary jurisdictional injustices from the Major Crimes Act are visible in cases involving non-tribal offenders whom are not pursued by federal courts. Given the probability that crimes committed by tribal members will occur within tribal jurisdiction, convictions for serious crimes are punishable by steeper sentences, hence the institutionalization of Native men.

Though this era brought rapid change, poverty nonetheless continued. Gendered concepts of disparity were also introduced in numerous manners, as legal marriage required wives to take the last names of their husbands which resulted in the loss of many family names. Clothing changed and the *Ihanktonwan* began avoiding the tribal forms of dress resembling the concept of a “Blanket Indian”. Sources of food shifted from subsistence-based diet to rations of canned meats and vegetables, sugar, and flour (Maroukis 2004:74). Even burial styles changed in accordance with religious regulations in various denominations, proving to be one of the most unexpected of heartbreaks of all (2004:74)

The death of *Ihanktonwan* head chief *Padaniapapi* (Struck by the Ree) in 1888 marked the relinquishment of sociopolitical-economic use of band structures. The village systems were abandoned as scattered housing on family allotments occurred, which dispersed the bands of *Ihanktonwan*. Communal activities and structures of function became increasingly difficult. Thus, the band chiefs previously having a great influence over consensual forms of government became less and less relevant as newly imposed foreign styles of governing were introduced to tribal structure.

### **Patterned Echoes: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Submission, Survival, and Struggle**

The *Ihanktonwan* received US citizenship when they received a trust-patent during the Allotment Era. Tribes also possessed a sovereign status and the inherent right to self-govern. However with the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934, tribes were given a choice to self-govern in a manner federal officials would recognize and supposedly respect provided this was done within a Western framework (Maroukis 2004:202). Pre-drafted and fairly uniform tribal constitutions were “granted” while only minor amendments were allowed, as such changes required the approval of the Secretary of Interior (2004:202). Considering the devastation caused by a half-century of harmful federal policies, the constitution drafted by an Indian bureau was understandably approached with trepidation, anger, hesitancy, and suspicion. By 1964, federal approval was granted for a non-IRA constitution which provided the *Ihanktonwan* with a General Council and Business and Claims Committee to address tribal political and economic

issues. However the constitution's role in reversing tribal economic problems of unemployment, poor housing, and an eroded landscape is hazy at best.

Tribal economic conditions, devised through poverty, worsened even further with the Great Depression. Only 201 people were employed on the reservation in 1933 (Maroukis 2004:197). The government began distributing biweekly staples of flour, sugar, and cheese and churches reportedly fed 100 to 200 people a day. To address tribal economic problems, Congress implemented an Indian division in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which put national citizens to work during this time (2004:198). Also providing employment was a New Deal program called the Works Progress Administration (WPA), although federal relief and rehabilitation programs offered no longer-term solutions to the deep-seated economic problems facing the *Ihanktonwan* (2004:198).

The approval of a tribal constitution coincided with the enactment of ineffective policies for tribal economic development. Federal programs designed to lure tribal members away from reservations for employment did nothing for economic growth on reservations during the 1950s. Garrett-Davis (2006:182) argues such relocation programs were driven by federal aims to further fragmentation and terminate tribes as legal entities. Due to these program's failure, the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act was passed. Although it supplied tribes with the first flow of funds for tribal economic development, this program caused more damage for the *Ihanktonwan* (Maroukis 2004: 265).

*Ihanktonwan* federal funds were subsequently invested in a pork-processing plant project. For obvious reasons, the tribe lacked experience in economic development which led to locating white investors to direct and manage the plant (Garrett-Davis 2006:182). By the 1970s, only one-third of the tribal population in Charles Mix County were employed full-time and half of the

population fell below the national poverty line (2006:182). The pork-processing plant was a welcomed project and by 1973 it was fully functioning. The corporation was expected to recover their investment plus interest and a profit by 1983, at which time the tribe intended to buy them out (2006:183). Yet existing racial tensions, cross-cultural misconceptions, and flawed business planning led to the dismal outcome of the venture.

Poor work conditions, no-nonsense styles of management, and stringent work schedules lent to the challenges experienced by tribal employees. Lacking resources in tribal populations resulted in various challenges for tribal employees (Garrett-Davis 2006:183-184). Further aspects concerning cultural calendars, welfare schedules, and in some cases, alcoholism, were poorly perceived in the workplace environment. Because there was a lack of understanding regarding structural issues impacting the population, management was harsh to employees and demonstrated little tolerance for any perceived acts of insubordination.

Contractual agreements to share the pork-plants profits with the *Ihanktonwan* were not honored by pork-plant management. Simultaneously, company financial affairs were poorly communicated to the tribe (Garrett-Davis 2006:185). By 1975 tribal discontent grew, fueling a distinct form of politically charged anger. Thus, a very organized takeover of the pork-plant took place resulting in a week-long occupation. Although conditions were agreed upon, these terms of settlement never materialized (2006). Praise for dismantling tribal rebellion resounded throughout the white communities of South Dakota through racism and media coverage (2006:185-187). The plant eventually shut-down.

Early economic programs for tribal development were problematic for numerous reasons. Federal agencies enforce policies and implemented programs to stimulate tribal economic “development”. However, development processes were unfamiliar to tribes. Capitalist

approaches aimed to induct tribes into a larger US economy, yet federal economic policies triggered the advancement of impoverishment for the *Ihanktonwan* and many other tribes nationwide. Advancing capitalism depends on sustaining hierarchical systems of class. The goal to induct tribes into the US economy proved successful, but only in reestablishing a low class-based population, an essential for larger capitalist economies to prosper. During the 1960s, the careless decisions of programs such as the Economic Development Administration and the US Department of Commerce, proved unsuccessful and destructive. Kalt et al. (2008:113) assert that past federal development efforts rarely supported projects with the use of competent business analyses and market feasibility studies. Kalt et al. (2008:112) additionally argue that failure in tribal ventures often resulted from the absence of project-oriented solutions addressing the fundamental causes of economic “underdevelopment”. There is a high likelihood that project-oriented solutions, competent business analyses, and market-feasibility studies were either absent from the pork-processing plant’s development, or poorly done. Had this information been made readily available the fundamental causes to tribal underdevelopment would have been both recognized and better understood by investors, which subsequently may have spurred investors to consider threats present in tribal economic ventures. Again it must be reiterated, the most damaging economic development strategy at this time resulted from making investments that were “virtually always unaccompanied by a systematic approach to dealing with underlying barriers to on-reservation development” (2008: 113). Thus, development became deeply distorted during the developmental phases of tribal economies.

Kalt et al. (2008:113) additionally argue, key issue with most projects during this era was tribal dependence on non-Native management. Because tribal economic development “planners” began seeking funding through federal grants, the web of federal dependency strengthened

(2008:113). Federal approaches proved structurally harmful, as most elected leaders focused more on federal prerogatives, rules, and priorities rather than building solid economic policies and sound governments (2008:113). Federal agencies failed tribes in not addressing the very structural problems imposed by the federal government. Such aims appear to not have been a priority and perhaps even disregarded.

The most successful *Ihanktonwan* development venture was the Fort Randall Casino. The 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act made it possible for reservations gaming developments (Maroukis 2004:289). A Yankton Gaming Commission was subsequently created and the casino providing a restaurant, a lounge, a gift shop, and a 58-room hotel, opened by 1992. Several years later, the construction of travel plaza and convenience store adjacent to the casino provided another source of economic development. Though casino profits afforded revenue to establish various tribal programs, it did not create long-term economic stability, which has lent to the problematic conditions currently affecting *Ihanktonwan* communities.

### **Ihanktonwan into the Present**

The legacy of federal policy continues to threaten *Ihanktonwan* land base, as demonstrated in 1998. The 1858 treaty ceded aboriginal title to ninety-six percent of the 11 million acres of *Ihanktonwan* territory, leaving 430,405 acres for reservation settlement in exchange for a number of rights (Ritter 1999: 17). The allotment era further diminished the reservation lands granted by the 1858 treaty; by 1934, 50,000 acres remained. On January 26, 1998 the United States Supreme Court again diminished *Ihanktonwan* tribal lands. After decades

of massive land dispossession, a mere 39,000 acres is all that is presently left of *Ihanktonwan* land (1999:17). This dispossession resulted from a jurisdictional conflict between the tribe and a private corporation over a plot of tribal land sited for the construction of a landfill. The private corporation subsequently elicited State assistance. The Supreme Court ruling was based on the echoes of the 1887 Dawes Act and the Congressional intent to diminish the reservation due to amount of un-allotted land base, i.e. allotment land-loss resulting from death, poverty, fraud, and manipulation (Maroukis 2006:60). This was no fortunate accident. This was nineteenth-century federal Indian policy serving its purpose. In reducing reservation boundaries, the US Supreme Court also reduced tribal jurisdiction. Subsequently, tribal power was reduced as a result.

In terms of economy, many tribal groups have yet to recover from devastation. According to the US Census, as of 2013, Natives suffer from poverty at a rate of twenty-seven-percent, nearly twice the times of the national rate. However, South Dakota leads in the nation's highest rate of tribal poverty. Forty-eight percent of the State's 65,000 Natives are currently living below the US poverty threshold. However in regards to the *Ihanktonwan*, according to a study done by Amnesty International (2012), an alarming eighty-six percent of the 3,500 enrolled tribal members living on the reservation are unemployed. Unfortunately the data is lacking on detailed statistics on *Ihanktonwan* conditions.

The towns encompassing *Ihanktonwan* territory including Wagner, Marty, Lake Andes, and Pickstown<sup>5</sup>, lack the resources needed to provide economic industry, growth and employment, particularly for tribal members. Starting businesses in sparsely populated towns located in dispersed areas are faced with daunting obstacles, especially when considering barriers

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<sup>5</sup> According to the US Census Quick Facts, as of 2010 the unemployment rate for the Yankton Reservation was 86%. Demographics: Wagner population 1566 (40.5% Native, 54.7% White), Marty pop.402 (95% Native, 3.5% White), Lake Andes pop. 879 (7.8% Native, 82.4% White); Pickstown population 201 (10.4% Native, 86.2 White).

related to tribal, federal, and state jurisdiction. For example, it can be nearly impossible for tribal members to start a business on reservation land, as reservation land is considered trust-federal land, which cannot be used as a source of collateral needed when tribal members apply for credit loans.

Opportunities for local gainful employment are also severely lacking, despite employment available at tribal headquarters, federal agencies, schools, the casino, the travel plaza, and various other small businesses. While larger towns such as Yankton or Mitchell (both located over sixty-miles away) offer more opportunities, commuting is often not feasible for families living in poverty. Additionally, the issues of institutionalized racism are rampant in South Dakota – on both State and local levels. In general, non-Native businesses approach hiring tribal members with reserve. This area’s racial polarization can be deeply ingrained, which is rooted in historical racial tensions extending back to non-Indigenous settler families settling on and around *Ihanktonwan* lands<sup>6</sup>.

Anger, distrust, and guilt are the residual results of domination and colonialism and are still intensely felt by the Indigenous population due to the loss of life, land, culture, and language, yet history is largely ignored by settler-descendent populations. Recalling the patterns of economic strife and tensions demonstrated within the context of the pork-processing plant, it should be clear such patterns are still very common in present-day reservation life. Not only are the harmful impacts resulting from federal destruction visibly recognizable in the current *Ihanktonwan* economic climate, but also through various expressions of discouragement and self-esteem collectively.

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<sup>6</sup> See Kent and Johnson’s (1976) *Flows of funds on the Yankton Sioux Indian Reservation* for an in-depth analysis on additional factors lending to impoverishment.

Poverty is argued to be one of the greatest threats to health. Not only are poor people sicker more often than wealthier people, they generally live shorter lives due to poorer economic, social, political, and physical conditions (Swinnerton 2005). With the lowering of class base, distributions of morbidity and mortality subsequently increase. Lacking income and access to material resources creates a lack of decent standard of living and further, a lack of participation in society. Direct implications of poverty on health are attributable to the lack of access to nutritious foods (2005:76). Poverty also lends to poor conditions in housing, exposure to infections, overcrowding, and higher risks involving crises, accidents, and fires. However, the indirect impacts of poverty effect mental health while the social impacts can affect the capacity for healthy decision making (2005:77). Mortality is also attributable to decision making and risk. Social divisions and poor material conditions impact hope and empowerment to make healthy decisions about drinking, smoking, substance abuse, diet, and exercise. Additionally, poor people are less likely to participate in preventative health or get routine medical care (2005:77). Consistent exposure to dire circumstances also influences attitudes that are often fatalistic, which paired with the abundance of risks that poverty attracts, can be deadly. Behavioral aspects affecting health may result from limited or no access to information and education. (2005). Voss et al. (2004) examine effects of further trends in poverty revealing the children from impoverished homes are subject to inferior schooling while commonly exposed to less educationally stimulating home environments. Impoverished children are also likely to reside in high-risk neighborhoods, have health needs that are often left unattended, and forced to face a host of many other disadvantages (2004).

Voss et al. (2004:1059) assert most research reveals that when the general population is touched by short stints of poverty that usually last for two to three years at time. Such families

which experience poverty are likely to experience it again (2004:1059). Considering the extreme levels of poverty most consistently the higher rates within Native populations, the direct and indirect consequences become difficult to conceptualize. If you are not from a reservation and have rarely been exposed to reservation life from an Indigenous perspective, the nuanced connections easily drawn by residence from these forms of long-term impoverishment may be easily missed. What has come with poverty in tribal communities are high levels of crime, sexual and physical violence, substance abuse, alcoholism, high rates of morbidity and mortality, and high rates of diabetes amongst many other health concerns. It goes without saying, tribal trends of poverty are systematic symptom of a long history of imposed federal domination. What adds insult to injury however, is the invisibility of tribal histories that expose the root-causes of such social problems. This can result in a great deal of victim-blaming from a wider population. Discussing the common attitudes and behaviors regarding poor conditions is a challenge, as casting an oversimplified analysis only further marginalizes an already marginalized population. Thus, trauma must be addressed.

## **Red Rage**

Red Rage is a striking concept which holds a perpetual presence in the lived experience of being a contemporary Native person. Throughout the years, issues generating Red Rage have been examined and termed within paradigms of internalized oppression and historical trauma. Yet naming specific behaviors informed by historical trauma reveals how internalized oppression looks and more importantly, how it feels. In reality behaviors associated with Red Rage are

perplexing, hurtful, and often unnamed as the normative social products of a marginalized population.

Introduced by *Ihanktonwan* trauma counselor and national organizational development consultant Faith Spotted Eagle during the 1990s, Red Rage is an array of “behaviors displayed by people who have suffered oppression and are in some measure, traumatized by it” (Randall 2008:144). Reyhner (2006) defines Red Rage as a behavioral manifestation resulting from accumulated impacts historically imposed on Indigenous groups through the process of colonization. The memory of generational trauma, violence, and oppression is reiterated through various contemporary forms of trauma, violence, oppression. Thus, Red Rage is as much collectively felt as it is individually expressed. Red Rage hurts because it comes from a place of pain. It revels in a space rooted in self-protection. Red Rage comes from a sense of feeling powerlessness. It is an inheritance of trauma and these behaviors are destructive.

That Indigenous groups in the US have survived and are growing demonstrates an inspiring degree of strength and resilience, albeit recovery takes time. Tribes, languages, and tribal cultures have survived, which is indication enough defining these populations’ perseverance. The temporal aspects of trauma exposes a generational mobility of transmission. The recurrent nature of trauma increases when combined with long-term poverty and inescapable systematic inequalities. Thus, trauma is recycled, regenerated, and expressed generationally, producing layers with each passing generation (Poupart 2003). Direct or indirect manifestations of trauma inform the current lived-realities experienced within Indigenous collectives, while communal and individual perceptions further define the effects of trauma and ways in which trauma is dealt with. Tribal systematic social webs of conflict are intricate and extremely difficult to understand unless deeper connections are made. Studies focusing on US tribal

communities are grounded on concepts of intergenerational trauma and commonly used terms such as, internalized oppression or internalized racism, are virtually meaningless unless one witnesses the results of such in action (2003).

Given the conditions associated with poverty and extensive histories of trauma, it is hardly surprising that current studies indicate higher rates of crime in tribal communities, exceeding that of the national average (Fairchild, Fairchild, and Stoner 1998; Oetzel and Duran 2004). The Bureau of Justice Statistics indicate Indigenous communities experience violent crimes at much higher rates than the national average as well. Unfortunately, representative studies of crime and violence have never been done across all tribal communities, thus data is severely limited.

Violence is nonetheless a very normal part of Indigenous lives and communities, thus witnessing violence is normal as well. The likely effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) impacts tribal communities most assuredly, as given how many Indigenous people are subject to high rates of violence and death. An additional layer is that of Native youth suicide rates, which are triple the rates of any other youth group in the US according to federal studies outlined in Stephanie Woodard's NBC article in October 2012 (Halpern 2009; Cross et al. 2009). Suicide rates are also high in older Native generations. An article in Indianz.com (2013) reported studies done by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention indicate the suicide rate for Natives between the ages of 35 to 64 have gone up over sixty-five percent in the past decade. The issues facing Indian Country are extreme and often compounded by the jurisdictional injustices of federal intervention. However, the ways in which tribal conditions effect women are central to this study.

The statistics of violence afflicting Native women overall are extraordinary. According to Amnesty International (2012), 1 in 3 Native women will be raped in their lifetime; the rate of sexual violence against Native women is 2.5 times higher than any other group in the US. According to the Department of Justice (2012), 86% of on reservation sexual assaults reported by Native women were reportedly committed by non-Native perpetrators who cannot be prosecuted in tribal courts, which causes these cases to become federal. Not only do Indigenous groups lack a political voice, but tribes systematically lack political power. This is demonstrated through the inability to sentence even tribal perpetrators in tribal court with anything higher than a misdemeanor. Further, tribal courts are unable to jail offenders for longer than a year – felony status cases committed on tribal land by tribal members are handled within Federal court, which carry high conviction rates that hold harsher sentences. As a result, Native victims are not protected because a high number of assaults are not prosecuted. In 2011 alone, the federal government reportedly declined to pursue charges in 65% of on reservation reported domestic/sexual violence cases (The Belt Way Indian 2012). The overall number of cases denied prosecution in federal court involving non-tribal crimes in tribal jurisdiction are exorbitant. It is not the tribes that have demonstrated a legal incompetency, it is the federal government.

Institutionalized racist and sexist forms of governmental resistance has been publically demonstrated through the hard fought battle to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. This landmark piece of legislation was designed to improve community-based and criminal justice responses to violence against women while also providing provisions that specifically offered better protection for Native women, LGBT, and undocumented victims. To have an act that protects not only Native women, but marginalized populations as a whole should have been welcomed, but it was not. The ripples of systematic marginalization are now being felt on a

national scale, which I hope has increased the chances for marginalized populations to be better heard and seen.

We are still here, we are strong, and our current movements are becoming difficult to ignore. While the information in this section has centered on providing answers as to why Brave Heart is direly needed, it must be stated that the retained striking aspects of tribal cultures shape the core of tribal resilience. As dismal as tribal histories seem, groups are taking a hold of their own destinies. The ways in which Brave Heart Society approaches healing is an example. Statistical data provides a view into structural symptoms of a traumatic past, however they do not tell the stories which expose very distinct tactics used by tribal groups to reclaim tribal lifeways. In this section, the present-day challenges will be discussed so as to illuminate how trauma shapes social structure, however readers must keep in mind, the tragedy faced by tribes is not the sum-total of tribal identity.

### **Invisible History: Sisters, Society, and Documentation**

Existing within historical bands of the *Oceti Sakonwin* were distinct autochthonous subgroups informed by varying social aspects of camp-life and localities. Anthropologists termed such groups as societies or cults (Mails 1985; Wissler 1912; Hassrick 1964). The Dakota/Nakota term *okodakiciye* supplies a less definable concept for subgroups than what is discernable from Eurocentric conceptualizations of the term society or even worse, cult. Anthropological literature largely regards societies as masculine and cults as feminine. It is important to discuss gender briefly, as the available documentation regarding Dakota/Nakota/Lakota societies are indeed

skewed by Western biases. It is true that divisions existed between genders in *Oceti* societies, and for good reason. However Indigenous gender divisions were gravely misunderstood within Western analyses.

The most comprehensive record of historical *Oceti* women's societies are provided through the works of Clark Wissler (1912). Though this text makes more mention of *Oceti* women's groups, little information was attained and discussions are decontextualized. A commonality present in the few manuscripts which mention women's groups is discussed through varying descriptions of *Sinte Sapana Winyan* (Black Tail Deer Woman) and *Anog Ite* (Double Face Woman), feminine figures which revealed the status of *Winyan Nonpapika Ihanbdapi* (Double Woman Dreamers). Double Woman Dreamers were women who had received dreams or visions with messages associated with medicines, war, healing, quilling, tipi-making, dances, and a number of other qualities (Wissler 1912; Medicine 1983; Walker 1980; Rice 1992). Both dream figures were representative of a *wakan* (holy/sacred) blessing, as woman dreamers were given powers to create *wakan* cultural articles, shields, and war medicines.

Medicine (1983) postulates that paths of Double Woman afforded a choice between reckless fun and various sexual partners, or a life of a skilled artisan with the virtues of Dakota/Nakota/Lakota women. Choosing the former path was likely a rare occurrence, yet such women were associated with masculine qualities. Medicine (1983:247) further explains this role may have been similar to the feminine roles of *winkte* males. Though gender roles differed greatly and divisions of labor were strictly defined, these roles were considered complimentary and practical (Medicine 1983:247). Individuals existing outside of gender norms were simultaneously perceived as both unfortunate and *wakan*, as many held distinct medicinal roles in *Oceti* groups (Medicine 1983:243).

Although largely ignored or minimized by Western scholars, there were numerous women's societies that performed important functions that gave status and power to *Oceti* women. Wissler (1912) categorizes various women's societies, however Medicine (1983) lends a deeper, comprehensive analysis illuminating larger societies may have housed smaller subgroups. The women's groups documented by Wissler (1912:75-99) included:

- Double Woman Dreamers
- Porcupine Quill Makers
- Women's Medicine Cult
- Praiseworthy Women (Winyan Tapika)
- The Owns-Alone
- Tipi Makers (Tanners)

Little is said about what differentiates *Oceti* women's societies outside of specific dances, skills, ceremonial dress, and medicines. Demallie (Albers and Medicine 1983:241) argues it was very likely that the Double Women Dreamers, the Porcupine Quill Makers, and the Women's Medicine Cult were three parts to a larger, single society. Given the tendency for *Oceti* bands to gather for annual hunts and ceremonies, cultural transmission likely occurred amongst society structures.

The concept of an *okodakiciye* loosely translates to a group of friends committed to one another. Born in 1889, Ella Deloria's documentations offer a distinct view into *Ihanktonwan* frameworks of *okodakiciyes* by demonstrating how animal culture acted to shape *Oceti* camp approaches to living. The manuscript *Origin of Dakota Societies: A Legend* addresses the inclusive Dakota *akitica* (warrior) societies which were responsible for keeping order within the camps (Deloria 1932: 316). Deloria's emic perspective and use of the Dakota language combined with her scholarly training, Christian upbringing, and "modern" view, lent to her role as a

“cultural mediator” (Medicine 1980). Deloria’s perspectives were influenced by both Dakota and Christian conceptualizations during the androcentric era in the early twentieth-century.

Deloria mentions little about women’s *okodakiciyes*. Nonetheless in the biographical manuscripts recorded by Sarah Emilia Olden (1918), *Tipi Sapa* (Black Lodge – Deloria’s father) makes specific mention of what resembles women’s societies. *Tipi Sapa* was born into a life rooted in *Ihanktonwan* value systems structured by camp lifeways and references a subgroup of women present in his past camp. *Tipi Sapa* frames the group using the term class, however, clearly class in *Ihanktonwan* culture differed from class in Western culture. *Tipi Sapa* illuminates elements of society-hood in the following excerpt in relation to women’s gatherings:

“They spoke beautifully of their mothers and said that any virtue in themselves was owing to the good teaching they had received from them. These girls generally remained a long while at the meeting, exhorting one another ‘to love and to be good works’. They laid great stress upon being kind to the poor; and also agreed to look after their weaker sisters in the Circle, to try to keep them from going astray. These meetings were bound to have good results in that their influence was direct and far-reaching.” [Olden 1918:43].

It is clear that certain groups of women cared for other women in need. *Oceti* societies were gendered not only in roles, but medicines and ceremonies. Groups of women performed women’s ceremonies, such as *Isnati Awica Dowanpi* (Sing over Those Dwelling Alone), the coming-of-age ritual held for *Oceti* girls. While Deloria (1934) asserts that *Ihanktonwan* bands did not provide *Isnati Awica Dowanpi*, many *Ihanktonwan* women in present-day disagree. *Tipi Sapa* (1918:42) confirms the medicinal qualities held by women stating, “There were many medicine women, who sucked disease from the skin of anyone ill. Both had, also the gift of conjury, and were eagerly sought after as fortune tellers”. It is possible such women may have been associated with the war medicine societies mentioned in Wissler’s texts (1912:75-99).

Though women's roles structured the core of a camp, war medicine women's societies afforded a particularly powerful female contribution to such exterior cultural domains structured by men.

Contrasting early analyses on Dakota people, fundamental qualities structuring Dakota culture affords an effective rebuttal against assertions that Dakota groups were patriarchal. The *Canupa Wakan* (Sacred Pipe) and a structural set of spiritual teachings were brought to the *Oceti* by a woman: *Pte San Win* (White Buffalo Calf Woman). Further contrasting are linguistic associations with *Ina Maka* (Mother Earth) and the feminine strength connected to *eglushaka* (pregnancy or to grow strong) and the *wakan* energy of women's menstrual cycles which act to weaken male medicines and war bundles (Medicine 2001:141). In pregnancy, a woman grows stronger. After birth, lifecycles occur upon *Ina Maka*. In death, spirits travel from *Ina Maka* along the *Wanagi Tacanku* (Trail of Spirits) and are met by *May Owicapaha*, a woman who then decides whether spirits will go to the "happy hunting grounds", or back to *Ina Maka*. Thus, humans are welcomed into life physically from a woman, progress through lifecycles upon woman, and in death are then led to another life by woman, or sent back again to exist upon a woman.

This section's entirety centers on a basic explanation of *Ihanktonwan* history and certain elements of culture in an effort to correlate the past with the present. There is a clear disconnect between perceptions shaped by Western systems and a collectively conceptualized sense of cultural continuity alive within *Ihanktonwan* people. The following sections revolve around present gender dynamics within *Ihanktonwan* communities grounded on the accumulation of stacked trauma associated with federal genocidal attempts, patriarchy, cultural violence, and economic devastation, recovery, and contemporary strife. Not only does colonization act to efface identity, but the innate character of colonialism is directly structured by patriarchy (Hogan

2000:85-86). Thus, colonialism either instills or exacerbates patriarchy. However, this study is not intended to further marginalize resilient lives of Native people, yet the ways which the tangled history of the *Ihanktonwan* informs a need for collective healing must be revealed.

### **Brave Heart Society: The Need**

Historically imposed power dynamics skewed gender roles. Consequently, internalized power disparities are recognizable through current conceptualizations of what is often considered “traditional” Dakota/Nakota/Lakota culture. This poses a very distinct cultural issue which Brave Heart Society confronts and deconstructs within a cultural community approach. The struggles existing in Dakota gender dynamic is symptomatic of historical trauma, as *Ihanktonwan* men and women were robbed of their roles. These roles were the foothold of power structuring past *Oceti* lifeways. In forcing dependence through deprivation, reservation settlement ensued. Thus, from the perspective of many *Ihanktonwan* women regarding *Ihanktonwan* men, various forms of patriarchal behaviors exist within the *Ihanktonwan* community and culture. I argue these behaviors are attached to the history of domination; more directly, to generational cycles of systematic emasculation. Colonialism breeds patriarchy because it is rooted in patriarchy (LaRocque 1996). This is not to say that all *Ihanktonwan* men are patriarchal in exacerbated manners beyond the norm of male privilege within US society. It is also not meant to say the structural problems in the community are caused by men. It is to say however, that gender roles within *Ihanktonwan* perceptions have been skewed which has lent to the conflicts existing within *Ihanktonwan* communities. The issues faced by Indigenous people throughout the US are

multifaceted and layered. When a sense of powerlessness exists, people internalize powerlessness in various manners. Historical and present forms of emasculation inform patriarchal attitudes, shaping the behaviors present within *Ihanktonwan* systems and within the perspectives of many *Ihanktonwan* people.

Clearly statistics reveal a need for action. The Brave Heart Society was a response to a community need for a system of cultural support, empowerment, and healing. Culture and symbolic meaning distinctly tailored for issues impacting women and family systems are the product of nearly two decades of work done by Brave Heart. The framework structuring my research largely analyzes how Brave Heart women have addressed social issues in a manner that empowers contemporary Indigenous women. The approaches taken are congruent and complimentary to cultural revival, transformation, and preservation, which are common cultural priorities present within many Indigenous groups sharing similar histories of domination. This organization is founded on a collective sense of self which constructs and maintains social boundaries while additionally demonstrating reverence for Indigenous survival and resiliency. Indigenous nations survive and in general, resist US homogenization. Brave Heart anchors subjectivity and continues this trend of resistance.

The Brave Heart Society largely focuses on issues that impact woman, however over the years it has become evident men play an integral role in the organizations functioning. As member often conceptualize the marginalized space they occupy as Indigenous women in the broader US society, Brave Heart acts to reinforce and support this space, naturally instilling a sense of distinct cultural pride. The Brave Heart Society is concerned with cultivating a place-based sense of self while restoring the most integral value in *Oceti* collectives: being a good relative. This organization mirrors the autochthonous Dakota/Nakota conceptualization of an

*okodakiciye*, which translates loosely to making friends in which one is committed to. Thus, *Cante Ohitika Okodakiciye* (Brave Heart Society) is an *Oceti* structure addressing the circumstances of a contemporary era by adapting past cultural philosophies to meet present needs of *Oceti* collective lifeways.

The Brave Heart Society centers on using both revived and preserved ceremonies and transformed practices, language, education, tribal values, and generational guidance through informal mentoring systems to address current social problems via culturally tailored approaches. While social problems existing are experienced as varying realities, structural social problems shaping tribal realities are not autochthonous characteristics of Dakota/Lakota lifeways. This is communicated often within Brave Heart, as the intrinsic social aspects of the group allows for dialogue associated with decolonization. The Brave Hearts make an effort to reaffirm the sense of an authentic collective self that centers on transforming current values in reestablishing a framework that culturally filters and addresses social problems to foster collective healing and wellness. In turn, this has created a culturally based community model to live within for Brave Heart members, their families, and future generations. There are many obstacles to overcome and many problems that still exist, which will be discussed in the following sections. The efforts made have nonetheless produced very positive outcomes for individual members. This structure is the manifestation of a very old conceptual process formally used in balancing the dynamics of historical *Oceti* camp social structures.

## IV. Theoretical Framework

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*There is no image of an American Indian intellectual...it is as though the American Indian has no intellectual voice with which to enter into America's important dialogues.*

-- Elizabeth Cook Lynn

This study of the cultural significance, history, and functions of the Brave Heart Society is framed under the tenets of Indigenous feminism. Indigenous feminism recognizes distinctive components of feminist theory as they pertain to the special significance of Native women. Although feminist theories in general center on the intersections between race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, gender, and class, Indigenous feminism lends a deeper analysis relative to Indigenous rights to self-determination and advocacy for empowerment through decolonization. Indigenous feminism is presently being used in global Indigenous studies, however Indigenous feminism is appropriately informed within this study as it pertains to a *Red Pedagogy* in an effort to lend critical attention to cultural and symbolic meanings within *Ihanktonwan* lifeways, cultural continuity and transformation, historic trauma, and socioeconomic structural issues faced by Brave Heart.

### **Indigenous Feminism: Deconstructing Western Definitions**

The theoretical approach framed through an Indigenous feminist lens, according to Luana Ross (2009:50) is distinctly defined by the core components of tribal sovereignty and rights to self-determination while combined with advocacy for empowerment through decolonization.

Therefore, Indigenous feminism as an approach is not only a form of advocacy for women, but collectives as a whole; this includes men and all other genders. Ross conceptually follows in the theoretical footsteps of Kate Shanley's (1984) definition of Native feminists and how feminism embodies a special meaning for Native women:

Thus, the Indian women's movement seeks equality in two ways that do not concern mainstream women: (1) on the individual level, the Indian woman struggles to promote the survival of a social structure whose organizational principles represent notions of family different from those of the main-stream, and (2) on the societal level, the People seek sovereignty as a people in order to maintain a vital legal and spiritual connection to the land, in order to survive as a people. (1984:214).

Feminism is used to label a rather wide variety of views and movements which center on empowerment of women and an opposition to patriarchy, sexism, and male domination. Indigenous feminism lends yet another angle to the already diverse approach of various feminisms' breadth reaching across fields and disciplines. However, as Smith (2005:127) argues, it is with Indigenous feminism that anticolonial struggles are made central to feminist politics. Hence, informing Native women's organizing efforts are the considerations correlating appropriate forms of governance and the distinct statuses of Indigenous people. Further, the structures in Western societies are based on systems so that structures of domination can survive. Within an Indigenous feminist framework, the very distinct components of locality, tribal affiliation, history, and economics shape the issues affecting tribal communities.

This diversity is something that offers voice and position to marginalized groups and their nuanced political, historical, and cultural differences while connecting issues that intersect empowerment, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, and ethnicity. Because this approach is

concerned with decolonization, the concept of sovereignty will be addressed critically through an approach provided by Alfred (1999) in which defines sovereignty as a foreign concept of political power imposed by Western forces; thus, a power that is granted is also a power that can be taken away. In this regard, Alfred (1999:88-89) further argues for the need to shift away from the concept of sovereignty towards the concept of self-governance as it pertains to the concept of Indigenous nationhood (a state of being). In doing so, tribal self-governance will be restored as a social process that acts to shape the political process. Collective forms of Indigenous governance centered on social processes that shaped a collective. Alfred (1999:89), in agreement with Deloria, asserts that tribal sovereignty fosters a process fully centered on the political, rendering the social obsolete. Adhering to concepts of sovereignty has fostered the removal of the very communal social aspects that defined political roles within a collective. Brave Heart will be addressed as an existing collective concerned with social processes. The society acts to implant the social back into the political through the revival of a collective form of self that possesses political power, which in turn has awakened dormant tribal values attached to the concepts of autochthonous Dakota women/warrior societies and their social/political functions.

### **Red Pedagogy: Cultural Transformation, Continuity, and Awakening**

With the rise in Indigenous intellectualism comes the deconstruction of theoretical approaches insufficient in analyzing Indigenous collectives. Grande (2000:350) argues for approaches defined by a “Red Pedagogy” which decentralizes and shifts constructs of cultural politics towards conceptualizations of cultural survival. Frameworks distinct to Indigenous

groups are needed to afford contextual explanations of present political, economic, and social operating within and against Indigenous communities. Grande (2000) argues the additional need for a Red Pedagogy to foster transformations, however, approaches are needed within critical theory which are informed by Indigenous frameworks to address issues afflicting communities. Though the approaches to Indigenous intellectualism vary, Grande (2000) further argues for the need of dialogue to examine differences in discourse. This paper is centered on a style of Red Pedagogy with aims to better examine the relevant Indigenous needs for functional organization such as Brave Heart Society.

### **Cultural Continuity**

The Indigenous feminist approach in this thesis will be informed by elements of Friedman's cultural Marxist approach (1993). Components of Friedman's (1993) approach speaks to aspects of cultural revival and the weaving of cultural "identity" as being, most importantly, a matter of invention or reinvention pure and simple. Though Friedman (1993:745) argues that most cultural "identity" manifests under conditions of contrast and opposition, the reality of the historical processes involved in cultural transformation and the re-contextualization of practice demonstrate a fundamental continuity. With this approach, the concept of cultural invention shifts towards the more accurately termed concept of cultural transformation. Autochthonous cultural practices are then considered as cultural lifeways that are mobilized to construct a present day sense of self/collective (1993:747). Being that many Indigenous collectives have been transformed by colonial domination, an assertion of ineligibility for the

title of “authenticity” tends to be present in anthropological literature. Friedman (1993:747) believes this says very little about the actual mechanisms used to create or transform the process of building cultural practice. I would also like to add, the notion of ineligible authenticity continues the historical pattern of Western minds applying Western defining standards upon Indigenous identities.

### **Cultural Transformation**

It is important here to address the issues of authenticity and what is sometimes referred to as the “invention of tradition”. In terms of the tendency to apply Western conceptualizations of tradition in binary opposition to that of modernity, I will address continued cultural practice as an autochthonic process while using the conceptual work of Robert Paine (1990) to contour my analytical lens as it relates to the term “authenticity”. Paine (1999: 80) asserts that Western views act to shape what is considered authentically Indigenous. This derives from historical power over definition as definition was allotted by colonialism through settler discourse. That is to say, what was to be considered Aboriginal (Indigenous) and what qualified as authentic by authority. Thus, Western powers tend to see “invention” in claims made by the Other, particularly when claims run counter to colonial enterprises. Ironically, often Western discourse simultaneously lacks the acknowledgement that the concept of the Other is in fact a Western invention itself. Authenticity in this thesis will be addressed through an Indigenous perspective, which will partially be connected to the past in ways that are shaped and recaptured to inform the colonially “imposed self” with the past sense of, what Paine (1990:81) refers to as, “real” self. Paine argues that the

former is exercised as the latter is realized and brought up to date (1990:79-80). However, in relation to Brave Heart's efforts to reclaim cultural lifeways, I believe concepts of collective self is actually encouraged to accept both imposed and real concepts of self, thereby acting to reinforce elements of an accepted Indigenous hybridity which counters the internalization of colonial imposed cultural shame.

Many of the practices currently used in Indigenous societies are not "mere novelties", but instead markers of transformations and adaptations developed and redeveloped to not only exist in current conditions of the present, but to also assert live presence and existence, countering Indigenous invisibility. In agreement with Crosby (1997), Trigger (1997:89) argues that acknowledging "aboriginal hybridity" does not necessarily mean recognition of Indigenous identity as one that is fully assimilated into the wider encapsulating society. It is undeniable that Indigenous collectives asserting cultural revivals do so with simultaneous motives attached to political foundations. Much of the cultural discontinuity that has occurred over time in Indigenous cultural practices resulted because of Western colonization. Current struggles do occur over land rights and policy has required Indigenous collectives to demonstrate recuperated "traditional" practices in order to protect land and land use. While struggles over land offer Indigenous people opportunities to demonstrate extensive knowledge of cultural practice, this is not the sole reason for cultural revival and transformation.

## **Cultural Awakening**

There are many reasons why multi-generational cultural practices are consistently mobilized – for health, governing, social processes, and healing, etc. Subjectivity in this regard will be considered in relations to Indigenous cultural revival as they pertain to perceptions of self in a manner related to the shifting definitions of a collective. As such, this analysis of the Brave Heart Society will also contain elements of Susan Crate’s (2006: 164) concepts of ethnic awakening and the practice of cultural forms of seeking the social space for constructing and representing notions of a collective sense of self. This in turn acts as to renew a cultural filter as it pertains to a contemporary sense of self to better make sense of what has happened historically through providing an understanding of how trauma has been woven into current Indigenous realities, which has resulted in a loss of culture, language, and practice.

Brave Heart, in this lens, acts to fill a gap in autochthonic knowledge existing between generations. These actions create a safe space for younger generations to gain a sense of pride, countering the aforementioned colonized/missionized instillation of cultural shame within Indigenous collectives. In this way, Brave Heart’s work is not only geared towards reclaiming culture, but also to foster decolonization of the colonially imposed processes of identity, perception, and cognition. In this method of reclaiming self, Brave Heart addresses the tendency to individualize sense of self within larger society by demonstrating a tribally constructed sense of self as it is woven and held together by place-based collectives which simultaneously instills a sense of pride.

The revival of Brave Heart was a truly revolutionary act which was put into motion by a collective who has been subject to systematic and institutionalized imposed spiritual, mental, and physical death for the sake of building a nation-state’s imagined history. Brave Heart and the existence of Indigenous people worldwide further reinforces the notion that their/our survival is a

form of resistance. For many tribal people, through reviving culture and reaffirming collectivity, the integrity of our survival is reinforced.

## V. Interview Data and Analysis

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*The ultimate aim of Dakota life, stripped of accessories, was quite simple:  
One must obey kinship rules; one must be a good relative.*

-- Anpétu Waŋtété Wíŋ (Ella Deloria), 1944

This study employs both the written and oral data documenting historical information associated with *Oceti* women's societies, the history of *Ihanktonwan* territory, and the present state of the *Ihanktonwan* community so as to frame the socio-cultural significance of the Brave Heart Society. Primary attention was given to the written documentation on these topics in the preceding chapters. In contrast, the data presented in the following employs primary sources of oral information associated with the *Ihanktonwan* community, although other communities of the *Oceti Sakowin* are included as well. Oral sources supply additional information on topics such as women's societies, society functions, ceremonies, and cultural adaptations to meet the needs of communities throughout the *Oceti Sakowin*. Perceived conceptualized impacts deriving from the revival of society lifeways and place-based cultural practice will additionally be examined. Oral data was provided through ethnographic interviews conducted by the principle investigator in 2013. In aims to provide permanent record of Brave Heart members' thoughts and feelings, quotations are used to further contextualize information collected. This study recognizes each account provided as the truth of each individual speaker. As such, this follows Fetterman's (1998:123-124) notions regarding direct quotations emerging within interviews as representative of the thoughts, feelings, and general reality of the speakers.

The sub-sections structuring this portion of the study conveys and analyzes the orally relayed knowledge systems of *okodakiciye* lifeways and histories, the numerous social issues impacting Indigenous youth in the community, and the collectively expressed needs for

*okodakiciye* systems of support throughout the *Oceti*. This discussion covers an array of topics including, how and why the Brave Heart Society was redeveloped in 1994, efforts to address trauma and healing through culturally tailored approaches, Brave Heart organizational strategies and additional Brave Heart developments, ceremonial events, and political activism. Included as well are the distinct challenges and community conflicts in which Brave Heart must continually face and overcome, and finally, the present functions and overall future visions for the Brave Heart Family Society from within the context of Brave Heart perspectives.

This section centers on the revival, development, present stages, and future goals of the Brave Heart Society. This study provides oral sources of information regarding historical and present-day women's societies within the context of perspectives held by Dakota/Nakota/Lakota women. Because these perspectives lack documentation within other literature sources, this study acts to fill an existing gap in the field of anthropology. Brave Heart members demonstrate that private oral knowledge systems have fostered the continuation of female society lifeways structured in cultural systems of practice that have been adapted to complement the conditions of contemporary society. This study affords a level discrepancy regarding certain elements of ceremonies and culture. Nonetheless this section centers on documenting the experiences, realities, and truths of Brave Heart members. Simultaneously this section contextualizes interview data within the framework of an analysis. Thus, general descriptions of ceremonies, roles, cultural functions, and expressed levels of awareness and concern are shared in a collective Brave Heart voice which tells the story of the Brave Heart Society.

### **Oral Histories: Lifeways Revealed**

As described in the background section, it is clear women's roles in the *Oceti Sakowin* were either minimized or completely ignored by anthropologists. This section provides orally preserved knowledge from predominately *Ihanktonwan* (Dakota/Nakota) sources, however some sources are descended from the *Hunkpapa* (Dakota) and *Oglala* (Lakota) as well. Readers must keep in mind that while similarities are present, band structures throughout the *Oceti Sakowin* have always been culturally diverse. This portion of the study documents the cultural lifeways associated with women and women's societies per the information provided by oral sources in Brave Heart.

One major source of cultural knowledge comes from the perspective of an 82 year-old Brave Heart *kunsi* (grandmother). In response to a question regarding the purpose of *Oceti* societies, the Brave Heart *kunsi* simply states, "People possessing similar skills and approaches to life are naturally drawn to one another. Our camps were balanced; without balance people lost their lives." This resonates with an additional comment made by a 64 year-old Brave Heart elder, "They would have given balance to men's society. You have to understand the ceremonies and language. Balancing was important." An observation of another 63 year-old Brave Heart elder contextualizes this discussion by referencing tipi structures:

Everything has a meaning associated with balance. Look at the tipi, the poles that provide the frame are the women because women are the core of our people. The covers are the men because they protect the core of their people. Men are different now because they're so colonized. Women held a serious role in every aspect of Lakota society. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This logic is embedded within most aspects attached to *Oceti* lifeways, as the culture generally applies a deeper meaning to virtually anything preserving the livelihoods of

Dakota/Nakota/Lakota people. Life and survival were not taken for granted during earlier eras, as exposure to harsh environmental challenges required disciplined social structures.

Additionally surrounding past documentations, one oral source draws a connection between Western misconceptions in literature and the Western treatment of Indigenous people as “less than human”. This Brave Heart goes on to ask, “How could they have gotten anything right about us? We were dirty animals.”

Given the systematic harms imposed on *Ihanktonwan* populations, trauma undoubtedly caused a fear of federal repercussions and punishment. Since ceremonies were essentially outlawed, spiritual practices were hidden to avoid repercussion. It is probable that information regarding cultural practices was often withheld. Particularly if such practices involved women and women’s societies, as men were responsible for the safety of family systems. An example of knowledge which has been transmitted orally regarding societies was shared during a conversation with the *kunsi* and her father:

The Dakota *wicinyena* speakers around here, they had a very powerful women's society that was like a police society. Its name was *Hokogeh*. My clan-grandfather, he lived to about 15 years ago, he used to talk about them. "*He yo kog'ye wana iya a wayiankapikta*" -- This society is the security (or police) for dances. He'd tell some funny stories about what some of those women would do to their brother-in-laws. Stuff like that. He said that before anyone left these circles they had to go through that door and get the permission from a woman at the door. Then he used to sing their songs. He said during the gatherings they were put in charge of people's comings and goings. He said they'd sing their songs. They had a special song. They danced like they were moving from side to side. They had a special dance. It must have existed quite a while but I never did see them in their existence. And after that, he told me there was a group where the members would choose her successor. What other things they did, I did not hear. But I know everybody that went out of gatherings, when they wanted to come back in, they had to be allowed to return by a woman. [Brave Heart elder (Hunkpapa), 2013]

The oral histories told by fluent language speakers pose a strong challenge to assertions that *Oceti* women's societies were nonexistent. Women's societies retain continuity despite a point of disconnect posed by Dakota and English terminology. References identifying surviving societies are presently spoken about despite the absence of the term society during previous eras. This is demonstrated through accounts regarding *winyan omniciye* (women's gathering):

Societies evolved into the *winyan omniciye* societies in the churches. The Episcopal, the Cedar, the Greenwood, the Sore Shoulder Creek. And that's where many of our younger women learned how to behave as young women. They sat quietly until they got old enough to sit at the quilt. And they were just thrilled out of their tree when they were able to sew. At night, if a young girl's sewing was not up to par, well the grandmothers would secretly redo the stitches without the young girl knowing. In teaching them how to quilt, they taught them how to be good women. They were gentle. It was their [in reference to younger members] job to help serve the adults who came to meetings. It was a replacement of what they remembered and weren't able to do after everything that happened. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Per descriptions provided by two additional elder oral sources, groups of women approached tasks using a template replicating *okodakiciye* structure, demonstrating cultural transformation. These groups survived into the mid-twentieth century. Furthermore, certain cultural practices of continuity were kept private yet practiced in plain sight, such as the *winyan omniciyes* which were based out of religious institutions.

Another dynamic to society structures of women relate to the concept of secrecy. The elements of secrecy were also expressed to be historically common within *Oceti* camps. As detailed below, a 64 year-old Brave Heart elder illuminates an aspect of secret functions as a means to protect the honor of individuals in need:

There were also secret societies. In particular, one society would help people. Nobody knew who belonged to that society. But the role of that society was to help take care of the people. So mysteriously food and articles they needed would appear in front of their tipi and no one would know who had gifted that because it came from the secret society.

They protected the pride of the individual who was receiving the gift. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Oral sources express society secrecy continues to exist in present-day. One 35 year-old Brave Heart explains society secrecy exists in more contemporary times, as this concept was mobilized by *Ihanktonwan* elders in the 1980s.

My mom spoke of it. She spoke of a society that they had back in the early 80s. She'd attend and listen. She brought some of the values to our home; talked about it and the way we should be.

It was like one of the old secret societies, just taken into the time of the 1980s. But the reason they were secret were for different reasons. They were afraid that social services and other entities, would think they were a political group organizing something. They didn't want their food stamps to be stopped or their GA [General Assistance] to be tampered with. So they met at homes. They would go to homes for ceremonies at night. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

The fear of dispossession and deprivation are still felt within *Ihanktonwan* territory. The memories regarding history are fresh because members carry on accounts of survival within their *tiospayes* (family systems). In using a secret structure the workings of a society reveals how society lifeways remained part of a collective conscience.

Another commonality within interview data occurred with numerous mentions regarding Double Women Visions. *Winyan Nunpa Ihanbda* (Double Women Vision) reportedly gifted women with a certain set of skills of quilling, beadwork, tipi-making, or other similar skills otherwise not mentioned. Early literature reveals an element of confusion between Double Women, those who had received a *Winyan Nunpa Ihanbda*, and the figure *Anog Ite* (Double/Two-Face Woman). Multiple similar accounts of *Anog Ite* reveal a dual nature possessed by this archetype. While the Brave Heart *kunsi* explains that qualities of *Ano Ite*, can

be attributed to people who are not trustworthy, another 33 year-old member discusses knowledge orally passed down within her family which defines the purpose of this figure:

Some people think of her in a bad way. But what is important is how she redeemed herself. How she came out of that. That's why she comes to your dreams. She brings you good things. As long as you pray to her and you make an offering in a good way, she'll come to you. [Brave Heart adult (Oglala), 2013]

The same source goes on to share the general outline of a story preserved in her kinship system about *Anog Ite*:

There was this beautiful woman. Everywhere she went, everyone stopped to watch her because she was so beautiful. She had a beautiful face and really long hair. The way she dressed and the way she carried herself. But here you have Sun and here you have Moon. Moon was Sun's wife. Everywhere those two were, they showed how in love they were. One time, as they were together, Sun and Moon were sitting in their tipi. This girl wanted to be up there with them, where people could see her. But she wasn't trying to earn her way, she just wanted it to happen. Sun and Moon, they were in their tipi and having a ceremonial gathering. Moon got up to tend to some soup outside. The girl saw her chance, so she went up there. She started talking to Sun. Sun had noticed her and thought she was beautiful. So he said, "Come sit and talk to me." So she sat next to him. In Lakota/Dakota way, when you have a woman sitting in another woman's spot, right away that woman thinks, "<gasp> That woman took my place!" So when Moon came back in and saw her sitting in her place, her heart shattered. "She took my spot and my husband no longer wants me." Then, Moon left. The woman didn't realize what she had done. She almost broke a marriage. She brought bad feelings into the marriage because of her actions and thoughts. *Tunkasila* felt she needed to pay for this. As she sat next to Sun, *Tunkasila* took some of Sun's rays and burnt half her face with it. Then Sun was told, "Because of you, how you reacted, this happened. You should have been faithful to your wife." He had his unfaithful thoughts though, so *Tunkasila* split Sun and Moon up. That's why they say when Moon goes down, Sun is following her. It was told to her, the women, "It was a bad act. But it is how she learned and what you learn is what matters." That story taught me, no matter what you have live good. Whatever happens, you always keep your mind, thoughts and actions pure. You keep that pure, everything will be okay. [Brave Heart adult (Oglala), 2013]

This particular source further details a sacred site associated with *Anog Ite* in western South Dakota. The cave is often visited by women to provide offerings to *Anog Ite*. Because this member has done this, she explains that *Anog Ite* continues to visit her dreams and provide her

with gifts such as patterns for quillwork, beadwork, and dresses. Further discussions reveal that as all human beings do, *Anog Ite* is a figure who possesses both light and dark qualities. Groups of Double Woman Dreamers are said to have existed in *Oceti* camps. Within the scope of the extreme fragmentation which transpired, the loss of such larger structures of societies may have occurred as bands were no longer able to convene for annual ceremonies and buffalo hunts.

In reference to past *okodakiciye* functions, the Brave Heart *kunsi* states, “The societies, the different ones in old villages, they were a way for people to get together to do things that needed to be done,” exhibiting further elements of *Oceti* practicality. An additional perspective deeply ingrained during the childhood of the 64 year-old Brave Heart elder is shared in the following:

I remember Grandma telling me about the *winyan okodakiciye*; where the women helped each other. I’ve grown up hearing my relatives talk about the societies that the camps had. It was rather common knowledge among our kinship systems through oral history that we indeed had societies. Many of them were specifically created for the roles of women to fill. So, it's kind of like how in non-Native society, growing up listening to people say, "Oh, we had cars and horses", and that is just a given. And in our society, in our Indian world, they said, "We had societies," so it's the same parallel. We just knew that they were there. It is unfortunate how little is written, they are very well known in most of our *tiospayes*. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This elder quoted above goes onto states that according to her grandmother, who lived to be 104 years-old, collective lifeways were structured within a need-based culture. Thus, various societies certainly would have met numerous needs arising within a camp. She goes on to explain that many *wa’apiya win* (women who bring balance/healers) existed throughout the camps. This information is also supported in *Tipi Sapa’s* biography (Olden 1918). *Tipi Sapa* additionally asserts that women healers cured sickness for individuals who were sick. However, in terms of medicines used by women, the Brave Heart *kunsi* explains:

There were a lot of different women working with different kinds of medicines. There are so many different medicines. You certainly hear them talk about them because different women had certain abilities. In other certain areas, women didn't do things, but when it came to children and knowing how to deal with women's conditions. They were very capable. [Brave Heart Elder (Hunkpapa), 2013]

This *kunsi* explains that it has become common knowledge that women's societies existed throughout the *Oceti Sakowin*. In a powerful yet simple logic, the *kunsi* explains, "Well, multiple groups of women existed because multiple skills existed and multiple things needed to be done."

Oral sources touch lightly on society responsibilities addressing problems which arose within family system. The 63 year-old elder follows this assertion by mentioning that *Oceti* children who were orphaned never stayed orphaned, as structures were in place to mediate such issues. Oral sources provide more information regarding the historical Brave Heart women, however. It appears the historical presence of Brave Heart Society is generally recognized throughout the *Oceti Sakowin*. Collective conceptualizations are similar in detail amongst the majority of Brave Heart sources. A particularly revered founding elder of Brave Heart explains the original Brave Heart women required having a solidly defined sense of spiritual strength:

Brave Hearts, we call them *Cante T'za* over there in Rosebud [on the Rosebud Reservation; *Ohitika* is an alternative term used by present-day Brave Hearts]. *T'za* means strong. The Brave Heart Society had very strong women, they had to be. They fulfilled a difficult role because they cared for the bodies after a battle. If you can imagine, bodies weren't always...I'm not sure if you've ever been exposed that smell. It's really awful, like rotten and sweet at the same time. The first time I experienced it was after my aunt and cousin were found murdered. I was asked to retrieve their bodies from this apartment. This old man instructed me to use large bundles of sage to manage the smell. My male cousin who was supposed to help me, he could only go so far down the hall. He started making really high pitched, strange noise and then he wouldn't move. I told him to stay back and that I would take care of it. And I did. I always think about that when I think about the Brave Hearts because sometimes those bodies were decomposing. There are stories about the bodies being in rough shape. So these Brave Heart women would retrieve the warriors. They cleaned up their bodies and dressed

them. It was to make it less painful for their families. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Conceptualizing such a role is difficult given the present-day luxuries in society, as Western practices sterilize the process of death. This particular member's impactful perspective further reveals just how difficult being a Brave Heart women must have been.

Similar accounts confirming the above description of the Brave Heart Society were provided within the interviews of three additional Brave Hearts elders. However one particular source states that Brave Heart women were known to sometimes go to battle, though little more was shared on this. The original Brave Hearts held a public presence throughout the *Oceti Sakowin* and similar roles may have existed in other bands or a larger overarching society. While it is not regarded as a secret society, the original Brave Heart's fulfilled secret roles. As mentioned above, certain functions were discreetly done as a means to preserve a family's sense of dignity. The original Brave Hearts secretly provided such resources for respective families in need. Oral sources do not specify if provisions were afforded only after battles, or if this was a regular function of the society outside times of war.

Aspects of *Ihanktonwan* history has been lost, however much has been held onto. This study demonstrates a need for more research. Given the fragmentation of *Ihanktonwan* collectives, *Ihanktonwan* practices and stories were subsequently fragmented. Thus, knowledge exists at varying degrees throughout *Ihanktonwan* kinship systems. To grasp a better understanding of what has been preserved will require further research. However, for the purpose of this study, sources afford insight into what frameworks were used to structure the contemporary Brave Heart Society. Reinstalling a sense of collective belonging while providing access to cultural practice acts to disarm elements of generational shame associated with trauma

and loss. Yet untangling internalization of shame requires one to heal. To heal requires drive. From this angle, cultural practice can benefit the process of healing as long as a desire for healing exists. Reviving a group modeled after historical *Oceti* systems was a strategy taken by Brave Heart in an attempt to meet the needs of *Ihanktonwan* family systems. Because this has proven quite successful, Brave Heart now reaches across tribal lines as a means to provide other groups with a culturally tailored system of support.

### **Unsettling Cycles: Raising Awareness**

The oral sources within this study demonstrate awareness in relation to specific conditions negatively impacting their communities. Within virtually all conducted interviews, Brave Heart members also express a strong need for such issues to be resolved. Interviewees express unease about prevailing problems in communities such as poverty, alcohol/drug abuse, sexual abuse/violence, domestic violence, and suicide. Additionally, oral sources display a consistent concern regarding the prevalence of the aforementioned issues.

This section seeks to detail Brave Heart members' accounts surrounding present problems impacting the lives of Indigenous people in this area. Such accounts will demonstrate ways in which participants perceive Brave Heart influences positive change within the lives of Brave Heart women and families. Thus, the oral stories will briefly demonstrate how painful histories have created a long-standing struggle for a collective to gain stability. Because Brave

Heart's mission centers on reviving culture as a means to foster positive change, the society employs a bottom-up approach focused on Indigenous family systems and youth.

Within Brave Heart Society, all members hold positions as both elders and youth in relation to other members. While virtually every interview defines a definitive community need for Brave Heart, members between the ages of 18 and 35 prove particularly revealing. These members straddle a social space which fosters resonance with adolescent Brave Heart members. Brave Heart members express that at-risk teenage girls are paramount to upsetting cycles and promoting change. By equipping them with strength through a collective subjectivity, Brave Heart seeks to break the cycles of trauma so blindingly prevalent in family systems. Simultaneously, participants between the ages of 27 and 35 provide a direly needed style of informal mentoring, as they work directly with adolescent girls, model culturally appropriate behaviors, and lead healthy lifestyles. This section is dedicated to this particular group due to their candidly collective, special perspectives as young professionals and mothers leading healthy lives. All of which they attribute to having strong mentors within a *winyan okodakiciye*. Furthermore, the actions of these particular Brave Heart's will ultimately determine whether or not Brave Heart survives.

Indeed the history and statistics outlined in the background sections are visibly in motion throughout Indigenous populations residing in South Dakota. Certain community issues are clear markers of a tangled history of US imperialism and dominance. The sustained face of marginalization continues on through the combined effects of ominous economic conditions, social and residential isolation, and the varying levels of trauma – historical and present-day forms alike. From the accounts of younger oral sources, the reasoning behind why they believe Brave Heart was started contextualizes a present state of reality they are currently facing and the

challenges they are striving to overcome. Within this line of reasoning illuminating such, one 18 year-old Brave Heart sheds light on issues present within the following segment of her interview:

Interviewer: What do you know, or why do you think, Brave Heart was started? What was the need?

Respondent: Probably all the stuff that goes on. All the violence – the women are brought down and oppressed by it. The culture needed to be brought back. You know, especially for the women. They needed a stable setting for them to go to.

Interviewer: Right, and what are social issues women deal with?

Respondent: Uh, each other. There is so much girl-on-girl violence and I believe that originates from self-hate. So does jealousy. They don't have anything to target their anger on. Brave Heart brings in the ceremonies [*Isnati*] and cultural stuff which helps with that need. We talk about it.

Interviewer: Between women, why do you think there's so much “hatred”?

Respondent: Ah, because they don't really know where our place is in this society. They're told we're supposed to be in the house, having the kids and taking care of them. And the men go out and party, do whatever they want. They lose themselves. The girls that are sexually abused, there are so many. A lot of them go out and open their legs to everybody and don't even know why they do that. This takes part of their spirits away; they are lost. Brave Heart helps bring that back. [Brave Heart youth (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

The specific style of verbalization demonstrated by this Brave Heart reflects the ways which messages are verbalized by older Brave Heart mentors. Such discussions draw connections between abuse and girl-on-girl violence in a manner which stresses a need for self-love and self-respect. The barriers present within “girl culture” on the reservation stem from a specific form of lateral violence that is rooted in internalized forms of oppression and racism. The issues regarding girl-on-girl violence and conflict resolution prove to be especially prominent themes present during events held for younger Brave Heart girls. Indeed Red Rage is commonly experienced by Indigenous youth, rendering younger views on conflict as something to be

feared. When Red Rage goes unmanaged, it prohibits the ability to experience conflict as a normal, healthy aspect of life. Feeling unsafe to experience conflict in this population is not unfounded, as it can often draw forth hyper-vigilant, go-for-the-throat reactions. Simply stated by one particular Brave Heart member highly experienced in mediation, “Our people do not know how to get angry. Actually they leap across the steps of anger and jump right into rage.”

The physical violence which many of these girls face within their personal family systems is additionally impacted by toxic behaviors present in their wider communities which acts to set a standard structuring their peer-on-peer relations. Physical altercations are ubiquitous and unfortunately so ingrained it’s regarded as a normal aspect of “rez life”.

A further layer lending to a culture of violence comes with the presence of social networking sites such as Facebook. These public forums can be used to launch social campaigns against youth within the community which in a sense, follows youth into what should be the safety of their own homes. However, the degree of violence commonly experienced within this population far outweighs the mere stereotypical catty behaviors associated with adolescent teen girl behaviors. For this region, the threat of violence is not only prevalent, but normal. Thus, physical abuse is not only a threat to adolescent girls which is indicated by the extremely high rates of sexual assault and family violence, but also through the high probability of laterally violent behaviors present within their own peer groups. Within this scope, this Brave Heart members’ perception regarding self-hate as a driving force behind jealous and hateful behaviors proves deeply insightful and hard to deny. Given the expressed tendency for absent fathers figures combined with high rates of teen pregnancy, it becomes clear why Brave Heart invests so much energy in attempting to foster healthy young women. There is a high likelihood that these girls may be largely responsible for shaping the future generations of the *Oceti Sakowin*.

The above is not meant to further marginalize male youth. In calling attention to the absence of strong male figures in the community, Brave Heart hopes to encourage strong men to step forward, as multiple members assert that boys must be taught to be good men by strong men. What is to be done when this presence is missing? As one elder expresses:

I think that men societies are so important. When we first started Brave Heart, some men came to the group and said, "You girls need to start a men's society." And we said, "We can't. We're women." And so we can help, we can encourage and raise our sons to be strong men and pray they evolve into that. But we have to respect them once they get to that stage. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Adding a further contrast are the gendered dynamics of relationships which are expressed to be present between elder women and young males participating in Brave Heart. Forging space for male members has posed challenges, as male members attempting to assert their voices are sometimes overwhelmed by an ingrained sense of respect instilled through upbringings structured by strong women. One 64-year old mother of an older Brave Heart male member expresses that her son has difficulty asserting an opinion to elder female figures, as he was raised to respect females in such a way that makes disagreeing with grandmother figures highly difficult. However, these internal issues continuously require courageous communication as male members grow into adulthood. The alternative of excluding a male presence is understandably not an option for Brave Heart mothers. And while society members make do with the male resources available to the community, it is indeed highly encouraging to witness the high regard in which Brave Heart is held by male members. Many of whom grew up within society structure, as Brave Heart has been in existence for nearly twenty years. This point is illuminated in the quotation provided below in which one 37 year-old male Brave Heart expresses why he thinks Brave Heart was revived:

I think Brave Heart was developed to help women in our communities to start seeing that their roles were very important and they needed to gain that pride back. I think there's been so much damage done by alcohol, drug, and sexual abuse, the backs of the women have started to weaken. Their roles they play are so much more important than anyone gives credit to. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Lending to his point, this member goes onto explain that if expectations associated with courtship and expectations were altered within young girls' perspectives, boys would mostly likely follow suite, as young boys are so highly driven by girls' behaviors. That is to say, by influencing a shift from perceptions of what young women currently view as attractive in young men, such as unhealthy, misogynist behaviors, towards traits which signify someone who leads a culturally sound, spiritually competent, sober lifestyle, the community would change. However, it is difficult to envision healthy partners for healthy girls if such partners are rare. This further lends to an expressed need for strong male role models, which is a difficult challenge to overcome. Outreach for a stronger male presence is much needed.

Teen suicide is a particularly troubling concern prevalent within the *Oceti* population. The stories are staggering and communities throughout South Dakota are highly prone to a snowballing-effect within teen populations after a suicide completion. During the fieldwork portion of this study, a young man committed suicide from the *Ihanktonwan* community. Shortly after, Brave Heart received a request by a mother who lost her 14 year-old daughter to a recent suicide. In compliance with my role as a Brave Heart, I agreed to accompany a Brave Heart elder to visit the mother. The Brave Heart elder was called upon to provide a ceremony for this family. As necessary, the ceremony was held where the girl took her life. Words cannot describe how unbelievably painful it was witnessing this family's grief.

However, I also witnessed an abundance of love, strength, and forgiveness. In participating in our cultural ways, in supporting a family who belong to the same people, in holding a mother as she cried for her child, I was reminded of a familiar lived-experience: our reality. The presence of our spirituality is tremendously powerful and for this family who knows very little about their culture, I witness the beginning of a healing process. Our spirituality helped a mother, who had internalized so much guilt and blame for her daughter's death, begin to let go. Beautiful things happen because our spirituality is alive.

All of us in Brave Heart share unfortunate experiences similarly agonizing as the story above. One 33 year-old member of Brave Heart possesses an intimate perspective regarding how distinct social issues plaguing Indigenous communities manifest into behaviors projected by Indigenous youth. She is not only *Oglala* (Lakota) with a professional history as a police officer, but also an active member in two women's societies located in *Ihanktonwan* territory and *Sicangu* territory. This Brave Heart has witnessed the hardships of two realities from two very different perspectives. Despite her first-responder role as a police officer however, this Brave Heart's life is not exempt from the cycles of traumas she so direly strives to change. As she expresses in the following, in a position held by officers on the reservation the levels of trauma are blinding:

Me being a police officer and seeing the violence in the community and with the kids especially, I realize my purpose was to make life better for these kids. To make life easier and safer. A lot of police officers get burnt out because you're seeing horrible things. You're like, "when is this going to end?" It's never going to end because it was put there. The alcoholism, the drugs, the violence, domestic violence, the sexual assaults, the child-abuse. It's always going to be there. [Brave Heart adult (Oglala), 2013]

This Brave Heart member most recently held the position of a resource officer for several schools on a reservation neighboring the *Ihanktonwan* reservation. One can gain a deeper insight into the state of a community by gaining insight into the state of its youth. This oral source provides a first-hand view into the social conditions facing younger generations of the *Oceti*. These symptoms of trauma regularly manifest through a multitude of behaviors. Most disturbing are common displays of suicide ideation, suicide attempts and sadly, alarmingly high rates of suicide completion. The burden carried with the position held by this Brave Heart was especially weighted because the resources on reservations are notoriously lacking.

I'm an ear and a shoulder to a lot of kids on daily basis. I had 2 high schools, 2 middle schools and 9 elementary schools I had to watch. On a daily basis. At the end of the school year we had a huge influx on suicide ideations. And I was taking kids to the ER, sitting there for hours and in my mind, you know what at this very moment I am the only person this kid has to talk to. [Brave Heart adult (Oglala), 2013]

Strong efforts centered on providing a culturally rich, loving, stable, and safe home life for youth offers no guarantee for children of the *Oceti*. This Brave Heart demonstrates that the same risks threatening unstable family systems act to threaten stable family systems as well. In the following, her account details a deeply emotional story which exposes a compelling theme found in this study.

Dealing with all this, seeing it so many times firsthand. I didn't even realize it was right under me. That night, I was getting ready for bed. I heard some footsteps...then I heard something slide under my door. I looked and it was a note Lisa\* wrote. She said, "Traci\* overdosed." She took thirty pills. I called the ambulance. I was trying to keep her awake until they got there. We live way out there by the casino. I kept thinking, "WHY? What could be so bad?!" The first thing I did was blame myself. "I'm not a good enough mother, what the hell am I doing wrong?!" It was there with my girl, it was real. It was happening to me. I never felt so alone in my life. Watching her in the ambulance through a window in the back of the ambulance. I could see her little face. I could see them pumping her stomach. I thought, "This is a nightmare...I have to fight for my daughter's

life. I have to. I have to be there for her no matter what." [Brave Heart adult (Oglala), 2013]

The reasoning behind an expressed need for the system of support fostered through Brave Heart sharpens with each account shared. However this story is striking because the professional role occupied by this member was designed to address the very issues she had to overcome. Although supportive family systems indeed supply more safety for youth, often times this is not enough. As the member recovers her original point, her perception framing a need for more support:

You know, the high rates of violence and sexual crimes, the suicide. Oh my god, when I think about that MAN everybody is fighting for all of these things. They're fighting for the land! They're fighting for money! All these council people are just up there fighting for bullshit. I'm like, who in the hell is fighting for our kids?! Who is going to do anything for them?! Our kids are hurting. They're killing themselves because they're hurting so much. They're dying. [Brave Heart Adult (Oglala), 2013]

Although this study's aim was not to center on stories of trauma, stories of trauma are nevertheless impossible to avoid. The very fabric of Brave Heart was woven because trauma needs to be healed. Thus, stories associated with Brave Heart naturally possess striking elements of traumatic accounts because they are from a highly traumatized population. However, the willingness to provide candid stories of survival is a bold indicator of the positive outcomes of Brave Heart's cultural approach to healing. These members represent healing in motion. Brave Heart specifically focuses on cultural revival which is inextricably linked to healing. Innately associated with trauma is a collective memory of cultural genocide. Wounds are profoundly felt because orally preserved accounts of culture genocide live on which deepens a cultural void. Historical trauma paired with other present-day social issues produce distinct behavioral markers. One such behavior addressed within the society materializes through what Brave Heart

elders regard as “the culture of silence.” This Brave Heart’s daughter demonstrates a shift from the culture of silence per the following statement.

I've worked hard to help Michelle<sup>7</sup> cope. Helping her deal with this. She has her ups and downs but she's coming out of it. One of the things she said to me, "Mom you know what? I wanna tell my story." I arranged an all school assembly at the high school. Michelle got up and told her story of that night. When she got done the whole school was silent. You could hear a needle drop as she talked about this. So she got done talking, man you could see how the kids' faces looked -- they all knew. They were all there. They all knew exactly how she was feeling.

They learn how to talk and mentor. That's the part of being in a society. That's a part of women's roles. To me it's like, my role is to help. Help build these girls. To encourage them. You know what? It helps them. I've seen it. I've seen it with Brave Heart. With Stone Boy. I've seen it. It helps them. It gives them a piece of who you are. [Brave Heart Adult (Oglala), 2013]

Considering the extent of historical trauma the *Ihanktonwan* have survived, the systematic attempts at erasure of culture and language was by far one of the most damaging. Losing a grasp on the intricate Dakota/Nakota/Lakota lifeways and language not only meant the loss of an autochthonous linguistic/cultural expression, but also the loss of a specific *Oceti* philosophy used to make sense of world. As such, it should not be difficult to understand why many *Ihanktonwan* people are perceived to have lost their voices. Cultural frameworks structuring Brave Heart Society affords a space for members to emerge from the culture of silence in a safe atmosphere that normalizes the verbal expression of shared experiences. This is often regarded as one of the first initial steps taken towards the ongoing process of healing. Verbal expression from this angle is arguably a revolutionary act that elder members quickly recognized very early on in Brave Heart Society’s revival.

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<sup>7</sup> Names have been changed to protect the identity of interview participants.

## Western Disconnects and Clinical Approaches

In opening a door to cultural revitalization and healing, the preserved and revived lifeways embedded in autochthonous philosophies which were stolen, now offer liberation for a populations responsible to overcome the residual consequences colonialism. With discourse and dialogue through a cultural lens, Brave Heart aims to supply members with a culturally defined support system while simultaneously challenging them to face their trauma. This approach allows for members to make sense of certain conditions and additionally, make peace with traumatizing histories.

Each interview began by asking members to explain how they became involved in Brave Heart. The responses created an unexpected trend, as members began contrasting the Brave Heart system with other local systems of support. What appears to be mistrust or disregard for the mental health system emerge consistently throughout the present study. Furthermore members disclose a mutual resonance associated with expressed needs for more culturally tailored systems of support and treatment. Brave Heart participants often regard Western systems as somewhat unfriendly. Those members who have received treatment perceive such resources as somewhat incompetent.

I went to another treatment before this and stayed there for almost 2 months. I wanted to see what they had to offer. I guess how they can help me. I came back with information, and I don't like to use this term about White Man society thinking, but as a Native American woman, it seriously didn't help me. Sure I knew information, book wise. But I didn't know anything heart wise. And so, I appreciated that part of it, but it was almost like you're spilling out your guts to a person that doesn't really care and you'll never see again after this in your life. So why am I doing this? [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Brave Hearts with an aversions to Western human services express structures like Brave Heart serve as positive alternatives to foster healing.

A level of high sensitivity is expressed towards the perceived strict programmatic structure present within Western organizations consisting of paperwork, sign-ins, charting, etc. A 70 year-old Brave Heart demonstrates an interesting display of resistance as she details her annoyance with non-tribal organizational approaches. It is probable this attitude stems from a long history of federal intervention and federal/state/tribal program mismanagement which gestated the present condition of *Ihanktonwan* communities.

I think the people who get jobs in these programs, these federal programs, they know the program is not going to belong to the people. It's going to belong to the government. And they turn it into what *they* want it to be. It's so bureaucratized. Documenting every little thing. You know, it's just a mass of paper from beginning to end. It takes the whole heart out of healing; out of the teachings. The n there's nothing left. So, I've always appreciated that the government doesn't pull our strings. Makes us dance to their tune. Because Brave Heart does what we think we need to do and we do it together. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Though this is less fluidly verbalized within younger members' interviews, it is an aspect of programs that Brave Heart elders especially take issues with. Resentments towards various state and federal government programs are indeed boldly expressed throughout multiple interviews. This particular theme emerged organically, as this was a subject not outlined within the interview guide. Subsequently, much of the data exposes an expressed anger in connection with historical domination and the contemporary hardships faced in *Ihanktonwan* territory and other communities alike.

Certain dynamics present in Western structures appear to trigger elements of historical trauma. One particular 65 year-old Brave Heart elder details an experience she had with a specific mental health resource on the *Ihanktonwan* reservation.

The care Brave Heart sisters have for each other that helps. You know that love that you don't find. I tried the other way, but I missed an appointment because I couldn't get to Marty. I called and left a voicemail. Then I got a letter! I called and said, "Could I set up another appointment?" And here he said, "We dropped you." I said, "WHAT?! You dropped me? Why?" And he said, "Because we schedule appointments and we have families, we work, we have a life, blah, blah, blah." Then I called my sister and I said, "They dropped me! After I spilled my guts, those suckers!" I was really mad because I thought they wanted to help me! [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This member's perspective provides an important angle regarding boarding school trauma and mistrust for Western systems. The concept of caring seems to be impeded by the acknowledgement that therapist are paid. That is to say, they are "just doing a job", whereas Brave Heart's system is viewed as a lifestyle within a collective. The above quotation presents an issue within systems perceived as structurally impersonal. This elder explained her willingness to seek help from this particular resource, though she had reservations about the structure. Her history consists of mortifying memories of the trauma and abuse she experienced at Catholic boarding school, which will not be shared within this study. The structures of Western systems are expressed by most members as a constant reminder of the staunch restricting religious/governmental structures from past eras. *Wasicu*<sup>8</sup> (Caucasian) influences perceived to exist throughout mental health systems are suspect to members. Because the severe distrust for *wasicu* people has not fully dissipated from this population's consciousness, it is no wonder why members are resistant to receiving emotional support from these systems. Especially those with

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<sup>8</sup> In English, this term translates to: Stealer of the Fat.

strict regulations of paperwork, intakes, and hardline appointment regulations. When asked about her perception surrounding counseling, this member goes on to explain:

I guess I wanted to share how I felt. I wanted someone to explain to me why I was having anxiety attacks. Someone I could trust. Because by then I already went into that world of *wasicu* counseling or whatever. They go by the book. They go by appointments and it just so reminded me Marty [a boarding school]. I just couldn't open up. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Seeing as these systems have multiple strikes of perceptions against them from the start, it is unfortunate that the distrust is often reinforced by workers and policies grounding these structures. Further, *Ihanktonwan* territory is a poverty stricken community. Clients lacking transportation and other resources should ideally be given leniency, however situations which arise resulting from lacking resources may be a source of frustration for human service workers. This oral source illuminates a line of reasoning behind why cultural systems of support act to culturally address the need for moral, familial, and collective support. *Okodakiciye* (society) lifeways are solely based on relationships. The distinct and isolating forms of systematic trauma from similar histories of lived experiences are present in Brave Heart's unit, lending a cohesiveness to the Brave Heart sisterhood.

Brave Heart members believe *wasicu* counselors are inherently unable to grasp their circumstances. Levels of doubt for Western systematic approaches are also felt by younger members, demonstrating the generational transference of distrust. Members express additional issues associated with race and gender. One 35-year old member states:

Yeah, the white man's treatment won't work. Why would we trust it? I once had counseling in school. And just talking to the counselor, everything coming out of his mouth, I couldn't understand anything he was saying. He was using such terminology that I didn't feel, I couldn't relate to. They used a male. A male counselor! I know he couldn't relate to things that were happening in my life. I felt he was just another male and he was

White. It was a male that had traumatized me, so I didn't feel comfortable. They still wouldn't send a woman to talk to me. A woman's society I understand because it was not only coming from a mother perspective, it was coming from a grandmother perspective -- as a protector. So I felt comfortable and safe. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Not much explanation is needed to understand why Brave Heart is attractive to Indigenous women. Recalling the background sections, high rates of abuse are present throughout Indian Country. The *Ihanktonwan* do indeed follow this pattern, which is commonly addressed in the trauma healing provided through the Brave Heart circle.

While the culture of Brave Heart has been revived, adaptations are very visible in forms of an esoteric language used by Brave Heart members. Interviews reveal the hybridity of Western and *Oceti* conceptualizations of healing which are verbalized through culturally distinct emotional expression.

### **Relationship Building: A Healthy Core for Healing**

Brave Heart is culturally defined by conceptualized forms of communications. Healthy relationships require a lot of work for any population. However because conflict can be especially frightening, Brave Heart recognizes that part of the individual processes of healing includes learning how to engage in healthy disagreements. Trauma produces a particular barrier that can wreak havoc on relationships. The concept of Red Rage is a distinct feature present in Indigenous populations, as it derives directly from this logic. A Brave Heart who has twenty-nine years of experience as a trauma counselor offers a deeper perspective on this subject in the following statement:

We are facing the challenge that we live in a traumatized society. The UN language refers to us as a post-conflict society. Everybody here has a degree of trauma and that trauma is going to reflect how people operate as a team. The level of healing they get in that trauma resolution is going to reflect in their ability to be a team member. If they don't find resolution, the internalized in-fighting will not change. I see that in every organization. The storming sometimes never goes away. When a person gets scared, whatever trauma they survived, the same feeling of that kind of fear transports itself into current activities. That's why people turn on each other; it's like they're in the heat of the battle of an original trauma. The blood flies and people go for the throat.

From their trauma, they get scared and they're slingin', throwing things, running and it doesn't have to be that way. So that's a big challenge. Every time you start something, the battleground, it's the kitchen. When you bring women in, they cook a certain way. They do whatever they do and if nobody else does it that way, then I can see it happening in the kitchen. Then I think, "Okay, girls. We gotta sit down and we gotta talk." You know, how you do the, *you do not put your bare hands in the potato salad* and put that on the plate because somebody else is already saying, "You don't do that!" Then instead of saying something, since we come from the culture of silence and because they haven't found their voice, they'll walk off and say, I don't know why people think it's a great thing to say, "I'm outta here." That's a cowardly thing to do, anybody can walk away. It takes a lot of courage to stay in there and work it out. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Brave Heart relationships are a safe core for women overcoming trauma. The Dakota principle that one must be a good relative anchors Brave Heart. Safe, healthy relationships are continuously developed through a process of relearning, which takes patience and practice. In challenging members to work through emerging conflicts, Brave Heart further engages healing. As the patterns of storming are curbed, secure relationships are enabled. Because members recognize they are safe to trust, they in turn are able to cultivate support from other Brave Hearts. Moreover, levels of commiseration are available because members are able to relate to similar sets of circumstances.

Prior to the revival, members report feeling a sense of isolation. With their induction into Brave Heart, similar circumstances of trauma became recognizable. Members assert that it is through Brave Heart this component is seamlessly provided. To lend further to this point, the personal experience of a 52 year-old Brave Heart is shared below.

What happened to me, I never knew, I always thought I was standing alone. I always thought, "I ain't going to tell nobody nothin'." After Brave Heart, I realized there are so many of my people who are living the same struggles. And this isn't our people's fault. But if they asked me now, I'll tell them about me. I'm not embarrassed. I'm not ashamed. It's just what happened. After I learned to accept that. It was there and now it's gone. Now I'm alright. A give a lot of credit to Brave Heart for helping me. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

In resonance with the above quotation, another 35-year old member illuminates the same point in saying:

The energy they had [Brave Heart elders], it just drew you. You know and, just the things they talked about in regards to trauma. It, you know, it was like a magnet effect. You were drawn to it, because you know that all the other girls there had trauma like the trauma I had, myself. You know we were taught to not say anything. And there, I felt safe. I felt like I could actually speak my mind and let go of some of the things that did happen. It was a spiritual movement. Brave Heart has been successful because the women grow a bond. Um, like I said, they grow a spiritual bond. Maybe it's from their trauma and the trauma of our people from way back. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Spiritually emotional bonds are created because of the interconnections drawn between language loss, cultural genocide, historical trauma, and present conditions. The bonds are strengthened, as stories are shared from perspectives that are predominately place-based. Being able to relate similar lived experiences of reality in the context of this particular area affords an extremely distinct space of healing from extremely distinct traumas. In having a choice to practice their existing cultural lifeways, these individuals are not only given a choice to supply themselves with a cultural approach healing, but also a choice to actually reclaim what was taken from their families. Thus, members express they have been able to reset balance in their spirits.

### **Calling the Spirit: Brave Heart Women's Revival**

The expressed need to address trauma consistently supplies the reasoning behind Brave Heart's revival. It was in 1994 that *Ihanktonwan* community elders launched their first four-day cultural healing retreat as a means to address trauma and motherhood. The retreat proved successful, highlighting just how gravely Indigenous women needed healing work. Thus, this event served as a catalyst for the revival of Brave Heart Society and has since been held annually in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Within the structure of this event, space is offered for both Western elements of therapeutic healing and specific Dakota healing ceremonies. Though multiple *Inipi* (sweat lodge ceremony) are held throughout the four day retreat, the ceremony specifically used in healing called *Nagi Kicopi* (Calling Back the Spirit) is of great importance. While multiple leaders of the retreat hold credentials in Western therapeutic approaches of treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, sexual abuse, and codependency, the need for culture and spirituality is met with their additional backgrounds as spiritual/cultural leaders. As such, autochthonous ceremonies for healing are available for participants within a two-fold approach.

One of the founders of Brave Heart explains the concept regarding a need to heal from trauma in relation to an element distinctly spiritual. As this elder explains, the first step of healing must occur for these women on a spiritual level that speaks to women's spirits:

And we realized that in order for us to do this work, we had to go to the root of the trauma. And to begin to call back their spirits. And so, we went back to relying on an old time ceremony which was called: *Nagi Kicopi*, or calling back the spirit of the individual who had been *tansag'ktat*, or shocked, by the trauma because we believe the spirit jumps out of our bodies and goes to a different place. In non-Native culture in the mental health fields, it's known as disassociation. But long time ago, our people were wise psychologists. So they always knew about *tan sagkta*, or disassociation. The way they would call the spirits back helped our people function in a better way. This was our way of healing. The realization came about that many of our people are not living in full spirit. And so, after this realization came about, gifts of healing came about. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Providing more context is needed from within what this actual experience provides. This is afforded through a 52 year-old member's perspective which demonstrates the power behind the concept of reclaiming a lost spirit:

I was in bad shape when I came to Brave Heart. Mentally, emotionally, physically. Everything you can imagine. I went with absolutely no spirit, whatsoever. Through that [*Nagi Kcopi*], they gave me the spirituality back. They gave me my voice back. They made it okay to give up all those things – I didn't have to be the way society wanted me to be. I wasn't what had messed me up. I was almost like a little girl relearning this. I will be forever grateful because I know, this day, this minute, who I am. I know there will never, ever be another being who can strip that from me. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

The below quote speaks directly to this point. However this 35 year-old member additionally addresses a subsequent awakening which occurs as spirituality is reintroduced to someone with a whole spirit. This is posed in a manner which connects to a certain dormancy resulting from the historic taking of Indigenous spirituality.

Let me just put it this way, it awakens a spirit. You start to remember because of your bloodline. You start to remember things from a very long time ago and it's powerful. It's the ancestors coming through you. You know, through that ceremony. Through your blood. The blood is old and sacred. You start to remember things. And everybody has that. What it comes down to is an awakening. If you do it whole heartedly you're going to awaken your spirit. And then it's going to start talking. You know and telling you things. You're going to radiate that. And with that comes that energy.

Parts of our spirits are dormant because of the White society. Through their education it becomes mute until the ceremony happens and we are awakened. It's still there. It's there. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

From these perspectives it becomes clear that reclaiming of a spirituality that was historically taken reunifies an inextricable relationship between the emotional and the spiritual. Western knowledge systems intrinsically lack a spiritual intelligence that is inherent within

Indigenous knowledge systems. To equate spiritual emotionality with anything outside of the spiritual would be a reminder of the trauma associated with spiritual prohibition.

Brave Heart members demonstrate an eloquent awareness associated with emotional development. All Brave Heart interviewees between the ages of 35 years-old and 70 years-old express a development of voice on both individual and collective levels that spurred their personal journeys towards healing. This may be considered common knowledge within systems centered on Western talk-therapy. And perhaps talking allows one to reclaim their spirit. However from the perspective of Brave Heart, to gain full access to one's voice one must first fully regain access to their spirit. Talking becomes effective when fragmented spirits become whole because fully present people convey fully present truths. This autochthonous cultural element defines a first step towards cultivating wellness.

The first retreat supplied a culturally competent atmosphere to begin the healing process for Dakota/Lakota/Nakota women. Brave Heart elders recognized the retreat possessed a striking resemblance to the collective functioning of *winyan okodakiciye*. Upon the completion of the first retreat, the development of a Brave Heart sisterhood ensued.

The Brave Hearts elders pursued ethnohistoric research through various archival resources during Brave Heart's initial development. The process which reportedly lasted a year, was methodical. Obtaining accurate information aimed to ensure that families associated with past *okodakiciye* were allotted respect. Given the state of surrounding *Oceti* communities, organization and development can be often met with resistance and criticism. This is another dynamic of internalized oppression. As a means to circumvent backlash, Brave Heart carefully aimed to meet appropriate *Oceti* standard of conduct. In doing so, Brave Heart mobilized both ethnohistoric sources and living oral sources to obtain knowledge regarding *winyan okodakiciye*.

A particular emphasis was vested in the ways which historical women were taught leadership throughout the course of a year. With this process, the society quickly became aware of how little written evidence exists on this subject:

We know this was a way practiced in our camps. But we didn't know where we knew this from. Just from people telling us, I guess. So when Faith wrote that grant to go do research on the societies, it was really a learning experience. It's just like you said, there's really not good records and not good recollections of women's societies. And the value of having these societies. There was not, it was just like, well yeah they had women's societies. They did different things and whatever, but not like the Tokala societies [policing and warrior societies]. Those were much more, they were given the lime light. They were more acknowledged. Maybe more honored than what women did. And it was expected of them, but not as respected in the writing or honored as what men did. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Because Brave Heart required a tedious research process, oral sources commonly make mention that *Oceti* women's societies are invisible in historical record. Brave Heart elders express a distaste for anthropology, as the early literature marginalizing Indigenous women is clearly realized. Oral sources regard this marginalization as another aspect of a dark US history which further defines their perceptions of anthropology. However, with as much oral knowledge that has been preserved about *Oceti* lifeways, members refer to anthropology humorously and with an apparent ease.

Despite insufficient documentation, Brave Hearts benefitted from archival research nonetheless. Members became increasingly familiar with Ella Deloria's work in ethnography. However, many members disagree with Deloria's documentations regarding certain *Ihanktonwan* ceremonial practices. The major source of disconnect is within Deloria's assertion that the *Isnati Awica Dowanpi* (a coming-of-age ceremony for girls) was not practiced in *Ihanktonwan* bands. Existing *Ihanktonwan* oral histories within various family systems along with additional first-

hand experiences of Brave Heart elders tell otherwise. While Brave Heart elders express a sincere respect for Deloria, they also strongly contest this point.

. *Oceti Sakowin* bands were diverse and varied not only in language, locality, and sometimes structure, but also in cultural practice. Additionally, diversity existed amongst the numerous bands of *Ihanktonwan*. It is a gross oversimplification to apply a one-size-fits-all aspect to the bands and *tiospayes* of the *Oceti*. Furthermore, considering the cultural damage caused by assimilation policies, it must be stated that some families maintained a stronger grasp on aspects of the culture than others. Thus, cultural continuity and discontinuity exist to varying degrees within various populations. On this point, some Brave Hearts are respectfully critical of Deloria due to her deep involvement with both Christianity and anthropology. Brave Heart members suspect these two male-driven aspects that structured Deloria's life acted to also narrow her conceptualizations. Additionally, a Brave Heart elder who was Deloria's student recalls perceiving Deloria as stringently religious, stern, and colonized. The era in which her work is rooted in is a possible reason for present disconnects, as Deloria struggled to exist in a very ethnocentric field during a very androcentric, racist period of time. Thus, many Brave Hearts express that while much of Deloria's work may accurately reflect the kinship groups she was personally familiar with, such groups were not the sum-total of all *tiospayes* present in *Ihanktonwan* territory. The preserved knowledge provided through the works of Deloria was nonetheless inspiring, impactful and incidentally, many Brave Heart members are part of the Deloria *tiospaye* (including my own family).

Deloria's records lent to a loose template framing future events, ceremonies, and philosophies prioritized by Brave Heart. Yet it was the interview process which followed that proved invaluable. One particular encounter with an Indigenous grandmother reportedly marked

the official naming of Brave Heart as a revived society. The origins of the name stems from a group of women called *Cante Ohitika Okodakiciye* (Brave Heart Society). Oral sources provide a powerfully deep and undocumented history of both the concept and name of *Cante Ohitika Okodakiciye*. The existing parallels of metaphoric significance between the past and present forms of the Brave Heart Societies afford further validation that Brave Heart was indeed needed by the people. This point is clearly defined within the perception of a living Lakota elder:

A 94 year-old grandmother relative, she's still alive. She told us, "You know, the work that you girls are doing, you're calling back the spirits of these people who are hurt. Their spirits are injured, it's kind of like the Brave Heart women from long time ago." So we asked her what the Brave Hearts were. She said in the old days the Brave Hearts were the ones who went out to the battlefield. They were known as women who would retrieve the bodies after a battle. If the deceased had relatives needing help, or if some of the bodies were decomposed, they would gather them up and take care of them. They would return them to their relatives. It was their role to help the departed go home to the spirit world. She said, "You're doing that kind of work and you should call yourself *Cante Ohitika Okodakiciye*." We took this direction from a grandma. And then, it was almost prophetic because we began being called upon for help with our ancestors' remains. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

In shifting their roles towards the battlefield of trauma, Brave Heart women are attempting to bring their people back from a spiritual death or dormancy. Yet another layer exists regarding the significance of the society's name. To illuminate just how prophetic this direction has proven to be, the discussion must briefly center on an important milestone which lent to the rising awareness of Brave Heart Society's presence in the *Ihanktonwan* community, albeit community resistance existed nonetheless.

While centered on cultural aspects of healing and trauma, the society quickly became recognized as a political force in Brave Heart's early stages of development. The correlations between trauma and politics should be clear given the topics discussed above. Hence, activism serves as a vehicle to foster further change. Four years after the society was reestablished,

members of the *Ihanktonwan* community called on the Brave Heart women to fulfill their societal role. Thus, Brave Heart Society asserted a very strong, consistent presence throughout the duration of two court cases involving *Ihanktonwan* remains.

The White Swan community<sup>9</sup> was illegally taken from the *Ihanktonwan* Pick-Sloan development of Fort Randall Dam on the Missouri River during the early 1950s (Lawson 2009). The many families residing in this beloved community were left powerless against federal regulations of forced relocation<sup>10</sup>. Because the presence of both Christian and ceremonial burials existed throughout the area marked for pre-construction, the Corp vowed to relocate the burials. However the Corp lied.

During the winter of 1998, water levels of a reservoir in White Swan dropped exposing a massive number of *Ihanktonwan* remains. Although members of the *Ihanktonwan* were horrified as historic wounds were reopened, they also became aware of their federal rights under the National Historic Preservation Act (section 106) and the Native American Graves and Protection Act. Fortunately this situation afforded a learning process which led to a success for the *Ihanktonwan*. Subsequently the federal court ruling required Fort Randal Dam to cease operation for six-weeks to allow for reburial. This was not the last situation involving remains that required a battle in court, however.

Unfortunately in 2002 another “inadvertent” discovery occurred in the North Point Recreational Area on the Missouri river. By law, any federal undertaking requires tribal consultation (King 2008). Had the tribe been notified of this particular development before construction began, the situation could have been avoided. Not surprisingly the Corp did not

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<sup>9</sup> A historic *Ihanktonwan* community located several miles West of Lake Andes, South Dakota near the banks of the Missouri River.

<sup>10</sup> For more information, see Beth Ritter’s 1998 dissertation on *Ihanktonwan* land dispossession.

comply. Many graves were not only disturbed, but completely destroyed and taken away with large loads of dirt used to cover a nearby campground. This was not only a blatant disregard for tribal rights, but also for *Ihanktonwan* people. The situation serves as one example of the institutional racism permeating South Dakota. A Brave Heart elder's first-hand account contextualizes why the emotional impact of historical trauma was understandably felt:

I walked up to the top of the hill. You could see how the bank was sliced. You could see the top of the skulls of the relatives. There was dentalium, there were beads rolling down that bank. A box had already been removed to a museum in Rapid City. So we told the Corp, I was so angry, "You ARE NOT going to remove any of those. They were buried here, you're going to leave them. You're not going to examine them, you're going to leave them alone." [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

The Brave Heart elder explains that a woman wearing a society belt was amongst the remains, "Society belts identify which society someone belonged to. Like other ways too. That *As'ke* Society, they wore their hair in this certain way. They had a similar society belt too but they were from Rosebud." The woman held a very small pipe along with other cultural articles, which members of Brave Heart were able to rebury once the court battle concluded in *Ihanktonwan* favor. However further damage resulted prior to the reburials. As dump trucks dug up dirt from the campground, *Ihanktonwan* people had to go through the dirt by hand and find the bones of their ancestors. Between her unexpected sobs at a recent meeting, one Brave Heart grandmother recalled, "It was the most painful thing I've ever had to do. Frantically digging for them! I would never wish that on anybody. They don't care about us. They have no compassion for our people." The leading advocates for initial action were the grandmothers of Brave Heart. Thus, a collective subjectivity was officially established and remains visibly recognizable today through a strong public presence associated with not only spirituality and culture, but political issues as well.

## **Detraumatize: Decolonize**

As developments progressed, annual *Nagi Kcopi* retreats gained a perennial presence supplying Brave Heart with more female membership. Brave Heart members describe the *Nagi Kcopi* as the most powerful event available for adults. Nonetheless, it was quickly realized that organizing within marginalized populations is never an easy task. Separating the symptomatic behaviors of internalized oppression from the root causes of internalized oppression is impossible. The challenges posed within the community are realities Brave Heart members have learned to navigate through, which has required compassion, support, patience and incidentally, humor. Thus, the challenges Brave Heart continues to face, warrant discussion, as criticism was an integral element influencing Brave Heart's development.

Much of Brave Heart is not well understood outside of what members convey and what is witnessed by a wider community. Furthermore, a deeper understanding is cultivated after individuals take the initial steps towards healing. While initial healing is obtained through *Nagi Kcopi*, healing continues through an individual process of growth and healthy living. Members draw support from Brave Heart through talking circles, cultural practices, and maintaining a sense of self in relation to a collective subjectivity. Subsequently healing supplies an intimate lens centered on recognizable behaviors of a traumatized populations. And while ongoing communication and learning ensues throughout Brave Heart events, the challenges present in a traumatized population can be overwhelming. Especially for individuals returning to the community after their first *Nagi Kcopi*.

When I first came back from that first time being out there [retreat], I had so much joy. I went to my family and said, "You guys need to go out this! You need this." I was trying to throw everybody in there because I knew we all need healing. So a lot of reactions were good. But a lot of them were afraid of the unknown. Not knowing what was over here. Fear of their selves. Some would get to the point where they believed me, then they'd back up. So many of our people are stuck. Our people have a huge of lack of trust. They don't know who to talk to. They put up so many blocks. Oh, if you get too close to this one then they'll throw up another one. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

The experiences felt through this event are difficult to convey. Returning to unchanged circumstances after experiencing a sense of self-change can feel lonely. This does not go away as the healing continues. However as strength grows over time, members find that coping becomes easier. Healing further entails discovering deeper elements of trauma which shapes one's surroundings. This organically emerges with personal experience. Thus, the support system Brave Heart offers is easily mobilized, as members view life through similar lenses that sharpen with continued communication. Thus, the dynamic understandings gained through this experience lends a dimensional perception regarding where one fits within a traumatized population.

Furthering knowledge which connects the past with the present in a comprehensive manner helps one recognize the visible connections between cycles of internalized oppression, historical trauma, poverty, systematic emasculation, violence, abuse, sexual assault and other issues alike. Generations of colonialism, treaty making, land dispossession, diminishment of sovereignty, and the devastating effects of federal policies fostered the dysfunctional cycles present within *Ihanktonwan* systems and other *Oceti* systems alike. These cycles are faced on a daily basis, as systems are completely saturated with reactionary behaviors and conflicts that can

impede the ability for Indigenous communities to become healthier. These points are stressed as one Brave Heart elder states:

The retreat is the most powerful thing, but because trauma is scary, people still think they're the only ones suffering from trauma. They're kind of in a state of darkness. They don't really know what they're looking for, they don't know that they're hurt. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

There are disconnects between individuals who are healing and individuals who are not healing, which becomes visible during times of conflict. Further, healing from the recognized effects of colonization creates a complicated dynamic, as the general population has likely not been exposed to this profound perspective. Through nineteen years of development, Brave Heart members have learned to recognize the presence of this challenge in *Ihanktonwan* community. Because Brave Heart members have developed an understanding regarding systematic issues affecting the community, members highly uphold the concept of decolonizing one's thinking.

The people who have been affected by the teachings of the *wasicu* and those who have actually been colonized don't understand how or why they've been colonized. They don't know what that means. They don't know the teachings; that this is not the way our people were. So they think they live as good Dakota people, but actually they live as good *wasicu* people. They don't understand the concept of colonization. So when somebody stands up and talks to them about how colonized people are, and that is why we treat each other the way we do, they just draw a blank. Nothing reaches them because they don't understand that's how they've been affected. It becomes part of you. There needs to be a really good way to help people understand it's not their fault that they're colonized. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Calling attention to colonized behaviors can cause a sense of shame for those who are not versed in concepts of decolonization. By recognizing the perceptions of a deeply colonized individual affords the foresight to approach dialogue strategically which aids in effective communication. Put simply, this shame acts to further marginalize individuals who are already

marginalized in a wider society. In turn, individuals are likely to shut-down. As Brave Heart members discuss the society's development, naturally the subject of past criticism emerges. Once again conflicts explained to emerge from community criticism illuminates concepts associated with Red Rage. The negative reactions to Brave Heart's developments is regarded as cycles of jealousy, ignorance, and fear. One 64 year-old founding Brave Heart elder states:

When you are talking to someone who is raging at you and using the F word, you have to remind yourself to talk to that person's spirit. To call that spirit. And then say, "I respect you. I know you're scared and it's going to be okay." Then they'll remember. It's almost like they'll snap out of it. Because when they're raging and they're afraid or wanting to hit, they're back at the original trauma that place. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Thus, if approached from a space of understanding, Red Rage can be easier disarmed, which requires practice, healing, and the development of effective communication skills.

### **Gender, Jealousy, and Conflict**

As younger members discuss community criticism and conflict, jealousy is regarded as the main culprit defining conflicts that are largely gendered. This further reveals insights associating jealousy in connection with cycles of guilt deriving from a sense of powerlessness. Members explain that individuals who displayed jealousy towards the development of Brave Heart were fully aware that something needed to be done to help the community. However, because they were not part of this movement, they became overtly critical which likely stemmed from a guilt associated with a lack of action. One 70 year-old Brave Heart elder explains:

I believe the awareness of what we were doing was came about because people were jealous of what we were doing. And so they didn't want to come and participate and see, they wanted to criticize and find fault. So, we were attacked probably within the first

three years. But, one good thing is that we didn't allow them to destroy our circle. Didn't allow them to pull it apart. So, I think it got to be a protection when we'd laugh about it. You know to laugh about the people who were jealous and the things they said. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This brings into the discussion issues of gender and conflict within the *Ihanktonwan* community and ultimately, other tribal communities alike. As members were probed for further information surrounding earlier faced challenges, a common theme emerged concerning male criticism and colonized patterns of patriarchy. Members assert that Brave Hearts have faced a male resistance anchored by a sense of insecurity. As told by a 43 year-old Brave Heart:

They would say, “Why are these women getting together?!” They thought we were taking their family away from them, or girlfriends, or whatever. They saw them growing too. Even some guys would say we're gay. Stuff like that. Just because we hang together, we're supposedly having a relationship. It's a sisterhood. A friendship. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This illuminates common issues present within unhealthy relationships. The views expressed by a 22-year old male Brave Heart prove particularly insightful on this subject. This reveals a male perspective was seamlessly molded by an upbringing within Brave Heart's collective. When asked about male resistance associated with Brave Heart's functions, he responded by saying:

There's some men that still have their white man set ways. They think they're superior. Even though we are society, there's certain views shaped by male superiority about women's society. And, so they believe their voice is a lot louder than a society voice. There are certain individuals, they try to be louder than us, but their on their own. Their mentality holds them back from actually learning from the society. It keeps them in an acute mindset, so they can't broaden their mind to understand different things. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

The above refers to a common tension between men and women in this population. That is not to say all relations resemble this structure, but this tension is certainly common nonetheless. A 37 year-old male Brave Heart member provides a striking perspective regarding men in the community in relation to historical emasculation:

If you live in a place where there's over 80% unemployment, your masculinity, it's taken away! Our men have been indoctrinated to think men make decisions without the say women, that they're not as important. So when men have low self-esteem, it's because they don't have what it takes to be what society says it takes to be a man. And who could that come out on? But money is not sustenance. It can provide food, but there's nothing more self-proclaiming for a provider as there is going out and killing something, bringing it back and providing nourishment for your family. That was taken away. I think when everyone's on welfare of General Assistant checks, what is your true purpose if you're not going out and trying to provide something for your family. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This statement defines a conglomeration of issues existing within a community that has never recovered from federally imposed economic devastation. That is to say, given the unemployment rate and lack of industry, the *Ihanktonwan* community has never even reached an economic state of stability. However in terms of conflict and gender dynamics, this source further explains his perception regarding cultural loss, criticism and Brave Heart women:

A long time ago, we understood the power of life. A sacred deity *Pte Sa Win*, she brought one of our most sacred items to our people. It was the pipe. Now if you exist in a society where one of the most sacred things and gifts given to you came from a woman, you have the innate ability at a very young age to respect women. Now this society is structured off of an Adam and Eve paradigm. Maybe Eve was hungry. So a group of women are scary in an area where women don't usually have power. There again you look at our society though. Women have always had the power to speak their mind. If they're more organized, they are more powerful. Women always speak their mind in the communities, but if they can come together, they naturally become a political force and they are hard to stop. A lot of the work Brave Heart does has to do with decolonization. If you're able to look at how far you've come from your racial, or your ethnic, or your cultural group and how assimilated you've become and what you've allowed to be okay, I think it's a

surprising realization that's infuriating, but it's healing and allows you to go back where you were at before. Find your way home. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

In consideration of the above, it becomes clear why conflicts have a tendency to get tangled with the introduction of varying combinations of added dynamics. Additionally, the unemployment rates are an indication of how high the rates of poverty are on the *Ihanktonwan* reservation. Clearly defined above, poverty negatively impacts health. Poverty also impacts the state of well-being which can result in depression. With a lack of resources, a likely abundance of free-time, and residual anger and frustration, the tendency to engage in conflict often is difficult to avoid in this community. This member expresses overarching themes of conflict during organizational periods of development in a community embedded with internalized oppression. The Brave Heart man goes on to explain in general how aside from all the conflict, it is undeniable that Brave Heart is doing good things:

It's always gonna be this way with anything new around here. The first thing they'll say is, "Who gave you the right?" Then the next thing they'll say is, "You're doing it wrong." Then they'll say, "There's no such thing as those things anymore."

But, if you were to ask all those people the same questions, they'd tell you how it's done, who should do it, and the way to do it. It's like you can't be a prophet in your own land, they'll crucify you. But if you don't do it now, then when? And if not for who better than the kids, then who for?

That's the thing that, when you look at the society as a whole, the services they're trying to provide and the things they're trying to do. There's nothing bad about it. You know, I think it all goes back to what I said earlier, if we were individuals, when we first came to the reservation and times were hard, we would have never made it as a people. Now we have become so individualistic in our interpretations of what needs to be done and how, it's become dangerous. We have the right to say things behind closed doors, but a long time ago if you talked shit, people would say, "You need to say that in front of the camp, let's go." Then you have to prove it or lose honor. You gotta bite the knife. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

In reference to the expression “bite the knife”, this ceremony was practiced within *Oceti* bands as a public show of honor and commitment. In this context, it is used to parallel past concepts of honor in relation to present-day petty behaviors. Often this practice was used in a manner to dispel lies or gossip, which are now driving forces behind most community conflicts. Further, this statement speaks to male-resistance to Brave Heart, as men are often critical of the ways in which Brave Heart conducts ceremonial practices. Such male-driven criticisms are unfounded, however. Women have always led women’s ceremonies, thus men naturally lack a knowledge about these perspectives of *Oceti* culture. A huge source of past criticism centered on the next Brave Heart development, which is presently the most influential for younger generations. This ceremony is called *Isnati Awica Dowanpi* and will be further discussed in the following section.

Regardless if the behaviors associated with traumatized population are well understood, the challenges posed are nonetheless difficult and draining. Yet Brave Heart has been able to withstand these styles of conflicts. The society has managed to gather enough support to create a solid foundation and now are a publically acknowledged collective subjectivity. The above quotations provides insight into how jealousy derives from an internalized sense of powerlessness, which may explain why many individuals remain idle and subsequently critical as others begin seeking social change.

### **Brave Heart Girl-Culture: *Isnati Awica Dowanpi***

With the initial steps being taken towards collective healing, the cultural grounds were fertile to begin work with Indigenous young women. The next major development of cultural revitalization occurred with the first publically held female coming-of-age ceremony in over one-hundred years called *Isnati Awica Dowanpi* (To Sing over Those Dwelling Alone). The rehabilitation of this nearly lost and once forbidden ceremony centered on providing cultural empowerment to foster a collective subjectivity of support for Dakota/Nakota/Lakota girls. It has since become an intertribal event, however. The first *Isnati* was held in Greenwood, South Dakota within *Ihanktonwan* territory. It has since been relocated to an area where a Sundance is held near White Swan, South Dakota. *Isnati* warrants discussion in this study, as this particular event is explained to be the leading event drawing new members to the society at much younger ages.

Planning the first *Isnati* was a “make-or-break kind of a deal,” according to the main Brave Heart elder responsible the event’s planning and revival. This elder expresses an immense love for her people, however she acknowledges a simple truth present in her community saying, “Our people can be mean. Especially if they are not in full spirit.” Brave Heart women saw the need to shift youth towards a spiritual road, thus providing an open ceremony broadened Brave Heart women’s access to wider number of girls. The founding Brave Heart elder explains the first event as being the hardest.

The hardest changes to make in Indian Country is always within your own community. They don’t care to hear you. I was so tired on that fourth day during the first year. Hardly anyone from our own people supported us; they’re own young girls. I was getting ready for the girls’ coming out, but I couldn’t show my anger and frustration to anyone because I knew that was going to make them give-up. I couldn’t make this about me. So I went off on my own and climbed a hill. I cried. I screamed and I said, “Daddy, please help me. I don’t know what to do, I’m trying. I need help. They need help!” When we started the ceremony, I felt better. You girls were so beautiful. You looked different. As I looked up to one portion under the arbor, I saw a group of grandmothers sitting there. I couldn’t tell

if they were real. But there was one woman standing behind them. She was TALL! And she had wild hair. I was thinking, “Whose relative is this?” But she gave me a strange feeling. She had leaves and sage in her hair and her hair was worn down, it was wild. She had painted arms and something on her face. I couldn’t understand. Later, I asked an elder about her. She told me, “Oh my! One of them showed themselves! She was one of those women, those warrior women.” That is what made me realize that we had to continue our work. The spirit was moving. Our relatives, the older ones, this is how they told me I was doing something right. So, we’ve kept it going for the last 16 years. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This interview proved particularly jarring. Prior to the above quotation, this interview veered off into a tangential discussion regarding particular groups of *Oceti* women recorded to have existed within Wissler’s (1912) documentation. This Brave Heart appeared visibly taken aback in reference to the *Winyan Tapika* society (1912:80). Per Dakota translations, Wissler (1912:80) outlines very little regarding this particular group beyond a basic description. However Wissler asserts that these particular women were regarded as *wakan* (sacred/holy), as they were a dreamer society. These women wore buckskin dresses with their hair loose over their shoulders, embellished with bunches of sage, leaves, and feathers. Wissler (1912:80) further explains their faces and arms were covered in red paint with four additional blue dots upon their chins, foreheads, and both cheekbones. This member believes it was a woman belonging to this society that revealed herself during the first *Isnati*. She asserts she has never heard of such a group until this interview, however the description matches the woman she recalls seeing.

The revival of this ceremony was of distinct importance to *Ihanktonwan* women for reasons associated with calling back the spirits of not only individual members, but also an entire collective of new generations. There are many distinct elements of a woman’s moon (menstruation) which are culturally defined by an intrinsic nature that supplies young women

with a healthy spirit. This is how elder women historically cared for the spirits of young women. However, these perspectives nearly vanished from an overall collective conscience. Recalling Federal Indian Policy detailed in the background section of this study, it is clear federal policy obliterated Indigenous lifeways which proved devastating for future generations. Until the 1978 passing of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (Wilkins and Lomawaima 2001:244), cultural practices such as the *Isnati* were either forced underground, or rendered completely extinguished.

In reviving the ceremony, Brave Heart members explain they gathered information amongst themselves and an additional number of oral sources throughout the communities of the *Oceti Sakowin*. Discussed briefly in the background section of this study, *Pte San Win* (White Buffalo Calf Woman) gifted the *Canupa Wakan* (Sacred Pipe) to the *Oceti Sakowin* nineteen generations ago. *Pte San Win* brought the *Canupa Wakan* during an ominous time of struggle to offer a way for *Oceti* people to communicate with *Wakan Tanka*. Henceforth, prayers were sent through the form of smoke. Further, *Pte San Win*'s messages entailed teachings about the *Wicoh'an Wakan Sakowin* (Seven Sacred Rites) which became the spiritual foundation Dakota/Nakota/Lakota people were to base their lives upon. These rites are not chronological and include the following:

- *Inipi* (Sweat Ceremony) – Held in a dome-shaped structure made from willow saplings and covered by hides, tarps, or blankets which represents the womb of a pregnant woman. Heated stones are situated in a central hole and water is poured over the stones by whomever is leading the ceremony to create steam. This ceremony is generally done throughout four intervals (rounds) and between each, the doors are opened. *Inipi* renews life and affords purification.
- *Hanbdeceya* (Crying for a Vision) – Held on an isolated hilltop where one has pledged to stay for between one to four days with a blanket and their pipe and no food or water. *Hanbdeceya* is a time for individuals to pray for understanding, knowledge, strength, and to communicate with spirits. The visions are then discussed with a wa'apiya wicasa (spiritual helper).

- *Wanagi Wicagduha* (Keeping of the Spirit) – This is preformed throughout the course of a year after a death. Love ones can visit and spend time with the spirit during this year which is a formal period of grief. Upon conclusion, the spirit is considered purified and sacred and then, released while relations between mourners alternatively grow stronger.
- *Winwayang Wacipi* (Sundance) – One of the most important rites and involves four days of dancing during summer at the time of a full moon. Dancers whom have pledged, do so on their own accord for personal reasons. No food or water is consumed. The dancing begins at dawn which is done in an arbor with a central sacred tree which holds the dancers prayers. Dancing concludes at dusk, however intervals between rounds for dancers to rest. *Winwayang Wacipi* is a selfless time of sacrifice to pray for one's nation, family, and loved ones.
- *Hunkapi* (Making Relatives) – Used to solidify a relationship with loved ones through a ceremonial adoption. This relationship is very *wakan*, respected, and special.
- *Isnati Awica Dowanpi* (To Sing over Those Dwelling Alone) – The coming-of-age ceremony preformed after a girl's first menses. Teachings are relayed regarding the roles of woman. Marks a time of womanhood.
- *Tapa Wanka Yap* (Throwing of the Ball) – Used to endow blessing upon the people. Preformed only by young girls to represent a powerful element of purity. Held in a circle as the girl stands in the center. A blue and red ball filled with buffalo hair is tossed to the north, east, south, and west. Those who catch the ball receive powerful blessings.

Given these rites hold a strong presence in *Oceti* culture, preserved information about the *Isnati* ceremony was easily gathered. As one of the seven sacred rites of the *Oceti Sakowin*, *Isnati* centers on teaching young women to respect themselves, their roles, and their bodies through the instruction of elder women within society. The concept of being sacred during menstruation is illuminated by an elder Brave Heart below:

When a girl has her moon she is *wakan*. She is sacred during that time. She is co-creator. She's the only entity on this earth that can make life for humans other than the creator. So during that time, she is to be respected. When they isolate them, it's because they're powerful and a girl must be taught about this. She is so powerful, the prayers during ceremony go to her rather than out to the universe. It's not about contamination and it's not perceived as distasteful. It's a huge respect. In fact, I think there's logic in this with the PMS thing. That's why the girls were to be doing beadwork in *Isnati*. Because it causes them to concentrate and their feelings so they won't be up and down. A long time ago these items they made in moon-time were prized. They had power. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This perspective dispels the mistruths told by Hassrick (1956) associating a woman's moon with contamination while positing menstrual isolation was a male-imposed practice. This is a misunderstanding. However, the articles made during moon-time are an important teaching present during contemporary *Isnati* ceremonies, which affords girls time to learn how to bead.

This four day ceremony is private and continues to require isolating youth in a private camp. Isolation affords ceremonial space for an array of mentoring which is provided by older Brave Heart members. Further, girls are taught two ceremonial songs while additional teaching is afforded though fluent-speakers, as girls are expected to publically introduce themselves and their kinship systems in the Dakota/Lakota language on the fourth day. Girls are not allowed to touch food or water which symbolizes their sacredness. Thus, their mothers are employed to assist at mealtimes. This affords a bonding period that allows mothers to care for their daughters as a little girl one last time before entering womanhood. The public aspects of *Isnati* are present in a two-fold approach: the ceremony is publically open to any girl wishing to participate, and in conclusion during the fourth day, the girls are presented as women through a public forum.

*Isnati* inherently acts to honor both the existence and roles of women. In doing so Brave Heart elders anticipate young women will be empowered to in turn, honor themselves. While many girls do grow up in culturally intact family systems, many do not. As elements of culture are reintroduced to the spirits of youth, a specifically tailored protective form of messaging fosters the reinstalling of an adapted lifeway associated with contemporary Dakota/Nakota/Lakota women. Further, *Isnati* is a land based cultural practice that requires young women to exist outdoors for the duration of the ceremony. This acts to inherently reconnect youth with land-base cultural concepts while removing modern technological

distractions. Girls learn about specific women's medicines by gathering medicines within the areas near their camp; older women afford the youth with medicinal mentorship. Additionally impacting relationships with landscape are the very old stories relayed by elders throughout the ceremony. Thus, a certain pride is naturally and seamlessly reinforced within the spirits of female youth, as this practice distinctly contains a rare spiritual familiarity stemming from spiritual memory.

The concept of speaking to one's spirit is a philosophy also present within this structure, which counters the difficult challenges young girls are forced to overcome in their communities. A 35 year-old Brave Heart member who participated in the first *Isnati* expresses that *Isnati* changed her spirit's understanding of the world. Thus, things now make more sense. While this member did go through the *Nagi Kcopi*, she continued her healing journey by also participating in the first *Isnati* at the age of 20 years-old. This allowed her to obtain what she had missed at a younger age. Spirituality has been immensely influential in her personal growth and development. This Brave Heart leads a sober, healthy life and dedicates much of her time to *Ihanktonwan* youth. She also is perceived by other Brave Heart members to lead by example, as she demonstrates that access to a happy, healthy life is very possible within the confines of a poverty-stricken housing area.

A few past *Isnati* girls serve as oral sources in this study. They candidly share their take on the Brave Heart Society and *Isnati*, which sustained a strong presence throughout their development. One 18 year-old Brave Heart explains:

I feel stronger because of *Isnati*. I know I have to come back to help when I'm home. It makes me feel empowered because I've been through the ceremony and I feel more connected to life as a woman. You make your own reality. The girls not having that experience don't know that women are so sacred. They do hold a lot of power. That is

something that girls need to know. The majority of members have been through sexual abuse. So relating is a big thing. [Brave Heart youth (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

In the ease which the above is effortlessly phrased exhibits the common language used within Brave Heart. This Brave Heart member additionally makes mention of the very real presence of trauma within the lives of youth. It should be clear this young woman is a living example of the results produced by Brave Heart efforts. In providing youth with a continuous running dialogue and a system of support through a collective subjectivity, success is becoming increasingly visible. A new generation of members are indeed cultivating an emotional intelligence which fosters a very culturally strong sense of self. Below, this Brave Heart further discusses an evolved role Brave Heart girls absorb after *Isnati* while additionally commenting on trauma perspectives within youth:

For Isnati, it's just kind of an awakening. It offers a cultural background that helps you feel comfortable with conversations about trauma. I think talking about trauma would scare young girls if they weren't comfortable. From there after, you start to work on the healing. That's how I see it. I went through it and I'm an older sister to the one's going through it in the future. It's a duty to be there and offer the teachings I have. [Brave Heart youth (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Again the concept of an awakening is referenced in association with spirituality. This demonstrates that such awakenings are not just isolated experiences felt by older members of Brave Heart, but also felt within younger generations as well. If awakenings occur at a younger age, it is likely young girls will continue developing with a full spirit and subsequently break away from present cycles of trauma. The responsibility of continued participation is explained as an intrinsically ingrained element present upon the completion of *Isnati*. Though the perils of life transpire outside of the circle the girls express a need to carry on these ways, which

simultaneously insures both an access to a support system and cultural preservation. The support they provide for younger *Isnati* participants affords a role of responsibility and an opportunity to mobilize the cultural teachings obtained. Connections are reestablished as perennial perspectives season temporally. As such, carved social spaces within this cultural lifeway congruently intersect with varying stages of development. Thus, girls can practice continually absorbed teachings as while progressing through womanhood. Though challenges to obtain time off work or school prove difficult to overcome, one Brave Heart member explains a specific experience in how she felt her spirit stir upon being formally called upon by Brave Heart elders.

That one time, I was busy, busy, busy. Your mom came to me and said, "Mah girl, can you make it to *Isnati*?" I was like, "Ah, noooo, I'm working and I'm so busy." Then later that day, someone brought me in a stick. It was a painted stick. There was an invite attached and it told me when to be down there. It said a long time ago, when you got something like this, *you had to* listen. <laughter> I was like, "Oh MY GOSH, I have to go down there." I still have the stick in my jewelry box.

When I got that, honest to god, it touched my heart. *It touched my spirit*. When I got it, I was like, "this is so powerful." [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Economic struggles within this area center on obtaining basic necessities to live. Though spirituality is regarded as a basic necessity requiring little money, the time that is required poses a challenge. However, the Dakota way of life provides nutrition for one's spirit. Young members learn quickly that just as one must nourish their body to maintain physical health, they must also nourish their spirits to maintain spiritual health. In introducing the concept of speaking to one's spirit at an earlier age, it is probable that youthful thought processes will shift towards a spiritual consciousness grounded in health, culture, land, life, relationships, and the future. Naturally, preservation will follow, as such relationship building employs youth with spiritual obligations.

Thus, every Brave Heart member is not only a youth, but also an elder. This acts to tailor the cultivation of ongoing relations.

Boys play a very important role during *Isnati* as fire-keepers. This has instilled a sense of responsibility within the young men who have been raised as fire-keepers within Brave Heart. These men, now in their mid-20s and 30s, carry on their responsibility by teaching a younger generation of boys about what it means to be *bde heca* (a hard worker) – the single most lauded trait youth can project in the *Oceti Sakowin*. This concept characterizes taking care of one's elders. It means unabashedly volunteering to help your people with whatever is needed in a respectful, non-resistant manner. To be referred to as *bde heca* is to be held in a very high regard which is most certainly earned. Brave Heart boys are responsible for meet various needs for the women while also keeping the ceremonial fire burning throughout the duration of *Isnati*. This requires Brave Heart boys to stay up all night, which is done in rotation. They additionally help teach the *Isnati* girls how put up their tipi. This is a very important learning, as the symbolism inherent in one's lodge derive from strict teachings about womanhood. Simultaneously teachings are relayed to the girls regarding the gendered relevancy attached to *Oceti* lodges, as it was the women who owned the lodges in historical *Oceti* camps. The male aspect of work in this ceremony is integral to a successful *Isnati*, as it provides balance. Taking care of the women is not easy, but it teaches the youth what the responsibilities and roles are of a respectable Dakota/Nakota/Lakota man.

Marriages have occurred between members of the society, which was unexpected. The ceremonies are not meant for a place of courtship. However, relationships do continue after the ceremony concludes. It is a beautifully organic aspect of society-life to witness the birth of a child resulting from respectful courtship relations. Ceremonial teachings for youth indeed center

on respect and self-worth. These individuals are living testaments of such teachings which will likely be passed down to their children.

Though members of Brave Heart often have a tendency to stray from the circle as life progresses, the non-judgmental nature of Brave Heart Society is realized upon the times when members are in need of support. Thus, membership is not exclusive nor excluding. The experience of one 27 year-old Brave Heart member demonstrates a common youthful tendency which Brave Heart elders are intimately familiar with. The accepting, gentle nature of Brave Heart elders is demonstrated through her perspective below:

I didn't know everything around me was alcoholism, violence and abuse. So as I was growing, I was trying to balance that with what I was learning through Brave Heart. I remember one thought that always went through my head -- I was Native American so I was going to be an alcoholic. And what do alcoholics do? They drink. That was my mentality for a while.

I was definitely hard when I didn't reach out to Brave Heart or have them in my life, I would end up going down the wrong path. I felt ashamed of myself. It was hard to forgive myself and accept that. But when I reached out to Brave Heart every time, I never felt sad or let down. [Brave Heart youth (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This particular approach taken by Brave Heart's illuminates an awareness and compassion for members who must straddle a space between social realities and spiritual safety. The point is not to project expectations in manner to shames members for mistakes. Brave Heart offers an open heart to those needing love and support, yet messages are still conveyed correlating negative consequence with unhealthy decision making. This is taught to younger members through the disposition of older members who are mothers and grandmothers. It teaches compassion. The real work occurs when members venture out and come back without being scolded or shamed. Their own organic realizations provide them with the most powerful and effective style of learning. Brave Heart elders act as the safety-net after painful lessons.

Some Brave Heart members believe people from the community are deterred from reaching out to Brave Heart due to feelings of unworthiness. This is very unfortunate, as the accepting, non-judgmental nature of the Brave Heart circle deeply felt, but only with experience. All Indigenous people are worthy of reclaiming culture and spirituality; Brave Heart members assert that no matter what mistakes are made, spirituality will always be waiting because Indigenous people will always be worthy. As one 70 year-old grandmother states, “We may live in poverty, but we are sure as heck not poor. We are wealthy with culture and love.”

The power held within *Isnati* is clearly visible per the momentum supplied after seventeen years of practice. Planning has become fluid, as the organization and development of annual ceremonies have become more routine. Much of the responsibility has additionally been absorbed by older *Isnati* girls. Further, during the early stages of *Isnati*, a vast amount of outreach was required to gain participants. Recruitment is presently less needed, as the Brave Heart Society is regularly contacted by local families with daughters who want to participate. This reveals the successful reintroduction of a new cycle which meets the needs of an at-risk population. However gaining community participation has been quite the struggle. The ceremony continues nonetheless. Brave Heart has successfully inducted over one-hundred young Indigenous girls into womanhood. Encouraging results of this event are visible with the return of many young women who maintain a strong, dependable, and consistent presence within the Brave Heart circle.

### **Outreach and Activities: A Brave Heart Family**

The Brave Heart Society is an established contemporary force which projects not only a spiritually based collective subjectivity, but also a unified political voice. As the *Nagi Kcopi* and *Isnati* have been sustained throughout the years, Brave Heart has expanded its collective sights on a number of arising needs which became visible with further development. As some organized annual events have faded, others have survived serving as seasonal markers throughout the course of the year. Interview data reveals a consistent pattern of powerfully expressed experiences associated with *Nagi Kcopi* and *Isnati*. This indicates such ceremonies are regarded as highly important, which may explain why oral source descriptions of additional events lack detail. Thus, these events will be loosely outlined and briefly discussed below.

During the fall months, Brave Heart and other community groups combine forces to organize an annual community event called *Taste of the Past*. This communal feast serves various traditional dishes made from seasonal foods and wild game. The event provides a forum to encourage healthy foods and eating while also illuminating the power of providing food for one's own family by way of gardening and hunting. The foods are harvested from multiple gardens throughout the community which Brave Heart sponsors through grant funding Brave.

The issues related to diet are pressing throughout the *Ihanktonwan* community. Lacking economic resources and residential isolation can influence unhealthy eating habits, as cheaper sources of processed foods are often sought out by residents. A lack of education surrounding healthy eating no doubt lends to unhealthy eating decisions. Given the rates of unemployment and poverty, health conditions suffer for an array of reasons which are outlined above in the background section of this study. To address such issues, Brave Heart women established a *Cante Waste Woju* (Good Heart Gardens) in 2003 which has since supplied the community with a three-acre garden. The garden offers space for Brave Heart members to learn gardening skills

and subsequently provides a yearly harvest of traditional vegetables such as corn and squash. Over forty gardens have been planted throughout the *Ihanktonwan* community which were initially funded through grants received by Brave Heart Society. Though the grant was not received this year, many communities were able to still plant their gardens. This was made possible through the tireless volunteering efforts of younger Brave Heart men, which is an extremely clear example of what it means to be *bde heca*.

Some wild game can now be provided for the communal feast through the Brave Heart Society's recently developed hunting camp call *Ozuya Wicoti/Wode* (A Time to Go Explore/Hunt). This coming-of-age event is organized by Brave Heart men annually and is open to young *Ihanktonwan* boys, or any other tribal youth wishing to participate. Mentoring, guidance, and culturally relevant practices associated with hunting are topics Brave Heart men focus on during this event. Brave Heart men stress this development is direly needed due to a perceived lack of male role models in the community. Further, young male Brave Hearts express Brave Heart Society's survival will be better ensured if it becomes well known as not just a women's society, but a family's society. Understandably gender roles and development is stressed to be needed. However community perceptions largely associate the Brave Heart Society with women. On this point, the oldest male Brave Heart who is 37-year old, expresses:

I think that if you say women's society, you will create a fear in men. They might be scared to be considered a woman if they're a part of Brave Heart. But if it is Brave Heart Society, then have more, and more activities with men, it would probably be established the society's been around for a while. You can explain it's about the goodness of *people* with no specific agenda. It would be more prone to have more activities. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Efforts are being made to provide more activities for Brave Heart boys and men. As demonstrated in this study, the Brave Heart Society does indeed appear to be a family society, yet focus has been primarily placed on females within the society. Thus, developing efforts are expressed to be in motion to foster a more male oriented membership. This speaks to an issues presented above concerning healthy relationships. If young girls are developing into healthy women, future heterosexual relationships require the presence of healthy men to better ensure the cycles of trauma can be broken. Boys must learn about the cultural roles of *Oceti* men from perspectives free from the skewed notions of gender associated with Western patriarchy. Thus, decolonizing gendered perspectives is a need Brave Heart is attempting to meet. On the topic regarding Dakota gender roles, one Brave Heart man explains:

I think that some people have a hard time swallowing the idea that there was a hunter and a gatherer, but there was someone that had to take care of the camp. And in order to promote any type of equality. The word equality, it doesn't mean we're equal and they're equal. It means everybody is equal. It means that everybody has a purpose and they're all thriving for life and health. And, prosperity for their family. They had to rely upon one another. It was not often looked at like, "Oh I wish I could hunt, " you know I mean, I don't know if anyone could imagine how hard it was for a man to go out for days at a time and hunt. There's times where he wished he could take care of the camp! But from a very young age he was taught to do that. As far as the women's role, I think that if you were to take those roles and compare them to people's ideas now of equality, it doesn't even exist in the same world or realm of current ideologies. Because it's about life and death. And, it's about what the men had to sacrifice and what the women had to sacrifice. Teaching boys how to sacrifice and provide for their families brings back our pride, our self-worth. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Fostering past ideologies into contemporary adaptations entails learning and teaching. This is demonstrated through action and practice which is presently available through Brave Heart men who have proven to internalize concepts of decolonization. There are not many, however. This expressed need is echoed by many oral sources, however a mother who is 35

years-old expresses a certain resonance with the need for boys from the perspective of issues affecting boys with no father figure:

A lot of older men say, “They're not doing the ceremonies right. They're not singing the right songs.” And I don't believe that to be true. I think it's that we intimidate them because we continue to carry these things on. They say these things because they're just sitting there, doing nothing while we're doing the work. So, they're intimidated because they're male and they should be doing it and they're not. They should be teaching their sons, but they're not. They're learning through their mothers. So, the roles have reversed.

Like my son. He attended Brave Heart functions as a young boy up until last year. And he is now 15 years old and he went with me when he was 3 years old! He has become an exceptional role model for the community. And he shows those virtues that were instilled in him through me and Brave Heart. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Though the perspective of a mother is an important perspective, particularly powerful are the observations exposed by a young man yearning for the presence of other healthy male figures. This particular perspective illuminates that if healing work within male populations does not occur, healing the community cannot fully occur:

If you have a woman who finds herself, having a male that is lost, then you're still only, it's not 50/50. You still have one party set in a certain way...we need to learn more about how to find ourselves. To better ourselves. With these societies, they help with that. Hunting camps and other males stuff, help with that. To where we find our self-respect. Where we can humble ourselves. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

When asked if he thought young men might benefit from talking circles, this same Brave Heart responded by saying:

Yeah, I know I would! Because men go through hurt too. They go through a lot of really, really hard things. It would help them get this off their chest, their stress, their tension, and their worries. It would help lighten them. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This idea resonates additionally with the older Brave Heart male from above, as he expresses:

Oh yeah. I think there needs to be retreat for the men. And I think on that level, it'll take the men in the society to create something like that. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This aspect of introducing a male component officially into the structure of Brave Heart came to be a prominent theme within interviews. One other event predominately drawing young male participation developed two years ago with the founding of a four-day lacrosse camp. With the help of a renowned professional lacrosse player, Brave Heart members and other community organizations sponsored the first camp which proved a success. Subsequently, the *Canska Wakan Kdi Okodakiciye* (The Lightning Stick Society) was developed and presently mobilizes the reintroduction of lacrosse into the lives of Dakota youth. Teaching lacrosse structured within a Dakota paradigm, the game is conceptualized as Creator's Game which simultaneously serves as a forum to influence healthy conflict resolutions skills. Lessons are posed through a historic lens. For example youth learn the historically held values of resolving conflict nonviolently, as mentors convey messages regarding the use of lacrosse in the past which helped avoid battles, settle disputes, or dispel conflicts between bands. This in turn preserved life. The camp is gaining momentum, though it is still in the early stages of development.

Preservation has always been a major focal point for Brave Heart members. After the above outlined reburial experiences, preservation partially centered on cultural resource management. Many members in Brave Heart have assisted in doing archeological surveys to protect sacred sites. As a result, several members, male and female alike, have been certified as para-archeologists. The preservation work of Brave Heart members ultimately resulted in the establishment of an *Ihanktonwan* tribal historic preservation officer position. One particular

Brave Heart man highly experienced in cultural resource management is an active consultant presently involved in surveying sacred sites at *Pe'Sla*, a very sacred area in the Black Hills that the *Oceti Sakowin* recently purchased in attempts to provide preservation. Other Brave Heart members additionally serve on certain cultural committees and treaty steering committees. A clear influence defined by the Brave Heart Society is indeed present throughout tribal systems.

In an effort to preserve very old oral knowledge and history present within the *Ihanktonwan* community, Brave Heart sponsors an annual Water Lily Story Telling Institute in late winter, or early spring. Because not many winter events are available, this offers a cozy forum for members in Brave Heart Society to convene. The name of this event derives from Ella Deloria's novel *Water Lily* (1985) and serves to honor Deloria for her contributions to the preservation movement. The institute takes place over four-days at which time, elders and community members publically relay oral stories as children relaxingly sprawl out atop multiple buffalo robes. Feasts are provided and stories are taped to ensure preservation.

Other work centered on language revival efforts at a weekly *Wah'opi* (Language Nest) that annually attended a Lakota language summit in eastern South Dakota. However, *Wah'opi* lasted for five-years due to conflicting time schedules. Additionally the Brave Heart Women's society offered a weekly event called *Nagi Ksapa* (Spirit Smart) which centered on providing space to learn how to make powwow regalia. The importance of facilitating *Nagi Ksapa* is better illuminated within a story shared by one founding Brave elders:

We heard many stories about little boys or girls watching the powwow who do not have outfits. One powerful story came from this girl. She said she'd always go to the powwow and she'd just dance barefoot because she wanted to dance so much. This grandma saw her doing that and it must have touched her heart. The following year she brought her some moccasins and gave them to her. She said she just cried. Even when she was telling me that, she was crying. From that time on, she decided she was going to learn everything she could about making outfits. She helped us as we started teaching the girls

in the winter time. When you're idle, you should be occupying yourself. We would teach these sessions about the meaning of designs. People don't know the meaning of designs anymore in the dance arena. They're different from tribe to tribe, so we can't control the evolution. It's going to evolve regardless, but at least we can start with basic knowledge and that's what we did. And the women teachers came.

Actually some microenterprises came out of this. I can think of three girls that now make outfits for the community and sell them. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Positive consequences resulting from *Nagi Ksapa* and *Wah'opi* continue to be visible within the community nonetheless. These microenterprises not only provide a source of income for member economically struggling, but also provide local access to a needed cultural resource for *Ihanktonwan* people. This has undoubtedly influenced a sense of empowerment for these particular Brave Heart members.

These events also proved powerful for Brave Heart oral sources. In relation to the language, one 18 year-old member expressed:

I really enjoy speaking the language. It makes me feel centered. More activities, gatherings are needed. I noticed a lot of them have faded off. But definitely a lot more of the language needs to be in there so it can be kept alive.

It's [the language efforts] more about the youth. To let people know the language is still strong. That the youth is still speaking it. It's not just for females, it's for young men too. We go up there and that's one part of the culture that is important, our language is needed in order to really communicate with each other. [Brave Heart youth (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

As stressed above, language is integral to gaining an intimate understanding of the culture. The philosophy of culture is absorbed by Brave Heart members' spirits during an array of multifaceted cultural experiences, but the language is needed to truly verbally process such cultural conceptualizations grounding Dakota/Nakota/Lakota cultural philosophies. To reinforce teachings, it behooves one to talk about their experiences and further, ask questions. Having a

grasp on the language better equips members with nuanced understandings to target specific inquiries regarding varying dynamics of cultural practices. Answering questions can be frustrating, as simple and powerful cultural concepts are often lost in lengthy, tangled translations. English and Dakota/Lakota are not very congruent, as English terminology cannot structure Dakota spiritual terminology.

Language work is paramount to fully breaking away from the culture of silence. This perspective serves to provide an example of what language prohibition has done to cultural lifeways. Assimilation produced a particularly disturbing internalization of shame which discouraged older generations from teaching the language. This shame has manifested generationally into a shame associated with not knowing the language and subsequently has created a fear of the language, as internalized oppressive behaviors emerge as people attempt to learn the language. A fear associated with language thus results in language suicide. Certain aspects of Brave Heart cannot be sustained due to time schedule conflicts and lacking resources. But there is a visibly expressed need to revive both events.

### **Brave Heart Activism**

The most recent event the Brave Heart Society participated in and partially sponsored occurred in January of 2013, which gained quite a bit of public notice. The Brave Heart Society was one of the main organizers of an international treaty signing called Protect the Sacred. This treaty reestablished the 1863 Peace Treaty between the Pawnee, the Ponca, and the *Ihanktonwan*. Exercising their governmental status, tribes pledged to stand as one nation in solidarity against

any environmentally destructive developments of environmental racism. An additional seven tribal groups from Canada and the US signed the treaty soon after. Because the proposed pipeline's route spans across the Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River reservations, tribes have passed strict referendums concerning corporate consultations and prohibits any signatures of agreement from any tribal member or department. The *Ihanktonwan* passed a referendum establishing further tribal solidarity with the Oglala as well. Not only does the route go through the Oglala territory, it crosses the *Mni Wiconi* Water Line which is a blatant show of environmental racism. The route also spans across the 1851 and 1868 Fort Laramie treaty territory offering a point of federal power tribes are attempting to capitalize on. To additionally lend to this movement, Brave Heart members are currently organizing a conference surrounding the proposed construction of a Keystone XL man-camp which will house 600 construction workers. The target location of the man-camp neighbors two reservation communities. Brave Heart Society and other Oceti victim advocacy programs are partnering to gather support in an effort to protest the camp. Importing an influx of men into reservation communities will undoubtedly generate a rise in sexual assaults and prostitution which renders an already vulnerable populations more vulnerable. This is highly visible within communities near the oil fields in North Dakota after an influx of male oil-workers relocated and now presently reside in similar camps. Brave Heart members assert this development fosters a neo-colonial occupying force that replicates past colonial forces occupying military forts throughout Indian Country. From this perspective continuity of colonialism is starkly visible: the dominating force of the new Calvary are major corporations and behind the modern-day mask of Manifest Destiny is the face of advanced capitalism.

Brave Heart members who are well versed in both treaty agreements and NHPA section 106 regulation hold especially strong presences throughout environmental justice groups throughout the *Oceti*, which are now cultivating transnational networking relation with other organizations alike. Such networking has provided training for *Oceti Sakowin* members on the above issues and rights of tribal nations per treaty negotiations. Groups are also providing training for tribal members interested in activism and protest, as tribes are prepared to do what is necessary to stop the pipeline's destruction. The Brave Heart members are making strong attempts to instill the empowering importance of activism within younger generations. With the help of social media and networking sites, the modeling of Brave Heart activism has become more visible to a wider public which is a source of pride for younger Brave Heart members. Thus, it is clear that Brave Heart members are a strong presence in not only tribal politics, but also transnational activism.

### **Braving the Future within the Present**

The preceding section exhibits that Brave Heart Society has been developed with an inextricable interconnectedness with Indigenous feminism, Indigenous advocacy, and activism. Brave Heart female voices lend to issues on a transnational scale. The discussion so far provides only a general account of Brave Heart efforts. Still, such descriptions do little justice to the rigorous processes involved in Brave Heart development planning, outreach, and grant-writing. Brave Heart women have worked relentlessly to ensure the survival of the society. The existence of Brave Heart Society requires overcoming the ever impending economic challenges that most

organizations face. However, those predominately responsible for overcoming challenges are the Brave Heart founding elders who are beginning to tire easier with age.

Nonetheless Brave Heart elders are a steady presence who visibly enjoy their roles. Brave Heart functions entail hard work and at times, serious attitudes. Yet humor is integral to every process. At the core of Brave Heart is a family that has a lot of fun. This atmosphere is safe, comfortable, and stimulates genuinely invigorating dialogue. Elder members balance stress by sustaining close bonds with their society sisters. *Kunsi* Circles (Grandma Circles) are reoccurring informal meetings used to organize, exchange information, resolve conflict, and strategize. These circles are also bustling social spaces full with conversations and laughter amid sporadic queries from the preciously bold and beloved Brave Heart grandchildren. These children are gently supplied with the loving answers grandmothers generate with ease. The very cultural dynamics grandmothers strived to make normative are noticeably in motion. The atmosphere appears so seamless it is as if this social process has always existed. And in a way it has, however this atmosphere has become increasingly fragmented. The Brave Heart Society is cohesive collectivity incarnate and Brave Heart relationships are the bonds suturing reconnection. Witnessing the social dynamics of a *Kunsi* Circle is a sight to behold. These children naturally associate normalcy with these gatherings because they were born into these lifeways. They will grow together and hopefully, one day sit in similar circles while remembering their grandmothers.

Concern for society survival emerged very early during Brave Heart development. The founding Brave Heart women have provided a fifty-year plan in an effort to provide current and future leaders with a defined sense of direction. This plan is illuminated by a founding 64 year-old member:

I have no idea how we had the foresight to do this, but when I think about, it's phenomenal. I just don't know how we came up with this. But, that's the spirit moving probably. It's been a few years, but a while back we decided to have a retreat and we were going to do a twenty-five-year and fifty-year plan. And the fifteen-year-mark in the strategic plan is where we would have a business that would be self-sustaining to support Brave Heart needs. We're in the seventh year, we have about eight years. We need to develop a business.

Recently we wrote a grant and we created a strategic plan for a grocery store. Our vision is that the grocery store would support the activities of Brave Heart. But we have to get the funding. I remember one of the 50 year visions was that we would have the language alive and there'd be young people talking together in our language. 50 years. That's one we really have to find funding for in order for that to be ensured. We were, it was because of the fear that there'd be no one talking. Even if we're not hear. So, that's the, that was the outcome. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Efforts are being made to attain funding for the Good Heart Grocery Store, however this development will take a consolidated effort involving multiple members. There is no doubt Brave Heart women are capable of making this economic venture successful. However, the need for a Brave Heart Lodge is currently proving most pressing. The society was recently forced to relinquish the last lodge due to new ownership. For now, one particular elder uses her personal home to host many functions. Because the Brave Heart Society has lost numerous lodges to similar situations, Brave Heart women are determined to purchase a permanent residence to house the society. Aimed to sustain Brave Heart structures, internal society goals outlined in the fifty-year plan include developing a sub-society pool of younger women to train and learn from the *Kunsi* Circle, creating a grant writing team, developing a Brave Heart Leadership Council, facilitating more retreats for different issues, and training members to afford Brave Heart peacemaking from a conflict-resolution framework structured by certain principles in the Dakota language.

The Brave Heart envisioning document reveals a great interest to envelope community youth with culturally structured, age-based resources that will span into adulthood. For example, aiming to curb the specific systematic issues consistently impacting the education of *Ihanktonwan* youth, elders wish to partner with other organizations to create a culturally founded alternative school in *Ihanktonwan* community. Brave Heart elders also wish to establish a total language immersion program centered on Dakota language revival. Further, to support youth graduating high school, Brave Heart women are interested in also developing a “Third Age Center” as a means to teach young adults about their roles surrounding culture, language, history, dance, and songs. Elders also envision establishing a restorative justice center and additionally partnering with other organizations to develop a culturally relevant Co-Occurring Disorders Wellness Center. Other envisions include organizing more culturally framed adult trainings surrounding leadership development, vocational education, nutrition and health, cultural preservation, and child care and parenting.

Younger Brave Hearts certainly do have their work cut out for them. Reassuringly the desire to sustain the society is strongly voiced by oral sources responsible for parenting these young Brave Heart children. Brave Heart efforts will depend upon this particular generation. However, when asked what they want to see in the future for Brave Heart, the entirety of oral sources similarly replied: survival. The society is clearly treasured. Elder members express especially defined emotions of fear, as a few members were brought to tears while discussing their anxieties. One founding 70 year-old member articulates her sense of unease by saying:

Well the current challenge is that the original group is getting old. I know that we have some nice, strong young women coming up that are capable and everything. But it's scary. It's not that we don't trust, it's just scary to know we're getting old. We're not able to do as much. [Brave Heart elder (*Ihanktonwan*), 2013]

This is further discussed by younger members who are concerned both for the survival of Brave Heart and for the health of elder members, as development and organization is a stressful dynamic of *okodaciye* life. Livelihoods lacking in spare resources face difficult barriers related to time and economic constraints which can prohibit assisting in organization efforts. However, this lifeway must be upheld for long-term changes to occur. As one Brave Heart male states:

I think that is something thing I have fear about. There are integral players in the society that at this point in time, there's nobody stepping forward to replace them. If the doers are not doing what they're doing right now, the society would have a hard time continuing on. It's because the people doing the work, they're totally selfless. We live in a society where selflessness is not a resource that is abundant. I mean nobody wants to do a job with no reward, especially monetary wise. I think there's a lot of fear because, my mom, if she stops Brave Heart might fail. That scares me because at some point, I'd like her to sit back and watch instead of working herself to death. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

This subject drew forth a lot of emotional responses demonstrating the perceived importance of Brave Heart relations, as distress appears to stem from whether or not leadership roles will be taken on. Recalling early developmental approaches to revival, Brave Heart elders asked many *Oceti* elders how leadership was historically taught. Consecutively assertions claim younger *Oceti* women learned by watching older *Oceti* women. This has grown to be a fundamental concept structuring the Brave Heart collective.

**Funding: “We are Not a Program, We are an Okodakiciye”**

Unfortunately a modern-day *okodaciye* like Brave Heart is critically reliant on economic resources for the structures to survive and further, thrive. Brave Heart elders have become highly efficient at locating funding, though only one of the two assuming the role of grant-writing continues to do so. Matters associated with economic resources and development directly correlate with encouraging new membership. One 52 year-old member who believes the society needs more members to grow stronger, explains that growth requires people to consider the Brave Heart Society significant enough to care:

I think what's important is that caring connection, that -- I'm not going to help you here then drop you over there, I'm going to be there no matter what. I think about my sisters that way, "That's how I think about you. Whether you're in our home 24 hours a day or not, that's how it is. So when you need something, or you're hurting, or just need to talk," I say, "that's what I'm there for.

Like said, I don't know. I know you have to survive with money. I do know that. But I also know the Creator is more powerful than money. It's not like it was back then. Back then, our people were satisfied with whatever. Here, now. Well, it's sad to hear that, or see that. Either nobody has cars, nobody has gas, you almost have to provide everything to get them there. Instead of them actually really wanting to, in their heart to just do it because it's in their heart. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

It is clear that people must begin conceptualizing beyond an individualized level to influence and further social change. This concept of collective thinking began holding less of a presence after the implementation of many federal policies such as the 1887 Dawes Act. By individualizing family systems and family members, communal lifeways and extended kinship networks suffered fragmentation. However poverty is one barrier affecting community participation in Brave Heart meetings. Though immediate needs clearly take precedence over meetings, it is similarly possible lacking participation correlates with an aversion to use already sparse resources to attend events that are perceived to lack significance. Incidentally levels of

perceived importance and limited funding pose a paradox, as a Brave Heart grant-writer explains:

It's a catch-22 though, they can't care unless they see what caring looks like. So somehow the resources need to come while we do this other stuff over here. The other work, or we can't help them care. You have to reteach it. If you provide everything for them, then it can happen. [Brave Heart adult (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

To attain a grasp on matters related with events reveals that an array of cultural functions not directly related to trauma are accessible and beneficial; especially for youth. Recognizing the importance of Brave Heart functions requires exposure. While organizing more events annually would offer community members access to more opportunities for participation, this is not feasible if funding is scarce.

Moreover this elder explains the need for redefining an organizational paradigm based on *okodakiciye* responsibilities that must start at a structural level. Tribal communities routinely tend to seek resources that are program-based. Deeper concepts of decolonization lend momentum to the process through action, as the same member states:

The challenge women societies have now is that anything you do in Indian Country, you have to have a Western cup and a cultural cup. The Western cup is programs, projects, and money. The cultural cup is the society approach. People get confused when they call us a program! I always correct them and say, "We're not a project. We're not a program. We're a society."

Having had to establish that, we've made a pledge not to take federal money. A lot of the society movements get lost in that process and start down the road of becoming a program. People's mentality in all of Indian Country relate to programs. They think everything has to be a program. Then they begin expecting or demanding services like a program. So that is what we had to overcome -- we don't have staff members. We can't give you gas money. We can go get you during the initiative we're currently doing or the circle we may be having. But we aren't going to hand out funds. So we're dealing with that program mentality and we have to switch that. I think we've done that now. We tell people they must provide support and help out with food. And they're not going to get paid. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Tribal programs are often federally funded and subject to federal standards that are not tailored to address the very fundamental issues problematic impacting tribal development. This results in a lack of progress, as federal systems keep colonized mentalities intact. Federal dependency is something Brave Heart members are stringently opposed to exactly because the paradigm shaping the *okodakiciye* is decolonized, thus indigenized. Federal approaches have a long history of stunting tribal development growth. Believing these systems have the best interest in mind for tribal groups further indicates a colonized mentality. This stance taken by Brave Heart members illustrates how attaining an intricate understanding of the structural framework of systematic disparities of power reinforces, justifies, and further fuels a mistrust for federal systems. Subsequently, the nuanced webs of a systematic formula structuring Indigenous lives are easier recognized. Unfortunately principality requires Brave Heart women to overcome very difficult challenges. Set standards of Westernized systems and mentalities are hard to side-step when the very configuration of the US is upheld by internalized colonialism.

Members aim to transfer concepts related to decolonization into practice, which is no easy task. Discourse related to elements of decolonization vary throughout Indian Country, however Brave Heart women conceptualize this process from the very distinct angle of a place-based collectivity molded by strong female leadership. The resonance generated by this conceptual angle could arguably develop fluidly across the *Oceti* with the development of strong relationships between existing *Oceti* women's societies. This may also reinforce cultural continuity and revival with the exchange of information. Deepening exposure to a wider network additionally may afford access to extended systems of support for both members and leaders. When asked what future approaches are in development, a 33 year-old member of two separate women's societies expresses her desire for closer relations between *Oceti* women's societies.

Elders confirm such relationships are needed and the building of a few are advancing into fruition.

Centered on similar approaches as the Brave Heart Society, the Stone Boy Women's Society is from Oglala territory in Pine Ridge, South Dakota recently contributed to the Brave Heart *Isnati* ceremony during July of 2013. Another *winyan okodakiciye* relationship is developing also with the White Buffalo Calf Women's Society from Rosebud, South Dakota. Incidentally this society was the organization which established the first reservation-based domestic violence shelter in 1977 functions within *Sicangu* territory. Additionally one founding Brave Heart elder was also a founding member of White Buffalo Calf Women's Society. Women from this organization contributed to *Isnati* in 2012, occasionally attend Brave Heart gatherings, and maintain regular contact with Brave Heart women. In scope of fostering stronger relationships, the 33 year-old Brave Heart member emphasizes that a retreat for the *Oceti* women's societies is needed:

Maybe we need a retreat for the women societies. I've talked about having a retreat for the healers. I mention that because I was a police officer. All of us women working really hard, we were seeing a lot. Why can't we have a retreat or something for us who do the work? That needs to happen. Maybe a retreat or a camp for the societies to reconnect and build relationships. It's about networking. [Brave Heart adult (Oglala), 2013]

This member provides a compelling line of reasoning. Other sources made little mention of similar ideas, however this particular member plays an enormous role in organizing Brave Heart functions. If the notion of a society retreat has not already been relayed to the elders, it likely will be at some point. Further, this may be possibility given that a major Brave Heart goal outlined in the fifty-year-vision centers on developing additional retreats similar to *Nagi Kcopi* to address additional subjects.

The Stone Boy women who contributed to the 2013 *Isnati* motivated Brave Heart women to reestablish another ceremonial milestone integral to girlhood. Stone Boy women held a *Tapa Wanka Yap* (Throwing of the Ball) for a past *Isnati* girl during the third day of *Isnati*. This acted to supply more of an intact spiritual existence for the young Brave Heart, as *Tapa Wanka Yap* is one of the two important ceremonies held for young girls. Recalling above, *Tapa Wanka Yap* is one of the seven rites given to the Oceti Sakowin by *Pte San Win*. The rites form the basis of a spiritual foundation. Hence, this practice is highly important. *Tapa Wanka Yap* is sometimes inaccurately declared to no longer exist. The present-day ceremonies may not be performed often which perhaps explains a perceived nonexistence, however oral sources confirm this rite remains spiritually intact.

Though Brave Heart women have implemented *Tapa Wanka Yap* ceremonies into past *Isnati* ceremonies it was done only on a few occasions. Establishing a space for *Tapa Wanka Yap* during future *Isnati* ceremonies will afford two important ceremonies integral to the *Oceti* female lifecycle. *Tapa Wanka Yap* signifies a gift only young girls can offer. This practice directs very special blessings towards all directions of the Oceti, in turn a substantial value is placed on the distinct virtues of girlhood. *Isnati* marks a transition from girlhood into womanhood, yet the majority of *Isnati* girls have not experienced *Tapa Wanka Yap*. This ceremony places a special value on the role of a young girl. In using an innate sacredness to selflessly give to their collective instills a higher sense of meaning and worth for *Oceti* girls. The message is clear. One must be a good relative. Furthermore, because the young girl is a blessing, she can afford blessings in turn. This is a tremendous honor that *Isnati* girls should experience before exiting *Oceti* girlhood because it shows them how inherently sacred and loved their spirits are. As such, Brave Heart members are dedicated to provide an added spiritual nutrition for young girls in

making *Tapa Wanka Yap* an established practice during future *Isnati* ceremonies. Additionally, Brave Heart elders assert the intention to develop an annual event framed by an Oceti ceremony called Biting the Knife. This practice will act to fill another milestone for Brave Heart women requiring a public show of commitment for continuing the *okodakiciye* lifeway revived through the Brave Heart Society. Biting the Knife is an old ceremony used by the Oceti bands to assert ones honesty and honor. The ceremony instills a renegotiated role through officially honoring the past and future efforts of younger Brave Heart women. Thus, two practice will be preserved.

The 33 year-old Stone Boy/Brave Heart woman expresses to need to implement more ceremonies into the Brave Heart Society, but she especially stresses the need to teach details of each ceremony to youth in a comprehensive manner so as to continue the process of oral knowledge systems. As noted below, this member explains a few ceremonies Stone Boy women:

One of the things the Stone Boy Women's Society were involved in was the birthing ceremonies with the welcoming the womb and spirit. I did that myself with my own. I've helped a lot of women go through that. And to me, when I went through it, it just gave me a whole new perspective and respect for what is inside of me. And how that came to be. You know, that gave me, it made my bond stronger. In the placenta, in knowing that connects our baby's spirits. The transfer of character, I'm going to go down the list of everything I've participated or helped in. The naming, the *hunka* [the adoption rite] the *Isnati*, and a couple throwing of the balls. Girls completing *Isnati* should also be worked with for the next several years on their roles and the different *wasnas* [ceremonial foods] needed for ceremony. [Brave Heart adult (Oglala), 2013]

Information was not afforded within interview data to extend on further explanations of the birthing, womb, and transfer of character ceremonies mentioned above. Brave Heart elders emphasize a strong interest in developing such ceremonies for women, however strengthening a relationship with Stone Boy women would aid in the organizing efforts. Thus, it would behoove Brave Heart members to implement a retreat into the Brave Heart structure to stimulate the

process of solidifying a network of women's societies, which may in turn provide a source of support for future revivals embarked on by other *Oceti* groups.

Funding will define the feasibility of a society retreat. Funding will also define the survival of the Brave Heart Society. Quite simply, to sustain Brave Heart's livelihood younger Brave Heart members must acquire grant-writing skills. Individual healing is often an ongoing, long-term process. Trauma can residually impact confidence while fear impedes a willingness to use newly attained skills, as noted in the following statement. And while Brave Heart elders are very driven to see Brave Heart members grow and succeed, they also experience times of discouragement, exhaustion, and frustration. All of which continuously emerge with ever-present and changing multidimensional challenges that can easily hinder further development of the society. The perceived reasoning behind many failed attempts to train members in grant-writing is explained by a founding elder in the following:

They get scared, like she said. I've tried it over the years. Then they'll be afraid that people will look down on them if they fail. People always say, "Brave Heart needs to have more events. Brave Heart could be so huge if more people got involved." But they don't realize how much money that takes. [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Because the grant-writing role have been occupied by the same Brave Heart elder since the beginning of revival efforts, funding needs suddenly become imperative, but the actual process involved is largely unknown or unrealized. This is a challenge Brave Heart members direly need to overcome if the Brave Heart Society is going to survive, which will require both younger and older members to willingly absorb the responsibility of grant-writing. If more members are able to actively mobilize this skill the Brave Heart Society will be much more likely to attain sufficient funding to afford more development and growth. Further, if this roles is

shared by multiple members, not only will more members be able to conceptualize the hard work involved with this role, but also the chances of burn-out will become less likely.

Though the approaches taken by Brave Heart Society has proved considerably effective, this work can be tediously taxing. Oral sources express an overall positive outlook concerning Brave Heart, but it must be stated that the society is not perfect. The planning and development phases of new events are strenuous and rarely experienced by much young members, as the grandmother and mother doers are apt to naturally take care of what needs to be done quickly and effectively. However, members can be scarce during these phases when their presence is much needed. This may be due to certain aspects intrinsic to mothers and grandmothers of a modern-day *okodakiciye* structure, as doers are insured things will get done if they do it themselves. Undeniably, this makes perfect sense if younger members are lacking in numbers during organizational phases of an event.

Despite challenges, these Brave Heart female forces are seasoned doers, mothers, and grandmothers. Which is why relinquishing drive and control may cause anxiety, as the possibility of failure does exist. Brave Heart elders must allow their efforts to come into fruition, however the question is when? The process of reviving an *okodakiciye* lifeway afforded the grooming of younger adult members to conceptualize the transitional roles that alter with age. Ultimately oral sources associate the concept of being a Brave Heart woman with the quality of being a doer. The concept of being a doer is associated with being a woman because women simply do what needs to get done. Brave Heart members are doing what is needed for their people to survive.

I think with women alone, we just do it. And that's one of things I learned. Nobody just talks about it. We do it. That in itself shows who we are. [Brave Heart adult (Oglala), 2013]

This illuminates that such adapted Brave Heart strategies are forms of cultural transformation revealing continuity of the need-based cultures structuring *Oceti* band systems. Not only are these women doers, but effective doers because they have developed an ability to recognize exactly what needs to be done. Being a doer requires self-drive, motivation, and confidence. A traumatized population entrenched in poverty can generate jealousy and this requires a thick skin. To be a proactive Brave Heart leader is a selfless role. No matter how selfless intentions are, because of poverty and trauma there will always be suspicions that such intentions are motivated by desires for self-gain. Thus, a collective style of conceptualization must be adopted by future leaders to better recognize the issues, conditions, and needs of a collective. In turn, the seeking of creative culturally tailored approaches to meet such needs becomes a natural process. Put simply, leaders must internalize the importance of the Brave Heart Society so deeply that individualized concepts of self are seamlessly woven with collective concepts of self. Leaders must see that for Indigenous people to survive, spirituality and culture must survive because spirituality is indeed inextricable from the process of living.

The end result of this work is expressed to be aimed at a state of collective wellness. In the following, one founding Brave Heart elder shares an interaction that revealed to her what the process of Brave Heart replicates:

When behavior started to change, we started seeing a transformation begin to happen. And what we realized was that, we were creating an inner-circle to prop them up in. When they'd go out to community they'd get knocked down and they'd come back and we'd help them again. And when I explained this to a gather in Canada, they said, "Do you know what you have done? You have created a community development model of wellness." [Brave Heart elder (Ihanktonwan), 2013]

Most development of Brave Heart Society evolved organically through a need-based lens focused entirely on survival through collective resurrection. Incidentally the intimate perceptions held by Brave Heart women supplied insight to naturally target accurate issues with approaches structured not by standardized models, but by lived experiences of reality and cultural knowledge of ceremonial practices defining spiritual need. In doing so, interestingly the culture and experience of Brave Heart members unintentionally developed an organic system that resembles Brave Heart and DeBruyn's clinical strategies to resolve historic trauma (1998:71).

Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998:71) assert the model rests on the importance of extended kinship networks to support identity formation, a sense of belonging, resonance of a shared history and group survival. In placing importance on defining treatment within the context a population oriented around the same themes of generational trauma assists in lifting the taboo against verbalizing painful emotions. This model, centered on facilitating the resolution of historical unresolved grief, entails a hybrid approach intersecting Western clinical intervention and Indigenous cultural intervention which stimulates the process of grieving historical trauma. Stimulating the process of grief is done within a group over a four day period with facilitators trained in historical trauma work. To encourage expressing emotional pain group, processing techniques are mobilized through various cathartic exercises. The entire process involves group processing and exercises, daily prayer, *Inipi Gaga* (Sweat Lodge Ceremony), and concludes with a grief resolution ceremony called *Wasigdaki Istamniyanpi Wicakcepakintapi* (Wiping the Tears of the Mourners). The ceremonial participants successively become part of an extended family that supplies a connection to system of support that affords future contact. This process is then followed by family and individual therapy or further spiritual development. Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998:71) argue an indirect consequence of this process fosters a re-attachment to

cultural values for participants, which in and of itself, is a form of healing. Especially for individuals who have discontinued cultural practice or over lack in cultural experience.

Historical trauma must be address also on a community level. Brave Heart and DeBruyn argue that tribes must establish communal grief rituals structured by “traditional practices”. Further, as a means to curb cycles of historical trauma, Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998:71) argue a need to develop tribal programs centered on heightening historical awareness that incorporate the assistance of elders to teach storytelling skills to youth through oral lessons on tribal history.

If it is not already obvious, this study demonstrates the approach taken by the Brave Heart Society are a refined version of the above framework. However, how such a loose framework was happened upon is quite simple: the approaches are structured by *Oceti* cultural conceptualizations of spirituality which are very, very old. Therefore, implanting cultural collective conceptualizations into a model centered on addressing the needs of the respective collective affords an approach distinct in nature that fosters cultural and historical resonance. Thus, this model is actually based of an autochthonous ceremonial system that historically met the intrinsic needs of the *Oceti Sakowin*. One sentiment consistently expressed by oral sources asserts that our spirituality affords ceremonies to address everything one may likely face through the duration of a lifecycle. And this concept is directly rooted within *Oceti Sakowin* band systems structured by a need-based culture. By this point, it should be clear that the *Oceti Sakowin* were subject death, war, and at times, a very difficult existence. Trauma is no new phenomenon within band structures and it would be presumptuous to assume such strictly structured need-based cultures had no spiritual method to address trauma. As demonstrated by

oral sources, methods certainly existed to address issues such as grief and mourning, losing a child, losing one's spirit, and the return of warriors that have taken lives.

Ceremony and spirituality meet the needs of the *Oceti Sakonwin* and many people need healing. Because intrinsic healing qualities of ceremony and spirituality exist, the approach is provided through the culture. Additionally, four is a sacred number which defines the duration of paramount *Oceti* ceremonies such as *Wiwiyang Wacipi* and *Hmbdeca*, both of which last four days. This event seamlessly honors a symbolic timeframe of cultural significance concept, which in turn supplies a time to dedicate to very serious issues.

Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) argue Indigenous people need tribal resources for historical trauma resolution from paradigm founded on tribal programs, however these programs are quite frankly the antithesis of *Oceti* spiritual systems that better ensure healing. Implementing clinical approaches into this healing processes is feasible. However implementing this process into a tribal system is not. And even less realistic, implementing multiple aspects of this process into a tribal system within multiple tribal programs. Tribal programs fostering such a system would either lack effectiveness or fail. Tribal system are often rife with conflicts exactly because of trauma. Further, developing tribal programs that would likely be federally funded to foster healing from federally caused historical trauma is nonsensical. This programmatic formula produces the very atmosphere that oral sources express having an aversion to, as mentioned above. Effectively approaching healing requires stepping away from federally dominated systematic ruts.

What Brave Heart women have built replicates this particular model because it is framed within a shared culture, history, location, and population. Brave Heart Society is completely separate from tribal systems and programs, however. Furthermore, an array of cultural resources

are accessible through one singular source, which curbs fragmentation. While contemporary trauma is rooted in historical trauma, Brave Heart women delve deeper into issues beyond that of historical trauma by critically examining nuanced behaviors and systems. Additionally, decolonization is used to reframe autochthonous *Oceti* culture and practices, spirituality, philosophies, and teachings to address social problems and current conditions. The adaptive transformations to cultural approaches are recontextualized versions of very old systems. All of which have developed a foundational basis of not only decolonization, but re-indigenization.

Within nearly a twenty-year timespan, Brave Heart has grown into a forces beyond the boundaries of a tribal programmatic comfort zone. The territory of development pursued by Brave Heart women may seem novel at first glance, as novelty certainly does exist, but only in a temporal scope of context shaping development. Specific cultural adaptations are fundamentally distinct within the Brave Heart strategy. In discussing methods, one elder casually says, “they’re just cultural strategies of care”, going on further to use the phrase: *Cante Ohitika Wa’apiya* (a Brave Heart way to bring balance, or sets things right). It is the very concept of cultural strategies of caring which clearly define why Brave Heart women center on bringing their people back from a spiritual death, in doing so Brave Heart women are bringing a collective back from a spiritual death. An effective community model for spiritual wellness is the future goal Brave Heart women are seeking to develop by actively basing approaches.

## VI. Concluding Remarks

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*Every society needs educated people, but the primary responsibility of educated people is to bring wisdom back into the community and make it available to others so that the lives they are leading make sense.*

*--Vine Deloria, Jr., Red Earth White Lies, 1997*

### Developmental Procedures

The majority of this study took place in the *Ihanktonwan* homelands. This study served to reiterate why living in this territory is at times, very trying. Within the duration of examining the difficulties framing the present study, such difficulties were also in continuous motion. At the

time of this study's processes of fieldwork and documentation, several instances of public displays of systematic racism took place, one suicide, five reported sexual-assaults (per information provided by White Buffalo Calf Women's Society), two annual ceremonies, one newly implemented ceremony, and two Brave Heart *Kunsi* Circles. This indicates that the circumstances framing the interviews were continuously shaped by exterior community happenings normal within the context of Brave Heart lives. Despite such arising occurrences, interviews were recorded in a quiet space at the residence of an elder Brave Heart. This location is used often for Brave Heart meetings lending a relaxed and familiar atmosphere for Brave Heart interviews.

Assisting consultants in this report were two *Ihanktonwan* founding elders of Brave Heart; one of whom is 64 years-old, the other 70 years-old. A total of twelve interviews were conducted between May and June of 2013 and oral sources between the ages of 18 and 82 were interviewed; ten women and two men. Of the twelve sources, ten identify as *Ihanktonwan*, while two female sources affiliate with the *Hunkpapa* Dakota and *Oglala* Lakota. Questions structuring the interviews focused primarily on personal accounts driving membership in the Brave Heart Society, what it means to be a Brave Heart from personal perspectives, and perceptions regarding the impacts Brave Heart has had on wider tribal and political structures.

Arising consistently throughout interviews was a topic concerning the approaches taken by Brave Heart to foster healing in contrast to other local resources in the community. Personal accounts of sources' struggles with trauma and healing naturally arose with a particular question regarding their participation with Brave Heart, however this was not a focal point within the interview guide. Given the population has been subject to a great deal of generational trauma, this was to be expected. Further the problematic dynamics present in clinical systems of support

within tribal programmatic structures and topics connected to decolonization were also consistent subjects of discussion. All of the above lent greater depth to the data examined in the present study.

## **Revitalization**

The contemporary Brave Heart Society is a revived and recontextualized adaption of the historical Brave Heart Society. Initially the contemporary Brave Heart was designed to meet the needs of a traumatized population in 1994. Because the society has proven to fluidly possess degrees of cultural plasticity, twenty-years of adaptive growth has afforded the evolution of a revitalized organization that now centers on additional issues involving health, food sovereignty, decolonization, re-indigenization, cultural preservation and revival, environmental justice, and social change. These efforts began with a core group of *Ihanktonwan* elders. Growing in age and development, younger Brave Heart women are now being groomed for Brave Heart leadership. Thus, the Brave Heart organizational points of focus are sharpening per the development and youthful perspectives that are intimately knowledgeable concerning contemporary social issues impacting the community in present-day.

This study supplies a needed angle within anthropological literature concerning Indigenous survival and resiliency, *Oceti Sakowin* women's societies, and discursive space documenting the strong voices of Dakota/Nakota/Dakota women. Subsequently, contextualized oral sources of knowledge juxtapose historical inaccuracies. Furthermore, this study challenges claims asserting the nonexistence of women's societies in the *Oceti Sakowin* by exposing the

revitalization and continuity of a historic women's society that was founded directly upon the historical knowledge of primary oral sources. The Brave Heart story demonstrates developmental approaches to the revival which mobilized cultural continuity and cultural transformation.

### **Brave Heart Significance**

This study centers on the development, functions, and cultural significance of the Brave Heart Society in correlation with written and oral knowledge, preserved and revived cultural practices, and spiritual approaches to historical trauma. Multilayered cycles of trauma permeate the *Ihanktonwan* community. Present conditions indicate the *Ihanktonwan* have not fully recovered from decades of federally imposed devastation, deprivation, and dispossession. The systematic attempts to erase an *Ihanktonwan* subjectivity continue to impact the lived realities of collective experience and memory. The continuation of intersecting cycles of generational trauma structure social conditions present with the contemporary *Ihanktonwan* community. This study examines how the Brave Heart Society meets a collective need to heal by employing culturally tailored approaches. In providing a system of support, Brave Heart members supply a perennial resonance defined by distinctly similar cultures, histories, and traumas. While healing is provided through specific spiritual approaches, it is the spiritual reclaiming of culture which defines a collective space that affords constructing and representing notions of a collective sense-of-self. The Brave Heart Society is a support system that symbolizes a cultural connection that maintains a consistent place-based presence. Thus, Brave Heart members sustaining a connection

to Brave Heart Society sustain a cultural connection that in turn, sustains a collective subjectivity.

It is clear a post-conflict war continues despite its invisibility to an outside world. The importance of a Brave Heart presence is paramount. Educating members on why such issues continue to exist exposes the main enemy of people in struggle: ignorance. Not having a dynamically proper political education generates unawareness. Once people obtain this understanding, they can diagnose what they are living under. Systems will continue fostering systematic wrongs, but ignorance ensures such systems will continue running. The way populations are being governed now treats a large sector of people less than human. In recognizing all human beings have human rights, people begin to fight for the rights of human beings. There are so many steps to be taken towards self-empowerment for people entrenched in struggle, but the first step towards empowerment is learning about the power source that takes self-empowerment away. Thus, the education Brave Heart inherently supplies lends to the power of this organization.

In closing, it is this author's hope that the present study illuminates the significance of developing approaches and organizations on cultural principles outside of the structural norms of federal programs. If this study increases understanding regarding the need for collective-driven and culturally tailored developments of approach to resolve trauma, then it is a success; because with understanding comes awareness and consideration of the power of spirituality. This study is a tool for Indigenous groups to use in efforts to seek resolution for collective and individual trauma through reclaiming cultural lifeways.

Brave Heart women are the living, breathing testaments of the power housed within both Brave Heart approaches and *Oceti Sakowin* spirituality. These women are an inspiration to many

who are residing within the confines of struggle. No words can do justice by the lengths Brave Heart women have gone just to provide a basic foundation for future Brave Heart girls to build upon. Healing is a difficult process involving total exposure of one's stored hurts that would otherwise supply a lifetime of micro- explosive acts of Red Rage. Healing requires becoming familiar with the ugliness until the ugliness is no longer ugly, because healing is the process of cultivating a deeper understanding. Decolonization involves resolving the pain and resentment resulting from a history of indoctrination and cultural loss. Recognizing the nature of colonization and the degrees in which one is colonized leads to a need for resolution. Thus, decolonizing through a process of healing and vice-versa can subsequently result in a process of adaptive indigenization.

Our ancestors of Brave Heart women created structures that our spirits understand because within our spirits, these Brave Heart women continue to reside. By healing, Brave Heart women promise their spirits that they will live a good life and thus, promising the original women of Brave Heart. This is a story about a group of women with brave hearts who chose to live a good life. Our mothers, our grandmothers, our great-grandmothers have shown us how to heal by striving to heal themselves. We were not expected to survive, we were never supposed to thrive. But we are here. We are healing. We will continue to heal for our children. These are truly revolutionary acts of resilience made possible by the efforts of the founding Brave Heart elders. *Pidamaye, Cante Ohitika Okodakiciye. Hecetu ksto.*

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