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CULTURAL MOVEMENT(S) AND COUNTERNARRATIVES: THE RHETORICS OF
NATIVE WOMXN RUNNERS

by

KIM MARTINEZ
B.A. Florida International University, 1997

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

This analysis demonstrates the complex ways that Native womxn runners mobilize the rhetoric they create around and through their running activity to challenge settler colonial, heteropatriarchal ideologies in favor of Indigenous lifeways; build upon cultural practices that include running and a wider spectrum of gender roles to enact more inclusive, modern Native identities; and lead intersectional advocacy efforts that center Native communities. Utilizing a Cultural Rhetorics, Indigenous Feminist, and Decolonial framework that recognizes Native womxn as experts in their own lived experiences, I have gathered Native womxn runners' counternarratives from virtual spaces/social media to learn from their cultural, rhetorical (oral, written, digital, visual, embodied, and kinesthetic) practices via a process I call story gathering. Because I am non-Native, I sought to center Indigenous womxn's voices by consulting Native womxn runners' Instagram accounts or organizational websites; print and web-based articles that either quote or were written by these runners; and podcasts, televised interviews, or recorded workshops/panels for which they served as guests. As these sources highlight, Native womxn runners create their own coalitional counterpublics that continually enact cultural knowledge in context via discursive strategies that recognize Indigenous culture as diverse, inclusive, modern, living, vibrant, and embodied. As such, the runners' social media presence and on/offline activism serve as rhetorical, cultural, and political acts. That is, they mobilize multiple modalities and rhetorics in culturally specific ways that have the potential to lead the mainstream (white) running industry toward greater inclusion and effect changes on a larger scale. I argue for a similar shift within Rhetoric and Composition, which still regards work by womxn of color as niche scholarship. To remedy this, the field must acknowledge Native womxn as not just

knowledge keepers, but knowledge *makers* who should be better recognized and valued within our discipline regardless of their relation to the academy.

For the Heart Workers

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Importantly, I would also like to acknowledge that the Indigenous lands upon which I live, study, write, and work are the ancestral lands of the [Seminole Tribe of Florida](#) and the [Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida](#). I hope that anyone reading this, particularly those with ties to Florida, will use the provided links to learn more about and build relationships with these tribal nations whose peoples have lived on and with this land since long before colonial conquest.

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CHAPTER ONE: STARTING POINTS AND STORY GATHERING

Rooted in legal studies, Kimberlé Crenshaw's theorizing of intersectional experience as being more than the sum of its parts (i.e., more than sexism plus racism) in regards to Black women's oppression helped address single-axis discrimination law that isolated aspects of identity (i.e., sex *or* race) and only served a privileged subset of individuals (140). As Crenshaw explains, if Black women are limited to claiming either sexual or racial discrimination, it defines their experiences against those of white women (the norm in cases of sexism) or Black men (the norm in racial discrimination complaints) thereby disallowing the uniqueness of their experiences as *Black women* (143). Such standards of comparison put Black women in a position of having to choose whether to support racial equality at the expense of gender or gender equality at the expense of race. Thus, as Patricia Hill Collins observes, "Bringing a racial frame into feminism challenged the false universal of whiteness as a normalizing standard that was used to explain the experiences of all women" (104). That is, it helped frame historical omissions within feminism that centered white women's experiences and forced feminists to consider their own culpability in marginalizing women of color. What this "racial frame" did not do, however, is offer a permanent or universal fix. For example, per Lindsey Yoo, the binary traditions of American society often reduce the divide to a rift between Black and white feminism, ignoring those who fall outside of or between these neat oppositional categories. Such limited, binary thinking obscures the fact that Native North American womxn¹ have had to face similar choices at the intersection of race and gender – a fact I seek to address in this analysis by centering Indigenous womxn's voices and activism via the rhetoric they create around and through their running activity.²

Positionality and Theoretical Framing

To do so, I must remain aware of my positionality as a Cuban American cisgender woman, which has been shaped by each of the following lived experiences. I am a U.S. born child of immigrants and, thus, am categorized as racially white but ethnically brown (i.e., Latinx). In result, I am a settler on Indigenous land who is, however unintentionally, complicit in oppressive colonial systems. I learned English first as a child due to my parents' own struggles as second language learners of English and the discrimination they faced because of this. I have been able to pursue higher education, but have also been one of few womxn of color in my graduate program in a field (i.e., Rhetoric and Composition) that still struggles with its own privileging of white, heteronormative, cisgender, male scholarship and Standard Language Ideology within an academic system that does the same. While these experiences sometimes overlap with those of the Native womxn runners whose rhetorics I analyze here, they are not the same. Furthermore, their rhetorics are informed by each runner's experiences and diverse cultural lifeways offering insights that, though related to one another in various ways, are also not monolithic. Thus, as some of these rhetors often note, they do not speak for all Indigenous womxn, and following their example, I must emphasize that I do not intend to speak for them or claim their knowledge or understanding as my own.

Instead, I approach Native womxn runners' rhetorics via a Cultural Rhetorics framework that recognizes these womxn as the experts in their own lived experiences. As such, I acknowledge the inextricable links between rhetorics and cultures and the situated nature of meaning making (Powell et. al 4). In addition, I employ an Indigenous feminist lens that identifies not just patriarchy but *settler colonial heteropatriarchy* as the impetus for Native (and othered) womxn's oppression. This framing advances a broader spectrum of gender identities

based in various Indigenous cultures and, thereby, supports Native sovereignty via individual and communal self-determination (Pyle). It also acknowledges that, like other feminisms, Indigenous feminism is comprised of ever-evolving conversations (i.e., Indigenous *feminisms*, plural) rather than a singular, static concept, and that their critiques of power structures intersect with non-Indigenous feminisms, disability studies, and queer theories – all of which inform and expand those conversations toward greater inclusion (Nickel). Given this, my approach is also necessarily Decolonial in that I aim to center Native womxn and their communities as not just knowledge keepers, but knowledge *makers* whose complex identities and discursive practices shape their advocacy and should be better incorporated into the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Thus, it aligns with “Decolonial theories, methodologies, and pedagogies [which] are designed to assist scholars, educators, and students in decolonizing Western foundations of dominant thought by investigating and intervening in the histories and rhetorics that sponsor colonial intellectual production and reproduction” (Haas 190-191). To further support this, I quote these womxn wherever possible throughout this project and cite the Indigenous scholars from whom I have learned throughout this process with the aim of amplifying these voices – voices that should be recognized as far more than just a rhetorical niche or subfield.

Such inclusion, however, requires Writing Studies scholars (including myself) to reckon with “the complexity of the kyriarchy (as Rachel Presley has used the term), the simultaneity of workings of power, and the ways that people struggle against some aspects of systems of laws, norms, and practices while benefiting from other aspects” (Dingo and Ratliff 5). Though uncomfortable, this process is necessary if we are to broaden disciplinary notions of what topics can guide rhetorical endeavors; what sorts of scholarship are possible; who can do such work; and what it might look like. In what follows, I argue that, through the multimodal and varied rhetorics

they create at the intersections of sport, media, and advocacy, Native womxn runners' already do this work and that we should follow their leads. Part of doing so requires an understanding of the ways that Indigenous relationality organizes Native communities as it differs significantly from the settler colonial hierarchies upon which European colonizers built non-Native North American societies.

Indigenous Relationality

In stark contrast to the bigenderism and heteronormativity of colonial heteropatriarchy that I will discuss later in this text, Indigenous relationality maintains that Native peoples exist in relationship to one another as well as to the land, elements, and species that comprise their environments. As Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, clarifies, “my nation...is a series of radiating relationships with plant nations, animal nations, insects, bodies of water, air, soil, and spiritual beings in addition to the Indigenous nations with whom we share parts of our territory” (58). According to such a view, all members of the ecosystem, human and non-human alike, have purpose and value. All have something to contribute, and in sharing their individual gifts, each member serves the larger community in their own way preserving what Robin Wall Kimmerer describes as a “gift economy” that ties communities together. Citing Lewis Hydes’ notion that “‘It is the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people,’” Kimmerer clarifies that “The essence of the gift is that it creates a set of relationships. The currency of a gift economy is, at its root, reciprocity” (26, 28). This perspective precludes the colonial notion of private property and land ownership as the land itself is regarded as an independent, self-possessed entity that serves as only one member of a larger community.

According to this relational view, all individuals, including the land, possess unique skills and knowledge that contribute to what Simpson describes as a networked Native intelligence that creates and sustains Indigenous ways of being. That cultural intelligence, or *Ninshnaabewin*, is not only place-based but process driven and adaptable over time. Borrowing from Glen Coulthard, Simpson uses *Ninshnaabewin* interchangeably with the term *grounded normativity* emphasizing that “Grounded normativity isn’t a thing; it is generated structure born and maintained from deep engagement with Indigenous processes that are inherently physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual” (23). Such processes are embedded in Indigenous bodies via the cultural lifeways they enact on a daily basis – lifeways learned from elders, creation stories, spiritual practices, the non-human kin that co-inhabit Native homelands, and the environment (land, elements, etc.) itself. These ways of being and doing are rooted in each individual (human or not) and radiate out to the community as those entities interact with and support one another.

Per Simpson, then, grounded normativity is “a series of complex, interconnected processes that make up a nonlinear, overlapping emergent and responsive network of relationships of deep reciprocity, intimate and global interconnection and interdependence, that spirals across time and space” (24). In other words, it is the ethos by which Indigenous peoples live. As such it is a culturally- and context-specific knowledge base that Native peoples put into practice daily and cannot be static. Instead, it continually enacts connections among members of the ecosystems within which Native peoples live so that as any of those members shift or struggle over time, their relations respond, working together to preserve their various Indigenous practices and lifeways. Those bonds then overlap with, respond to, and interact across other Native and non-Native communities to form broader relationships that impact Indigenous

peoples in various ways. In colonialism's case, that interaction leads to the attack, containment, and destruction of grounded normativity to keep it from "imped[ing] land acquisition, settlement, and resource extraction" (Simpson 25). In other words, settler colonialist ideology necessitates the constraint and transformation of relational, gift economies and the Indigenous ways of being upon which they are based in order to reclassify and commodify Native communities according to its own hierarchical order.

White Habitus

Unlike the relational structure of many Native communities, North American settler colonial societies are raced, classed, and gendered, and the combination of these hierarchies privilege white, middle class, cisgender men who then become the heteropatriarchal standard against which all others (e.g., non-whites, those of lower socioeconomic status, queer individuals, womxn, etc.) are judged. While each of these categories have harmful impacts on Indigenous peoples and other communities of color, perhaps the most difficult to address is race because as Ann Louise Keating observes, "'whiteness' has functioned as a pseudo-universal category that hides its specific values, epistemology, and other attributes under the guise of a nonracialized, supposedly colorless, 'human nature'" (904). In other words, whiteness is hard to define because it masks its ideology as the naturalized, unmarked norm in and through which it operates. However, that norm persists in the form of white privilege/supremacy, which permeates North American societies and ranks all others according to their proximity to whiteness. Asao Inoue refers to these invisible and insidious machinations of race as *white habitus* (147). It is precisely this racial habitus, which intersects with other settler colonial hierarchies involving gender and class, that makes counterpublics and counternarratives so

important for non-white and often multiply marginalized communities like Native womxn both on- and offline.

Networked Feminist Counterpublics

In response to the “significant exclusions” of traditionally subordinated groups based on gender, race/ethnicity, and class from Jürgen Habermas’ conception of the “public sphere” whose foundational power dynamics placed bourgeois, white men at the center as *the* public, critics such as Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner suggest conceiving of multiple “publics” to acknowledge the context-specific nature of groups that constitute publics and their strategic address of various, community-based concerns rather than those of a single, dominant public. When they serve as forums for marginalized voices, Fraser deems these groups, “counterpublics,” describing them as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourse to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (67). Counterpublics, then, provide agency to the marginalized by allowing them to internally negotiate group identity and concerns before engaging with dominant publics. Doing so, allows them time to organize and coordinate efforts in anticipation of the power structures they will encounter and the social hierarchies they will need to navigate in order to self-define their interests. Such functions are vital for all subordinated groups, particularly women, who in being equated with domesticity and “private life” were (and to varying degrees still are) thereby excluded from civic and public/political engagement.

Precisely by making the “private” public, women gained access to public, civic discussion first through charitable organizations concerning abolition and prohibition and later

through alignment with civil rights arguments concerning voting and property rights as being inherent to personhood. Commonly referred to as Second Wave Feminism, feminist initiatives of the 1960's and 70's drew additional strength from a coalitional approach, building on the gains of the Civil Rights Movement by drawing on the 1964 Civil Rights Act in an effort to address discriminatory employment practices and systemic harassment in the workplace, among other concerns (concerns that still exists today). Digital feminism in networked spaces employs a similar approach as online content, on social media sites in particular, makes what was traditionally considered "private" information central to public concern. That information includes multiple elements of one's identity, the people with whom they associate, the subjects they discuss, and the content they share. Such conflation of public and private concerns, though disallowed by Habermas' focus on the "common good" over private interests, actually supports Fraser's contention that only by discussing private concerns can one determine what is of shared interest and overcome power structures that exclude subordinated groups specifically by characterizing their concerns as personal (and, thus, "private") (73).

In short, by using the technological structure of social media – specifically, user profiles, friends lists/followers, comments, and updates – digital feminists form what Danah Boyd deems a "networked public." Such platforms allow for both individual representation of identity while also serving as both the means of and loci for interaction with other users – functions integral to any successful counterpublic. Furthermore, social media's inclusion of friends/followers one may not have ever actually met, access to user-provided information (whether restricted by privacy settings or not), and facilitation of participation meet traditional requirements that publics be "self-organized" by virtue of being addressed, inclusive of audiences not-fully-known, and focused on topics of common interest. Hashtags have become one of the most efficient ways

for networked publics to achieve these functions – particularly, when used as a means of activism – because they provide a way not just to raise awareness but also to build community.

Citing Shaoke Zhang et al, Kitsy Dixon reminds us that “Using social media as a point of advocating verifies role identities where participants in the online community develop trust in others, commitments to the situation, and positive emotions toward those who have verified their identity” (37). There is validation for individuals within these digital collectives, which help organize group ideas and provide a space for disempowered voices to be heard. Additionally, by offering the space for advocates of a cause to perform their identities and voice their concerns, these networked counterpublics demand attention, creating the opportunity to leverage that attention offline via community action, a process Native womxn runners have been adept at navigating.

Despite providing a certain amount of protection, however, counterpublics can never be entirely insular if they hope to reach a wider audience that allows them to bolster support and effect institutional change. As Catherine Palczewski explains “engaged argument with those with whom they disagree is an essential element of a healthy counterpublic” whose benefits include:

- (1) garner[ing] national attention for a group and, thus, enhance[ing] credibility; (2) open[ing] a forum for the repetition and recognition of the group’s message; (3) push[ing] for implementation of the group’s recommendations that require institutional support (the support of a strong public); and (4) enabl[ing] the counterpublic to [as Brouwer states,] “push for access to strong publics”. (275, 276)

Such benefits outweigh the costs of engaging with outsiders and are part of the reason that counterpublics must always consider dominant rhetoric regarding their groups in order to both compare their self-characterizations with dominant narratives and develop strategies for

countering such narratives in favor of a more representational picture. Despite the potential physical, psychological, and emotional risks of engaging with dominant rhetoric, such efforts are necessary if counterpublics are to challenge others' misconceptions and self-identify. Native womxn runners work to do both, addressing racist and (hetero)sexist systems in- and outside of the running industry that continue to reinforce white, cisgender men as *the* public. Functioning as networked feminist counterpublics, they further draw attention to Native womxn's leadership as integral to Native sovereignty as well as feminism writ large.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women/Relatives (MMIW/R)

As several scholars have argued, colonists and the settlers that followed used Native womxn to access resources on tribal lands, creating "the social dynamic...in which Native women were valued not as human beings but rather as commodities to leverage land and power" (Deer 67). Such abuses have continued over time taking several forms from white men forcibly marrying or kidnapping Native womxn and keeping them as slaves who could not refuse their sexual advances to U.S. soldiers trading much needed food and clothing in exchange for sexual favors or urban relocation efforts that provided additional means of sexual exploitation due to unemployment and poverty among Native peoples (Deer 63, 73). All of these examples meet the definition of sex trafficking (or what some call survival sex work) which "encompasses any exchange of sex for goods or services in which the person providing sex is a minor and/or providing sex under force, fraud, or coercion" (Sovereign "Current"). They all also fall under the kind of sexual/physical violence encompassed by what, today, is referred to as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn/Relatives (MMIW/R) epidemic.

Building from this history, extractive oil and gas industries are the most recent contributors to higher rates of physical and sexual violence against Native peoples, and Native womxn, in particular. Sarah Deer explains this phenomenon as follows: “The dynamic has to do with large numbers of non-Native men relocating to temporary living quarters near reservations...these shanty-towns are commonly called ‘man camps.’ Descriptions of these camps are eerily similar to the frontier dynamic as chronicled in the history of the discovery of gold and oil.” (78). This influx of non-Native men brings with it higher crime rates, including drug use, prostitution, and sexual violence. Coupled with: a lack of infrastructure including law enforcement and health services; often limited or muddy state, federal, local, and tribal jurisdictional guidelines; and remote and/or sizeable acreage, the close proximity of these camps to Native communities puts those communities – and particularly their womxn, girls, and Two-Spirit individuals – at higher risk of experiencing physical and sexual violence. In fact, [Sovereign Bodies Institute](#), a Native-led organization that is home to the MMIW (now MMIP) database, published a community impact report noting a direct correlation between the TransCanada and formerly proposed Keystone XL Pipeline (terminated in June 2021, after years of Indigenous organizing and legal opposition) routes and thirty-one areas where MMIW cases have been reported (“Current” 6). Among those thirty-one areas, which traverse four different states (i.e., Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska), twelve of them overlap with or are adjacent to reservations (Sovereign “Current” 9).

Given these statistics and their continued impacts on Indigenous communities, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn/Relatives (MMIW/R) serves as both a key term and an additional framework for this project. As a key term, I discuss this epidemic as an advocacy issue in Chapter Four with MMIW/R representing the historic and current violence against Native

womxn/relatives as well as the social justice movement whose goal is to address and prevent that violence. However, as a persistent undercurrent to Native womxn runners' experiences as *Native womxn*, MMIW/R serves as a framework that informs their running and rhetorical practices along with the advocacy work they create by intentionally intersecting those practices. As such, it also connects the other theories and key terms I use throughout this project and helps shape my analysis of these runners' work. I do want to emphasize, however, that in approaching Native womxn runners' rhetoric and advocacy via this framework, I do not intend to focus on Indigenous peoples' *victimry* (per Vizenor).³ Instead, I hope to highlight these womxn's active and consistent engagement with an ongoing epidemic as well as their intentional (and sometimes, concerted) efforts to counteract the heteropatriarchal, settler colonial systems that continue to sanction such violence against Indigenous peoples.

Counterstory/Counternarrative

Using Richard Delgado's terminology, Aja Martinez refers to dominant narratives as "stock stories" (69). These stock stories enact power relations and transmit ideologies to create a calculated version of reality that reinforces the privileged positioning of those who control (and thus, sit at the top of) social hierarchies. Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams explain that the danger of these "official narratives" is that they "set the agenda for how and whether other narratives can operate with consequence, and they also set the measures of universality—that is, the terms by which we assign generality, validity, reliability, credibility, significance, authority, and so forth" (580). Within North American settler colonial heteropatriarchy, those officialized narratives have cast white, cisgender, heterosexual males as the standard by which all others are judged. In answer to this problematic standard, which persists in both Rhetoric and

Composition and higher education writ large, Martinez offers what she conceptualizes as Critical Race Theory (CRT) counterstory.

Martinez proposes counterstory as a way for marginalized peoples whose voices are too often ignored or silenced to be heard. She explains that “CRT counterstory recognizes that the experiential and embodied knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racism that is often well disguised in the rhetoric of normalized structural values and practices” (Martinez 69). In this way, counterstory allows non-dominant groups, or counterpublics, to speak back and tell their own stories, to reflect the realities of their own lived experiences and not the officialized narratives that reinforce racist, sexist, heteronormative hierarchical standards. In result, Martinez argues that “Counterstory as methodology thus serves to expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege and can help to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (69). That is, it has application both in- and outside of the academy because if, as Thomas King (Cherokee) suggests, the stories we hear and tell establish the relationships through which we shape our worlds, the only way to move those relationships toward greater equity is to include a wider array of voices from which we can learn in all settings.

Through this project, I attempt to do just that, not only by citing Indigenous scholars, but by centering Native womxn runners’ voices wherever possible. However, while Aja Martinez draws on many (related) experiences of Chican@s to create what she calls a *composite counterstory*,⁴ I want to clarify that this thesis is not meant to create a composite counterstory for Native womxn. As a non-Native womxn, I lack the lived experiences and cultural understandings that such an endeavor would necessitate. Furthermore, the womxn from whom I have learned throughout this thesis project do not all post/write/speak about the same concerns in the same

way – neither do they speak to or for the same audiences – and even when their rhetorics and/or advocacy do overlap, the perspectives they share remain unique to their lived experiences.

Perhaps most importantly, these athletes come from various Indigenous nations, each with their own customs, languages, and cultural practices. Thus, to presume that I (or anyone really) could distill their stories into a single, universal Indigenous counterstory would be both reductive and extractive thereby perpetuating colonial violence toward Native peoples. For these reasons, while my goals align with those of Aja Martinez to offer non-dominant perspectives that challenge the normative whiteness of stock stories, I intentionally use the term *counternarratives* instead of counterstory. My aim in using *counternarratives*, plural, is to highlight the individual (non-composite) nature of Native womxn’s counternarratives and the ways these runners use their stories (i.e., narratives) to reclaim running as their own, challenge (mis)perceptions of Native peoples, and advocate for their communities.

Story Gathering and Ethical Considerations

Building upon Kathy Absolon’s (Anishinaabekwe) work on Indigenous research methods, Tricia McGuire-Adams (Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek) advocates for “story collection rather than data collection” because it better aligns with Indigenous ways of knowing/being/doing, including the relational value of all human and non-human kin (21). This approach serves to combat the academic privileging of traditional Eurocentric methodologies that center dominant (i.e., raced, classed, sexist, and heteronormative) narratives, require detachment, and render Native peoples and their cultural practices as “less than,” if not invisible. Because I am not Indigenous, I lack the cultural knowledge and understandings needed to implement their Anishinaabeg-informed methodology and do not wish to be appropriative.

However, as a Latinx feminist, I would like to demonstrate my respect for these processes and to recognize Native knowledge making (both in- and outside the academy) by virtually gathering Indigenous womxn runners' voices about their experiences and listening to their stories to learn from their cultural, rhetorical (oral, written, digital, visual, embodied, and kinesthetic) practices. To do so, I consulted various sources, including: Indigenous womxn's Instagram accounts or organizational websites; print and web-based articles that either quote or were written by these runners; and podcasts, televised interviews, or recorded workshops/panels for which they served as guests.

My search for these womxn's voices began with Jordan Whetstone (formerly Jordan Daniel) (Kul Wicasa Oyate/Lower Brule Sioux) whose Instagram (IG) account I started following in fall 2020. As part of a course project involving ways to apply code meshing and multimodality as culturally sustaining pedagogical strategies for Composition, I knew I wanted to create social media-based class activities that included a wider array of voices. However, in reviewing my own Instagram account, I realized that though I followed other people of color, Indigenous voices were conspicuously missing from my IG feed. Seeking to remedy this, I specifically searched for Indigenous IG users and came across Whetstone's account, [@nativein_la](#), and learned about the creative ways she uses her running platform to advocate for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women/Relatives (MMIW/R). Whetstone's account led me to her non-profit organization, Rising Hearts, through which I learned about other initiatives and participated in my first MMIW/R workshops and run/walk in May of 2021.

Since that time, Whetstone's personal and organizational Instagram accounts have been a constant source of learning, and it is through her work on Patagonia's "Run to be Visible" film that I also learned about Lydia Jennings' (Yoeme and Wixárika) story and research in October

2021, and began following her IG account, [@llcooljennings](#), as well. Through Whetstone, I also became aware of Rosalie Fish (Cowlitz Tribe, Muckleshoot Reservation) who has followed in Whetstone's footsteps wearing the red handprint across her face during her high school and, now, collegiate track meets to advocate for MMIW/R. In learning this, I wondered if others were intersecting running and MMIW/R activism and decided to search for "Native Women Running," which is how I learned of Verna Volker's movement of the same name as well as Kwe Pack's Indigenous-led running group. From there, reposts on [@native_women_running](#) have led me to the other womxn I include in this discussion such as Angel Tadytin ([@angels_ventures](#)) (Diné), Kylie Bemis ([@kuwisdeltu](#)) (Zuni Pueblo), and Shayla Manitowabi-Huebner ([@shaylaraemh](#)) (Anishinaabe/Wiikwemkoong). Thus, in line with snowball sampling methods, the list of Indigenous IG accounts that I follow has grown over time, and not surprisingly, most of the Native womxn I follow are runners who use their platforms for Indigenous advocacy and social justice work.

Because most of these womxn do not appear to maintain separate personal and public social media accounts, their advocacy posts are woven in among more personal messages that involve their families. Recognizing this, I have chosen to omit any posts involving the runners' families out of respect for their privacy. I have also intentionally focused on narratives from Native womxn runners who function as public figures via their: leadership in charitable and/or community organizations; contributions to various media (either as writers or interviewees for magazines/newspapers/websites/podcasts/panels); or role as content creators for publicly accessible Instagram accounts. Additionally, because I excerpt these sources throughout my discussion, I direct link to each post that I quote or describe so that readers can reference the posts themselves verbatim.

To limit the scope of my virtual story gathering, I searched for Instagram content posted between January 2021 and December 2022. Exceptions to this included a 2017 and 2019 post from Jordan Whetstone involving cultural appropriation and racial slurs, which I remembered seeing on a previous occasion due to my greater familiarity with her IG account. Because these posts related directly to foundational and persistent misrepresentations of Native peoples, and those misrepresentations are still used to justify violence toward Native womxn in particular, I chose to include them in my discussion. The only other exception to the above stipulated timeframe was a November 2019 post from [@kwepack](#), which stood out in my review of their account due to the poem it features. This coupled with the fact that Kwe Pack's account has far fewer posts than most of the other Native womxn or organizations I surveyed (i.e., there were only forty-five posts total across the 2021-2022 timeframe), led to my inclusion of the post as it demonstrates the positive impact of community on Indigenous womxn's health and wellness.

As a supplement to the runners' social media posts, and to help provide additional context for their running activity, I incorporated quotes from other popular media sources. Several sources were already linked or tagged on the womxn's IG accounts, so I started with these. However, to find additional sources, I also searched the names of Native womxn runners with whom I had become familiar as well as terms like *Native women running*, *running and MMIW*, *Indigenous or Native runners*, and *Boston Marathon*. I included this last term because since Jordan Whetstone's participation in the 2019 Boston Marathon went viral, several other Native runners have qualified to run the race or volunteered to run for charity at Boston. I was also aware that, due to its prestige, the marathon always receives plenty of media coverage, which helped in locating additional sources.

Throughout this story gathering and writing process, I have tried to keep the following questions in mind:

- How does running reflect colonial and/or Indigenous worldviews?
- How is running tied to Indigenous histories and/or communities?
- How do Native womxn runners function as a counterpublic, and how does that counterpublic shape discourse (i.e., counternarratives) around Indigenous womxn and running?
- How has Indigenous running turned into advocacy/activism?
 - How is that advocacy/activism rhetorical?
 - How has that rhetoric been digitized by Native womxn runners (affordances/constraints)?
 - How does it open room for possible coalition?

I have also tried to remain cognizant of the fact that, as Kingston Mann points out, “The mainstream logics of scholarly research, journalism, and politics have sometimes reinterpreted the counterpublic discourses created online in ways that strip them of their meanings and make their context and creators invisible” (qtd. in Jackson 377). I say this because as a non-Indigenous, Latinx womxn privileged by my role in academia, I want to stand in solidarity with the Native womxn runners from whom I have learned. With this in mind, I have quoted them extensively throughout this discussion and done my best to center Indigenous voices throughout my analysis. I have also tried to practice cultural humility by incorporating Indigenous theorists into this discussion as much as possible. In doing so, my search for and integration of Indigenous theorists also functions as a form of story gathering that looks not just for Native stories, but also Indigenous scholars’ interpretation/ analysis of various Native lived experiences and cultural concepts. That is, like Native

womxn runner's work itself, Indigenous scholars/thinkers are integral parts of the story gathering process.

In addition to consulting and centering Indigenous theorists' voices in my analysis, I have (to the extent that they identify themselves as Indigenous) included any provided tribal affiliations and literally highlighted their texts on my References pages so that others might also more easily reference them in future related work. While I understand that some may misinterpret these citation practices as othering Indigenous scholars, my intent here is to disrupt the notion that white scholarship remains the default standard in academia by centering Native knowledge makers and the communities from which their knowledge stems. I have further attempted to balance academic and non-academic sources as a way of recognizing the expertise of community-based organizations, their constituencies, and Indigenous individuals who draw from their personal, lived experiences – that is, as I state above, to emphasize Native peoples as knowledge makers whose insights are both *valued* and *valuable* regardless of their relation to formal academic institutions.

Finally, because their advocacy efforts are culturally based as well as time and labor intensive, I want to compensate the Native womxn runners I cite throughout this text for the work they do and the knowledge they share. In fact, I originally intended to request the copyright holders' permission to include screenshots of their social media posts and seek institutional funding to appropriately compensate them for their work. However, while the University agreed that these would be the appropriate ethical steps for using their images, they discouraged me from pursuing this process, suggesting that I refrain from including any screenshots instead. Despite removing the screenshots as directed, I still feel ethically bound to secure the runners' consent to use their words and to compensate them for what they have taught me. As such, I have contacted each of the womxn to explain the nature of my project, ask their permission to quote/describe their social media posts, and offer to share a copy of the final version for their

review.⁵ In that same communication, I also offered to compensate them directly or donate what I can to an Indigenous organization of their choosing as a way to acknowledge the value of what they share. I realize that these are just starting points, and I still have much to learn and do to move from allyship toward becoming a true accomplice or (better yet) co-conspirator in the work that these womxn do, but I hope this will be the first step toward building those relationships.

Overview

The chapters that follow contextualize Native womxn runners' rhetorics and running practices both within North American settler colonial systems and within their own Indigenous cultural lifeways. To do so, I begin Chapter 2 with a brief overview of colonial heteropatriarchy in order to explore the ways that the class, race, and gender disparities upon which it is built manifest in the popular sport of running. I then discuss organized efforts within the running community that are working to make the sport more inclusive, several of which intersect with initiatives helmed by Native womxn runners.

With this context established, I next introduce the link between Indigenous relationality and more expansive concepts of gender in Chapter 3. I also explore running's significance in Native cultures, both past and present, and the ways that Native womxn use their running stories to create intersectional counterpublic discourses that challenge colonial misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples, in general, and Indigenous womxn, in particular. These counternarratives help bring Native cultural identities and social justice concerns to a wider audience, allowing Native womxn runners to use their sport as a form of advocacy in service to their communities on- and offline. This advocacy serves as the topic of Chapter 4 in which I explore the rhetorical

strategies that Native womxn runners use in support of their activism and the ways they digitize Indigenous cultural practices/beliefs to rhetorically claim space for Native peoples.

Finally, I conclude with a consideration of the coalitional potential of Native womxn runners' advocacy work. In doing so, I reiterate these womxn's leadership as key to the kind of critical, intersectional collaboration that the running community needs if it is to move toward greater inclusion – a process from which the field of Rhetoric and Composition could also benefit.

Notes

1. While I consider the term *women* as signifying all individuals who identify as such, some have used this term to exclude women of color and/or trans* or non-binary women. For this reason, unless directly quoting/paraphrasing others, I use the term *womxn* throughout this text to emphasize the inclusion of all who identify as women. However, I recognize that, more recently, some have also used the term *womxn* to set trans* and non-binary women apart as supposedly “not real women.” Given this, I want to be clear that trans* women and women of color are *women*, and in no way is my use of *womxn* here intended to question that fact or exclude, erase/replace, or otherwise invalidate any individual’s gender identity or personal pronouns.

2. Throughout this text I use the terms *Indigenous* and *Native* interchangeably when referring to the *womxn*, communities, or cultural practices that I discuss. For variety’s sake, I also occasionally use the alternate terms *Native North Americans* or *First Nations* to signal the peoples whose lands were colonized to form what we now know as North America. While I understand that, per Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou, Tūhourangi), these terms have sometimes been used to “collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different,” I include “The final ‘s’ in ‘peoples’ [as well as in ‘Americans’ or ‘Nations’]...as a way of recognizing that there are real differences between different Indigenous peoples” 6, 7). I also use the plural terms *womxn*, communities, and cultural practices to recognize the diversity of Native peoples/*womxn* as well as their communities and cultural practices.

3. See Gerald Vizenor *Manifest Manners*

4. As Aja Martinez acknowledges, “composite characters are abstractions representing cultural or political ideologies, and could be mistakenly read as overly-stereotyped depictions of certain ideologies and politics” (Martinez 71). Given this, a potential drawback of Martinez’s Critical Race Theory (CRT) composite counterstory is that it may be misinterpreted as presenting all Chican@s and, by extension, Latinx/Hispanic peoples’ experiences as monolithic when, like Native peoples, there are a wide variety of Chican@/Latinx/Hispanic cultures, identities, and experiences (Martinez 71). The same could be said for other non-dominant groups’ voices presented via CRT composite counterstory.

5. See Appendix B for sample correspondence sent to each runner or running group.

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CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTUALIZING RUNNING

Before exploring Indigenous womxn runners' particular uses of their running platforms, it is important to understand the context in which they run. This context is informed by a history of North American settler colonial conquest as well as the ways its ideologies persist into present day. As such, this chapter offers a brief overview of colonial heteropatriarchy and its imposed bigenderism as social machinations that sought to eradicate Indigenous lifeways. It then considers how those colonial impacts pervade even the seemingly innocuous activity of running by exploring the classed, raced, and gendered aspects of the sport. Finally, this section highlights local, national, and international initiatives within the running community that are designed to redress these disparities via deliberate efforts to make running more inclusive – initiatives that often intersect with Native womxn runners' work.

Colonial Heteropatriarchy

As Ashley Mack and Tiara Na'Puti, Kai Pyle, Sarah Deer, and several others have discussed, bigenderism and heteronormativity functioned as tools of colonial domination in North America by forcing Indigenous peoples to adopt European heteropatriarchal roles that displaced their own notions of gender and sexuality. Assimilative forces such as Indian boarding schools, governmental policies and programs, and white-centered media depictions all contributed to the transmission of these roles. As Kai Pyle elaborates, "Heteropatriarchy purports to establish a biological root of gender, claiming empirical difference between men and women that determine their aptitudes, inclinations, and abilities. At the same time, it places these qualities in a hierarchy in which men are superior to women and deserve control over women" (112). Such hierarchy disrupts First Nation peoples' cultural sense of relationality through which

communities along with the individuals and resources (land, water, food, cultural knowledge, etc.) they are comprised of exist in a kind of kinship that ties them to one another interdependently. Furthermore, these kinship bonds cast each participant's role as equally valuable and necessary to the ongoing ecosystem of their communities.

Thus, the colonial imposition of heteropatriarchal hierarchies served as a reorganizing strategy – what Scott Morgensen calls “the gendered and racial reordering of indigenous societies by colonial systems of categorization” – that sought to force Native North Americans to assimilate (195). For example, per Pyle, “American officials, viewing agriculture as a male enterprise, attempted to force Native women to stop farming and to make Native men take on those roles instead” (113). This repositioning of responsibility according to white notions of gender disrupted long-established cultural lifeways in numerous Indigenous communities. To further solidify their assimilation, colonial governments frequently separated Native children from their families, sending them to residential schools where they could be immersed in bigendered norms. As such, “boarding schools taught girls skills such as sewing, cooking, and housekeeping in an attempt to coerce them into white heteropatriarchal roles” (Pyle 113). Such roles were reinforced over time through the imposition of patrilineality across tribal nations and the removal of women from tribal leadership roles that resulted.

Other tactics for naturalizing these white gender ideologies as a means to force assimilation have involved institutional violence that: dispossesses Native peoples of their ancestral lands and treats these lands as commodities to be exploited; targets Indigenous women for sexual violence; separates Indigenous families, placing Native children in Christian boarding schools or with white foster parents; erases Two-Spirit and other Indigenous queer/non-binary identities; and socially reinforces stereotyped images of Native peoples. As I will discuss below,

such issues and their continued impacts on Indigenous peoples persist into present day, informing Native women runners' worldviews and the discourse they create via their running platforms. In fact, the "white habitus" (per Inoue) they seek to combat has become so pervasive that it manifests itself even in what seems to be the simple act of running.¹

Running as Competitive, Classed, White and (Bi-)Gendered

The term *running* conjures various images – any of which might be intimidating to the casual or new runner. One might picture the recreational runner who regularly winds their way through neighborhoods or on trails testing their own endurance and speed. They might envision a running group that takes up space along roadsides pushing one another as they train for an upcoming race, or they might even think of high school, collegiate, or professional athletes competing in track and field events. Whatever the context, however, there is a competitive aspect to all of these images. Track and field athletes, for example, earn formal rankings and prizes (e.g., ribbons, medals, or monetary prizes and sponsorships) that serve as rewards for outrunning their competitors. Running groups have leaders (typically veteran runners) who function as pace setters or coaches for less experienced members, and even solo runners track their own best time and pace with the help of the latest fitness app or gadget. But what do these runners look like?

Among the estimated fifty million runners/joggers in the United States, running statistics (e.g., race lengths, run times by distance, etc.) broken down by age group and binary gender categories are easy to find with thirty-nine being the average running age and 50.24% of runners identifying as female in 2018 (Galic). Market research site, 16Best.net, reports that this figure rose to 60% in 2019 (Kumar); however, Running USA's 2022 *Global Runner Survey* logs post-pandemic runners as 55% female, 43% male, and 2% non-binary. These numbers are significant

when considered in the context of running's mainstream (white) history, which per Shelly McKenzie, started as a "jogging movement" that grew in popularity among post-World War II Americans but continued to exclude women from participation in organized races thru the late 1960's (qtd. in Hoermann-Elliott 44). Given the public (traditionally male) space that runners occupy and the physical strength and endurance (that is, the historically coded *masculine* athleticism) running requires, such exclusions are not surprising and impact more than just cisgendered womxn.

Major races are only just beginning to offer runners the option to register as non-binary. For example, while some two hundred US race events have made the change, the Boston Marathon recently launched its 2023 registration with the option for registrants to select "non-binary" in response to the gender question for the first time in September 2022 (Holpuch).² With this change, the Boston Athletic Association (BAA) has set qualifying times for non-binary runners equal to those for female registrants "which organizers said were inclusive of the standards for the two existing [i.e. male and female] divisions to enter the race" – a stipulation, as Amanda Holpuch reports, the BAA says it will update once they establish a better basis for non-binary run times. However, while providing an alternative, this option still seems to center heteropatriarchal (binary) gender standards as the default, which may have contributed to the fact that only twenty-two of the of the 23,267 applicants for the 2023 marathon selected non-binary on their registration (Lorge Butler). In order to truly shift this standard, they will need better data on non-binary runners, data that may be hard to come by until associations like the BAA do more to make these runners feel a welcome part of the run community.

Also included in Running USA's 2022 *Global Runners Survey*, runners' incomes range broadly with the highest (i.e., those making \$175,000+) and lowest (i.e., those making \$50,000

or less) earners each making up 19% of respondents. While this appears to imply, as many have claimed, that running is an egalitarian sport, a closer look at running costs quickly dispels this myth. The average yearly cost of running in 2021 was \$1,748, which included running shoes and apparel, nutrition (food and drink), technology, and coaching but excluded race entrance fees and any associated travel (Running USA). With the bulk of participants reporting entrance fees ranging from \$21-\$50 for shorter 5K or 10K events and \$51-\$100 for half and full marathons, and one third of respondents willing to travel more than five hundred miles for running events, these fees and travel expenses can substantially increase running costs (Running USA).

Further compounding expenses are gender and racial/ethnic income disparities that impact not only what runners make but where they can afford to live and, thus, whether they have a safe place to run. For instance, US Department of Labor (DOL) statistics from July 2020, report that (white) women continue to make eighty-three cents for every dollar that (white) men earn (“Earnings”) – baselines they do not bother to label as “white” because, per Asao Inoue, whiteness functions as the unmarked norm. Additionally, racial/ethnic disparities continue with Black Americans earning seventy-six cents, Native Americans/American Indians earning seventy-seven cents, Hispanic/Latinos earning seventy-three cents, and multiracial individuals reportedly earning eighty-one cents for every dollar earned by their white, male counterparts (“Earnings”). In fact, at \$1.12 per dollar earned, only Asian-Pacific Islanders surpass white workers according to the DOL. Combining these gendered and raced disparities only further exacerbates the gap with Time’s Up reporting that “Latinx women earn 54 cents, Native American women earn 57 cents, Black women earn 62 cents, and AAPI women earn 90 cents on the dollar of a white man”. Thus, womxn and most runners of color wind up spending a larger

percentage of their yearly income on running – with womxn runners of color being most affected – a fact that could preclude some from pursuing or persisting in the sport, but not the only fact.

Not surprisingly, as the above statistics might suggest, running remains a predominantly white sport with sixty four percent of the 5500+ runners surveyed selecting White as their race according to the *2022 Global Runner Survey* (Running USA). In fact, the largest minority represented among respondents is Hispanic runners who ranked at 20% with Black and Asian runners coming in at 7% and 5% respectively, and American Indian/Alaskan Native and Mixed-Race individuals accounting for only 2% each (Running USA). While these numbers signal a clear disparity within the running community, the inclusion of this data is an improvement, for as Jackie Hoermann-Elliott observes, the 2020 version of this same report included “nothing of the race, sexual orientation, class, or other intersectional identity markers” for respondents (45). Not coincidentally, when it comes to diversity, Livestrong.com’s “126 Running Statistics You Should Know,” published in March 2022, reports only that “Information on running demographics around race and ethnicity is limited” and lists five “organizations [that] are working to make the sport more inclusive,” including the Fly Girl Collective, Black Girls Run Foundation, Black Trail Runners, Black Roses NYC, and the Running Industry Diversity Coalition (RIDC) (Galic). The last institution, RIDC, is currently in the midst of a five-year study focused on diversity and product needs in the trail and road running communities/industries with initial reports from phase one expected by the end of March 2023.

This increased interest in quantitative data, however, comes in response to what runners have expressed qualitatively for some time – namely, that beyond the economic disparities involved, running can feel unwelcoming for runners of color and those who identify outside of traditional binary gender categories. As Hoermann-Elliott observes in her study of running as a

catalyst for composing, “not all bodies enjoy the same privileges, especially not when running or walking in public spaces” (46). Black mxn, in particular, are subjected to racist projections that criminalize their movement through public spaces in ways that can be fatal. While the Black Lives Matter movement and the 2020 murder of Ahmaud Arbery, who was out running two miles from home, have drawn renewed attention to this fact, several other intersectional identities continue to experience various levels of aggression within and around running communities.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (LGBTQ) athletes often face running events that default to binary gender categories and, on collegiate and professional levels, must confront policies that regulate which bodies qualify to compete in divisions that are still defined according to heteropatriarchal standards. When non-binary categories do exist, as with this year’s Boston Marathon, they are too new to reflect the real runners (and their variation) within this category so that, though well-intentioned, they may continue to single these individuals out within the racing community. Similarly, womxn of color, in particular, have also expressed frustration over the thin, white, blonde image of female runners that persists in popular media and serves to *other* all those who do not fit this narrow, raced fitness/beauty standard. Several tie this frustrating reality back to the fact that, in addition to the runners themselves, running remains a white majority industry where “The decision makers at large brands are often white. So, too, the owners and operators of the local running stores that are often the lifeblood of the recreational running community. Ditto for running magazines” (Armour). Couple this with the fact that, as a 2017 *Runner’s World* survey found, forty three percent of womxn runners experience harassment compared to only four percent of mxn, and safety, once again, becomes a primary concern – and

one that, for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), womxn, and non-binary runners, significantly shifts the cost of running (Hamilton).

Whether the backdrop consists of trail terrain and wildlife or city streets and traffic, safety is a concern for all runners. For this reason, running gear might include reflective features on clothing or shoes, headlamps, or other visibility devices. While these safety features might suffice for many, they do not fully address the concerns of all runners. From a product perspective, apps and fitness gear that track runners' routes along with pepper spray, personal alarms, and knives that runners can strap to their hands for easy access while they run have all become commonplace and can add to the monetary cost of running (not to mention profit for the running industry). However, actions like whistling, catcalling, or aggressive comments; being followed or approached by strangers on running routes; and the threat of being attacked while out for a run all come with a psychological (and sometimes physical) cost that detracts from the physical, mental, and/or emotional benefits that recreational and sporting activities like running can provide.

Additionally, since these behaviors are more frequently directed toward womxn (with 30% of womxn having been followed and 18% sexually propositioned while out for a run), they can make female runners reconsider where and whether to workout at all (Hamilton). Urban settings, for instance, are more populated, increasing womxn runners' chances of being harassed but also the possible number of witnesses should a threatening encounter occur. Trails, on the other hand, provide greater solitude but may prove more dangerous for solo runners. As Alex Elizabeth, who identifies as a Korean American womxn, explained to *Trailrunner*, her "fear [has been] stoked by others' actions on multiple occasions, such as by the group of men who used their bodies to block a trail she was running on...and other runners' comments: *Are you out here*

alone? Why aren't you scared?" (Zimmerman). She is not the only one to experience this sort of threatening behavior. Compounding such scenarios are the fact that heteropatriarchal tradition places the burden of dealing with these sexist and threatening behaviors on those targeted, advising women to reconsider their attire, how they wear their hair, at what times they run, and whether they opt to run alone. That is, they are asked to follow a rape schedule and cast as culpable should they refuse to do so and anything happen to them. Such are the complex factors Indigenous womxn (and others) negotiate each time they step out for a run.

Running as Inclusive and Community Building

While the above factors can be daunting on their own, let alone combined, they are not insurmountable. In response to such raced, classed, and gendered disparities, several groups are seeking to shift the running climate toward greater inclusion by strategically building community both (inter)nationally and more locally. Interestingly, the work of Native womxn runners often intersects with these efforts and their missions. Not surprisingly, then, a closer look at these groups reveals Native womxn runners' frequent involvement as partners or allies to several of these initiatives.

One such group, the [Running Industry Diversity Coalition](#) (RIDC) was “founded [in October 2020] to help address the running industry’s whiteness and systemic racism” (“Running Industry”). Originally founded and co-Chaired by Chris Lampen-Crowell and Alison Mariella Désir, the RIDC leadership team has recently transitioned from five to ten additional diverse members of the running industry and/or community, including Kiera Smalls, Abigail Sharpless, Betsy Rathwell, Shannon Woods, John Benedict, Song Nguyen, Sergio Avila, Kathy Dalby, Jason Faustino, and Tom Carleo. As Désir explains:

We were really intentional about [the board's] racial composition, its gender composition. We're people of all different socioeconomic backgrounds, and this is something that we know is our strength; this difference is our strength. That's something that is written into the bylaws, and the work that we've done is to make sure that this continues into the future. Always in favor of more power being in the hands of those who are most marginalized. ("Running Industry")

Such efforts have not only brought these runners together as part of the RIDC but have also informed their individual efforts in the running community.

In addition to their work with the RIDC, several of the Coalition's current or former leadership team have organized various running initiatives of their own with more specific marginalized populations in mind. For example, Désir founded the Harlem Run community-based wellness movement in 2013, before organizing Run 4 All Women, an activist and fundraising campaign that uses running to organize in support of greater turnout among Black voters and to fundraise for women's reproductive rights organizations like Planned Parenthood. Similarly, former RIDC board member, Verna Volker (Navajo), founded Native Women Running (NWR), in order to "build and nurture community that features and encourages Native women runners on and off the reservation. [and to] increase visibility in the running world nationwide and worldwide for historically excluded runners" (*Native*). Thus, RIDC provides one means for these separate enclaves to negotiate intragroup differences and coordinate action in favor of greater diversity across the larger running community.

Runner Carolyn Su's Instagram account, [@diversewerun](#), serves as another coalitional space whose goal Su describes as "Building racial representation through storytelling, advocacy, and community" (*Diverse*). Since its inception in December 2018, the account features a weekly

post, highlighting runners of various ages, races/ethnicities, gender identities, and physical (dis)abilities, and is currently on feature 167 and counting. Those features have often included Native womxn runners like Jordan Marie Whetstone (Kul Wicasa Oyate/Lower Brule Sioux), Rosalie Fish (Cowlitz Tribe, Muckleshoot Reservation), Angel Tadytin (Diné), and Verna Volker (Navajo) whose advocacy efforts have been amplified via reposts on Diverse We Run's Instagram account. Su also frequently reposts content from a wide range of runners from diverse backgrounds or hosts Instagram takeovers that allow other runners to share their perspectives and reach those who may not follow them. In doing so, [@diversewerun](#) cultivates community by connecting content that may exist outside of users' regular social media bubble. The account also puts social justice concerns in conversation with one another in ways that amplify marginalized voices and advocate for a more coalitional approach to disparities within the sport and its surrounding industry.

Of course, these larger coordinated efforts would not be possible without the smaller, more individualized running initiatives that comprise them. Such community-centered campaigns often focus on more localized concerns such as physical and/or mental wellness within specific marginalized communities – concerns that, as I will explore in Chapter 3, womxn-led Indigenous running groups like Kwe Pack and Native Women Running share. For example, the aforementioned Harlem Run movement, for example, centers walkers, joggers, and runners of “all sizes, ages, and abilities” who live and move in Harlem with the goal of cultivating and supporting a healthy lifestyle for members of urban communities (“About”). To this end, the free running club hosts a weekly Monday night run and Thursday night speed workout for anyone who wants to participate. Further, by running and working out within their own neighborhoods, the group cultivates connection not only internally among its members but

also externally between Harlem Run participants and their neighbors. If not encouraged to join in themselves, those neighbors may pursue their own wellness activities or offer support and encouragement in other ways via community volunteering, social media interaction with Harlem Run, or just a wave on the street. Such actions strengthen community and contribute to making moving in public spaces safer for all residents, many of whom are Black and brown.

Though their target populations differ, other running initiatives like Girls on the Run, Frontrunners, and Wings of America offer similar opportunities for both smaller and larger scale community connection. Conceived as a local running initiative in Charlotte, North Carolina with only seventeen participants in 1996, [Girls on the Run](#) has grown into a national organization with two hundred local chapters that offer a girls-only program whose curriculum is scaffolded by age group and combines life skills coaching with physical activities like running (“Frequently”). As their website describes, the program is meant to create a safe space within which:

girls feel free to talk about issues they wouldn’t necessarily talk about with boys, try out new activities without a fear of failure and experience less pressure to look or act a certain way...particularly...during transition periods of development (such as middle school) and in settings that have been traditionally dominated by boys or men, such as in physical education and sports. (“Frequently”)

That offer of safe space includes anyone who identifies as a girl, a fact the organization highlights in the frequently asked questions section of its website. Furthermore, Girls on the Run explicitly welcomes young women of all physical and intellectual abilities and works with girls and their parents to offer accommodations when needed. Finally, in order to expand program access across economic backgrounds, they also offer financial assistance to help cover registration fees for those who qualify. Native womxn runners mirror these practices sponsoring

runners for various race events and organizing fundraising events that allow participants to move in whatever ways are accessible for them.

Another local running initiative that has now grown beyond national status is [International Front Runners](#) (IFR), which was founded in 1973, as a free jogging class in San Francisco that offered a place where gay and lesbian runners of all levels could find community through and around walking, jogging, and/or running. The group describes itself as:

an affiliation of Frontrunners clubs which promotes the sports of running, walking and related athletic activities for gender and sexually diverse People (henceforth the Community) and their allies; which supports the formation activities of Front Runner clubs;...communications between Front Runners clubs and the wider community;... facilitates inter-club events;...[and/or] selects delegates who represent IFR to other organisations. (“Mission”)

Though such a group may seem commonplace today, in the early 1970’s, the group offered a safe space where LGBTQ individuals could be themselves despite societal taboos that censured and even criminalized their identities. As one of the group’s original leaders, Bud Budlong, explained to *Runner’s World* in 2020, “especially in the 1970s, every LGBTQ person had grown up with negative views of themselves. Being a runner, it made us feel good about ourselves” (Dawson). Perhaps with this goal in mind, members chose to formalize the group, naming it after the first critically acclaimed mainstream gay novel, Patricia Nell Warren’s *The Front Runner*. The name resonated with groups in other cities and allowed these running clubs and their members to enter races together and, in 1999, to officially affiliate (both nationally and internationally) under the International Front Runners moniker. Despite social progress and the growth in visibility of LGBTQ athletes at all levels, however, IFR is still working “to expand

into Asia, South America, and Africa, where groups are scarce or nonexistent and LGBTQ rights still aren't recognized" (Dawson). Likely due to the historical exclusions and higher harassment rates experienced by womxn runners, IFR local chapters also continue to recruit more womxn whose participation with the group remains low. In these ways, their presence continues to function as a sign of solidarity, a challenge to heterosexism, and a means to make outdoor spaces safer for all to enjoy. Several Native womxn runners share similar concerns, advocating for better inclusion of Two-Spirit, queer, trans* and non-binary individuals in both their running and cultural communities.

Among several others, one final community-focused running initiative is New Mexico-based [Wings of America](#), which "uses running as a catalyst to empower American Indian and Alaskan Native youth to take pride in themselves and their cultural identity, leading to increased self-esteem, health and wellness, leadership and hope, balance and harmony" (Wings). This Indigenous-led and -focused organization centers cultural identity, family/community, education, and leadership via various programs. Referring to all their participants as "student-athletes," the organization trains and sponsors (via gear and travel expenses) a national team of young Native men and women, ages fourteen to nineteen, to compete for a spot on the USA World Cross Country Team, which they approach as a "cross-cultural learning experience" (Wings). They also host summer Running and Fitness Camps in Arizona, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, and South Dakota, thereby networking multiple Indigenous Nations (i.e., Navajo/Diné, Tewa, Lenape, Wichita, Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, etc.) to teach Native youth healthy lifestyle habits on and near their own homelands. These day-long camps are led by college-aged Native mentors who are trained via the Wings Leadership Camp/Facilitator Training. Described as "friends and role models rather than authority figures," Wings camp facilitators reflect and model relational

rather than hierarchal practices to “help camp participants find the inspiration they need to make a commitment to a healthy, active and culturally conscious lifestyle on their own terms” (Wings). Thus, the organization offers Wings participants opportunities for increased responsibility and leadership as they grow within the organization and develop their own cultural understanding.

Perhaps its best-known program, the *Boston Marathon Pursuit Program*, is a partnership with the Boston Athletic Association (B.A.A.) through which Wings of America selects five Native high school juniors from various Indigenous nations to attend Marathon Weekend. This fully sponsored trip, funded and chaperoned by Indigenous charity runners, offers these student athletes an itinerary that includes: college and admissions visits; educational outings in the Boston-area; participation in the pre-Marathon Boston 5K; and sightseeing via group runs through Boston and its surrounding areas (Wings). Thus, Wings maintains its focus on developing Native youth as *student* athletes encouraging their pursuit of higher education and rewarding the discipline they learn through running with an opportunity to represent their communities. It has also helped connect these youth with Indigenous running role models like Jordan Whetstone (Kul Wicasa Oyate/Lower Brule Sioux) and Lydia Jennings (Yoeme and Wixárika) who have both served as chaperones and done fundraising in support of the Pursuit Program.

Unfortunately, due to uncertainties surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, this trip was cancelled in 2021, when because the race was postponed from April to October that year, it coincided with Indigenous People’s Day (i.e., October 10th). Given this, in place of its annual Pursuit Program trip, Wings worked with race organizers to commission Indigenous artist, Yatika Starr Fields (Osage, Cherokee, and Muscogee Creek), to design and install a tribute to Native marathoners and to secure six additional race bibs for Indigenous athletes who wanted to

participate in the 2021 event (Wings). Their partnership helped increase Native representation at the high-profile race and educate the public about Indigenous running histories. As these efforts and all its programs demonstrate, Wings of America's initiatives not only seek to foster student-athlete's physical, intellectual, and emotional development, but do so by centering cultural identity via historical practices of running in Indigenous communities – traditions that also inform modern Native womxn runners and that I will explore further in the Chapter 3. In that section, I discuss how these runners uphold and adapt Native running traditions to combat persistent colonial narratives that continue to portray Indigenous peoples as inferior. By combining their running and discursive practices, then, these womxn not only preserve cultural lifeways, they also create counternarratives that center Indigenous lived experiences and serve as acts of resurgence.

Notes

1. Asao Inoue defines white habitus as the invisible “set of structuring structures” that privilege whiteness and mask its ideology as the naturalized, unmarked norm against which all others are deemed inferior (145).

2. See Jake Fedorowski for list of race events that include *non-binary* as an option for registrants.

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CHAPTER THREE: INDIGENOUS RUNNING AND COUNTERNARRATIVES

Having experienced the intergenerational impacts of colonial heteropatriarchy firsthand, Indigenous womxn runners' presence within the sport challenges the previously discussed normative white, male running narrative that continues to persist (and, by extension, the colonial heteropatriarchal worldview from which it stems) by enacting Native relationality.¹ In fact, Native womxn runners are intentionally forming running communities, both in person and online, that function as intersectional counterpublics who self-identify and collaborate to shape discourse about and embodied activities around themselves and Native peoples.² They do so by sharing their own running journeys, several of which exemplify how traditional Native uses of running continue in various forms among present-day Indigenous peoples. In this way, their stories function as counternarratives that tie running to Indigenous cultures, past and present, thereby establishing modern Native presence and identities.³

In order to better explore Native womxn runners' discursive practices, this section provides a brief review of Indigenous relationality and the ways it facilitates a broader and more fluid concept of gender. With this ideology in place, the discussion then moves to an explanation of traditional Indigenous uses of running with examples of how these practices have continued over time and despite colonial intrusions. Finally, the chapter concludes with a consideration of how Native women's running stories challenge colonial stereotypes about Indigenous peoples – and more specifically, Indigenous womxn – to create intersectional counterpublic discourses.

Relationality, Running, and Resurgence in Native Cultures

As I discussed in Chapter One, Indigenous relationality is made of a series of overlapping and reciprocal kinship bonds that link human and non-human beings (land, elements, animals, spirits, etc.) valuing all participants as contributing to the community. Because it organizes the world as a series of relationships, Indigenous relationality can also help remove hierarchies based in colonial bigenderism and heteropatriarchy. Whereas colonialism subjugates Native women to men via prescribed (i.e., gendered) roles and seeks to eradicate Two Spirit and Indigenous queer identities via imposed heterosexist bigenderism, many Native cultures view individuals according to their unique skills all of which contribute to sustaining the community. Simpson casts this as a form of “self-actualization” that takes place in familial and communal contexts and serves as a form of social responsibility (120). This sense of responsibility to others builds from Glen Sean Coulthard’s (Yellowknives Dene) notion of *grounded normativity*, which he defines as “modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time” (13). In other words, this ethos is quite literally *grounded* in the lands with and upon which Indigenous peoples create knowledge via lived experiences whose meanings shift and change in relation to one another.

Per Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, then, her Nishnaabewin (i.e., her cultural and context-specific knowledge base, or *grounded normativity*):⁴

emphasizes that we all have a relationship to creation and that these relationships are not tied to certain body parts...[so] that creating life comes in many forms, not just from the womb, and it creates a space where all genders can have valuable, ethical, consensual, meaningful, and reciprocal relationships with all aspects of creation. (121)

Thus, unlike colonial heteropatriarchy, which positions Two Spirit and queer Native people as threats to white, heteronormative and sexist gender roles, Indigenous relationality offers a way to include these individuals as essential community members whose very existence provides access to unique knowledge and perspectives that would otherwise be lost. It also recognizes Native womxn's abilities as not solely tied to colonially defined domesticity and their biological potential to bear children thereby disrupting settler colonialism's (hetero)sexist and gendered hierarchy. Within this relational context, then, the remainder of this chapter considers Native womxn's use and adaptation of Indigenous running traditions to create culturally specific counternarratives.

Runners as Messengers

Pre-dating other means of communication and forms of transportation, various Indigenous nations used runners to carry messages between communities. Citing Rasmussen, Tricia McGuire-Adams (Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek) explains how "Historically, the Anishinaabeg had female and male runners called michitweg...[who] ran distances between a dozen miles to over a hundred miles to reach communities through a system of woodland trails that create an 'intertribal relay system'" (85). Made up of various peoples, including the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa among others, the Anishinaabeg represent more than one Native community in and of themselves, and McGuire-Adams points out that they were not the only nation to employ such methods. She cites Milroy and Nabokov's works to add the Iroquois Confederacy and others to those employing this running-based communicative tradition, which extends beyond colonial borders.

Such runners were highly regarded within their communities as they not only carried communications but were also sometimes the only means to contact healers on behalf of the sick. In fact, McGuire-Adams describes how “The michitweg often took up a ceremonial role by being offered semaa (tobacco) and prayers, especially when a person in the community was ill” (86). She then positions today’s Anishinaabekweg (i.e., Anishinaabeg womxn) runners as “modern-day michitweg or oshki-michitweg (new runners)” whose messages center Indigenous wellness using the running group Kwe Pack as an example (92).

Founded in 2012, Kwe Pack (whose name translates to *Woman Pack*) is a group of Native womxn runners from the Fond du Lac Reservation (outside of Duluth, Minnesota) that has grown from seven to as many as 125+ members who trail run together across and around their reservation on a regular basis and enter long races together (“Gift”). Having come to running for various reasons including fitness or stress relief; health issues like diabetes, heart disease, or obesity; mental health concerns such as depression or anxiety; and/or to cope with the trauma of sexual assault or loss of a loved one, the womxn in the group support one another on their running journeys. To this effect, they motivate one another to keep going despite their current (dis)abilities or struggles. As one member, Janelle Zuech, observes, “We created a space where everyone can come as they are...We take care of each other during the run, no one is left behind” (McGuire-Adams 75). This *come as you are* ethic of Indigenous relationality encourages new members to join and provides a space where they can learn from those who are more experienced. It also establishes a bond that extends beyond their time on the trails as several of the womxn count the group as part of their personal support networks.

Noting how trail running is an activity that goes back generations, the womxn of Kwe Pack also see themselves as keeping Native running traditions alive by engaging in recreation on their ancestral lands. As Kimmerer contends, land is:

identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kin-folk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that [has] sustained us...Whether it [is] their homeland or the new land forced upon them [via the removal and relocation of Indigenous people from their traditional homelands], land held in common [gives] people strength; it [gives] them something to fight for. (17)

Given this, running the land is a way to connect with Native lifeways and one another. Both – the land and the runners – serve as teachers with whom several of Kwe Pack’s members have learned to recognize their own personal strength as they have transitioned over time from living sedentary lifestyles to running marathons and ultramarathons.

As founding member, Sarah Agaton Howes, observes, “Now if you ask people in the running community – the Native community or this region – they know that Native women run” (Tang). Thus, these runners’ message has grown to encompass not just Indigenous wellness but, specifically, Native womxn’s place in the running community on a larger scale. Furthermore, having been featured on “Good Morning America” and as part of Oprah Winfrey’s wellness-focused *2020 Vision Tour*, their audience has grown as well. Despite such attention, however, the group maintains its local, familial, and communal focus. In fact, they participate in the yearly Fond du Lac Spiritual Run as a way of also recognizing – for Anishinaabeg, and more specifically for Kwe Pack, for Anishinaabekweg (i.e., Anishinaabeg womxn) – the reservation’s roads and, by extension, the reservation itself as their own (Birch-McMichael). Such Indigenous-

centered commemorative runs reaffirm Native peoples' relation to the land and are more commonplace than one might think.

Running as Commemorative

Commemorative runs help to preserve Native histories often by reenacting some part of that history. For example, the Pascua Yaqui people, whose tribal lands span from Mexico up through Arizona, host an annual run in September to commemorate their anniversary as a federally recognized tribe since 1978 – status that, first and foremost, acknowledged their continual existence but also made them eligible for funding and services through the US Bureau of Indian Affairs. While this yearly run is typically a 5K (i.e., 3.1 miles) held on Pascua Yaqui lands in Arizona, the fortieth anniversary run in 2018, spanned a distance of over four hundred miles (“Reporting”).

That year, Pascua Yaqui relay runners began the race (known as Vanaatekai) in Sonora, Mexico and followed ancestral migration and trade routes north to Tucson, Arizona (“Reporting”). In line with cultural tradition, runners carried decorated rivercane staffs and functioned as members of a single nation despite their separation by the US/Mexico colonial border. Further, their presence on roadsides across a greater distance along with local Arizona media coverage that accompanied them on the run from Mexico drew the attention of passersby who might not otherwise have known about the run or those participating. As such, through the Vanaatekai, the Pascua Yaqui were able to subvert settler colonial narratives that justify the theft of Native lands via imposed border divisions and the resulting erasure of Indigenous peoples in favor of their own stories. Such stories empower the Pascua Yaqui to assert their continued

presence on and around their stolen lands and to inform non-Natives that First Nations people continue to exist despite colonial violence and dispossession.

The annual Sand Creek Massacre Healing Run/Walk takes place in late November and is another example of how Indigenous peoples use running commemoratively. During the event, which began in 1999, Cheyenne and Arapaho participants relay run/walk 173 miles to Denver, Colorado tracing the route US soldiers took after massacring 230 Natives, including elders and children, at Sand Creek in 1864 (“Annual”). In doing so, they remember murdered relatives and highlight the US military’s culpability in violating governmental assurances of safety that those at Sand Creek had received prior to the massacre – facts that state officials publicly acknowledge on State Capitol grounds during the yearly commemoration ceremonies. The run and the runners’ presence in Colorado also serve as reminders that, although (due to relocation and removal) they no longer reside there, parts of Colorado are actually traditional Cheyenne and Arapaho homelands (“Annual”). Thus, the run serves as a sort of collective memory, a living, breathing Indigenous record, and one that is recognized and respected by Natives and non-Natives alike. It also provides a time for these Native peoples to reconnect with their homelands via the embodied practice of running, which enacts their relationality.

Ceremonial/Prayer Runs

Another form of connection is enacted via ceremonial or prayer runs where running functions as a way to carry prayers and link communities to their cultural traditions. As Kimmerer explains, “To have agency in the world, ceremonies should be reciprocal co-creations, organic in nature, in which the community creates ceremony and the ceremony creates communities” (250). One example of this form of reciprocity that specifically involves running

is the Diné (i.e., Navajo) Kinaaldá ceremony. This coming-of-age ritual, which takes place around a girl's first menstruation, is meant to mirror the journey of Asdzáá Nádleehé (i.e., Changing Woman), the being whose entry into womanhood ensured the continuance of the Navajo nation (Bazhnibah). Guided by female relatives and mentors, it serves to steward a girl into womanhood so that she might fulfill her role as a strong, contributing member of the community. To this end, initiates give and receive offerings and blessings at various points across the four-day ceremony and grind enough corn to make a cornmeal cake large enough to feed all those who participate with them (Carr). Each young girl also runs two to three times a day as a symbol of the strength and endurance that will help her navigate life's challenges with the length of her runs representing her own longevity and others following her as a show of support (Markstrom and Iborra).

The ties between women, running, and community reinforced by the Kinaaldá ceremony are not coincidental as the Diné culture is historically matrilineal. Therefore, preserving this rite of passage serves as a way to maintain Native ways of life despite the heteropatriarchal nature of settler colonialism. Furthermore, because this ceremony is performed by young girls with their female elders and supported by the community, it conserves both leadership roles for Indigenous women and the value of those womxn within their nations. Per Markstrom and Iborra, it also counters the embarrassment and shame that is still ascribed to this experience in Western white (and other non-Western) cultures by centering on a girl's first menses and regarding it as a sacred transformation representative of Changing Woman, and all womxn's, power and strength. As such, the ceremony (and the running it requires) is a cultural rite of passage – a term that mainstream, white culture often reserves for boys'/mxn's experiences – that centers Native girls.

While the Kinaaldá focuses on a particular time in a young womxn's life, for many Indigenous people, running is an everyday ceremony. One of McGuire-Adams' interviewees, an Anishinaabekweg named Carrienne, describes her runs as follows:

'as I go, I'm talking to the trees and the rocks and listening to what's around me and I'm constantly praying for people. I'm praying for those who can't run; I'm praying for those murdered and missing women...So at the finish line, I then feel really, really empowered because I've done my ceremony...and they say it's the runner's high, but it's not: it's the sense that I've done my ceremony'. (87).

Here, Carrienne reconceptualizes the "runner's high" from an Indigenous perspective by explaining it as the feeling that her daily running ceremony creates. She also demonstrates how Native relationality weaves itself through all aspects of her life including her regular outdoor runs where she attends to her non-human relations, considers others who are differently abled, and remembers those impacted by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn (MMIW) crisis that impacts so many Indigenous communities.⁵ As McGuire-Adams argues, running here stands in for traditional ancestral ceremonies that may not be as readily accessible to Native womxn like Carrienne (93). Such actions may seem commonplace, but they remind us that "Ceremony is a vehicle for belonging—to a family, to a people, and to the land...[and]That is...the power of ceremony: it marries the mundane to the sacred...the material and the spiritual" (Kimmerer 37). Thus, ceremonial runs (whether formal or daily) help protect and reinforce Indigenous runners' cultural practices and land relations despite settler colonial erasures and forced relocations.

As the above examples demonstrate, Indigenous running traditions are long and continue into present day. More importantly, they enact relationality by demonstrating the nonlinear and

deeply connected nature of past, present, and future as well as the non-hierarchical link among mind, body, and spirit in Native cultures. With such ties in mind, Simpson asserts:

My Ancestors are not in the past. The spiritual world does not exist in some mythical realm. These forces and beings are right here beside me—inspiring, loving, and caring for me in each moment and compelling me to do the same. It is my responsibility along with them and those yet unborn to continuously give birth to my Indigenous present. (192)

Given this, Indigenous peoples' historic running practices continue to inform their present and shape their future. That is, commemorative runs are not simply an account of the past; they are a way to relive and/or retell it in ways that center Native peoples.

On one level, then, runs like the Sand Creek Massacre Healing Run/Walk disrupt the colonial narrative of Manifest Destiny and supposed Christian righteousness. On another level, such runs recontextualize the events they commemorate so that the Sand Creek run “becomes a way of empathizing across time and space...and then living a different ending” (Simpson 208). While the massacre (and the colonial mindset that sanctioned it) remains a source of intergenerational trauma for the Cheyenne and Arapaho and contributed to removal efforts, it neither destroyed them nor prevented them from returning and reconnecting with their homelands. These nations and their runners demonstrate their resiliency and sovereignty via the support Indigenous participants offer one another and the lead they take during the yearly run and associated events. Similarly, though US soldiers murdered their ancestors, modern-day Cheyenne and Arapaho carry their relations with them as future generations will do for the current runners so that they, too, are ever-present. While this may not change historical events, it does reframe them, providing the Cheyenne and Arapaho greater agency in sharing their cultural narratives of those events and their impacts.

The same can be said of the Pascua Yaqui's 2018 commemorative run recognizing their tribal lands despite colonial borders that would separate those lands and the people from them. In addition, the preservation and adaptation of ceremonial/prayer running and runners as messengers further support continued Native lifeways. In this way, running supports Audra Simpson's view of Indigenous bodies as "political orders" that function individually and in community to challenge colonial conquest precisely because their existence exposes settler colonialism as a constructed (rather than default) socio-political narrative (qtd in L. Simpson). Thus, these running practices function as what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson calls "affirmative refusal," contributing to an Indigenous resurgence where Native culture exists beyond colonizers' control (198).

Native Counternarratives and S-Words

Such resurgence requires not only a refusal of colonial narratives, but also an insistence on Indigenous presence. To this effect, Native womxn runners are consciously using their running platforms to share counternarratives that dispel colonial assumptions regarding Native health and bodies, public space, and knowledge making. For internal, Indigenous audiences, this re-storying affirms Native lived experiences and cultural knowledge based in relationality. For external, non-Native audiences, it serves as a counteractive measure that exposes white, heteropatriarchal privilege and its racist, sexist, and gendered underpinnings – the very inequities that have collectively contributed to efforts at Indigenous erasure and cultural genocide and, as explored in the previous chapter, that persist in modern running communities.

Sickness

In her work on physical activity as a means to foster decolonization, Tricia McGuire-Adams positions culturally centered movement as a means of disrupting the colonial “deficit narrative” that casts Indigenous peoples as unhealthy. She argues that this narrative conspires with other means of conquest to contribute to the decimation of Native cultures by naturalizing the destruction of their bodies. As McGuire-Adams contends:

Settler-colonial erasure does not only happen by external violence (e.g., genocidal tactics and sexualized violence) but becomes an internalized erasure vis-à-vis ill health.

Consequently, when Indigenous women die of ill health or chronic diseases, we are also unknowingly fulfilling the logic of settler-colonial erasure. [which] becomes, and is, an embodied experience. (39).

Thus, the deficit narrative of Native ill health not only contributes to erasure; it blames Indigenous peoples for their own destruction. This strategy functions ideologically by casting First Nation peoples as inferior and ignoring colonial relocation as contributing to higher rates of disease and obesity within Indigenous communities.

More specifically, this deficit narrative overlooks the fact that in addition to the violence they sanctioned against Native peoples, governmental mandates like the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the 1851 Indian Appropriations Act, and the Dawes Act were designed to steal fertile Indigenous homelands and redistribute them to white settlers. In doing so, tribes were forced to change their diets as the plants and animals they traditionally lived among shifted and reservations were divided over time. Such mandates have left several Native communities without access to quality, affordable food in what, today, we call food deserts. In result, as federal policy restricted Indigenous migratory hunting and fishing patterns, government rations

and subsidized foods replaced traditional Native diets. Policies like these and their resultant detrimental impacts on Native ways of life – neither of which the colonial deficit narrative acknowledges – continue to contribute to poorer health outcomes and more sedentary lifestyles among modern Indigenous communities.

The Native womxn of Minnesota-based running group, Kwe Pack, are personally aware of these impacts and are actively working to shift the narrative regarding Indigenous health for both themselves and others. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the members of Kwe Pack have all come to running to address physical, mental, and emotional health concerns. In the process, they have discovered a way to reconnect to themselves, the land, and tribal teachings. For example, one member, Nichole Diver, feels that “Running with the Kwe Pack is like feeling the wind on your face. It’s refreshing and freeing....Through running I met me, a me I’ve never known before...a stronger, happier, healthier, more confident me” (Birch-McMichael). Her description highlights not just getting to know herself better but also appreciating the experience of running the lands and feeling the elements.

In addition to this individual empowerment, the Kwe (i.e., womxn) in this Pack have also found community within their group, among other Native womxn runners, and more broadly within the larger running public. The group’s Instagram account, [@kwepack](#), uses collective pronouns in several of its posts, signaling their communal focus. One post, in particular, includes a photo of a runner’s lower legs with one foot on the ground and the sole of the other raised, midstride, as they run toward a group of trees ahead. Over the left side of this [image](#), the following poem appears:

Every time

We step outside

Every time We run

out of grief

Every time We run

out of love

Every time We

choose

To run

Towards our Life

We are Victorious

#KwePack (Kwe Pack)

The capitalized “We” in this text emphasizes the group as sharing in both hardships and triumphs as well as in having the power to decide to run and, in so doing, to shape their own lives, including their health. The lines “We run/out of grief...We run/out of love” also signify two different meanings here. On first read, grief and love are the reasons for running; they run because they are grieving or as an expression of love for running, themselves, and/or others. However, a second read offers another meaning where grief or love become the things they “run out of,” or lack. That is, running becomes a way to rid themselves of grief, or a lack of love becomes a reason to “choose to run/Towards our Life.” Likewise, “our Life” has a dual meaning in that it can signal the life Kwe Pack shares with each other and/or, in a broader sense, the Indigenous lives and traditions that running helps to maintain. This plural “we,” then, demonstrates the community these women build through and around running. That community, in turn, is key to combating colonial narratives that cast these womxn and their communities as inherently unhealthy. It motivates them to take care of their physical, mental, and emotional

health by sharing in the joy of running; encouraging accountability to themselves and each other; and offering empathy.

This is only one of many posts that highlight their mutual support with several other entries featuring members running outside together and with their families. These posts signal the mentorship roles that Kwe Pack members have taken up within their communities where they not only encourage one another to run, but they also serve as healthy examples to their families, friends, and others. As such, they intentionally challenge the colonial narrative of Native ill health and inspire others to eat better and take up whatever forms of movement are accessible to them. Regarding the group's impact, Kwe Pack member, Melissa Walls, says, "We have switched something massive in just one generation...this is not easy work. So, it is nothing short of miraculous to see those norms totally flipped in my own life and family because of this Indigenous women's running group. And it ripples out: Communities are watching" (Mailhot). In fact, after meeting with them on her *2020 Vision Tour*, Oprah Winfrey dubbed Kwe Pack "the poster women for wellness," admiring their dedication to physical activity despite the cold Minnesota winters (Lavine). This declaration is significant not just because it comes from a mainstream, Black media mogul but also because it centers Native womxn (and, by extension, Indigenous people) as pillars of fitness – and running, in particular – areas where white womxn have remained the norm. While this one instance does not resolve normative whiteness writ large, Kwe Pack and other Native womxn runners' daily running and discursive activity continuously help to correct more than just the colonial narrative of ill health.

Not Stereotypes, Racial Slurs

Two of the most prevalent colonial narratives deployed to criminalize and control Native bodies are encapsulated by the racial slurs: “savage” and “squaw.” Mainstream, white society’s norming of these terms has worked for centuries to justify colonial conquest and continued efforts to decimate Native cultures. Per the colonial narrative, Indigenous peoples need Euro-American Christian guidance to assimilate into *civilized* (i.e., the colonizers’) culture and become productive (i.e., obedient) members of North American society. Legal rulings like the United States Supreme Court’s 1832 decision in *Worcester v. Georgia* codify these attitudes with Chief Justice John Marshall describing Native nations as “domestic dependent nations” and likening their relationship to the US government as “that of a ward to his guardian” (“Federal”). Citizenship, however, is reserved for whites,⁶ and public discourse/space, for white men, exclusively. Any behaviors that question (let alone contradict) these norms are censured as uncivilized and cast as threats to colonial social order that must be squelched by any means necessary. Given this, the colonial deployment of the terms “savage” and “squaw” functions to dehumanize Indigenous peoples and justify colonial violence – implications that persist into present day.

Tracing the term *savage*’s origins, Togovnik explains: “Within an anthropology that grew in conjunction with colonialism, people of African descent and indigenous peoples became classified as primitives whose bodies were more natural, sexual, emotional, and violent than people who enjoyed the civilizing influences of European culture” (qtd. in Hill Collins 260). This misclassification of Natives as “primitive” served to justify European (and later Canadian and American) colonial violence and forced assimilation as supposed corrective measures to address the so-called “Indian problem.” In fact, as Daniel E. Lieberman et. al contend in their study of

Rarámuri (i.e., Tarahumara) running culture, “there is a long tradition of believing ‘primitive’ humans to be naturally athletic with an innate capability and proclivity for extreme physical feats...as impervious to pain and fatigue” (357). Such beliefs, what Lieberman et. al call the “fallacy of the athletic savage,” only serve to further dehumanize Native peoples, making it easier to treat them with increasing violence and disdain.

Though seeming opposites, competing white, classifications of Natives as either violent “savages” or unknowing “heathens” both support their subjugation by North American settlers. Contextualizing the implications of these stereotypes, Smithers describes how, “Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, European colonizers were at pains to justify their predatory practices: ‘savages’ they argued, failed to make the land productive, and ‘heathens’ needed their souls saved by Christian missionaries” (255). In this way, Indigenous peoples served as a foil to colonizers/settlers who positioned themselves and their exploits as civilized, enlightened, and/or godly – an ideological stance that informed colonialism from first contact and was later solidified in the mid-1800’s under the doctrine of “Manifest Destiny.” Such ideology was also the driving force behind Indigenous boarding schools in North America, a colonial system whose impacts, continue to affect Native lives.⁷ However, as one Indigenous womxn runner reminds us, such notions are embedded in foundational principles of US governance and continue even today.

In a [July 4, 2021](#) post, Jordan Marie Brings Three White Horses Whetstone (Kul Wicasa Oyate/Lower Brule Sioux), a fourth-generation Indigenous runner, discusses the word “savage” on her Instagram account, [@nativein_la](#). Mirroring a similar entry from [July 4 2020](#), this post includes an image that focuses on the runner looking sideways into the camera with her hand to her chin. Wearing a peach tank top, Whetstone is sitting outdoors surrounded by nature on a

summer day, and her beaded earrings and turquoise ring give a clear nod to Indigenous culture.

Accompanying this image, she writes of the Fourth of July holiday:

I don't celebrate today anymore...this holiday reminds me of systemic oppression...In the Declaration of Independence – I am referred to as 'Merciless Indian Savages.' This is how we are seen and documented to this day. I do not use the word Savage nor appreciate hearing it in songs, IG stickers, or as a cool expression. People need to recognize how harmful words can be. (Whetstone "[Last](#)")

After acknowledging the things she does celebrate – her family, ancestors, and those doing activist work to dismantle racist systems of oppression – and declaring herself a “proud...Lakota woman,” Whetstone signs the post “Sincerely, A ‘merciless Indian Savage’” thus, adding a defiant and sarcastic air that is supported by her posture, sideways glance, and facial expression (“Last”).

Despite her bold glance, Whetstone's caption reminds her audience that words cause real damage. She intentionally calls out those who use the term “savage” in popular music, on their Instagram accounts, or conversationally. Here, she is referring to the current popular uses of the word to mean outstanding, unafraid, fashionable, or otherwise trendy. For Whetstone, the fact that it is now a slang term does not change its historical meaning or erase the slur's devastating effects. Using the term, then, not only ignores its historic application to Indigenous peoples to scapegoat them for colonial violence, but also perpetuates that violence. Furthermore, the continued presence of the word in the Declaration of Independence – considered foundational to American democracy and the reason US citizens celebrate July Fourth – sanctions its continued use and institutionalizes colonial violence by cementing this distorted image of Native peoples in

popular imagination. Such are the pillars of colonial *civility* (whose brutal reality may better fit the definition of the derogatory term she opposes), or so Whetstone's post seems to suggest.

In 2020, she contextualizes her discussion of the term "savage" in the Declaration of Independence among other anti-racist efforts to remove Confederate monuments and street names; rename sports teams that appropriate and degrade Indigenous culture; and support Native sovereignty and Black liberation. Similarly, in 2021, she situates it among discussions surrounding the spike in anti-Black and anti-Asian violence, noting how "For so many, we were born with targets, born with less opportunity, because of the color of our beautiful skin and who we are" (Whetstone "[Last](#)"). By doing so, Whetstone rhetorically reframes the Declaration of Independence and its promise of equality as a "privileged kind of equality" – specifically, the kind that applies to the white, cisgender men who wrote it and others everyone else ("[Last](#)"). In this context, then, her call to revise the Constitution for greater inclusion aligns with recent movements to recognize and attempt to rectify systemic white supremacy and all the ways it shows up in BIPOC individuals' lives.

Although this may seem unrelated to running, the racism embedded in the term "savage" has impacted runners like Whetstone both in- and outside of the sport. For example, Whetstone recalls being the victim of a hate crime in middle school as follows: "Walking home...with a friend of mine who was white, there were kids driving by and calling out racial slurs....So they get out of their car, they come with their brass knuckles...their chains...with a pocket knife....And [my friend] basically told me to run" (Mondoor). In this case, running saved Whetstone from the physical assault her friend suffered for walking with her, but despite reporting the incident to the police and identifying the assailants, "it was just chalked up to kids being kids" (Mondoor). She describes this experience as helping her understand that while being

Lakota made her part of a tightknit community in her home state of South Dakota, it made her an outcast and a target in rural Maine.

Such racism also presents itself on the track as Indigenous runner, Rosalie Fish (Cowlitz Tribe, Muckleshoot Reservation) discovered in her sophomore year of high school. In a recent interview on *Out & Back With Alison Mariella Désir*, she reflects on her experience running for her tribal school, observing:

What I learned through competing as an athlete for a tribal school was the preconceptions of me as an athlete because I was tribal. I would show up to meets, and the rivaling schools would perceive me as a joke. We even, at one point, found graffiti in the women's bathroom, and there were offensive slurs such as 'Indian savage' and 'live off the government.' (Fish "Activism")

Having discovered that running helped her manage her (then undiagnosed) bipolar disorder, these experiences added both weight and a sense of responsibility to Fish's track career. She remembers, "that's where it became more than running. It became representing my people, and standing up to these stereotypes....to show that we can be top caliber athletes no matter what anybody says" ("Activism"). Since that time, she has worked to counteract the "savage" stereotype while also addressing white supremacy (an ideology built upon the colonial construction of Native inferiority) through her sport by training hard and setting an example for other Indigenous athletes. Not surprisingly, then, Fish has also found a mentor in Jordan Whetstone.

After seeing media coverage of Jordan Whetstone's 2019 Boston Marathon run, Fish contacted Whetstone to ask her permission to follow her example in advocating for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Two-Spirits (MMIW2S). With that permission secured, Fish

painted a red handprint across her mouth and the letters MMIW on her body during her 2019 high school state championship meet where she won three events and placed second in a fourth race (Trent). She recalls others' reactions to not just her activism, but her appearance, stating "When there's so much prejudice toward Native people, they looked at my paint and thought it was war paint because they think Native people are violent" (Trent). That assumption of Native violence is rooted in the racist term "savage," which as Fish's experiences demonstrate, continues to perpetuate colonial violence against Indigenous peoples and Native womxn, in particular.

Although not using the word herself, Jordan Whetstone also posts about the implications of the term "squaw," which United States government officials only recently (i.e., in March 2022) classified as a racial slur. Two different posts – one in [October 2017](#), and the other in [October 2019](#) – center on the cultural appropriation of supposed Native-themed Halloween costumes and their impacts on Native peoples. The 2017 post includes a photo of Whetstone standing outside dressed in traditional regalia with a caption that reads: "PSA: MY CULTURE IS NOT A COSTUME. This is my life. This is how I was raised. My regalia is not a costume. My regalia for my 'Coming of Age ceremony/Isnati Awicalowanpi' is not a costume. Pocahontie costumes are sexualizing and dehumanizing a people." (Whetstone "[PSA](#)"). Featuring a photo of Whetstone walking along a sidewalk wearing a black t-shirt with white lettering that reads, "MY CULTURE IS NOT A COSTUME," the 2019 post echoes this sentiment. Its caption, which begins with a definition of cultural appropriation, further asserts:

When you have old western movies depicting us by the stereotypical images of Natives or Disney films like Pocahontas push the narrative in an overly romanticized way and hyper-sexualizing Matoaka (Pocahontas), this gives everyone else in the world the image

of what Natives look like. Savage and apparently, clothed provocatively...It also encourages others to view us as a caricature, as less than, as objects. (Whetstone [“#CulturalAppropriation”](#))

Thus, though she does not use the actual terms, Whetstone is referencing the slurs “squaw/Indian maiden” (and “savage”) and how they are mobilized via popular culture – specifically, via the Disney film *Pocahontas* and culturally appropriative Halloween costumes that misrepresent traditional regalia and hypersexualize Native womxn.⁸ She explicitly connects the two issues in a 2018 op-ed piece for *Bustle*, where she asks readers: “Pocahontas was around 11 years old when John Smith — a man then in his late 20s — decided to make her his? And did you know that when you dress like a ‘PocaHottie,’ you hypersexualize a young girl who was repeatedly violated by a man almost 20 years older than she was?” (Daniel “I’m”)⁹. In this way, she exposes these tropes for what they are: a means to justify the settler colonial attack of Native peoples,’ and more particularly, Native womxn’s, bodies.

Such attacks are not a thing of the past and continue to impact Native womxn runners like Whetstone who recalls multiple incidents of harassment. In a 2019 *Runner’s World* article on runner safety, she describes an incident that happened when she was in high school, stating:

When I was walking, a car full of young men slowly rolled alongside me, making disgusting and racial comments; threatening me. They even brandished weapons. They were white males, and there was nothing to inhibit them from doing this in public, shared space. I was exposed, and I was brown. (Daniel “How Being”)¹⁰

Here, she connects being threatened with being Indigenous in a white, male space. She understands that “To be an Indigenous woman, a Lakota runner with brown skin, means that I am more of target” (Daniel “How Being”). Unfortunately, this is not her only experience with

these sorts of threats. In the same article, Whetstone also recounts how she was stalked by a man who “used [her] exposure as a runner to terrorize [her]” during college (“How Being”). As a member of the University of Maine track team, she trained and ran in public venues, and her meet schedules were a matter of public record. This provided her stalker easy access, causing Whetstone to not just avoid but actually fear solo runs, and impacting her athletic performance. As her article contends, these experiences have stuck with her for years, making Whetstone realize that running or walking outdoors, especially alone, is a privilege that white men are culturally sanctioned to enjoy at her expense.

Exploring this phenomenon further, Laroque contends that “the entire spectrum of stereotypes of Indigenous women contributes to a ‘dehumanizing portrayal of Aboriginal women as ‘squaws,’ which renders all Aboriginal female persons vulnerable to physical, verbal, and sexual violence’” (qtd. in Hubbard et. al 67). Smithers elaborates on this “stereotype” explaining how its two common manifestations as the “squaw slut,” who is a hypersexualized portrayal of a “savage” Indigenous woman, or the “squaw drudge” who is mistreated by Native men, combine to “[present] Indigenous women as either victims of male violence or wanton harlots willing to prostitute themselves and participate in acts of sexual hedonism” (254). Even the seemingly more positive “Indian maiden” trope functions in a similar fashion by putting Native women in service of white men (think, as Whetstone suggests in the aforementioned post, the whitewashed version of Matoaka – known in mainstream pop culture as “Pocahontas”), which “frames Indigenous women as objects to be bought, used, stolen, and even destroyed” (Hubbard et. al 68).

Having established this context, now consider the subtler, more cumulative daily manifestations of this hypersexualized characterization of Native womxn. For example, Disney

hosts running events on its theme park grounds that encourage race participants to dress up as their favorite Disney characters. In its race policies, the corporation stipulates that “Costumes must be family-friendly and may not be obstructive, offensive, objectionable or violent” (“On Site”). Despite these stipulations, a quick scan of #runDisney on Instagram reveals that at least five participants dressed up as Pocahontas for the recent (February 2023) Disney Princess Half Marathon Weekend. Upon closer inspection, four of the five (presumably non-Native) womxn wore the “[Riverbend Princess Athletic Tank Top](#),” which mimics the tan form fitting, one shouldered dress that Disney’s aged-up version of Pocahontas wears in the animated film. In its place, the fifth runner wore the “[Riverbend Princess Sports Bra](#)” instead. All but one of these five womxn also wore the matching “[Riverbend Princess Athletic Skort](#),” which features an iridescent feather print over a tan fabric. Apparel company, Crowned Athletics, manufactures and sells these items, marketing them as suitable “for a workout, race day costume, casual cosplay, or parkbound outfit!” despite the fact that they not only appropriate Indigenous culture, but in the process, also reify the aforementioned “Indian maiden” (“squaw”) trope (“Riverbend”). However, Crowned Athletics and their customers are not the only ones doing so.

Because the photos and the posts that feature them celebrate each runner’s completion of their chosen marathon distance, race organizers clearly deemed these outfits as meeting runDisney’s costume guidelines. By implication, this classifies those costumes as “family-friendly,” “unoffensive,” “unobjectionable,” and “non-violent.” The question then becomes: for whom? Clearly not for Indigenous runners like Jordan Whetstone who has been quite vocal about cultural appropriation and the harmful impacts of the fetishization of Native womxn. Thus, while seemingly innocent fun for those who donned their “Riverbend Princess” attire on race day, for Native womxn, everyday instances like these demonstrate the interplay of white

habitus/racism and sexism and are precisely the reason that harmful tropes like “squaw” remain so entrenched.

As Smithers and others have detailed, such essentialized, derogatory images of Native women have circulated via newspapers, film, books/comics, and adult media like burlesque and pornography, mobilizing a combined racial and gender-based discrimination that not only reinforces heteropatriarchy but flattens women’s identities and puts Native North American women at increased risk of sexual violence, exploitation, and murder. In other words, “The implications seemed clear: the [presumed] licentiousness of Indigenous women invited the sexual advances of ‘cow boys,’ ‘drunk Indians,’ and white men in mining towns—a history that continues into the present day with the ‘man camps’ that currently supply labor to fracking operations in the United States and Canada” (Smithers 261). Hence, the connection between Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn/Relatives (MMIW/R) and extractive industries that scholars like Sarah Deer have made.¹¹

These derogatory images also function as a means to control Native womxn’s bodily agency by tying it to white, feminine norms and classifying any womxn who falls outside those norms as a prostitute. As Simpson explains, colonial governments defined “prostitution as ‘illicit’ sexual agency taking place in the public sphere, often meaning any expression of relationship outside of church, monogamous marriages between men and women of the same ‘race’” (107). Such policies reinforce colonial heteropatriarchy and bigenderism by limiting Indigenous womxn to heterosexual relationships within which they are confined to domestic/private spaces. Further, these laws (and the ideologies they transmit) criminalize Native womxn who do not comply, making them culpable for any harm that comes to them should they venture into public (i.e., male) spaces – what might be considered a colonial “rape schedule.”

Space

With these slurs and the violence they sanction in mind, then, Native womxn runners' presence in public spaces serves as a collective counterargument to colonial ideas about who can take up public space and to whom that space belongs. As mentioned above in the section on running in Native cultures, running the land in and of itself is an act of Indigenous resurgence that can reconnect Native peoples to their lands and lifeways. Thus, Native womxn runners enact this resurgence each time they go for a run. However, colonial-based derogatory images of Native womxn, along with the violence they authorize against these womxn, make their running a more complex act of resistance. In other words, while all Indigenous peoples have strong relational connections to land, Native womxn are directly equated with it, and understanding this connection is key to grasping how their running is revolutionary.

Both Indigenous and Eco Feminists draw an intentional correlation between women and the environment. In fact, *The 6-Point Action Plan to Reform Current Systemic Barriers and Restore Safety of Indigenous Women* begins, "Traditionally, like the land, Indigenous women were respected and held sacred within their Indigenous Nations" thereby equating women and the environment as connected (National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, et. al). Similarly, in their discussion of Ecofeminism, Lynne Woehrle and Donna Engelmann echo this correlation as follows: "Ecofeminists view patriarchy as responsible for both the oppression of women, the poor, and indigenous peoples and for systems of production and consumption which view nature as a commodity to be used and discarded." Thus, these complimentary schools of thought critique patriarchal, extractive practices that harm both women and their environments and argue for social, ideological, and material transformations that will serve both.

To varying degrees, then, both Eco- and Indigenous feminists base their connection of women to nature on the social roles that have more closely tied women to their environments such as agricultural practices like farming and water collection or, more contentiously, reproduction and child rearing. However, while Ecofeminists identify patriarchy as the source of oppression for women and the environment, Indigenous feminists posit colonialism as the impetus, with patriarchy being only one tool of this dominating and destructive worldview. Thus, when Native feminists discuss the connection between women and nature, as they did in the aforementioned *6-Point Action Plan*, they do so as an argument for a return to Indigenous relationality because, as J.P. Clark points out in his discussion of Shiva, “Traditional subsistence production depends on greater interdependence and complementarity between men and women, whereas development typically marginalizes women, reduces their status and that of their labor, and increases male dominance”. This process of development and its effects play a key role in North American settler colonialism and the previously discussed “squaw” slur, turning the positive association of women with land on its head.

Because settler colonialism is built on the premise of domination and conquest with “territoriality...[its] specific, irreducible element,” land became a key commodity (Wolfe 388). This, of course, meant that so did Native women, who were seen as its embodiment and as gateways to environmental and cultural capital. Not coincidentally, then, “European men who entered ‘marriages’ with Indigenous women to access Native American resources and trade networks all helped to frame references to Indian ‘squaws’” (Smithers 259). Gregory Smithers’ use of quotation marks around “marriages” here signals the likelihood that such ties were forced (both by the men and colonial heteropatriarchal dictates) rather than consensual. Such forced relations with white men work in service to colonial conquest. As Sarah Deer explicates,

“perpetrators of sexual assault and colonization both thrive on control and power over their victims and ‘sexual assault mimics the worst traits of colonization in its attack on the body, invasion of physical boundaries, and disregard for humanity’ (p. 150)” (qtd. in Mack and Na’Puti 359). Comprising the international epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn, Girls, Two-Spirits, and Relatives (MMIWG2SR), attacks like these continue in the present day.

More current event than history, such circumstances compound the risk of more than just harassment for Native womxn runners. Yet, it is within this context that they run. Kwe Pack founder, Sarah Agaton Howes, describes this choice as follows:

One layer is that we need to know we are free. Being sedentary and sick as Native people is genocide. The reservation system was always meant to be a trap. And being too afraid to go outside and move our bodies is killing us. Running is freedom for many of us. We also know, though, that being out in the woods or on roads is dangerous, especially for us Native women. (Mailhot)

The options are straightforward: a sedentary life means poor health and earlier death while an active life, though it comes with risk, offers a chance at freedom. That risk is something that groups like Kwe Pack and Native Women Running are seeking to mitigate by connecting Indigenous womxn who can then run together for support and safety. Kwe Pack, for example organizes locally with regular runs, but its members have also entered marathons and other events together so that the womxn neither travel nor race alone.

Native Women Running (NWR) does the same, organizing teams that are event specific, and already has team participation planned for half and ultramarathons in 2023. With thirty thousand followers and having featured over two thousand Indigenous womxn, NWR’s Instagram account ([@native_women_running](https://www.instagram.com/native_women_running)) serves as a primary way to connect with the

organization (Lopez). Here, Indigenous runners can learn about upcoming events and how to apply to participate as part of the NWR team. Their highest profile team event to date has been the 2022 Boston Marathon, about which team member, Angel Tadytin (Diné) reminisced:

I wore my navajo bun and mini Navajo ribbon skirt. I was surprised how many I educated while running on my Navajo culture and the [@native_women_running](#) team. So whether it was [@shaylaraemh](#) beaded hair tie, [@hozhorunner4](#) MMIW skirt, [@llcooljennings](#) land back shirt, [@indigenous_runner's](#) families ribbon skirts or our [@native_women_running](#) team shirts someone saw us and was educated by us. (Native Women Running “[We want](#)”)

As she observes, these runners represent their cultures as they run, providing not only visibility for Native peoples, but also the opportunity to educate others about their cultures, and they teach these lessons as they run! Not an easy task when you have a 26.2-mile course to cover, your body aches, and you are one of only five Native womxn in a race of over 25,000 participants.

Along with cultural representation and the Indigenous resurgence they embody, these Native womxn runners demonstrate physical and mental fortitude that is traditionally ascribed to men. With candid posts recalling bodily pain and negative self-talk about how they got themselves into such situations, their strength is not the kind assumed by the “fallacy of the athletic savage,” but a deeply personal and human one. It is further amplified by the emotional courage and deep sense of responsibility they exhibit in showing up in spaces that were not designed for them – colonial spaces; white spaces; male spaces – and insisting on being their authentic, Indigenous selves (because who else could they be?). These womxn’s resolve to take up space despite continued colonial threats to their bodies and psyches remains an impetus for their running, but it extends beyond the sport as well.

Skills and Scholarship

As Kwe Pack member, Alicia Kozlowski, points out, “This group is comprised of incredibly resilient and strong women—there are lawyers, educators, social workers, professional artists, mothers, and public servants. We are all leaders, with gifts to share in our own ways. We are becoming the new ancestors” (Mailhot). Like Kwe Pack, the 2022 Boston Marathon Native Women Running (NWR) team included: former elementary school teacher turned organizer, Verna Volker (Navajo); three time All American collegiate athlete and Running Into Culture Program Director, Shayla Manitowabi-Huebner (Anishnaabe/Wiikwemkoong); marathoner and running apparel designer, Samantha Noyce (Diné); social worker Angel Tadytin (Diné); and soil microbiologist, Dr. Lydia Jennings (Yoeme and Wixárika). Thus, these womxn are taking up space in more than just outdoor running communities; they are inhabiting entrepreneurial and academic spaces in which they have been historically underrepresented and bringing Indigenous knowledges and knowledge-making processes with them into those spaces.

After graduating with her master’s degree in Exercise Science, for instance, Shayla Manitowabi-Huebner has gone on to work as a Scholarship Program Assistant at American Indian Services, helping other Indigenous youth pursue higher education. Because she was able to better connect with her Native culture via her running experiences – particularly, via the community support she received during her short eight-week training for the Boston Marathon – Manitowabi-Huebner started the Running Into Culture program to help Native youth strengthen their own cultural ties (“#439”). She was able to start the program with the support of the Dreamstarter Grant awarded by Running Strong for American Indian Youth, an organization that supports Indigenous health and heritage. Their spokesperson and co-founder, 1964 Olympic

Gold Medalist, Billy Mills (Oglala Lakota), served as a role model for Manitowabi-Huebner who now hopes to do the same for Native youth.

Like Manitowabi-Huebner, her Native Women Running teammate, Lydia Jennings, has also pursued higher education in service to her community. A soil microbiologist by trade, Dr. Jennings, earned her PhD in environmental sciences and wrote her dissertation on the impacts of mining on Indigenous communities and mining reclamation efforts. Specifically, she found that reclamation processes that incorporated local Native community's traditional knowledge resulted in better ecosystem recovery ("Run to Be"). For Jennings, who acknowledges grappling with imposter syndrome during her studies, her findings helped her realize how science and Indigenous ways of knowing could be "braided together" ("Run to Be"). She credits Native mentors and running as helping her work through the struggles she faced as an Indigenous womxn in the historically unwelcoming space of academia who was writing her dissertation in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, no less.

It is for these reasons that, when Jennings' graduation ceremony was cancelled due to the pandemic, she chose to run in ceremony instead. About this decision, Jennings observes:

I want[ed] closure on my PhD process, and I ha[d] to create my own ceremony of closure. Running seemed like the perfect avenue to do so. As I was working on my dissertation, running to honor the many Indigenous scholars I was citing seemed even more appropriate. It's important to honor these scientists because I wouldn't be here without them. ("Run to Be").

In the end, her ceremonial run spanned fifty miles, honoring forty-nine Indigenous scientists and dedicating the last mile to future Native scholars for whom she will become a role model (or, as members of Kwe Pack would say, "a future ancestor"). She formally began that mentorship in

August 2021, when upon co-teaching her first graduate course on Indigenous Research and Ethics, Dr. Jennings posted some powerful statistics on her Instagram account ([@llcooljennigs](#)), noting that:

Native American students comprise 1% of the US undergraduate student population and less than 1% of the graduate population. We are often left off of most post-secondary data due to our smaller sample size. But we out here!

There are 750 Indigenous PhD's across the US in ALL disciplines. In STEM, Indigenous graduate students are 0.002% of the demographic. I'm thankful to be amongst them, and eager to support more to join me!

...there are many of us in these institutions fighting to make these spaces for you.

(Jennings "[Today](#)")

Mentors like Jennings create the space for future Native scholars by preserving cultural lifeways that are deeply rooted in their Indigenous communities; lifeways that have, too often, been dismissed as non-academic.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes her own culturally situated knowledge making as a Nishnaabewin womxn, stating plainly, "My life as kwe...is *method* because my people have always generated knowledge through the combination of emotion and intellectual knowledge within the kinetics of our placed-based practices, as mitigated through our bodies, minds, and spirits" (29). By "kinetics" here, she means the process of doing something in context, which Simpson argues, is the way that knowledge is created (20). For Native knowledge makers, whether in or outside the academy, that context is always land and community, and it is with and within these settings that meaning is shaped. Given this, it is to these entities that Indigenous scholars are responsible (159).

Experiences like Shayla Manitowabi-Huebner's founding of Running Into Culture and Lydia Jennings' doctoral journey seem to take up similar ideas regarding land-based practice as a source of both Native strength and knowledge production. These womxn remain grounded in their communities and by the practice of running, which weaves its way into their academic and professional lives time and again. Perhaps, then, the kinetics of their situated Indigenous knowledges are supported by (if not metabolized through) the type of *doing* that they embody via their movement (i.e., running) in outdoor spaces that double as cultural classrooms and teachers. Simpson contends that, "Theory and praxis, story and practice are interdependent, cogenerateds of knowledge. [and] Practices are politics," (20). If this is the case, maybe it is that symbiotic relationship between running, land, and culture that is the catalyst for these Native womxn's use of their sport as a unique form of activism as well. In the subsequent chapter, I will more closely consider this phenomenon by exploring how Native womxn runners' activism blends embodied and kinesthetic, visual and material rhetorics on- and offline.

Notes

1. See “Indigenous Relationality” section of Chapter 1 or Leanne Betasamosake Simpson.
2. Nancy Fraser describes counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourse to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (67). For more, see the “Networked Feminist Counterpublics” section of Chapter 1 or see Warner.
3. I use the term *counternarratives* here to distinguish my discussion of Native womxn runners’ voices from Aja Martinez’s Critical Race Theory (CRT) composite counterstory and to emphasize that, though they may sometimes act in concert, Native womxn’s stories are diverse rather than monolithic. See “Counterstory/Counternarratives” section of Chapter 1.
4. Building from Glen Sean Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) defines grounded normativity as a “generated structure born and maintained from deep engagement with Indigenous processes that are inherently physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual” (23). For more, see “Indigenous Relationality” section of Chapter 1, or Coulthard.
5. See the Sovereign Bodies Institute’s “Reports,” the National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center’s “Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, (MMIW),” or the Urban Indian Health Institute’s “Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls”.
6. Native Americans were not officially granted U.S. citizenship until June 2, 1924 with the passing of the Indian Citizenship Act. See Library of Congress.
7. See “From Red to Orange: Strategic Use of Colors/Symbols” section in Chapter 4.
8. See “Pocahontas (character)”.

9. Jordan Whetstone formally published this *Bustle* article under her birth name Jordan Daniel. The author is, thus, listed as Jordan Daniel in the parenthetical citation and the references pages included at the end of this chapter.

10. Jordan Whetstone formally published this *Runner's World* article under her birth name Jordan Daniel. The author is, thus, listed as Jordan Daniel in the parenthetical citation and the references pages included at the end of this chapter.

11. See Sarah Deer.

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CHAPTER FOUR: NATIVE WOMXN RUNNERS' NETWORKED KNOWLEDGE AND ACTIVISM

Recognizing the power that their counternarratives have in reshaping perceptions of Native peoples in general and Native womxn, in particular, several Indigenous womxn runners use their running as a form of activism.¹ As discussed in the previous chapter, their presence on the land serves as an act of Indigenous resurgence (per Simpson) while the womxn's increasing participation in both local and national racing events actively diversifies the sport of running. That presence and participation, however, also brings Native cultural identities and social justice concerns to a wider audience. Furthermore, Native womxn runners' use of traditional and social media broadens their reach and allows them to coordinate efforts across platforms to address various issues that impact Indigenous communities. That expanded reach digitizes Indigenous cultural practices and identities to rhetorically claim space for Native peoples.

Thus, Native womxn runners are taking up public space on- and offline in service to their communities. Tackling numerous, interrelated concerns from Indigenous erasure/representation and land rights/stewardship to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women/Relatives (MMIW/R) and more inclusive modern Native identities, these runners' activism deploys multimodal discursive strategies via a combination of embodied, kinesthetic, visual, and material rhetorics. It is both these issues and the rhetorical strategies Native womxn use to address them via their running platforms that I seek to explore in this chapter. In doing so, I hope to center Native womxn's leadership as well as the intersectional efforts that guide and are supported by their activism – all of which combine to argue for recognition of Indigenous knowledge and personhood. More specifically, Native womxn should be valued as knowledge makers whose input/inclusion is necessary to both the mainstream running industry and the field of Rhetoric

and Composition if either is to address the racist, (hetero)sexist colonial systems upon which they were built.

Erasure/Representation

In addition to correcting the racialized and gendered misrepresentations of their peoples discussed in Chapter 3, Indigenous womxn runners use both their running and the media platforms to which they have gained access through their sport to combat Native erasure. Citing Tiffany J. King, Baldy observes: “Dehumanization of the ‘other’ continues in order to justify ongoing occupation but also to create settler spaces, spaces that must erase Native present and presence” (131). In other words, in order for colonial heteropatriarchal, bigendered, and capitalist ideologies to thrive, it is not enough to dehumanize Native North Americans via racial and gendered slurs or the violence these tropes sanction. Instead, “As King explains, ‘The inseparability of genocide and settlement force [us] to orient [our] examinations of the production of space in ways that always index the disappearance of the native....In order to make space, people and their ways of existing are being erased’ (2013, p.8)” (qtd. In Baldy 131). That erasure continues to happen on multiple fronts against Indigenous peoples, but perhaps, most fundamentally, via the settler colonially sanctioned theft of Native lands.

Given the previously established relational ties that exist among Indigenous peoples and their animal, plant, and elemental kin, colonial disruption of these bonds through relocation/removal of Native peoples from their homelands strikes a crucial blow to Native lifeways. However, that dispossession is compounded when colonists not only claim and occupy Indigenous homelands but also rename and restructure them (via colonially drawn borders and the idea of private property) thereby erasing Native peoples’ cultural histories and identities.² As

runner and creator/host of the *Grounded Podcast*, Dinée Dorame (Navajo/Indigenous Mexican/Yaqui) observes, “The act of re-naming or ‘staking claim’ to land and space is based in actively erasing Indigenous cultures by replacing them with a new identity” (Rom).

In the case of settler colonialism, that new identity actively dismantles the Native ways of being/knowing that are embedded in original place names and replaces these with racist, sexist monikers that reinforce white, male master narratives. Take, for example, Colorado’s Mount Evans Wilderness and Mount Evans Peak both of which are named after John Evans, the state’s second governor who sanctioned the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre (Rom).³ While the state acknowledges the U.S. Army’s wrongdoing at the annual Sand Creek Massacre Healing Run/Walk, it continues to honor the man responsible for that massacre by renaming Cheyenne/Arapaho lands after Evans. For descendants of the Cheyenne and Arapaho who were murdered by U.S. soldiers during the raid, such contradictory actions signify systemic ambivalence about if not continued racist disregard for Native lives. Likewise, despite knowing the impacts of the term on Native peoples in general and Native womxn, in particular, over 660 U.S. locations (i.e. towns, lakes/rivers and other bodies of water, mountains, etc.) across forty states have included the racist and sexist slur, “squaw” in their names for hundreds of years (Vigdor and Hauser).⁴ This nomenclature represents not just historical but persistent discrimination against Indigenous communities and womxn – a fact that a joint task force comprised of the U.S. Department of Interior and Board of Geographic Names in consultation with tribal governments has only recently (i.e. in March 2022) begun the process of redressing through the formal renaming of these locations on U.S. federal lands. If, as Robin Wall Kimmerer suggests, “Names are the way we humans build relationship, not only with each other but with the living world,” then place names carry significant weight (208). In the case of places

whose names included *squaw*, “Seeing the name on maps, and saying it in conversation normalizes the slur and further perpetuates discrimination and inequality” (Rom).

Consider, for example, Palisades Tahoe, California, which until September 2021, was commonly referred to as “Squaw Valley” despite having been renamed “Olympic Valley” sixty years prior when it served as the host city for the 1960 Olympic games. Because the location also serves as the starting point for the Western States Endurance Run (WSER), whose prestige stems from the fact that organizers bill the event as “the world’s oldest 100 mile trail race,” several runners have tagged their posts about the race with “#seeyouinsquaw” (Western). With the more recent 2021 name change along with official recognition of “squaw” as a racist, sexist slur and continued Indigenous advocacy, the hashtag has been revised to “#seeyouatstates” or “#seeyou@states”.⁵ However, the old name and popular hashtag/phrase, “see you in squaw,” still appear in online search results that include a 2013 *Runner’s World* article that used the phrase as its title and did nothing to recognize its offensive nature. That article is the top result in 5.3 million search results, which include discussions about why the hashtag should be changed to “see you at states” as well as comments on those discussions that accuse others of being oversensitive and continue to insist the original phrase is benign. Although both the WSER organizers and Palisades Tahoe have taken intentional steps to work more closely with local Washoe community over the last couple of years,⁶ conditions like these continue to presence colonial racism and sexism, and the daily hostilities they manifest against Indigenous peoples.

As if these implications were not enough given US history, runner and soil microbiologist, Lydia Jennings (Yoeme and Wixárika) explains the important ways that Indigenous place names center the land itself. Discussing Mount Wrightson in Arizona, Jennings describes how the mountain range’s two Indigenous names – “To:wa Kuswo Do’ag” among the

Tohono O’odham Nation and “Tewei Seewa Kawin” in Jennings’ own language – respectively reference the wild turkeys and a plant vital to her culture that can be found on the mountain. Per Jennings, then, “Both of these names tell us about the ecological and cultural significance of why this area is important to protect for our future ancestors, as opposed to the name of a European colonizer whose primary relationship with the landscape was exploitative and extractive” (“Land”). That is, the place names themselves instruct inhabitants about how to care for and interact with the lands, what needs protecting there, and why. When those names are the ones used by Indigenous peoples, their continued use also helps keep Native languages and, by extension, cultural knowledge alive. It is from this vantage point that Native womxn runners use their platforms to advocate for both land acknowledgements and the “LandBack” movement.

Land Acknowledgements

Whether a simple verbal or written statement or a more formal Indigenous led ceremony, land acknowledgements recognize the Native peoples upon whose lands various organizations or events now reside. While some see them as an empty gesture, others consider them a significant first step toward recognizing Indigenous peoples’ histories, cultural ways, and continual presence.⁷ As Jennings asserts, “an important part of making land acknowledgements is to recognize how systemic and institutional systems have been oppressive to Indigenous peoples, and how that oppression has historically influenced the way non-Indigenous people perceive and interact with Indigenous people, even today” (“Land”). Those non-Indigenous misperceptions include the idea that Native peoples no longer exist or that they fulfill one of the racist, sexist misrepresentations of Indigeneity discussed in Chapter 3. They also include the continuation of heteropatriarchal, white norms that devalue Native lives – particularly, those of Native womxn

and Two-Spirits – and scapegoat First peoples for their own oppression. With this in mind, Indigenous runners like Jordan Whetstone (Kul Wicasa Oyate/Lower Brule Sioux) and Lydia Jennings advocate for land acknowledgements on their platforms.

In the bulk of her Instagram posts ([@nativein_la](#)), especially those in which she is running or recreating outdoors, Whetstone tags the Indigenous peoples whose land she is currently on, modeling a virtual land acknowledgement that anyone can practice. For example, her [June 6, 2022](#), post features a photo of the runner in a gray sweatshirt embroidered with the words “YOU ARE ON NATIVE LAND.” Whetstone echoes this visual sentiment in her written post, which reads:

YOU ARE ON NATIVE LAND

TAKE THE CHALLENGE: Whose lands are you on? Drop in the comments and share the Indigenous lands you’re on. And if you don’t know, take this first step in learning! Share this post in your story to ask those from your community to do the same....And learn about the Indigenous peoples, their culture, their stewardship, and their community.

We are present. We exist. We are still here. (“[You](#)”)

She then includes the pin emoji followed by “Manahoac, Monacan, Sappony land” and “#NativeLands #WhoseLands #RunningOnNativeLands #Indigenous #Lakota” (Whetstone “[You](#)”). Here, she not only models how to acknowledge the Native lands her followers are on, but also challenges them to use that as a jumping off point for learning more about Indigenous cultures and communities. She further asserts continued Native presence in both time and space (i.e., as present in modern society and still connected to the land) – a fact reinforced by the Indigenized version of the Twitter logo that appears on the postcard she holds to symbolize her inclusion in Twitter’s Culture and Community platform as well as by the hashtags she includes.

The third hashtag in this post, in particular, #RunningOnNativeLands, is one that Whetstone uses frequently to signal not only the presence of runners on Indigenous homelands but her foundation's (Rising Hearts), land acknowledgement initiative of the same name.

Rising Hearts' [website](#) describes the *Running on Native Lands* Initiative as a “program that aims to make land acknowledgments at trail AND road race events common practice and encourages [their] partners to go the extra mile by giving back to the communities which the land is borrowed from” (“Running on”). Essentially, in exchange for their inclusion of a land acknowledgement at their events, Rising Hearts offers to serve as an intermediary between race organizers and the Indigenous communities through which their races will take place. They do so with the goal of “creating better communication between event directors and Native communities so that attendees can be more respectful of the land they are on and learn how to best protect the areas they visit in ways unique to that land and discover any culturally significant sites that should be avoided or require extra care” (“Running on”). In this way, they seek to prioritize responsibility to local Indigenous communities and to facilitate a more equitable interaction between Native and non-Native peoples by making the land acknowledgement only the initial step in that interaction and encouraging race organizers to “anticipate compensation to Indigenous communities or Native organizations for their time and energy who provide the land acknowledgement” (“Running on”). They also help event organizers determine who is best to deliver the land acknowledgement given the location of their event and/or what that acknowledgement might look like in practice.

In addition to the required (and compensated) land acknowledgement, *Running on Native Lands* asks event directors to consider fulfilling at least one of several additional asks. These include the provision of a set number of comped or discounted entries for Native participants or

the donation of a portion of event proceeds to an Indigenous community, organization, or program in the area. Additionally, the initiative encourages race organizers to donate left over food/beverages and/or clothing left behind by participants to those in need and offers to help identify local Native communities or organizations who can take those donations. Finally, the last ask is for sponsors to follow up on event cleanup efforts to ensure participants leave no trace on the trails or roadways they have enjoyed during the race.

Actions like these went a long way in helping to mend the Boston Athletic Association's (BAA) relationship with Indigenous communities in 2021 when, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, it moved the Boston Marathon from April to October 11, which was Indigenous Peoples' Day. Doing so meant the race, whose route runs through Boston and nearby Newton, Massachusetts, would disrupt planned celebrations among nearby Native communities and, because of the marathon's high-profile nature, detract from any broader (i.e., non-Native) recognition the holiday might receive. In short, as several Indigenous activists argued, it was yet another form of erasure. To rectify this, the BAA worked with Native runner Patti Dillon (Mi'kmaq), a Wings of America board member, to connect with Native organizers, including Rising Hearts. It is this collaboration that led to the first ever land acknowledgement at the 125th Boston Marathon in 2021, as well as the additional donated race bibs and expanded mural honoring Native runners that I discussed in Chapter 2 ("Boston"). The BAA also donated \$20,000 in support of an Indigenous Peoples' Day celebration in the city of Newton, Massachusetts organized by the local Mashpee Wampanoag community (Barry and Petri).

Through this collaboration, the BAA's initial erasure of Native peoples became a means to raise awareness of and garner media attention for Indigenous Peoples' Day as well as Native athletes and communities. In addition, the mural became a way to educate the public not only

about Native runners who previously participated in the Boston Marathon, but also about the cultural significance of running that those runners represent and continue to maintain. That visibility was a key reason that former collegiate athlete, Beth Wright (Laguna Pueblo) chose to run the 2021 Marathon, telling *Indian Country Today*:

It was important for me as an Indigenous runner to run the marathon on Indigenous Peoples' Day to show people that Indigenous people are still here. We're not just people from the past, but we exist in the present as runners, teachers, lawyers, activists, business owners, etc., and we're using our traditional knowledge in our day-to-day lives to uplift our communities, keep our communities healthy, and fight for our legal right to live on the lands we have always inhabited. (Ninham)

Thus, as the *Running on Native Lands* initiative and the implementation of several of its asks at the 2021 Boston Marathon demonstrate, land acknowledgements can serve as entry points to more just partnerships with Indigenous communities through which non-Natives can demonstrate respect for and recognition of First Nations and their lands by taking their cues from those lands' original stewards.

LandBack

Land stewardship is also at the heart of the LandBack movement, which NDN Collective's [LandBack.org](https://landback.org) defines as "THE RECLAMATION OF EVERYTHING STOLEN FROM THE ORIGINAL PEOPLES: LAND x LANGUAGE x CEREMONY FOOD x EDUCATION x HOUSING HEALTHCARE x GOVERNANCE MEDICINES x KINSHIP." The red "x" marks in this statement function visually and symbolically in several ways. First, they serve as scratch marks crossing out what was stolen/erased. This includes vital elements of

culture, basic needs, and the foundations/outcomes of sovereignty, and from a relational standpoint, each item listed fits into all three of these categories. With this in mind, the x-marks also emphasize and delineate each item on each line of the list as carrying equal weight. Next, they stand in for Indigenous leaders' signatures on treaties with colonial governments that regulated Native peoples' rights to the aspects listed⁸ – a fact that also draws attention to the ways colonial governments have continually broken those treaties. The x's further work as connectors that show the relation between the entities/things stolen and, lastly, as multipliers indicating the exponential, compounded impact of that theft on Native peoples.

Runner and scientist, Lydia Jennings, clarifies this impact in her 2021 *Trailrunner* article about land acknowledgments when she emphasizes how:

It's also important for many of us trail runners to remember that while for us, public lands can be our playgrounds, for the tribal nations who have a long-standing cultural grounding in these lands, these places are Indigenous peoples' food pantry, pharmacy, classroom, and place of worship. ("Land")

That is, land relations among Indigenous peoples are not about ownership as much as they are about kinship, and that bond creates an interdependence between Native peoples and their lands where each party shares a mutual responsibility to take care of the other (Kimmerer). That relational bond provides Indigenous communities unique knowledge that equips them to be the best caretakers of their lands because those lands themselves have been their teachers. Given this, the "x" marks in the NDN Collective's LandBack statement have an additional function – as the Indigenous equation that addresses the very colonial problem it delineates. It is with this sentiment in mind that Native womxn runners like Jennings advocate for the LandBack movement.

As a soil microbiologist, it is no surprise that Lydia Jennings has a close connection to the land. A quick scan of her Instagram account ([@llcooljennings](#)) confirms this with the bulk of her posts featuring Jennings working or running with the lands. Furthermore, *Run to Be Visible*, the short film on Jennings' doctoral journey and research heavily features the Apache lands upon which the Yoeme and Wixárika scholar lived and learned during her studies. As such, her decision to use her 2022 Boston Marathon run in support of the LandBack movement seems quite the natural fit. In an Instagram post about this choice, Jennings reflects:

Lately, my research has been looking a lot at the #landback movement in relationship to biodiversity and the #climatecrisis, and how Indigenous managed lands have more ecosystem resiliency. I hear many people talk about #landback in different contexts – some unsure, some excited. So, I wanted to use my run in Boston to highlight how tribal nations are putting landback into practice. (“[#Boston126](#)”)

To help do so, Jennings wore a white t-shirt that read “LandBack” in black hand drawn Native-inspired font on the front. The back of the shirt also explained, “#LandBack is the reclamation of: LAND x KINSHIP x CEREMONY x FOOD x EDUCATION x HOUSING x HEALTHCARE x GOVERNANCE x MEDICINES” before providing twenty-six examples of “#landback in practice” – one for each of the 26.2 miles of the Marathon route – that list the tribe, state, acres, and year for each example (Jennings “[#Boston126](#)”).

Though they differ slightly, Jennings' definition of LandBack echoes the statement by NDN Collective, and though perhaps unintentional, the capital “X” marks before the words *ceremony*, *healthcare*, and *governance* seem to place added emphasis on these elements of Indigenous sovereignty. Furthermore, the list of LandBack in practice that she provides includes twenty-six Native nations across fifteen states who have implemented restorative efforts

impacting Indigenous lands ranging from one to twelve thousand acres. Thus, her shirt alone serves to educate those around Jennings, including her fellow marathoners who hail from all over the country (and beyond). The hand drawn, Indigenous style of the front of her shirt works rhetorically by visually drawing others' attention to Jennings, her message, the examples on the back of the shirt, and the Native communities those examples represent. These examples allow those who read the shirt to see how LandBack impacts a wide variety of Indigenous peoples across the United States and to further investigate those examples via a quick Google search. Those who care to do so will learn that LandBack can mean a variety of things such as: establishing land trusts or conservancies that return homelands to their original stewards; paying rent or taxes as reparation for stolen land; providing better quality housing to Indigenous peoples; and more. Additionally, those who read her Instagram post learn that Jennings has also directly linked articles about each of the twenty-six LandBack examples on her @1NativeSoilNerd [Twitter thread](#) about running the marathon in support of the movement ("Monday").

In combination, then, her presence at the marathon and her choice to wear the shirt in support of the LandBack movement allow her to embody that movement by centering her indigeneity. Ever the scholar, Jennings uses this visual and embodied rhetoric along with her roles as an Indigenous soil microbiologist and runner to expand her reach beyond Boston to also inform those who see her Instagram (and Twitter) posts about LandBack from a Native perspective. By doing so, Jennings ties the movement to concerns regarding climate change presenting Indigenous land stewardship as a way to foster much needed biodiversity, noting how "Indigenous managed lands have more ecosystem resiliency" ("[#Boston126](#)"). Thus, digitizing her message does far more than just chronicle her experience at Boston; it argues for the value of

cultural knowledge and the people who practice it as well as the continued presence of Indigenous peoples on- and offline.

Complimenting her shirt, Jennings also wore a shortened version of a black and red ribbon skirt where red ribbons framed the red handprint indicative of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women/Relatives (MMIW/R) that appeared on the front and the reiterated “LandBack” message that appeared on the back. That red framing helps emphasize and draw attention to both the symbol and the words and, in so doing, also draws attention to each issue, while the skirt itself gives a visual and material nod to Indigenous culture. Audrey Thayer (Anishnaabe) of Leech Lake Tribal College explains the significance of ribbon skirts as follows:

Understand that it's both a political and spiritual significance when you see those ribbon skirts. It's about surviving genocide, we're still here, look at us, look at our beautiful nation here. The skirt ties us to the earth, ties us to the ceremonies, and ties us to our political unrest of issues for indigenous people. I would know if I saw women in a ribbon skirt in town that they were connected spiritually or politically to an issue that I could identify. (Duoos)

Jennings' choice to wear this adapted version of the traditional ribbon skirt – a ribbon running skirt, if you will – is both cultural and political, then, symbolic of her heritage and her purpose for running alike. In fact, she specifically recalls how: “Some runners came up and told me how they were inspired by my purpose; or to share how beautiful the skirt was. Others asked me mid race what landback meant” (Jennings “[#Boston126](#)”). Her culturally-inspired attire puts her message in motion as she runs the land included in the race route, carving out Indigenous space in a traditionally white sport, connecting with the Native communities and lands through which

she runs, and using the media coverage of the high-profile marathon to gain visibility for Indigenous peoples and the issues that impact them.

That attention-getting function, however, did not come without risk. As Jennings recounts in her Instagram post, “I was nervous to be wearing a very obvious skirt on Patriots Day in the city of Boston. I stuck out & could hear people around talk about me” (“[#Boston126](#)”). Her nerves here seem appropriate given her minority status at a, still, predominantly white event of over 25,000 people where only twenty-four runners were Native (Benallie). Combine this with the aforementioned higher rates of harassment womxn runners face along with Boston’s proud colonial history, and Jennings’ hesitation is well-founded.

Helping to mitigate these risks, Jennings traveled to Boston as part of the Native Women Running team and served as a chaperone for the Native youth participating in Marathon Weekend as part of Wings of America’s *Pursuit Program* for which she also raised funds. She also found support among the local Indigenous communities about which she observes:

I felt inspired by the people I had met earlier in the week: Lumbee community members, the Mashpee Wampanoag, the Indigenous Council of Newton, and the Longboat familyBut the most unforgettable moment was running down Bolyston Street, hearing waves of #landback being yelled back to me. It sent shivers through my body and propelled me to give that last spurt of energy while both smiling and crying. (Jennings “[#Boston126](#)”)

Here, her attire and her message need no explanation, and Jennings’ presence alone sets off a sort of call and response that centers Indigeneity and propels her forward via the visceral response it creates. She demonstrates how, “Being on the land is a highly intellectual practice that is a living interaction between heart, mind, and movement” (Simpson 215). In these ways, her Boston Marathon run and accompanying Instagram post afford Jennings the opportunity to deploy

multimodal discursive strategies in support of Indigenous-specific socio-political movements via a unique combination of embodied, kinesthetic, visual, and material rhetorics.

Per a Cultural Rhetorics framework, these composing practices and the texts they produce help to center people of color as authorities in their own lived experiences. Such rhetorics not only enable Native womxn runners like Jennings to reach a broader audience, but also enact and preserve the discursive strengths of cultural composing practices that “display immense creativity as [non-dominant rhetors] negotiate competing literacies to construct new genres and codes that speak to their own interests” (Canagarajah 601). That is, these multiple rhetorics work in support of Indigenous counterpublic discourse.⁹

Jennings’ race-day attire for the 2022 Boston Marathon works in one additional but crucial way – it directly relates the LandBack movement’s efforts to stop non-Native, colonially sanctioned abuse of Indigenous lands with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women/Relatives (MMIW/R) movement. Her combination of the LandBack shirt with the MMIW/R handprint visually equates the two issues for anyone facing Jennings. Similarly, the inclusion of the handprint on the front of her ribbon skirt and “LandBack” framed on the back of the skirt visually and materially makes them flip sides of the same coin. Given the previously discussed correlation between Native women and land, and the colonial exploitation of both, this placement is not coincidental.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women/Relatives (MMIW/R) Advocacy at Boston

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn/Relatives epidemic functions as both a key term and a framework that informs Native womxn’s running and rhetorical practices shaping their daily lived experiences as well as their advocacy work.

Thus, in addition to Lydia Jennings' strategic and rhetorical correlation of the LandBack and MMIW/R movements during her 2022 Boston run, several other Native womxn runners have used their running platforms to advocate for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn/Relatives to raise the visibility of this issue and create greater awareness of its prevalence among and impacts upon Native communities. For example, Jennings' Native Women Running (NWR) teammate and founder of the NWR movement, Verna Volker (Navajo), wore a very similar ribbon skirt when she joined Jennings for the 126th Boston Marathon in April 2022. Volker ([@hozhorunner4](#)) previewed the run kit in her [April 17, 2022](#), Instagram post. Like Jennings, Volker's skirt was black with red ribbons framing the red and black NWR logo on the front and the red MMIW/R handprint on the back. She paired this with a red shirt that also featured the NWR logo on the front and a pinned photo of Ella Mae Begay, a Navajo elder from Arizona who has been missing since June 15, 2021.¹⁰ The words "Trailing Ella Mae; You Are Not Forgotten" encircle Begay's face, referencing her family's Instagram account [@trailingellamae](#), which chronicles MMIW/R cases, including Begay's family's search for answers and support in finding their missing relative (Volker "[Flat](#)"). The semblance between Volker's ribbon skirt and Jennings' also helps reiterate the urgency of the issue across Indigenous communities providing more than one opportunity for spectators and participants to learn about MMIW/R.

In an [April 13, 2022](#), pre-marathon post, Volker stands facing the camera in her running kit with the Native Women Running Shirt and her ribbon skirt reversed so that the red handprint faces the camera. Holding the photo of Ella Mae Begay that she will pin to her back for the Boston Marathon, Volker states:

I encourage everyone to learn more about this story. The family have been left with no answers or directions. Often times, doing their own search...I am honored that the family has given me permission to run for her. The family continues to search for her and they never want her to be forgotten. Boston Marathon is a race that is televised all over the world. My goal is that Ella Mae is seen worldwide. (“[I will](#)”)

Here she centers not only her missing Navajo elder, but the family and their efforts to find her. Supporting this move, she also tags [@trailingellamae](#), to encourage others to visit the account and support their cause.

Interestingly, because this post centers Begay as one of several Indigenous people impacted by MMIW/R, Volker has flipped her ribbon skirt to feature the handprint in the front in support of that effort, while for the Boston Marathon itself, both the photo of Begay that she holds and the red palm print are behind her. On a practical level, few runners look back, so featuring the photo and the MMIW/R symbol on the back of her running kit ensures that her fellow runners are more likely to see it. On a symbolic level, however, perhaps these emblems appear on the back of her kit to represent MMIW/R (and its colonial origins/ongoing manifestations) as an issue that looms over all Native peoples, threatening their safety and wellbeing – the thing they hope to someday move past via greater awareness, legislation, and Native-led healing. If this is the case, then, perhaps the NWR logos on the front of her kit represent the way forward – a way for Indigenous communities to process, connect to culture/cultural lifeways, and heal as Volker reports having done since starting the Native Women Running group/movement in 2018, and for non-Natives, a way to raise awareness of the issue and garner their support.

While both Jennings and Volker utilized their ribbon skirts and their running to advocate for those impacted by MMIW/R at the 2022 Boston Marathon, they were not the first to bring this issue to the high-profile event. Three years prior, in 2019, fellow runner/organizer, Jordan Marie Brings Three White Horses Whetstone, made headlines when she ran the race with the red handprint across her mouth and the letters MMIW painted in red on her body itself. Indicative of the silencing of Indigenous womxn/relatives stolen from their families/ communities, the handprint on Whetstone's mouth here and her presence as a Kul Wicasa Oyate/ Lower Brule Sioux womxn work together so that Whetstone embodies both the MMIW/R epidemic and active Indigenous efforts to combat this violence.

Whether encountered in person by those attending the marathon or virtually by those scrolling through their social media feeds, the handprint across Whetstone's mouth is visually arresting. Its red color, chosen because it is a color that many Native peoples believe "transcends the physical world and calls to the ancestors in the spirit world," draws non-Natives' attention because of its association with blood and violence – both of which also come into play as part of the MMIW/R epidemic ("MMIW: Red"). This symbol combined with the red "MMIW" acronym painted on Whetstone's body – a Native womxn's body – centers this social justice issue, its accompanying movement, and the womxn/communities it impacts. It serves as a shorthand message to other Native communities affected by this crisis that they are seen, heard, and understood, that they matter. At the same time, the combined visual, textual (i.e., alphanumeric), and embodied rhetoric that Whetstone uses draws non-Natives' attention and, in doing so, has the potential to raise their awareness of MMIW/R by causing them to stop, to look again and, hopefully, delve deeper. Thus, like other multimodal, contact zone discourse,

Whetstone's text – written on, by, and through her body – and its purpose is read/understood differently by Native and non-Native audiences (Quispe-Agnoli).

As an Indigenous womxn and survivor of violence herself, Whetstone then stands in for all those who could not escape their assailants but, particularly, for the twenty-six womxn/girls for whom she prayed during the race (one for each of the 26.2 miles of the marathon). Thus, she runs *for* them in multiple ways – as a relative, a survivor, and an advocate. She runs because they could not, and in so doing, keeps their memories alive, amplifies their families calls for action/justice, and advocates for greater accountability from colonial governments (i.e., those of US, Canada, and beyond) and law enforcement. Whetstone also included the womxn/girls' names in her posts about the marathon in 2019, and several of the media outlets that picked up the story followed suit – a practice that centered these MMIW/R, bringing their stories to a wider audience, and one that I seek to support by also including their names at the end of this text (see Appendix C). As such, Whetstone's rhetorical choices at the 2019 marathon and on social media also impacted others' discursive practice, and her advocacy encouraged others (whether Indigenous or not) to get involved in some way. That engagement could take the form of reading the twenty-six names and/or researching even one of their cases; following Whetstone's Instagram account; learning more about MMIW and Indigenous communities; participating in a workshop or fundraiser; intersecting running and advocacy in support of this or another cause; etc.

Maintaining these efforts on behalf of MMIW/R and their families, Whetstone's [April 15, 2022](#), Instagram post featuring the runner in her 2019 Boston Marathon race bib with her right hand raised in a fist and her left hand on her heart uses red triangles to bullet point four statements. The first, which reads “Prayers for earth protectors like Berta Cacéres – to expose

the violence they face in protecting their lands from big oil & the extractive industry, a climate injustice,” recognizes the Honduran Indigenous and environmental rights activist who was murdered in 2016 – a declaration that once again links the issue of MMIW/R to environmental justice concerns (Whetstone “[3 years](#)”). Following this, she provides the rates of violence experienced by Native womxn with 84% subjected to violence, 56% facing sexual violence, and 97% being “victimized by non-natives” – statistics included in the 2016 National Institute of Justice Report, “[Five Things About Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men](#)”. Whetstone then reminds followers that, as reported by the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2015](#), the third leading cause of death among Indigenous womxn/girls age ten to twenty-four is homicide before noting that of the 5,712 Indigenous womxn/girls reported missing in 2016, only 116 were logged by the Department of Justice. This last statistic specifically addresses: the dearth of reliable data; systemic inaction; and lack of cross-agency coordination among local, state, federal, and tribal authorities regarding MMIW/R cases. Systemic failures like these leave Native communities to do the work themselves and have prompted the Sovereign Bodies Institute to develop and maintain its own [MMIW/R database](#). Such information is jarring and can take its toll on even those for whom these statistics are all too familiar as can the media spotlight that came when Whetstone’s prayer run went viral in 2019.

Whetstone addresses this in the above referenced Instagram post, reflecting on her decision to run for MMIW/R in Boston as follows:

3 years ago...I ran for missing and murdered indigenous relatives. 26 indigenous women and girls. After organizing panels, donating, candlelight vigils to support and amplifying wasn’t enough – our relatives were still going missing and being murdered, no support. No visibility. I lost faith in people caring about us. If all of what we/I were doing,

organizing and amplifying wasn't working, I chose to run for them...I was handed a platform and spotlight without asking and it took some time and mentorship to do it the best and most meaningful way. ("[3 years](#)")

As she recalls here, she was not prepared for the spike in interest that media coverage of her run created or the sudden jump of her Instagram followers from three thousand to fifty thousand, many of whom were looking to Whetstone as a newly public spokesperson for MMIW/R (Duane). This pressure coupled with the weight of researching and supporting MMIW/R and their families can take its toll on advocates like Whetstone who spoke about the impacts in 2020, observing:

It's been a year since I decided to use my running platform to raise awareness of the epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous Womxn & girls...Over time – this has led to anxiety attacks, depression, nightmares, finding their names & their stories was sad and [I] didn't sleep great. I'm learning how to continue this in a healthy way – emotionally/physically. ("[One Year](#)")

In an interview with *Runner's World* later that same year, the activist explained that she had been suffering from compassion fatigue caused by her detailed research into so many MMIW/R cases (Dutch). In that article, Whetstone openly discussed seeking mental health support, observing "I want to be able to fill the holes in a sinking boat with the things that'll work for me so I don't have to feel like I'm just covering this issue up" (Dutch). Since that time, the runner has made greater efforts to practice self-care, a practice Whetstone often encourages others to take up via her social media posts as well.

Whetstone's acknowledgement of her own compassion fatigue demonstrates the toll that kinesthetic and embodied rhetoric can have on rhetors when it is used for advocacy. Jennings,

Whetstone, and Volker all use running as a form of kinesthetic rhetoric that is “bodily enacted” in support of their overlapping efforts on behalf of Indigenous communities (Wieser 198).

However, as their posts demonstrate, that rhetoric is also bodily felt. When Jennings acknowledged the anxiety she felt as people noticed her ribbon skirt in her [April 2022](#) post about the Boston marathon, Whetstone commented to express empathy, remembering how she “could feel and see the eyes and hear the whispers” during her 2019 marathon run ([@nativein_la](#) Comment). This mental and emotional strain can then compound the physical exertion of the marathon, making the run even more difficult and draining.

Although this was of great concern for Volker, who typically sticks to trail running due to a chronic inflammatory condition that impacts her knee, she “remember[s] cramping at mile 16 and thinking this pain is nothing compared to those family who have loved ones missing or murdered,” a thought that, as she recalls, helped her “stepped forward in prayer” (Volker [“My last”](#)). In Volker’s case, then, her purpose for running positively impacts her endurance. Similarly, although Jennings describes her Boston run as difficult and notes feeling “out of [her] element,” the spectators chanting “#landback...back to [her]...sent shivers through [her] body and propelled [her] to give that last spurt of energy” (Jennings [“#Boston126”](#)). In these ways, their kinesthetic rhetoric becomes embodied, “actually effect[ing] a change in...the corpus” that re-energizes them and motivates them to finish (Wieser 198).

While purpose and crowd support help drive these Native womxn runners’ energy, their mutual support of one another also seems to fuel them along the way. In her response to Jennings’ [April 22, 2022](#) post, for example, Whetstone not only empathizes with the anxiety Jennings felt at Boston, but also recognizes her accomplishment with an emphatic, “Proud of you!” To this, Jennings replies:

[@nativein_la](#) I thought of you a lot of this run- of how brave you were to have done this alone in 2019. I had the benefit of having other Indigenous women running (I believe 9 of us total), so I felt strength in knowing they were there...I thought about how you have set an example for myself and so many others, in your purpose & pace 😊. And also I thought of you and Chaske at home cheering for us when I struggled. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do. Grateful for you 🙏❤️! (“[#Boston126](#)”)

She describes how running in community with other Indigenous womxn gave her strength during the Boston Marathon and how Whetstone was present in her thoughts during the race. Thus, though she was not physically present at the 2022 marathon, Jennings includes Whetstone among those who supported her during her run. She also connects her own purpose and pace to Whetstone’s example and advocacy. Later in this same post, Jennings also acknowledges Volker’s support and collaboration stating, “Thank you [@hozhorunner4](#) for suggesting the skirt & connecting our issues- land & MMIWG. Was an honor to share this experience with you!!” (“[#Boston126](#)”).

As Jennings’ comments suggest, these runners coordinate not only their advocacy efforts but the rhetoric they deploy in support of those efforts. For example, wearing remixed versions of each other’s ribbon skirts for their 2022 Boston Marathon run links not only Jennings’ and Volker’s causes (LandBack and MMIW/R), but the athletes themselves, which helps to assert Native womxn’s presence at the marathon and in the sport. In addition, their use of the red handprint on their ribbon run skirts symbolically ties them not only to the MMIW/R movement, but also back to Whetstone’s 2019 run where she painted the symbol across her mouth. Through this blend of their visual, material, kinesthetic, and embodied rhetorics, these runners create a continuum that connects their discursive strategies, their bodies, their efforts, and their

Indigenous presence across time. Similar to Baca's observation regarding Indigenous codex rhetorics, then, these runners "at once look back to the...past while critiquing the present and inventing possible shared futures (22)" (qtd. in Haas 83). They further employ the affordances of social media to their advantage, digitizing the above rhetorically established connections by commenting, tagging, and otherwise linking to one another's posts. In doing so, they start conversations, raise awareness, and create a place for Native womxn in traditionally white spaces like the Boston Marathon and the running industry at large; social media platforms; and Rhetoric and Composition.

Beyond Boston and MMIW

Although Boston is perhaps the highest profile race event at which runners like Volker, Jennings, and Whetstone have used their sport to advocate for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women/Relatives, a scan of Volker's [@native_women_running](#) and Whetstone's [@nativein_la](#) Instagram accounts demonstrates their continued advocacy for this issue and their efforts to be more inclusive of the varied Indigenous individuals/identities that it impacts. In fact, each runner has held virtual fundraising runs in support of the cause and participated in panels, workshops, and other events surrounding May 5th, the National Day of Awareness for MMIW/R in the United States. Though prompted by the social distancing required during the COVID-19 pandemic, these virtual runs have actually allowed for greater participation among a broader community than a traditional, local run could engage. As a result, these efforts have amounted to \$150,000 raised by Volker's Native Women Running and over \$240,000+ raised by Whetstone's Rising Hearts in support of Indigenous and MMIW/R organizations and the families of victims (Nelson/Whetstone "[#RUNNINGFORJUSTICE starts](#)"). Those funds go toward educational

outreach and resources; support services for victims and their families; funeral expenses for those murdered; public awareness campaigns and lobbying; etc.

Because [@native_women_running](#) frequently shares its community members' posts, the prevalence of images containing red and white and/or various MMIW/R acronyms or hashtags also demonstrates the concern surrounding this issue across Indigenous communities and Native Instagram users. Although MMIW remains perhaps the most recognizable acronym and hashtag, several other iterations appear across Native womxn runners' accounts. These variations include:

- MMIWG with the G standing for Indigenous girls;
- MMIWG2S where the 2S represents Two-Spirit individuals;
- MMIWT2S, MMIW2ST, or MMIWG2STR where the added T or TR includes Indigenous Trans* relatives;
- MMIWP, MMIP, or MMIR with the P indicative of Indigenous People and the R signifying Indigenous Relatives

[Sovereign Bodies Institute](#) (SBI), an organization focusing on the impacts of gender and sexual violence on Indigenous communities worldwide, discusses the pros and cons of this shift toward inclusivity as follows:

These versions [MMIP and MMIR] were created to be inclusive of missing and murdered Indigenous men and boys, as well as two spirit and LGBTQ people. The spirit behind these versions is inclusion of and advocacy for all missing and murdered Indigenous people regardless of gender....[However, this version] Does not acknowledge that women, girls, and two spirit people experience higher rates of violence than men and boys, and experience that violence for different reasons than men. (185)

The last portion of this explanation is significant, for as Andrea Smith points out, “The many works on Native women and feminism that say that we are ‘American Indian women in that order,’ ...position gender justice as something to be addressed *after* decolonization” (47). Such logic forces Indigenous women to address racial aims regarding Indigenous sovereignty over gendered concerns involving women’s roles and safety in order to project solidarity with Native men. As a result, they inadvertently reinforce heteropatriarchal roles that, in many instances, have been colonially imposed, which further subjugates Indigenous peoples, and women, in particular.

While Sovereign Bodies Institute (SBI) does not prescribe which hashtag or acronym to use, their practices tend to lean toward inclusion. However, when SBI refers to more than just women and girls, they tend to use MMIWP, “keep[ing] the W to remind people that this movement was born out of a need to protect our women, and includ[ing] the P so that the term is inclusive to all involved” (183). Through this intentional practice, they prevent the flattening of Native identity and acknowledge the complex intersection of race and gender (along with ethnicity, class, nationality, etc.) that Indigenous women must navigate and the ways that this contributes to the higher rates at which, as multiply marginalized people, they experience violence. As such, they hold space for Native women, in particular, enacting their presence within and importance to First Nations. Several Indigenous Instagram users seem to follow a similar philosophy, incorporating a mix of hashtags/acronyms in their digital rhetoric and exemplifying the deliberate shift within the MMIW/R movement to be more inclusive of various gender identities in the rates of sexual/physical violence happening across North America (and beyond). This practice is significant for Indigenous communities many of which, due to

internalized colonial/oppressive ideology, are working to reclaim broader Indigenous gender categories.

Internalized Oppression

Given the force, scope, and social machinations of colonialism since first contact, Native North Americans have internalized white, heteronormative and sexist gender roles over time and may even consider these roles “traditional” parts of their cultures. Recognizing this, Native womxn runners’ conscious efforts to use expanded MMIW/R terminology that includes non-binary individuals challenges this colonial bigenderism and the internalized oppression through which it was disseminated among Indigenous communities. Kai Pyle describes this phenomenon as follows: “one approach to redressing gendered violence in Indigenous communities has been a call to return to ‘traditional gender roles’...where ‘traditional’ generally signifies ‘before European contact’” and these roles are recovered through stories from First Nation Elders and tribal archives (111). However, given the widespread nature of colonial contact and the diversity of the 574+ federally recognized sovereign Indigenous Nations,¹¹ such recovery work often leads to conflicting gender narratives with some scholars claiming the matrilineality and “high regard” for women of all Indigenous peoples despite Elders’ and Native communities’ contradictory accounts based on their own lived experiences (Pyle 111). Per Pyle, a particularly dangerous “traditional” trope is that of Native womanhood as defined by motherhood. Citing Napoleon and Borrows, Pyle explains that:

While ‘mothering the nation’ is espoused as something to take pride in as a highly respected role, this discourse too often forecloses a multitude of other functions and roles that Indigenous women assume in their societies’...such as their participation as traders,

diplomats, leaders, healers, warriors, artists, and more. Likewise, teaching warriorhood and leadership as male traits contributes to the exclusion of Indigenous women from those positions, while also limiting the roles of men and boys to identities linked to violence and power. (114)

In other words, such tropes flatten Native identity, limiting women to their biological function of childbearing and discounting all other possible social roles – particularly for those women who are unable or unwilling to have children. Such roles also reinforce colonial heteropatriarchal norms, and because these roles have varied over time and across Native Nations, it appears that the heteronormative bigenderism spread via colonization has, indeed, been internalized (to greater or lesser degrees) among Native peoples.

Such internalized oppression can lead to “horizontal hostility,” which Launius and Hassel describe as a marginalized group’s self-policing of members based on their own internalization of the dominant group’s norms/ideology (49). Pyle provides one such example explaining that, “Images of male warriorhood in the American Indian Movement contributed to men keeping women off the front lines and discounting the role they played behind the scenes in furthering the movement’s achievements” (112). A similar example appears in Smithers’ work when the author asserts, “Tensions between Native American men and women who were active in early twentieth-century politics sometimes devolved into accusations of Indigenous women engaging in lewd or sexually compromising behaviors” (263). Such accusations deploy the “squaw” stereotype – what amounts to an Indigenous-focused, colonial version of “slut shaming” – as a way to control and/or punish women who deviate from “traditional” gender expectations. These examples also attest to the Indigenous internalization of Euro-American colonial gender norms. That internalization not only constricts women’s roles as a means to limit their social influence

and silence their critiques, but also further reorganizes Indigenous cultures by actually disavowing non-binary individuals altogether – a fact Native womxn runners’ use of Two-Spirit and Trans* specific MMIW/R terminology seeks to remedy. This discursive practice not only recognizes non-binary relatives as Indigenous community members impacted by sexual/physical violence, but also includes them in efforts to address that violence.

Two-Spirit Native Gender Identities

Building from Lee Edelman, Smith discusses “reproductive futurism” – where current oppressions are justified as necessary for the continuation of humanity (in the case of colonialism, white humanity) and queerness threatens that aim – to show how this concept reinforces colonialism and heteropatriarchal gender norms. The author further clarifies how uncritical appeals to tradition (like those discussed above) can further entrench these norms in Native communities. Along parallel lines, then, Pyle asserts that “Two-Spirit people are often especially harmed by appeals to tradition, as many Indigenous people have internalized the belief that only cis-gender heterosexuality is ‘traditional’ and view LGBTQ Indigenous people as being overly colonized and even corrupted” (117). Such views lead to the exclusion of Two-Spirit individuals from their communities as punishment for deviating from prescribed gender roles despite the fact that several Native Nations previously included members who identify this way and who served in various highly esteemed community roles including healer, oral historian, name giver, nurse, etc. (Hayes 45).

The Sovereign Bodies Institute’s [*MMIWG2 & MMIP Organizing Toolkit*](#) defines Two-Spirit as “a direct [English] translation of the Ojibwe term, Niizh manidoowag, ‘Two-spirited’ or ‘Two-Spirit,’ and is usually used to indicate a person whose body simultaneously houses a

masculine spirit and a feminine spirit” (44). The authors go on to explain that Two-Spirits in male and female bodies comprised a third and fourth gender respectively (44). Thus, the mere existence of Two-Spirits (along with Native womxn who operated outside of heteropatriarchal norms) stands in opposition to colonially imposed bigenderism, making them threats to Euro-American order and targets of sexual violence. In fact, the term *Two-Spirit* itself, formalized in 1990, is a more modern inter-tribal signifier of these Indigenous identities that Driskill frames as an act of collective, rhetorical and intellectual sovereignty in the way that it reclaims these varied identities under an “intentionally complex...umbrella term...[that] like *queer*,...is meant to be inclusive, ambiguous, and fluid,” but unlike *queer*, does not have a history of centering white, male subjectivities (72). In addition to the term Two-Spirit, the Sovereign Bodies Institute cites “Wahpetokeca” or “Winkte” (Lakota) and “Nádleetí” (Navajo) as tribally specific terms used to indicate these gender identities, and while other terms are sure to have existed, these were likely lost due to colonial efforts to control Indigenous peoples through the eradication of their languages.

Whatever the term used, however, the point is the same: “It claims Native traditions as precedents for understanding gender and sexuality, and asserts that Two-Spirit people are vital to tribal communities” (Driskill 73). Furthermore, as Scott L. Morgensen argues, “when activists chose to identify as feminist, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans on indigenous terms [as is the case with those who identify as Two-Spirits], they refused to singularly belong to those sexuality and gender categories and thus interrupted colonial epistemic authority” by focusing on Indigenous categories and epistemologies that “also resist appropriation when they refuse to be disentangled from indigenous assertions of relationality and inhabitance” (194). Such resiliency – what Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel and Leanne Simpson call “resurgence” – however, is neither

a linear nor a benign process (cited in Morgensen 194). Like other invocations of “tradition,” Pyle explains that the historical roles of Two-Spirits “as spiritual leaders, namegivers, medicine people, fortune tellers, and exceptional artisans...[often cited] as a way to boost the esteem of modern Two-Spirit people” can also create a seemingly impossible standard for them to fulfill (118). This pressure can make it difficult for Two-Spirits to feel “authentic” and is compounded by the years of exclusion from community and ceremony that Two-Spirits have endured (and, in some cases, continue to endure) in the wake of colonial mindsets. Thus, they remain vulnerable to internal critiques that frame them as either deviant or not Indigenous enough and external violence that continues to see their intersectional identities as threats to white, heteropatriarchy.

Reclamations

With this history in mind, Native womxn runners’ use of additional hashtags, acronyms, and/or terms that specifically denote Two-Spirit, Queer, and/or Trans* identities reclaims these formerly colonially foreclosed gender categories as integral parts of Indigenous communities. For example, the [@native_women_running](#) Instagram account has periodically featured posts by Kylie Bemis (Zuni Pueblo), [@kuwisdelu](#), an Indigenous runner who identifies as Trans*/Two-Spirit and includes #nativewomenrunning, #transathlete, and #twospirit in a variety of her posts. Among the seven reposts of Bemis’ content on Native Women Running’s (NWR) Instagram account in 2022 are posts celebrating her qualification for and finishing of the 2022 Boston Marathon. However, though NWR features Bemis as one of the Indigenous runners heading to Boston in a [March 31, 2022](#), post, few other media outlets mention Bemis in their coverage of Native womxn runners participating in the marathon. Thus, her inclusion on [@native_women_running](#) stands out and allows the Zuni runner to tell her own story.

In that [March 31, 2022](#), @native_women_running post, Bemis recounts her running journey as follows:

I decided to start running for weight loss, and as a way to control my gender dysphoria. After transitioning, I stopped running for a few years until...the pandemic. I've been training seriously as a female runner since...2020. I run to be the fastest Zuni woman....to center myself, collect my thoughts, and get in touch with my feelings....to reconnect with the land. ([“NWR will”](#))

When considered alongside the other Native womxn runners I have discussed thus far, Bemis's reasons for running are, at once, unique in that she is the first runner to discuss gender dysphoria and transitioning, but also all-too-familiar in her assertion of how running connects her to physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing as well as to self, land, and culture. The trans athlete goes on to further emphasize the importance of cultural connection and community, stating: “I race for our two-spirit community....for all my siblings and cousins whose indigenous genders have been stolen through colonization....also...for all the trans kids who are being barred from competition across the country. I want them [to] live. Because my ancestors survived, I know we will too” (Native Women Running [“NWR will”](#)). In this way, she asserts her own grounded normativity as a Two-Spirit person whose very presence manifests a fundamental form of Indigenous resurgence (per L. Simpson).¹² The proud Shiwi (Zuni) runner also claims space for Two-Spirits among the broader LGBTQ+ community and offers support to Native and non-Native Trans* individuals who may feel ostracized or alone. Native Women Running's centering of Bemis's voice and story on its Instagram platform and NWR's followers' comments on that post also help further echo and amplify that support.

Along similar lines, non-profit organization, Rising Hearts' *Running on Native Lands* initiative intentionally seeks "to partner with forward thinking race/event directors... who want to...expand [their] support and advocacy in creating a running community and outdoor environment to be more supportive and inclusive for Black, Indigenous, Brown, Asian, Muslim, Jewish, Two Spirit, LGBTQ+, Non-binary runners and walkers, and People with disabilities in these spaces" ("Running on"). To this end, all of the organization's virtual race registrations have intentionally expanded gender options to include *non-binary* and *Two-Spirit* along with *male* and *female* (Etling). Rising Hearts also not only includes Two-Spirit and Trans* people in any and all events centering MMIW/R, but also encourages its community to seek out and learn from Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ individuals. For example, while a [March 31, 2021](#), post brings attention to the Transgender Day of Visibility, another [@rising_hearts](#) Instagram post [June 7, 2021](#), asks followers to support 2SLGBTQ+ and Non-binary relatives year-round and not just during Pride Month (Rising Hearts "[Pride](#)").

Featuring a split screen image of the rainbow flag symbolizing LGBTQ+ individuals and the pink, blue, and white flag to represent Trans* folx overlaid with the Rising Hearts logo, the post reads:

To our Indigenous and Afro Indigenous Two Spirit, LGBTQ+, and Non-binary relatives - we see you. We are here to continue learning from you. We are committed to the work in protecting you, elevating you, and supporting you. Please do not erase and ignore our Two Spirit relatives. They are our relatives and have been here since before 1492. For all allies, friends and relatives, our support extends beyond June and needs to be 365 days of the year. Ensure that your campaigns are meaningful, uplifting and support the voices and faces you feature this month. (Rising Hearts "[Pride](#)")

This statement intentionally includes Afro Indigenous and Two-Spirit relatives among those to support during Pride Month and beyond, a message Rising Hearts amplifies in several ways. First, the organization tags [thirty-four Afro Indigenous, Two-Spirit, and/or LGBTQ+ accounts](#) to “Follow and support, [and] learn their personal pronouns” (Rising Hearts “[Pride](#)”). Next, the inclusion of the Pride and Trans* flag colors in this post draws viewers’ attention. Similarly, an almost identical reminder in another post from [June 1, 2022](#), also stands out in Rising Hearts’ IG feed because of its use of color. That post features the Progress Pride Flag, which layers white, pink, blue, brown, and black triangles on the left side of the Pride flag to signal inclusion of Trans* and BIPOC people. Both posts also feature a second photo with these colors superimposed over two Indigenous dancers dressed in traditional, ceremonial regalia to indicate that Two-Spirit and non-binary people are as much a part of Native cultures and communities as any other relatives. Finally, the [@rising_hearts](#) Instagram account uses the Progress Pride Flag overlaid with the organization’s logo in white as its profile photo, thereby centering those represented by the colors on the Progress Pride flag year-round and signifying its platform as a safe, inclusive space.

These discursive practices rhetorically acknowledge Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ individuals among the diverse Native populations in North America (and beyond) and, as Sovereign Bodies Institute observes, provide “the opportunity to educate others on who two spirit people are and why they experience violence” (“MMIWG” 184). They recognize Two-Spirit as a distinctly Native LGBTQ identity representative of “a connection to culture and spirituality,” reminding organizers and advocates that “It’s not enough to simply add a 2 on the end of MMIWG, we have to actively invite and welcome our LGBTQ and Two Spirit relatives into the movement, offer them leadership opportunities, and reach out to families of missing and

murdered Indigenous LGBTQ and Two Spirit people to let them know we are here to support them” (44, 43). Such intentional rhetorical and activist practices are reflected on Native womxn runners’ personal and/or organizational platforms, and this deliberate inclusion provides Two-Spirit and Native LGBTQ people greater visibility, which matters from both a cultural and safety standpoint alike. It recognizes non-binary Indigenous people as relatives and community members whose lived experiences are equally valid and valuable.

From Red to Orange: Strategic Use of Colors/Symbols

Just as it did in drawing attention to the [@rising_hearts](#)’ posts, several Indigenous Instagram accounts employ an intentional change in color scheme to help highlight specific posts and issues. For example, between May 30 and September 30, 2021, eight posts on Jordan Whetstone’s Instagram account ([@nativein_la](#)) address the issue of residential schools, the colonial ideology behind them, and the intergenerational trauma that they have caused for First Nation peoples. Triggered by the discovery of the remains of [215 children](#) in a mass grave on the grounds of Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia, Canada (Tk’emlups te Secwepemac homelands) on May 27, 2021,¹³ these posts visually shift the content of [@nativein_la](#)’s platform from featuring the color red (representative of MMIW/R) to centering the color orange thru the end of September 2021.

In a post from [July 1, 2021](#), for example, Whetstone stares directly at the camera, wearing an orange shirt with the red handprint that has become synonymous with MMIW/R painted across her face. The post itself discusses the 1,505 (a number that represents only a portion of 10,028 that have been found as of March 2022) Indigenous children whose remains were found in mass graves on former residential boarding school grounds in Canada and the U.S.

in summer 2021.¹⁴ It is for these children that she wears orange, hashtagging the post with #WearOrange in support of [Orange Shirt Day](#). Named after [Phyllis Webstad's story](#) of being stripped of all aspects of her identity, including the new orange shirt her grandmother had gifted her for her first day of residential school, Orange Shirt Day serves as a day of remembrance for those victimized by these institutions ("Phyllis"). While Whetstone connects this issue with #MMIR in an earlier post, here, she allows the handprint to make the initial visual connection before noting clearly near the end of the post, "This intersects with MMIR!" ("[1 5 0 5](#)").

Echoing the impacts of Manifest Destiny on Indigenous bodies, Whetstone declares, "These schools and missions were rooted in violence, sterilization, theft, molestation, abuse and murder. To strip us of who we are because being brown and Indigenous – is savage and not good enough. Not worthy" ("[1 5 0 5](#)"). In doing so, she ties these schools not only to MMIW/R, but also to the erasure of those it impacts and Native communities more broadly. In fact, this theme of erasure repeats across numerous of her MMIW/R-related posts appearing variably as being "forgotten," "erased," "invisible," and/or "silenced" victims of "genocide." These posts remind followers of: the role boarding schools played in the cultural decimation of Native peoples forced to assimilate into mainstream white, colonial culture; the fact that these schools operated well into the twentieth century;¹⁵ and that their psychological and material effects remain at play today for those who, as Whetstone stipulates, are only one generation removed.

Whetstone continues this visual connection between MMIW/R and residential schools in three additional 2021 posts that show her wearing the "Every Child Matters" orange shirt, which features faceless Native figures in traditional attire – figures that mirror the red dress figures often used to represent MMIW/R. The facelessness of such figures functions in a few distinct but related ways. First, they stand in for a wide variety of Native peoples who have been impacted

by MMIW/R and/or residential boarding schools. This includes multiple generations across various First Nations whose parents and grandparents experienced the abuses of residential schools firsthand and whose families are still processing that trauma decades later. Second, without a face, those stolen could be anyone's relatives/children. This realization helps viewers imagine what it must have been like to be forcibly separated from both family and culture at such a young age and drives home the toll that constant threats of violence continue to take on Native communities. Finally, this facelessness also reminds viewers of the invisibility of Indigenous peoples and concerns outside of their communities – a fact that MMIW/R activism, various hashtags, eye-catching colors like red and bright orange, and Indigenous influencers like Whetstone seek to remedy.

A quick scan of the reposts from other Indigenous Instagram-ers on the Native Women Running (NWR) account reveals that Whetstone is not the only one practicing this color shift. Thirteen reposts from September 2022 and fifty-five posts from late September to early October 2021, from a variety of Instagram users feature the color orange and directly relate to the idea that “Every Child Matters.” This timing is not coincidental as September 30th has become Orange Shirt Day in honor of Indigenous children/families impacted by residential boarding schools.¹⁶ This day was selected based on what was the first day of the school year for residential school students. As Native Women Running's [September 29, 2022](#), post explains: “This day is intended to ‘raise awareness of the individual, family and community inter-generational impacts of residential schools, and to promote the concept of ‘Every Child Matters’.” The orange shirt is a symbol of the stripping away of culture, freedom and self-esteem experienced by Indigenous children over generations” (“[Run, Walk](#)”). Not surprisingly, several

NWR followers' posts echo this sentiment, recounting relatives' experiences at colonial boarding schools and/or the intergenerational impacts of these schools on their families.

This intergenerational trauma has been reinforced by the recent announcement in November 2022, that Harvard University's Peabody Museum's Woodbury Collection contains hair clippings from over seven hundred Native children (Pember). These samples, forcibly collected from residential schools' attendees, have been in the museum's possession for over eighty years, and Harvard has only just begun the process of trying to return the samples (Kunze). More importantly, the existence of such a collection disregards Indigenous customs that regard long hair as connected to spirit and heritage (Pember). In the face of such continued disrespect and devaluing of Native cultures, customs, communities, and lives, wearing orange, running/walking in prayer, and posting about the issue or any events surrounding it along with the use of the hashtag/phrase "Every Child Matters," all serve as acts of remembrance and resurgence that help combat Native erasure. Additionally, linked by hashtags like #EveryChildMatters or #OrangeShirtDay, posts that chronicle Indigenous peoples' actual lived experiences at residential schools create a digital archive of these personal accounts, many of which may only have been shared privately among family members. Thus, these actions and the visual/textual and digital rhetoric that accompanies them work to challenge whitewashed historical accounts that ignore/deny the ongoing impacts of colonial violence.

Seeing Red

One additional deliberate use of color seems to accompany Native womxn runners who used their social media accounts on May 6, 2021, to address Instagram's overnight erasure of MMIW/R content created on the May 5th National Day of Awareness that year. Verna Volker's

personal account, [@hozhorunner4](#), for example, includes a single post with the Native Women Running logo centered on a bright red background overlaid with a simple five-word message in Black font: “We will not be erased” (“[We will](#)”). An identical post appears on her organizational account [@native_women_running](#), and several of her followers’ comments make it clear that she was not the only one to have content disappear. Similarly, the post that appears on both Jordan Whetstone’s personal ([@nativein_la](#)) and organizational ([@rising_hearts](#)) account contains only white text that stands out against a dark red background that reads: “Just checked through my stories – and about half of them were removed. I see so much of the heart work that went into yesterday – gone....We can’t even get one damn day!! This is erasure. This is further genocide of our people. This is @instagram silencing Indigenous People’s voices. And making our relatives INVISIBLE. WE WILL NOT BE SILENCED!!!!!!” (Whetstone “[Woke up](#)”). Although they feature the color red indicative of MMIW/R, these posts stand out among the rest on Volker’s and Whetstone’s content.

In Volker’s case, her [May 6, 2021](#) entry is one of few posts on either her personal or organizational Instagram account that do not feature a photo/video. In Whetstone’s case, however, the [May 6, 2021](#) post is the only content across the last nine years that she has posted to her personal account ([@nativein_la](#)) without including a picture/image/video. It is also the only post that contains #WeWillNotBeSilenced. While both posts discuss erasure, Whetstone’s pairs the term erasure with the words *genocide*, *silencing/silenced*, and *invisible*. Moreover, the activist’s use of *removed* and *gone* here also works synonymously with other MMIW/R-related terms like *stolen* and/or *missing*. This combination of simple graphics with clear messaging draws users’ attention to both the posts and, more importantly, the system-wide erasure of MMIW/R content and, more broadly, Indigenous peoples/concerns.

Although Instagram attributed its removal of MMIW/R content to a “widespread global technical issue not related to any particular topic,” and said that it mainly impacted sharing/viewing IG stories, several users reported that even their archived material had been removed. Needless to say, the timing of this “technical issue” remains suspect, and Whetstone and Volker’s accounts were only four of the many that were impacted. An *Indian Country Today* article posted on May 6, 2021, reported that hundreds of accounts had been impacted by the content removal, but the exact number remains undetermined (Eustus).

After the public outcry on social media, some users reported that their content was restored, and Instagram (owned by Facebook/Meta), did issue an official apology, stating: “We’re sorry to all impacted, especially those raising awareness for important causes globally” (Eustus). However, that apology fails to specifically name MMIW/R or acknowledge the emotional/psychological impacts that their removal of content had on Indigenous social media users immediately following their observance of May 5th as the US National Day of Awareness for MMIW/R. Doing so would have demonstrated greater accountability to Indigenous communities and actually helped raise other non-Native users’ awareness of MMIW/R and related concerns. Instead, lumping MMIW/R and Native social media users into the non-descript global activist community only served to reinforce Indigenous erasure. Instances like these demonstrate that while (as evidenced by more obvious threats to Indigenous lands as well as physical, psychological, and emotional threats to Native peoples) colonial violence remains apparent, it also manifests in more covert, ideological, and systemic ways.

One of those ways is the continued privileging of alphanumeric text. Rooted in Eurocentric tradition, this continued preference for alphabetic texts preserves the colonial perspective that equates alpha-centric composing with higher intellectual capacity. As Ruiz

explains, this dominance comes from colonial rhetoric that situated those with alphabetic languages as “more civilized and more advanced” and those without as being “inferior and in need of ‘development’” (8). Because Indigenous communities were those without strictly alphabetic texts, European colonizers rhetorically positioned themselves as saviors sent to civilize these communities. As such, the superiority they assumed became embedded in the alpha-numeric script these conquistadors imposed upon the Indigenous communities they subjugated.

Given this colonial rhetorical tradition, Whetstone and Volker’s choice to simplify their typically hybrid/multimodal composing practices for their responses to the erasure of MMIW posts in May 2021 is strategic. Their focus on alphabetic script in the two May 6, 2021 posts not only draws attention because it stands in contrast to the posts that surround them; it also uses the dominant public’s preferred means of communication to ensure they get the message that Native peoples, and Native womxn, in particular, refuse to be silenced or erased. They use the colonizers’ script against them, then, exposing Facebook/Meta’s removal of their content, gaining greater visibility for MMIW/R messaging, and hopefully preventing such erasure in future. In the process, they also demonstrate sophisticated discursive adaptability and a clear understanding of how “to transmit information about history, prestige, and authority in the heterogeneous contact zone” (Quispe-Agnoli 61).

Coming Full Circle

As the above discussion demonstrates, visibility is important to acknowledging MMIW/R and recognizing modern Indigenous lived experience in a world that often only considers Native peoples as they existed in the past and/or according to the racist/sexist misrepresentations of

Indigenous peoples that persist into modern day. However, there is another dimension to the importance of accurate Indigenous representations and visibility that cuts across all of these issues – that of safety. It is a concern that is ever-present for Native womxn runners each time they go for a run and one that is heightened by the obvious differences in law enforcement response, media coverage, and public attention that occur each time an Indigenous womxn goes missing or is murdered in comparison to cases where the victim is white.

Given this reality, it is not surprising to find that periodic discussions of safety make their way onto Native womxn runners' social media platforms. One such example is an Instagram post from [January 28, 2022](#), that features an image of runner/activist, Jordan Whetstone dressed in a blue tank top and shorts, checking her smart watch on the side of a deserted highway. In this post addressing Stalking Awareness Month, Whetstone details past experiences with catcalling, racism, and misogyny, observing that “As a Lakota Indigenous woman of color...I have to constantly be on alert and sadly, I’ve adapted my life to accommodate this” (“[STALKING](#)”). In other words, she has adopted a “rape schedule” about which Christie Launius and Holly Hassel observe: “the burden for preventing sexual violence is carried primarily by members of marginalized groups who are expected to limit their behavior, actions, dress, and other aspects of their daily life to try to minimize the likelihood that they will be victimized” (124). Having had a stalker herself, Whetstone explains, “Now, when I run (roads or trails), I have to bring phones, GPS and other gadgets to make me visible, to stand out, so that if something happens someone will remember me” (Whetstone “[STALKING](#)”). In this way, visibility becomes more than just about individual remembrance or even cultural acknowledgement; first and foremost, it is about safety.

As Whetstone's post illustrates, being visible functions ideographically and stands in for being valued and being safe. It means family and friends know where you are and when you should return. It means people – both those you know and the broader public – recognize your existence and care about your wellbeing. It also means they know where to look should the unthinkable happen. In these ways, visibility leverages community as a protective force for Native womxn and their relations. It is a strategy Whetstone mobilizes practically when she runs but also rhetorically when she uses or spells out particular MMIW/R hashtags/acronyms or leverages various colors and images in her posts to raise visibility and encourage community support and action, and she isn't the only one.

Native Women Running founder, Verna Volker, has at least eleven social media posts related to safety that go as far back as 2019, and often feature safety tips for womxn runners, including self-defense tools they can carry on their runs. In an April 2021 Tik Tok video that she reposted to her Instagram account, Volker runs alone carrying a personal alarm and handheld knife both of which strap to her hand. In the video, the mother of four addresses Indigenous peoples directly saying: “We’re going missing and murdered, and it seems like no one cares, so it’s up to us to watch out for each other. It’s up to us to take care of ourselves because our lives matter, our relatives matter. We are important. We must be seen” (Volker “[I use](#)”). Here, the phrases “watch out for” and “take care” as well as the words “matter” and “important” all reinforce the significance of being “seen.” Other tips Volker shares include telling loved ones where you will be and when you should return; sending a photo of yourself in your running gear to a loved one; using safety apps to track your run; and/or taking self-defense classes.

In another post in September of that same year, Volker expresses condolences to Gabby Petito's family after learning that her body had been recovered. Petito, a twenty-two-year-old,

white woman who went missing in late August 2021, was murdered by her fiancé while travelling in Wyoming. Her body was recovered ten days after her family reported her missing on September 11, 2021 (Maxouris). In response to the news, Volker also observes:

I have said before that I saw the story on every news outlet and social media. There is a difference between when a non-Native goes missing versus a Native womxn who goes missing or murdered. People often don't know that murder is the third leading cause of death for our Native womxn....I hope people use that same type of energy when our loved ones go missing or murdered. Not only as Indigenous womxn but womxn of color whose stories are the same as ours. We're often left not knowing what has happened to our relatives or there's not that same type of energy. (Volker "[I posted](#)").

Combined with her previous post, this content addresses the lack of visibility for Native womxn as victims of sexual/physical violence and, more generally, as people of color who matter. Posts like these advocate for equal news coverage and recovery efforts for all who go missing or are murdered not just for Native womxn but for all womxn and remind the running community of the previously discussed racial and gender-based disparities that make outdoor spaces and activities less safe for womxn, people of color, and queer folx. Volker was not alone in her response as viral media coverage of Petito's case that dubbed her "America's Daughter" caused many to question the imbalance of attention afforded to cases involving white womxn like Petito in comparison to the large number of unsolved cases involving people of color (Wagner).

More recently, Volker addressed safety again on the [@native_women_running](#) account via a [September 3, 2022](#), post in response to the news of Eliza Fletcher's abduction. The five slide post, once again, features detailed photos of the handheld alarm and serrated knife that Volker carries on her runs along with nine safety tips. To this, Volker adds the missing persons

alert for Eliza Fletcher and a close-up of the freeze-framed image detailing the clothing Fletcher was wearing – a pink sports bra and purple running shorts – during her last early morning run. Fletcher’s body was recovered on September 5, 2022, and her assailant was arrested the next day; however, several news stories surrounding the case seemed to focus on the time at which Fletcher chose to run (i.e., 4:30 am), her running attire, and/or her attractive appearance as having increased her risk of attack.

Volker responded to this victim blaming in a Tik Tok video that shows her trailrunning in the early morning wearing a headlamp to light her way in the dark. Framing the video is a single sentence: “Please stop victim blaming women who run early and alone” (Volker “[We can](#)”). Reposting the video to her Instagram account on [September 6, 2022](#), Volker adds a statement of solidarity, declaring: “We can run anytime we want. I run early because I have no other time and like to finish early. No more victim blaming. This is dedicated to women like us. RIP Eliza Fletcher #womenrunning #saftey #runner #elizaletcher” (“[We can](#)”). Thus, she decries the tone of stories covering Fletcher, a tone that is all-too-often deployed when Indigenous families or other people of color report missing loved ones. Furthermore, instead of her usual #nativewomenrunning, Volker uses #womenrunning and #safety to be more inclusive of all women runners or, as Volker puts it, “women like us.”

Jordan Whetstone’s @nativein_la Instagram post from the next day (i.e., September 7, 2022) expresses similar outrage. The image of Whetstone trail running in black shorts, a pale yellow tank top, and white cap reminds followers that “It shouldn’t take me or other runners I follow to say that we as women and as runners, need to be protected” (“[It shouldn’t](#)”). Per Whetstone, other things that people should not need to be reminded of include the fact that womxn should be respected; free from misogyny and violence; and able to run whenever their

schedules permit, and sporting whatever running gear works best for them, without being victim blamed. Like Volker, she includes safety tips at the end of the post (none of which involve attire or the time/location of one's run). Similar to her earlier post about stalking, the runner also asserts: "This issue is about SAFETY and those who take advantage of the situation to cause harm. We shouldn't have to finish the miles that #LizaFletcher couldn't. We shouldn't have to finish the miles that #AhmaudArbery couldn't" ("[It shouldn't](#)"). With these short, declarative statements, she ties the two runners' deaths together as issues of safety that highlight the sexism and racism that the larger running community, industry, and brands have yet to fully address.

Considered through the lens of visibility/representation, all of the issues I've discussed in this chapter stem from the same concern – safety – or perhaps, more accurately, the recognition for which it stands and from which it stems. Instead of having to arm themselves or run in fear, womxn runners in general and Native womxn runners, in particular, should be safe to go for a run despite time, location, or attire. Instead of being stolen, beaten, traumatized, and/or killed as a result of residential schools whose sole mission was assimilation into colonial (i.e., white) culture, Indigenous children should be raised by communities that center their wellbeing and teach them cultural lifeways. Instead of being ostracized, shamed, and erased, Two-Spirit and queer Natives should be embraced as community members whose individual gifts contribute to Indigenous resurgence. Instead of being abducted and killed, Native womxn, girls, Two-spirits and relatives should all be valued as full human beings with unique lived experiences and cultural knowledge. Instead of being renamed, claimed, polluted, extracted for resources, and destroyed, Native lands should be called by their true names and stewarded by their original caretakers – a process that begins but does not end with land acknowledgements and directly connects to the recognition of Native personhood and sovereignty.

All of these messages have found their way into Native womxn runners' running platforms on- and offline via various combinations of embodied and kinesthetic, visual and material rhetoric. In these ways, they blend not only running and activism, but multiple modes, various media, and culturally informed knowledge and practices to carve out a space that is distinctly Indigenous and centers Native womxn. This space recognizes these womxn's leadership as crucial to Indigenous resurgence and sovereignty, honoring a wider array of gender identities and roles in the process. It also serves as a means to educate Natives and non-Natives alike through a process of un-learning (of colonial ideologies) and re-learning (from Indigenous perspectives) – a process that, like running, can more organically engage them in intersectional advocacy efforts.

Notes

1. I use the term *counternarratives* instead of Aja Martinez’s counterstory to avoid misrepresenting the Native womxn runners I cite throughout as monolithic. For more, see the “Counterstory/Counternarrative” section of Chapter 1.

2. Places that retain Native names (e.g., Econlockhatchee River, the city of Apopka, or Seminole County in Central Florida) do not necessarily indicate respect for Indigenous cultures/land. Doug Herman explains how preserving Native place names can serve to historicize the Native peoples who lived there, creating the misperception that they no longer exist and, thus, contributing to Native erasure. Post American Revolution, retaining Native names also served to distance the US from Britain in an attempt to establish a separate, distinctly American history (Herman) – a move grounded in settler colonial needs rather than respect for Indigenous cultures/lands.

3. See “Running as Commemorative” section of Chapter 2 or “Annual Spiritual Healing Run-Walk” from the National Parks Service’s website for more.

4. See U.S. Department of Interior.

5. See Clare Gallagher’s or Andy Jones-Wilkins’ “#SeeYouAtStates”

6. The Western States Endurance Run offered its first land acknowledgement at the 2022 race and worked with Indigenous artists and runner, Yatika Starr Fields (Osage, Cherokee, and Muskogee Creek) to create the first ever WSER poster. Race organizers then donated a portion of the proceeds from that poster to the local Washoe community. See Brian Metzler or Ben Pryor.

7. A common critique of land acknowledgements is that they are empty gestures – a form of virtue signaling that makes dominant groups feel better but fails to address the historical white

washing of colonial genocide or the present day needs of Indigenous communities. In short, although they acknowledge that Native lands have been stolen, these statements do nothing to rectify that theft or its broad-reaching implications for Native peoples. For more, see Elisa J. Sobo et al's "Land Acknowledgements."

8. See Scott Lyons, *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent*.

9. Nancy Fraser describes counterpublics as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourse to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (67). For more, see the "Networked Feminist Counterpublics" section of Chapter 1, Fraser's "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," or Michael Warner's Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics."

10. On April 4, 2023, Ella Mae Begay's family announced that a suspect had been arrested for assault and carjacking in relation to her disappearance. Although the Associated Press reports that the suspect, Preston Henry Tolth, admitted to authorities that he had assaulted Begay and taken her truck, he has since pleaded not guilty to the charges. See Susan Montoya Bryan or Holly James.

11. See Congressional Research Service for list of federally recognized Nations.

12. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) asserts, that "Nishnaabeg thought is queer, and if we're doing it correctly, we shouldn't have to queer resurgence, because the political, ethical, and social organization that the 2SQ Indigenous community has held onto and protected so fiercely would already be centered" (138).

13. See "Remains" press release from the Tk'emlups te Secwepemac website.

14. See On Canada Project's "Settlers Take Action" for more.

15. The last residential school closed in the US in 1969 and in Canada in the late 1990's (Pember).

16. Orange shirt day is also known as Truth and Reconciliation Day in Canada, where it is more broadly recognized, and as the National Day of Remembrance in the US.

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CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND COALITIONAL POSSIBILITIES

This analysis demonstrates the complex ways that Native womxn runners mobilize the rhetoric they create around and through their running activity to challenge settler colonial heteropatriarchal ideologies in favor of Indigenous lifeways; build upon cultural practices that include running and a wider spectrum of gender roles to enact more inclusive, modern Native identities; and lead advocacy efforts that center Native communities. In doing so, they create a space for themselves and other marginalized runners in a traditionally white, male sport that has replicated the raced, classed, gendered, and ableist nature of the North American settler colonial structures within which running has often been mischaracterized as an egalitarian pastime.

Reflecting Indigenous relationality and the ways this worldview emphasizes the cooperative, interconnection between all community members (human and non-human alike), these runners' various rhetorics (i.e., written, digital, visual, materials, and kinesthetic) and activism center Indigenous concerns that are not just inter-related but also intersectional. For example, they connect issues of resource extraction and land theft to violence against Native peoples, and Native womxn and Two-Spirits, specifically. Similarly, they also discuss racial stereotypes/slurs, cultural appropriation, and Indigenous erasure as the slow and steady means through which settler colonial societies continue chipping away at Native sovereignty in order to justify their own hierarchical (i.e., white privileged/Eurocentric, bigendered, heteronormative, patriarchal, capitalist, middle-classed, etc.) organization. More than this, however, these Indigenous runners create complex, multimodal rhetorics that demonstrates the scope of Native knowledge and the importance of Native womxn's role as knowledge makers.

These discursive strategies recognize Indigenous culture as diverse, inclusive, modern, living, vibrant, and embodied. As such, the runners' social media presence and on/offline activism serve as rhetorical, cultural, and political acts. Through their efforts, these womxn continually co-create modern Native North American identity in flux. In addition, they correct racist and misogynistic stereotypes; address systemic, sexual violence as an extension of continued colonial cultural decimation; and reassert Indigenous land stewardship and gender identities. Perhaps, most importantly, the Native womxn runners from whom I have learned continually reaffirm and reframe relationality within and across advocacy communities. For example, Lakota runner, Jordan Whetstone expresses this concept in her own culture's terms as "Matakite Oyasin; we are all related," which she describes as "the Indigenous version of...intersectionality" (Wright). By making this connection, Whetstone not only aligns herself and her advocacy with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory but also claims space for Indigenous womxn within intersectional conversations. She further emphasizes the idea that though those conversations may have originated within academic circles, Crenshaw's actual theorizing stemmed from the lived experiences of Black womxn and has far-reaching implications for womxn of color regardless of whether they are situated in- or outside of higher education.

Given this framing, the culturally based solutions that Whetstone and her fellow Native womxn runners present at the intersections of race and gender have the potential to help not just Indigenous communities, but also other marginalized populations in and around the larger running community. That is, they create space for potential coalition across Native communities and communities of color – partnerships they have already begun to build and from which all participants can learn and benefit. Importantly, however, this does not mean that those

communities of color can be collapsed into a single, essentialized group or that intersectionality can be applied generically across communities.

As Patricia Hill Collins observes, some use “women of color” as a catchall term despite the specific backgrounds, experiences, histories, and needs of individual groups that fall under that umbrella (e.g., Latinx feminists, Two Spirit or Individuate individuals, Black womxn, etc.). Collapsing these diverse constituencies into a single category is exactly the issue that Crenshaw’s work on intersectionality sought to address. For both Crenshaw and Hill Collins, insight exists in the overlaps between categories, but only because of the specific identities generated there by the individual social actors who participate in each group, share their experiences, and help reshape knowledge making in the process. Those identities form “resistant knowledge projects,” which Hill Collins defines as those that oppose social injustice, have presence in and outside of academia, and recognize theorizing via praxis (Hill Collins 10-11).

By this definition, and considered alongside Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) conceptualization of Indigenous resurgence, Native womxn runners create their own resistant knowledge projects. Furthermore, these womxn seem to operate from a “coalitional subjectivity [that] moves away from seeing one’s self in singular terms or from seeing politics in terms of single issues toward a complicated intersectional political approach that refuses to view politics and identity as anything other than always and already coalitional” (Chavez 3). This mindset combined with the grounded normativity through which they continually apply cultural knowledge in context enable these Indigenous advocates to mobilize multiple modalities and rhetorics in culturally specific ways that have the potential to move the running industry and Rhetoric and Composition toward greater inclusion and effect changes on a larger scale. They have invested the time needed to build relationships across their individual

Indigenous identities and advocacy but have also effectively used social and other popular media platforms to recruit non-Native allies as well.

This strategic approach recognizes that coordinated efforts yield greater potential progress while discussions across various counterpublics result in better representation that, in turn, helps to (re)direct those efforts for maximum impact and broader inclusion. With this in mind, the Native womxn runners I discuss herein appear to recognize that “participating in building a community is simultaneously political (negotiating differences of power within a group), dynamic (negotiating practices that balance individual and collective goals), and aspirational” (Hill Collins 185). In other words, these womxn understand that community building requires both critical engagement and critical coalition that can both identify and negotiate differences in context.

Patricia Hill Collins dubs these negotiated differences “flexible solidarity” and sees them as a self-defined characteristic of contemporary Black Feminism. In a similar vein, Catherine Knight Steele articulates five principles of Digital Black Feminism, including “the prioritization of agency, the reclamation of the right to self-identify, the centralization of gender nonbinary spaces of discourse, the creation of complicated allegiances, and the insertion of a dialectic of self and community interests” (17). Placed alongside Indigenous peoples’ continued advocacy for self-sovereignty; a broader range of Native gender identities and roles; the sort of culturally situated discursive practices demonstrated by the Native womxn runners I have included here; and their emphasis on self-care, there are clear points of alignment between Black and Indigenous feminist principles and practices. Thus, it is no surprise to find Black and Indigenous womxn participating in cooperative initiatives like *Running with Purpose*, the Running Industry

Diversity Coalition, numerous “Finish the Run” or “Running for Justice” campaigns, Diverse We Run, and several others that blend sport/recreation and advocacy work.

Through these intersecting efforts and the flexible solidarity upon which they are built, these womxn are helping to build coalition across various counterpublics within the larger running community. They are also sending a clear message: their leadership is key to the kind of critical, intersectional collaboration that the running community needs if it is to move toward greater inclusion. I would argue that the same can be said of the field of Rhetoric and Composition, which still regards work by womxn of color as niche scholarship cordoned off into isolated subfields that limit its reach and impact. Given this, future work that considers the discourse of coalitional running advocacy efforts like those mentioned above may offer a way to build upon my current discussion of Native womxn runners’ rhetorics and bring additional feminist counterpublics of color into the larger conversations surrounding both running and rhetoric.

This is also where story gathering plays a crucial role because it is not just the stories we tell that shape things; it is the stories we listen to and for. The ways we make space for others’ stories and incorporate them into our own as well as the ways those stories fill that space and create conversations all matter. It is what moves us forward. As I write in a place where “Stop W.O.K.E.”¹ and “Don’t Say Gay”² legislation serves as a means for state officials to reinforce white supremacist, heteropatriarchal beliefs, I argue that story gathering requires (and can facilitate) a broader, networked and necessary view. In other words, if as the Native knowledge makers I cite throughout this project assert, we are all related, then so are our stories. Thus, in a time when the United States Supreme Court has overturned *Roe v. Wade*,³ functionally stripping women of bodily autonomy, and threatens the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)⁴ and, by

extension, Indigenous sovereignty via their pending decision in *Haaland v. Brackeen*, we must be more intentional about the stories we gather and the people we in- or exclude as we gather them. That process alone tells its own stories about who belongs (in running and outdoor spaces; in academia; in our local, national, and/or global communities), who matters, who is worth believing/protecting, and with whom we are willing to stand.

Story gathering encourages us to realize that it is not just what we learn; it is how we learn, from whom, and what we then do with those lessons. Each of these are active steps. They require engagement, listening, questioning, reflection, and empathy – ongoing dialectical processes dependent upon the kind of relationship building and reciprocity that align with Indigenous lifeways. As the Native womxn runners from whom I have learned demonstrate, such effortful, intentional processes support the kind of flexible solidarity and coalitional advocacy needed to foster greater inclusivity within the running industry, Rhetorical Studies, and beyond. My hope, then, is that, in some small way, the stories I have gathered here contribute to those efforts and that the ways I have gathered them provide a means for others to do the same.

Notes

1. Florida's House Bill 7, known as the Stop the Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (Stope W.O.K.E) Act, restricts whether and how public colleges/universities and K-12 schools can discuss race and gender. Enforcement of the act has already been blocked by Court injunction for Florida public institutions of higher education, but it remains in place for K-12. See Ryan Quinn's " Fla.'s"

2. Referred to as the "Don't Say Gay" bill, Florida House Bill 1557 prohibits discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity in Florida's public schools. Supporters claim this protects parental rights regarding when and how to discuss queer identities or sexual orientation with their children. Opponents, however, express concern for how this ban will impact queer students' mental health and available support systems as well as how it could support the erasure of LGBTQ+ individuals and history. See Meredith Johnson's "Dangerous."

3. In its 2022 ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the United States Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to abortion established by *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, opening the door for state bans on abortion. See Nina Totenberg and Sarah McCammon's "Supreme Court."

4. At the center of *Haaland v. Brackeen* is the question of whether the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is unconstitutional due to its provision that Native children be placed with relatives or with tribal community members whenever possible. Following ICWA, child welfare experts have considered placement with relatives when possible as the "gold standard" for all children. However, because this provision is based on the idea that tribal nations have authority over their members, a decision that ICWA's placement provision is unconstitutional could also have broader impacts on tribal sovereignty. See "About ICWA" or "Indian Child Welfare Act."

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**APPENDIX A:
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) EXEMPTION
DETERMINATION**



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board

FWA00000351 IRB00001138,
IRB00012110

Office of Research

12201 Research Parkway

Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

September 22, 2022

Dear Kim Martinez:

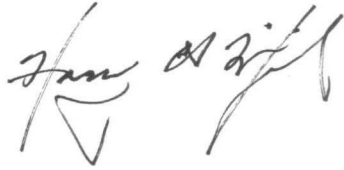
On 9/22/2022, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Exempt category 4
Title:	Rhetoric of Native Women Running
Investigator:	Kim Martinez
IRB ID:	STUDY00004721
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Request for Exemption KM 9-15-22, Category: IRB Protocol;

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harry Wingfield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "H" and "W".

Harry Wingfield
Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX B:
SAMPLE CORRESPONDENCE TO RUNNERS/RUNNING GROUPS

From: [Kim Martinez](#)
To: LYDIA.JENNINGS@DUKE.EDU
Subject: Permission Request
Date: Tuesday, March 28, 2023 1:48:00 PM

Dear Dr. Jennings,

My name is Kim Martinez, and I am a graduate student in the Rhetoric and Composition MA program at the University of Central Florida. As part of my program, I must complete a thesis project. For that project, I have chosen to focus on the rhetoric of Native womxn runners in order to draw greater attention to the work they do. This is why I am contacting you today.

Because I am a Latinx woman and non-Native, I am seeking to center Native womxn runners' voices. To do this, I have turned to my Instagram feed to consider what messages stand out among the runners that I follow, how they convey those messages, and what others can learn from them. After doing so, I would argue that Native womxn runners (and the communities they represent) need to be recognized as not just knowledge keepers, but also knowledge makers whose leadership has the potential to shift running spaces as well as the field of Rhetoric and Composition toward greater inclusion.

To make that argument, I would like to describe and discuss two of your Instagram posts and am writing to request your permission to do so. I have listed the posts below so that you know exactly which posts I would include, and I would be sure to direct link these to your IG account so that anyone reading my discussion recognizes your account as the primary source. For copyright purposes, I would not include any screenshots of your posts; instead, I would only describe them and/or quote from your captions. Out of respect for your privacy, I also would not include any posts that are unrelated to your advocacy or issues of racism or (hetero)sexism.

I recognize that your work is time and labor intensive and am truly grateful for the knowledge and insights you continually share as well as the opportunities you offer others (like me) to learn from and participate in that work on- and offline. I also recognize the long legacy of academics using Native communities as research subjects with no reciprocity or acknowledgement of those communities' input. I am attempting to address that where and how I can by asking your permission, studying your public advocacy work, and offering the compensation that I can.

For these reasons, in addition to appropriately crediting you for any posts you allow me to include in my analysis, I would also like to offer what compensation I can either directly to you or by donating to an organization of your choice. Since I have never done this before, I honestly do not know what a fair rate would be, but I am open to your suggestion.

I have included the abstract for my project with this message (see below) and would be happy to share the finished thesis with you once it is available.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration of my request. I am happy to discuss any questions or concerns you might have, so please don't hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

Kim Martinez

IG Posts I am requesting permission to include:

From @lcooljennings

- August 24, 2021 post on first day of teaching and rates of Native American students in US higher education and number of Indigenous PhD's:
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CS9bHycHfmq/?hl=en>
- April 22, 2022 post about advocating for LandBack at Boston Marathon, connecting with local Indigenous communities in the Boston area, and coordinating advocacy efforts with and

drawing support from NWR team: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CcqPXudl7Av/?hl=en>

Abstract:

This analysis demonstrates the complex ways that Native womxn runners mobilize the rhetoric they create around and through their running activity to challenge settler colonial, heteropatriarchal ideologies in favor of Indigenous lifeways; build upon cultural practices that include running and a wider spectrum of gender roles to enact more inclusive, modern Native identities; and lead intersectional advocacy efforts that center Native communities. Utilizing a Cultural Rhetorics, Indigenous Feminist, and Decolonial framework that recognizes Native womxn as experts in their own lived experiences, I gather Native womxn runners' counternarratives from virtual spaces/social media to learn from their cultural, rhetorical (oral, written, digital, visual, embodied, and kinesthetic) practices via a process of story gathering. Because I am non-Native, I seek to center Indigenous womxn's voices by consulting Native womxn runners' Instagram accounts or organizational websites; print and web-based articles that either quote or are written by these runners; and podcasts, televised interviews, or recorded workshops/panels for which they serve as guests. As these sources highlight, Native womxn runners create their own coalitional counterpublics that continually enact cultural knowledge in context via discursive strategies that recognize Indigenous culture as diverse, inclusive, modern, living, vibrant, and embodied. As such, the runners' social media presence and on/offline activism serve as rhetorical, cultural, and political acts. That is, they mobilize multiple modalities and rhetorics in culturally specific ways that have the potential to lead the mainstream (white) running industry toward greater inclusion and effect changes on a larger scale. I argue for a similar shift within Rhetoric and Composition, which still regards work by womxn of color as niche scholarship. To remedy this, the field must acknowledge Native womxn as not just knowledge keepers, but knowledge *makers* who should be better recognized and valued within our discipline regardless of their relation to the academy.

APPENDIX C:
MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS FOR
WHOM JORDAN WHETSTONE RAN THE 2019 BOSTON MARATHON

1. Amanda Webster
2. Savanna LaFontaine Greywind
3. Miranda Tenorio
4. Britney Tiger
5. Ashley Loring Heavyrunner
6. Lakota Rae Renville
7. Lucella Yazzie
8. Olivia LoneBear
9. Henny Scott
10. Ashlynn Mike
11. Jessika Alva
12. Josie Lee Head
13. Ariel Begay
14. Sunshine Wood
15. Raven Henry
16. Whisper Little Owl Horseman (FOUND)
17. Angel Rose Tomow
18. Lauren Two Bulls
19. Anela Gipp Alkire(FOUND)
20. Mariah High Hawk
21. Freda KnowsHisGun
22. Trinity Kriener
23. Anndiné Jones

24. Tamra Keepness

25. Noreen Osborne

26. Starla SpiritTrack