R.47. Speaking of Feminism: Today's Activists on the Past, Present, and Future of Feminism

Interview R-0889
Patina Park
April 22, 2016

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ABSTRACT – Patina Park

Interviewee:	Patina Park
Interviewer:	Rachel F. Seidman
Interview Date:	April 22, 2016
Location:	Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center, Minneapolis, MN
Length	101:33 minutes

Patina Park is the Executive Director of the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The organization provides a variety of trainings and support for Native American women and men dealing with issues of trauma, homelessness, mental and physical health issues, and homelessness. Park discusses her childhood in North Dakota, where she was raised by her adoptive parents. Although her father was a member of the Osage Nation, and her birth family were Sioux, she did not identify strongly with her indigenous heritage until she attended law school at Hamline University. As a young person she was heavily involved with theater and dance, and started attending Arizona State University as a dance major, but had to change after she injured her ankle. She recalls in detail her experience working in a women's health clinic that provided abortions during college, including her feelings about the anti-abortion protesters. She explains why she loves the law, and how she started to work on cases dealing with the Indian Child Welfare Act. She grew increasingly frustrated with the state of Minnesota's system of foster care and the practice of removing children from families. While she highly values one-on-one direct service, her work and especially her participation in the NOVO Foundations' Move to End Violence has increasingly turned her toward activism beyond advocacy. She discusses the profound impact of colonialism on indigenous people in the U.S. and also in South Africa, which she visited. She discusses Two Spirit (LGBTQ) programs, and her views of how domestic violence cannot be approached as a gender issue, but must be understood as a trauma issue. And she explains her hesitations about the use of the term feminism, and it's lack of utility in her community. This interview was conducted as part of Rachel F. Seidman's research for her book *Speaking of Feminism: Today's Activists on the Past, Present and Future of the U.S. Women's Movement*.

FIELD NOTES – Patina Park

(compiled April 22, 2016)

Interviewee:	Patina Park
Interviewer:	Rachel F. Seidman
Interview Date:	April 22, 2016
Location:	Park's office in the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center, Minneapolis, MN

THE INTERVIEWEE. Patina Park is the Executive Director of the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center (MIWRC).

THE INTERVIEWER. Rachel F. Seidman is an historian and associate director of the Southern Oral History Program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. The interview took place in Park's office. As Park pointed out in the interview, her office was quite messy and disorganized—piles of paper and books covered the desk and there was a clutter of art projects and other objects, including a handmade dream catcher and drying herbs, hanging on the walls and from the ceiling. She noted before and on the recording that she has Asperger's, although later she decided that she prefers to say that she is on the Autism spectrum. She noted that it means she misses social cues, and doesn't always understand metaphors or subtext. There is significant background noise on the recording, as people were gathered in a nearby waiting room, children were crying, and at times people came into her office or vacuumed the hallway outside.

NOTE ON RECORDING. Recorded on a digital zoom recorder.

TRANSCRIPT—PATINA PARK

Interviewee: PATINA PARK

Interviewer: Rachel Seidman

Interview Date: April 22, 2016

Location: Minneapolis, MN

Length: 101:33 minutes

START OF RECORDING

RACHEL SEIDMAN: This is Rachel Seidman. Today is Friday, April 22, 2016. I'm here at the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota with Patina Park who is the Executive Director. We are undertaking an oral history interview for the project currently called "#Feminism: Speaking Up and Talking Back in the Digital Age." So, Patina, I'm going to ask you to start by just telling me what you know about your grandparents. You knew them?

PATINA PARK: Oh! I do. I should let you know I'm adopted so I actually have more than one set of grandparents now. On my biological father's side I was able to meet my grandmother Viola two years ago I think it is now. She was married. My grandfather was Scottish. Actually a Scottish national so he had dual citizenship and they met in the military. So she, unfortunately, passed from a stroke last year in March but I was really grateful I got to actually meet her. I guess it was more like three, four years ago that I met her. On my mother's side, my biological mother's side, her parents have both passed on so I didn't know them other than see a few pictures. So I don't know much about them at all other than they were very big people--very tall and wide-looking, like Russian German.

On my adopted side, my mother's parents had her when they were forty, above forty, and so she was obviously the only child and all of her friends or her parents' friends had grown kids by then. So she grew up as a little adult; but they passed, my grandfather, maternal grandfather, would have passed--I think I was a few months old. And then my grandmother died when I was three. But I have pretty strong memories of her because I would go over to her house and she would make homemade butterscotch pudding for me. She had this white, white hair because she went prematurely grey in her thirties; but always had just this gorgeous, curly white hair. She died within a few months of my brother dying, too, so it was a really rough time on my mother. Her parents moved up to North Dakota when my mother and father moved from Oklahoma. So that's her side.

Now my dad's side--. My grandma's name was Kenneth because they thought she was going to be a boy and when she came out a girl they didn't change anything. So my father's mother was raised pretty much as a boy growing up. She died, let's see, I want to say ten--eight, eight years ago because my youngest was just a little over a year. She passed when she was in her nineties. She was on the very first, one of the first women's professional basketball teams according to her. Who knows? No one verified anything but apparently she was a really good athlete. The half court is what they played then. But, as a result, neither of her sons--my father, his brother--play sports because she could kick their butts and she was like five feet tall. I mean, she was this little bitty person and so both of them, neither of them, got into sports because they were embarrassed by the fact that she could beat them at sports. Her husband, Yeargin, he passed away probably--I think around when I was about six. Maybe five or six.

RS: How do you spell that?

PP: No, he was--. Y-e-a-r-g-i-n. Oh no, he was older, because, let me think--. [pause] The elections would have been like in, [19]78, I think. Right? Because I know I had to go down and spend a couple of weeks at my grandparents' because my father was running for office. And so while he was doing that I stayed. So that would have been [19]78. So he would have died in [19]79. But he was a farmer, a dairy farmer. He had one of the largest dairy farms in Oklahoma at the time. He also had oil wells. Everybody does down there. I have a lot of memories of driving around with him in his car. And he would let me drive--he would put me in his lap and I'd steer--to go check the oil wells and make sure everything was OK. But I only saw them in the summer. My mother's parents I saw all the time--at least her mother--but the others I only saw in the summer.

RS: So you grew up with your adopted parents?

PP: Um hum. Yes, they adopted me at birth.

RS: OK. And where did you grow up?

PP: The first twelve years in Steele, North Dakota, and then moved to Bismarck--

RS: OK.

PP: --until I moved away after high school. So, North Dakota.

RS: And how would you describe your home growing up?

PP: Oh it was great. I mean, they, we, I grew up on a farm for the first twelve years so very independent. I would get up at the crack of dawn with my dad when he'd go out to feed the cow and I'd go horseback riding. There are pictures of me on horses where my legs are straight out because I wasn't even big enough for my legs to go around. I can remember going horseback riding for hours first thing in the morning. I

wasn't in school yet so I must have been four or five. I tease my parents, now you'd get a child protection case. I mean, if people knew--[laughter]. Yes, I would spend hours. I'd only come home to eat. My dad working on the farm and my mom busy raising the kids. I spent a lot of time by myself, but on a farm that's awesome.

RS: How many siblings did you have?

PP: At that time I was the youngest. I have a sister who's twelve years older. I had a brother who was eighteen months younger than she was but he passed away of muscular dystrophy--which was the son that died when my mother's mother died--when he was fifteen. And then I have a brother, Phillip, who is six years older than me. So there would have been the four of us at that time. And then my mom had wanted a huge family because she was the only child but she had a lot of miscarriages. And my brother Phillip, who is six years older than me, he was born butt first, folded in half. And it was too late to do anything so she got her tubes tied after that which is why I came along and was adopted. Because she couldn't have children any more like that.

RS: And how would you describe yourself as a young person?

PP: Happy, you know, but a loner for sure because most of the time, unless I was in school, I was just playing and wandering around the house by myself. I know when I was, when my mother's mother died, she had--I think it was kidney cancer. She had some kind of abdominal cancer I remember and so she was at home. My mother was caring for her during that time. And so I do remember having to be quiet. So I'd spend more time outside than in. It's apparently a very painful, the most painful cancer you can have. So she was--. I can remember the syringes so she must have been on morphine or something while she was caring for her.

I spent all my days outside, running around non-stop. Riding the horse, riding three-wheelers, playing imaginary games in the fields because we had a very large farm. It was independent but fun.

RS: And then when you got to high school? Were you a studious person? Were you a--

PP: [laughter] Let's see. By then we'd moved to the big city. So that was a huge transition to go from a class where we considered the big--we were a baby boom in the 70s, in the 1970s, so I think we had like twenty-four students altogether. They split us into two groups. Whereas, I moved into Bismarck and my junior high, seventh grade, had hundreds of kids. So it was quite a shock. My biggest memory of moving to the big city is everyone kept talking about this thing called "MTV" and they were doodling it and I had no idea what it was because on the farm we had CBS and NBC. That's it. There were no other channels. You just didn't watch TV. But when I moved to the big city everybody watched TV. MTV, MTV.

RS: What was behind the move?

PP: My dad was appointed the state dairy commissioner and had been doing the commute. My brother graduated from high school and they just didn't want to do it again. My mom just had started working part-time doing taxes and so she actually found a job in town, too. So they both moved in and we lived close. We didn't have to go--because it's about an hour commute. It's funny; I do that every day now. I live in Wisconsin. So I drive farther now than my dad used to drive from the farm. But it seemed like a very long ways back then.

RS: And were you planning to go--well, that move must have been pretty--. How did it feel for you as a kid?

PP: I had--. We were--. I would come into town once a week anyway because I was taking dance classes. When my mother's mother died she left money in her will for me to dance because I used to dance even when I was little, as soon as I could move. I would come into town. So I had some friends who were already here that I knew from dance class. I just remember being in a daze. Now I can appreciate, too, how the Asperger's kind of played into where I missed stuff. Probably didn't know better but also had this strong sense of being in a foreign land, that they had rules and stuff that I did not understand at all. My good friend that I went to school there with, she was, she became a cheerleader and I didn't and that created a social divide, too. High school was--I was in theater. I danced all through high school. I went to college dancing until I hurt myself. I was with the theater kids, the freaks, the crazy people. And I was very content. [laughter] I had a lot of fun in high school. I enjoyed it immensely but I certainly wasn't part of the popular kids and had instances where they'd write stuff on my locker and throw things at me in the hall and--. It wasn't, like, the high school wasn't great but the experience overall, I had fun. I had good friends.

RS: And how do you understand the bullying? Was that a--

PP: It was because while we weren't in sports--sports was the big thing--wrestling and hockey were huge. I also had a really good friend from junior high who now lives, he lives in Colorado with his wife and their kids. The problem is, at that time he hadn't transitioned so he was Reina and was a woman and because we were good friends and in theater, I mean, it really was kind of peripheral picking on because they

just really never left him alone. Ever. High school, I'm sure if you asked him, was horrible. Absolutely horrible. But I was with musicians and the theater people and the dancers and so we kind of just stuck together. At the ten-year reunion, I'll never forget, one of the popular kids said, "Oh, you know, you guys were so cool. I wanted to be just like you." And I'm like, "Oh really?" [laughter] "That's funny. That's not how you acted." So cool. It was great.

RS: And were you, were your adopted parents Native American?

PP: My dad is an enrolled member of the Osage Nation of Oklahoma. My mom is native but not enough to be enrolled anywhere. Pretty much everyone in Oklahoma kind of considers themselves native because it's so--. The population is so huge down there. And there are so many tribes in a small state. So most people are.

RS: But in school that wasn't part of how you understood the bullying? [It wasn't] racial?

PP: Oh, no. It was not racial. No one knew. No one even assumed at all. I can remember a very [laughter] vivid moment when I was, when one of my best friends who was named Amy and she lived close to me. We'd hang out at each other's houses. I was at hers, her parents were home and her dad went off on this tangent, venting about drunken Indians that had been down at this--. There was this one bar in downtown which was more likely to be Indians going there but most people there were white and drunk, whatever. But I remember just sitting there and thinking, "My dad doesn't drink at all." Not being able to put what he was saying in any kind of context of my experience. I didn't know any drunken Indians at that time. Any. I had no idea what he was talking about. But once Amy told him later that I was Native, he didn't really want me coming

around anymore after that. But we remained good enough friends that she followed me her second year of college and moved down [to] Arizona State.

RS: So you ended up going to college in order to dance? Was that your plan?

PP: Yes, Arizona State, at that time, had one of the top public school programs and I knew I couldn't afford the private ones. William & Mary had the best one but there was no way I could go to William & Mary. I had a good friend that lived there with her family. She was a senior in high school. I actually lived with her that first year. I never did the dorm so there was no way I was going to ever do the dorms.

RS: Why?

PP: I would have no control over who that person is and to have to live with them? No. No. Absolutely not.

RS: So what was college like for you?

PP: It was kind of a secondary job to me most of the time. I worked full-time in addition to going to school. I hurt myself--. I took--the first year I only worked part-time and then the second year I was there I went full-time in the dance program. And then the following year I hurt myself right away and so they let me continue the classes. I spent a year in physical therapy and I had two surgeries and all this; but finally the orthopedic doctor, my PT, [said] "This is as good as it gets. I'm sorry but we can't replace an ankle," and I hurt my ankle. They said, "If it was your knee, your hip, we could do something but--". So I had to change my major and that's why I changed to psychology. The idea of leaving college was never even in my head because, for my parents, going to college was an absolute. So I knew they would not have supported my

decision if I'd decided to leave; but, in retrospect, I probably should have taken time off and stepped away.

But while I was going to college, even as a psychology major, I was working part-time in a women's clinic and ended up managing the front desk in the front office. I managed the front and then the nurse managed the clinic. We did abortions, too, so it was mostly serving Native Americans. Mexican women, actually, were our highest cash. We did take insurance. I did counseling. I did phlebotomy. You did just a little bit of everything. I was doing that while I was going to school. So college was never a primary thing I did.

RS: And how had you gotten interested in the women's clinic?

PP: I started dating someone I met at a Halloween party and his mother ran it and they needed a front desk person. Once I got there it just felt so like I was with my people kind of--I just fit--that I stayed with them the whole time I was in school.

RS: So what did that mean to you? That you were "with your people"?

PP: Well, they were kind of misfits, too. Kind of a different framework of thinking about how people should behave. No judgment; just kind of open-minded. You really do working--. I would say I did not work in an abortion clinic because I felt this strong, you know, at all; I worked there because it was convenient and then once I got there I absolutely supported everyone's right to make their decision. There's no other way I can think of to be. People who are anti-choice? I have trouble getting my head around people who try to take their framework of looking at things and place it on someone else. It's illogical. "If you don't believe in it, don't do it," is the logic. Too much of that is not logical at all.

I had a great group of people. We had so much fun. It was fun going to work even though it was very stressful. It felt good knowing we were helping people. Even the daily aggravation of the picketers was almost like bonding as a group because we all had to deal with those people who would then use the clinic when it was convenient and then go back out picketing after their two-week check. It was amazing to me how many people, the hypocrisy of people—I have never--

RS: Used the clinic for what?

PP: Oh, they'd have their abortion because they were God's only exception. It was okay for them.

RS: Really?

PP: Oh, all the time. All the time. Yes, absolutely. All the time. It was not okay for anyone else but when they found themselves pregnant? More oftentimes than not we would be serving former picketers or people who had become picketers. Because then they've given themselves the forgiveness. Because now they feel bad about it because they're picketing and preventing other people from doing it. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Those people just drive me crazy but we'd still serve them and be compassionate. Either you believe people have that right to make the decision that's best for them or you don't. You don't get to classify or judge people based on whether they fit some certain mold or not.

RS: And what years were those?

PP: I worked at the clinic from 1989 through 1995. That's how long I was in college. Actually, from 1988 to 1995. I lost a year and a half of credits, almost two years

of credits, because the dance credits don't pass to anything and then I didn't go full-time. So it took seven years to finally get my psychology degree.

RS: So did you--I think there was at least one big march on Washington for women's reproductive rights during that time. Did you participate in that kind of thing?

PP: No. There would have been no funding for us to do that sort of thing. I would if given the opportunity but even--my mindset is getting more to the point of activism rather than just advocate. I've always seen myself as an advocate for the one. And so, for me, it's always been more important to be there helping the individual with that whole process. Even here, the one, other than when I was practicing law, than to be out on the streets howling for the whole. Supporting that and realizing that that's definitely a role and a position and something that has to be done, but that it's really two separate talents and mindsets. I find a lot of times people who are activists for the whole have lost sight of the individuals that are actually impacted. They don't really know the stories of the ones whose rights they're trying to enforce. And that's fine because at a policy level the individual may not be as important. I've always been more about the individual.

RS: Where do you think that comes from?

PP: I don't know actually. I really don't know. A sense of--I was a loner a lot as a kid. I don't know. I really couldn't tell you. I've never gone into deep analysis of that. It just is. And it's only recently in my life where I have gotten to the point where I'm moving more into activism because I use dialogue that's more about systemic oppression and racism and pulling those policies apart that have continued this racism. I

went on a total soapbox even just yesterday about blood quantum and stuff in front of a group that I never would have done even a year ago. But I did.

RS: I'm sorry. I missed what it was about.

PP: Blood quantum. I was teaching a class on sovereignty at this conference in Las Vegas. I had a whole group of people there from all tribes all over. There's a controversy right now in tribal Indian country about tribes dis-enrolling or, "What is an Indian? How much Indian are you?" And a lot of it comes from this quantum mindset. A quarter quantum. Many of our community don't know the history. They don't know the full story. They don't know, they've never been given the benefit to know that the reason it's a quantum is because it came at a time of allotment. The Federal Government needed to figure out who the Indians were so that they would be entitled to land but that was part of genocide. In order to take that land you became a United States citizen and promised not to practice tribal, you wouldn't use your language [or] traditions. Your kids would go to school. You would go to church. You would farm. So the quantum is locked up completely with genocide. And they picked a fourth because they thought within two to three generations we'd be gone because of all the intermingling. Quarter quantum is, the purpose behind it was always to wipe out the race of Native Americans on this continent. And it makes sense because they want our land, right? Whereas in the African-American, one drop? Just one drop made you black when they needed them to build the country. The control. Just recognizing that even identifying what a race is is wrapped up in racism. There is old-school, a lot of old-school people in the community who think quantum is a tribal tradition because they don't know better. So I kind of went off on a tangent about that issue because right now there's more constitutional reform in

Indian country than ever before. One of the most controversial topics is membership. How do we define who a member is? A lot of it is that people want to stick to this old "how much Indian, how much blood do you have?" and that's not traditional for any tribe. There's no tribe I've ever found who can say prior to colonialization and prior to contact that cared about blood. It was about community, a sense of belonging, participation, knowing your language and tradition--all of that. That's what being a member was, not "where does your blood come from."

So I'm a little more--I pull in more language about oppression and racism than I ever have before.

RS: And is that--why is that?

PP: I think it's partly due to age. I'm forty-six now and I've been in a role now for a couple of years where I'm running things rather than representing or working with someone one-on-one. I'm getting further away from the individual people. And because I think my participation in [the] NOVO process, we've done a lot of intensive work. I'm with a group of activists. They are activists. I'm the only service provider within this Move to End Violence, my cohort. Everyone else is either a member of a coalition or--even if they do service it's usually very limited to one kind of instance or one kind of issue, like youth empowerment. Whereas we're the only agency that does the multitude of things that we do because of the huge impact trauma has on so many different levels. So I'm meeting people who use this dialogue just naturally. Ana is from Mexico. She lives in Chicago now but she frequently [would] talk about essentially dismantling the patriarchal system. Hearing her talk about it is different than reading it. It absorbs, for me, better when I can hear it, ask questions and help me put it into a context. I'm starting

to see a shift. Mostly recently, probably the biggest shift that happened is because I went to South Africa for two weeks as part of NOVO as a learning exchange. We spent a week in Cape Town and a week in Johannesburg. We started at Robben Island and we ended with the apartheid museum and we met people, all these NGOs, in between. And we met one Shirley Gunn who bombed buildings. She's hardcore. A white woman who went and trained in Cuba to learn how to detonate and do that kind of--.

Anyway, while I was there, before I went I really--. I remember apartheid. I was old enough [and] I remember it. I remember it in the news and I heard people talking about it. I really equated it to the civil rights movement based on race [or] color. You should say 'color of skin' because race is not an accurate--there's no such thing as race, right? It's a created thing to justify continued slavery and stuff based on head size, right? That is the history of race. While I was down there I learned that the problems that the Africans were having with loss of language, loss of land, being removed and placed in these townships, the huge disparity between socioeconomic opportunity for indigenous people of Africa vs the settlers. And I realized this isn't about race at all; it has nothing to do with color. It is colonialism. This is the impact of colonialism. It's the same here as it is back home.

For me it was very profound of an experience. For many of the cohort I felt like--except for the other two indigenous women--for everyone else there seemed to be this sense of hope and positivity that this constitution has passed and everyone has so much hope for that constitution. Everyone we spoke to spoke of it and how they felt so empowered by the world's being allies with them and comrades [and] how grateful they were. I went to the apartheid museum and just--to be honest, at one point I broke away

and just sat in a corner and sobbed. Someone else in our group did, too. Whereas others were empowered by this revolt and caught up in the revolution. When we went around the circle the next day and processed what we saw, they came to me and I said, "Listen, for me this trip has been life-changing but it's also been intensely depressing and sad because the same things that make you feel hopeful, for me, as someone who sees the effect of colonialism and knows that we have a constitution that says all men, all people, are created equal--. We're still waiting five hundred years after contact. It's very hard for me to believe that it's going to be any different here and that in two hundred years from now they're still going to be seeking equal treatment and equal opportunity. They're going to be talking about inequities and disparities like we do here in Minnesota. 'Where are they coming from?' I can tell you where they come from: They come from systemic racism and oppression that is engrained from the colonial experience but no one will talk about it."

Prior to that experience I didn't get it. Almost all the languages, indigenous languages, have a word that essentially equates to "all my relatives." You may hear that. You may hear it out [among] all my relatives. The concept never really hit home until I went to South Africa, that we really are all relatives, particularly the indigenous people, regardless of where we are on this planet. It's not just Lakota or Ojibwe or indigenous people of the United States or the First Nation. Really it's all of us. [We've] had this same experience from colonialization and no one talks about it. We don't hear that from the government. That's for certain. Canada is getting better. I hope I'm wrong. I hope South Africa does open their eyes but what I see on Facebook now there [are] still huge gender inequalities and there's still violence happening against women despite the fact

that the constitution says everyone is equal. It's just that now they don't mark boxes. They're not asked what their race is anymore but they're still treated differently based on it, right? It's now just harder to see because no one is paying attention. No one can point to documents because everyone's equal.

RS: I want to go back to get us to--is it NOVO?

PP: Yes, NOVO. It is the NOVO Foundation, the Move to End Violence.

RS: After you worked at the clinic and finished up college, then where did you go?

PP: I graduated from ASU in [19]95 and then I moved back here. I came to the Twin Cities.

RS: And you went to law school then?

PP: No. Not right away. I started working at HealthEast, Pediatricians for ( ) up on Maplewood because of my healthcare background. I had actually planned to go into forensic psychology because that's what I was interested in. But then I went to Manhattan for a visit and I thought "I can't live here. There's no way I could live here for any extended period of time." There's no grass; it's just cement and noise.

RS: You were going to go there to study?

PP: Yes, to the John Jay School of Criminology. I had meetings with the FBI and recruiters. I thought I had my path lined up but when I came back from that visit, "I can survive here." People are walking dogs, they're not all crammed around this tiny little stick, I thought, how awful that these dogs have to pee on—I was just mortified. I had a friend who was in law school at the time and I was having my existential crisis about what I'm going to do with my life now since dancing fell apart and now this fell

apart. She said "Have you ever considered law?" I [thought] "Huh, maybe that might be something." So I took the LSAT cold. I didn't even read the book. I went into the sucker totally cold. Well it's a law school aptitude test, right? I wanted to see if I had an aptitude. I scored high enough that I got a full scholarship to Hamline, and I got some others but that's where I wanted to go. It was a small liberal arts [school]. My friend had a high recommendation for it. ASU was so huge, I really wanted something smaller. I liked that they had this public interest focus in what they did. I went to Hamline and loved it. I loved law school. I was one of those people. I loved it.

RS: Why?

PP: Because I actually formed relationships with the teachers. At ASU there wasn't any--. Here, I could actually have discussions with them. The other thing I like about law it isn't actually black and white, it's subject to interpretation. Other areas use terminology that's not intuitive to the words ever being used and those confuse me. They make me very--like, just recently, I had someone explain to me what "crabs in a bucket" is. I had no idea what that meant. Someone said "It's like crabs in a bucket" and I went, "What?" And he said, "Well, no, because if you put crabs in a bucket they use each other to crawl up but sooner or later the one gets almost to the top and someone will inadvertently pull him down. So it means when you're pretending to support each other when in the end you're just pulling each other down." And I said "Why don't you just say that?" I mean, what? It makes no sense to me. Whereas in law you've got your law; you've got your precedent. It's all very logical and pragmatic. I love that about law. I love the pragmatic nature of law. And it's subject to interpretation. I like that too.

RS: And so you were interested in the public interest piece of it. Did you know what you wanted to do?

PP: Not really. I thought maybe something in health because I'd done that for so long. That was my background. I never thought about Indian law or Indian child welfare. Never even considered that stuff. In fact, I did a summer associate position with Halleland, Lewis, Nilan, Sipkins and Johnson at the time. They've broken up; I don't even know what they're called anymore. They were a major healthcare, they represented health systems. And I thought "OK." And insurance defense and stuff for that. I did not get offered a position and so I had to figure out what I was going to do and I ended up clerking for a judge. That judge was in juvenile court and he did ICWA cases and that's what really started why I'm here.

RS: He did what?

PP: Indian Child Welfare Act cases. He was one of the ICWA judges which is a federal law. It's from 1978 but it does mandate the placement of kids and a higher standard for removal than non-Indian kids. More work has to be done to fix the family before you can permanently terminate. Hennepin County has a large volume of the cases. There's such a high concentration of the community here. That's really where I started getting exposed. And also worth noting is, I never marked the box as an undergrad. I didn't mark the box until Hamline. So I really didn't even identify as a Native person until I got to Hamline and then I started to kind of rediscover that.

RS: And what was behind that?

PP: It's because when I was adopted my father wanted to, my adopted family wanted to know why there was a Native child, because that is very unusual and weird to

have a Native child available in a private adoption. That there was no family, that no one would take them; that is traditionally, culturally appropriate. The adoption agency told my parents that the tribe didn't want me because I was a half-breed. Since my mom was white they did not want me. My parents, I'm sure there are two reasons why they chose to tell me that growing up. One is so I didn't set myself up for disappointment in case it was true. But I think part of it too was because my adopted mom was always extremely nervous that someone would take me. I think there's always been in the back of her head an idea that they really never should have had me, that I belonged with family. But they wanted me so bad. So growing up she wouldn't take me to powwows. They didn't do anything because she was afraid someone would recognize me or say "Wait. Why do you have her?" and challenge her. She didn't want to be challenged.

What's ironic about it is my dad, on the flip side, I think if he hadn't believe that was true--. It never occurred to him that they would lie, which they did. I learned that when I met family at the adoption agency. That wasn't true. My grandma wanted me desperately and she was 40 when I was born so she would have been young enough. There was other family. There was extended family. But at that time, in 1970, and for many years after, adoptions were only considered successful if you severed the ties of all family so that the child could grow roots in this new one. The problem with that, though, is if my dad had known who the family was or who the tribe was, he would have reached out and tried to find family, to ground the family. Not to give me away but so that I could probably have gone home on the summers and gotten to know them and learn the language. He saw that as important but he had no reason not to believe them. And so he

may not have agreed to any of it but I think when he chose to tell me that it was because he was afraid I would go looking and be rejected and that that would be even worse.

I grew up knowing I was Native but not really identifying as such. I never felt a part of their tribe because I'm not Osage either. And I was thinking they didn't want me anyway so "If you don't want me, I don't want you." It really wasn't until Hamline, I got involved in the Native American Law Students Society and I started meeting a couple of other Native students. I marked the box, right? There again, instantly I have to justify that I got a full scholarship. Like, if you know I'm Native and I say I got a scholarship--"Oh, 'cause you're Indian." "No, actually my score was high enough that I would have gotten it anyway." But instantly you'll single-story me, "Oh, it's because you marked the box," right? You know, I have to defend it. Oh, I lost my train of thought.

Oh, and then when I started doing ICWA cases with the judge, it's when I started meeting people from various tribes and learning that this idea that the tribe didn't want me was completely foreign and wrong. That there was no basis in that in anyone I've ever met. In fact, it's the complete flip opposite. The tribes were fighting tooth and nail to keep the kids within the tribe, even if it's not with the family or the biological parents. To just keep them within the community, that's what everybody was fighting for.

I asked my grandma. She [said] no, she tried to find my mom but by the time she found her she'd come back from the--my biological mom was shipped to Fargo to an unwed mother's home. She had no idea where she was in the world. I told her she was, she gave birth in Fargo. They picked them up in the middle of the night. They had no idea whether they were driving north, south, east or west. They took them back in the middle of the night after they gave birth. They were not allowed to leave the house ever.

Isn't that insane? It's just insane. So when she came back she wasn't pregnant and she couldn't even tell my grandmother where she'd given birth. She could have been in South Dakota. She could have been in Montana. She could have been in Iowa. She had no idea.

RS: So when did you find all that out?

PP: I found out four years ago. It was when I met my mom, met my biological mom. I finally, mostly because of my kids, I thought "I really need to find out where I'm from." I knew I was Sioux. That's all they would say. But it was important to me to know where I was from and so I called the adoption agency, right? And they looked and found and connected.

RS: That's powerful. OK. So you discovered the ICWA cases and that set you on a new path.

PP: Absolutely. A totally new path.

RS: So what happened?

PP: I clerked for the judge for several years until he decided to go up to grownup court, we joke about. Both my kids, I had them while I worked for the judge. I didn't have any leave. With Jerry, my oldest, I had two weeks off after the time I gave birth until when I went back. But the judge was very flexible and so even though he was paying me full-time, I really was only in the office part-time and then doing stuff at home. And then for Gabe I managed to save up a month of PTL so I got to stay home for twice as long with him.

When he went to the grownup court I had a moment of not sure what--again, another life crisis of "what do I want to do?" I thought maybe I should try going back to

health. Maybe I should try to do the money, essentially. Maybe I should try to use my law degree to get money and be money-focused in my career. So for a year and a half I did executive compensation and benefit analysis for non-profit health systems. I've never been so miserable in my life. It was the worst job ever. You know, they paid me a lot. Benefits were great. On-site health care. It was just insane. But I would walk to work every day "I hate my job. I hate my job." And when I turned around to leave I was dreading that I had to come back in a day. I was so unhappy. And maybe if I'd gone there right after law school I would have never seen court, seen the families, had that experience; but the shift between these families who are struggling with all this stuff and still doing a remarkable job and CEOs bitching because they don't get use of the corporate jet without claiming it as a benefit and wanting these golden parachutes even if they're fired. It was too much.

So the ICWA Law Center, which is still in town, called me out of the blue and said "Listen, would you consider working for us? One of our attorneys is going JAG. She has an opportunity to go back into the military law, JAG. She was in the reserve but she's going to be leaving in a week." And it took me like a second; there was no doubt. But I did have to talk to my husband because it was a cut of salary of forty percent and I lost all my benefits. My husband had to--he's a cop--he had to be willing to pick up more off-duty to make everything equal and he, too, was instantly "Of course." I gave one week notice. I dropped projects. I did the most unethical, in my mind, unprofessional but I was so glad to be out of there. And I worked for the Law Center for almost four years.

RS: As an attorney?

PP: Direct representation of families involved in child protection. Indian families involved in child protection in state court and tribal courts. So White Earth, Leech Lake, I was licensed in Mille Lacs, Bois Forte, and then statewide but mostly Hennepin County because this is where the bulk of the urban population is. And I loved it. It was a great job. Oh my god, I loved that job.

RS: Why?

PP: Because I really felt like I was helping people and an activist for families. I was an advocate. A strong advocate. And I rock in court; I just do because I can be the reasonable one no matter what. And I think because I'm so pragmatic and I'm so "it is what it is." People's situations didn't impact me at an emotional level like others may have. The fact that a mom had been house-jumping or living out of a car or was prostituting herself to make ends meet, I had no emotional response to it. No judgment. It is what it is. But I could frame it in a way in court to be sympathetic or to be just matter-of-fact. "I mean, what else do you want her to do?" I was good at that. I wasn't good at prepping for trial because that's way too, I mean, look at my office. Organizing and detailing stuff; no. Most of the time we didn't go to trial anyway because they'd either not show or they'd just admit anyway. I finally, I had one case happen and I was already getting tired, but this case made me think "It's futile." The futility of the child protection system and how totally dysfunctional and messed up it is. I don't know if it is that way everywhere but it certainly is in Minnesota. I just decided not to do it anymore.

RS: What happened?

PP: Well, because I had worked with a judge for several years and then started representing clients, that was a span of seven or eight years. I had situations where I

would end up with the child as a parent that we had in court when I was clerking. With the judge, as his law clerk, we terminated parental rights on somebody [and] that kid ended up going into foster care and when she ages out pregnant, child protection opens automatically on them, they don't even give them a chance. And that happened more than once. Or they came back. We had them in court and then they came back and I'm now representing them as their attorney three years later because things haven't gotten much better. This was a case where we did terminate the mom and she had two older kids, a girl and a boy. The girl was probably about fourteen or fifteen at the time and her brother was a couple of years younger. He went to grandmother's. So the maternal grandmother was able to take custody of him but couldn't take the girl. [She] didn't have enough space. The county wouldn't support it because the apartment was too small. They won't give her money to get a bigger one, God forbid.

So the girl went into foster care and she did end up pregnant and did age out. So she's 18 now, has a baby. The county took the kid at birth. No positive drug tests, no whatever. And the rationale was basically because of her behavior in foster care, which was directly attributed to the fact that she was in foster care. She ran. She was trying to go home and see family and they wouldn't let her. She was staying out late because her foster parents were terrible. It was just annoying. But that's not what did it because that's common. But the baby, because it needed to go into foster care, we tried to argue to put the baby with grandma because the brother by that point was no longer living at home. Nobody knew where he was. He was sixteen, heavily involved in drugs and gangs. He had like hardcore felony, adult-level stuff on his record by now, some of which came with him when he moved in with her. He got it while he was in foster care. Because

under licensing it doesn't matter if they live there or not, he is legally hers, she was un-licensable. Because of his criminal record. Even though everyone admitted he hadn't been living at home for two years. So the kid goes into a non-family, stranger foster home. We fast forward a few months and this was in the fall. Fast forward a few months, every court hearing we have I'm arguing for the kid to go home. It's not happening. My client is showing up with her mother, who we terminated when I worked for the judge, and her grandmother. Three generations of--. Despite all of this involvement, [they're] still together. Nothing changed that.

Summer comes or late spring and the brother is shot in a drive-by shooting. He was the first murder of the season in Minneapolis. And the very next day the baby was placed with grandma because the licensing barrier was dead. I just, I sat there--. I'm gonna cry because it's--. Millions of dollars had been spent on this family to keep them apart essentially. That's been the entire focus. That no one ever thought about what really is best for these kids which would probably have been together with grandma with support. But instead they've created now four generations of dysfunction because the baby is already in foster care. The chances of it going home are unlikely. Why? What are we doing here? What are we doing? That child, the son, was struggling because of foster care, because they took him away from his family, but it's his fault. It was the mother at fault until they terminated, and then it was his fault because he wouldn't behave, and then it was my client's fault because she kept running away. But for me, at the core of all of it, it was this deep desire to be together that the system would not respect.

I started looking hardcore after that case because I just could not do it anymore. They're all like that and it still is bad. [laughter] It still is bad. So I wanted to try to get into a role where I was preventing it. I was trying to prevent it. So I moved into, I got a job with the Ho Chunk Nation in Wisconsin. It was a contract position through a Federal grant that funneled through the state. They passed the Wisconsin Indian Tribe Welfare Act which was codifying the federal law into the state law. I was responsible for the implementation. Developing curriculum training materials, tangible guides, and training everyone in the state.

RS: To do what?

PP: To follow the law and to understand why it's necessary. Which is what I saw my role as. Anybody can read law but to understand why something like the Indian Child Welfare Act or why the Wisconsin--. Why do Indian children, why should they get "extra," which is what people think. "Why shouldn't they just be like other children? Why are we treating them differently?" Well, because of colonization. Because the experience has been different for Indian children and the attempts to tear families apart have been going on forever. So it's not a surprise that our families right now are experiencing such high level mental health, chemical health, dysfunction; homelessness. Every measurable bad thing, we're at the top of the list. We're less than one generation away from forced sterilization of our women in hospitals. Of child welfare suites where they would show up in black cars and grab kids in the 50s and 60s. Why are we surprised, when no one has done anything to deal with the trauma, what multi-generational intense trauma does to a community. You can't just shake that shit off and pull your boots up and act like nothing ever happened. It's in our DNA at this point.

That's been proven now but we could have told you that years ago. And the impact on the parent creates cellular level change that you can see now in the kids. Yeah, duh. We could have told you that. Elders have been telling us that for generations. Sorry. I'm a little soapbox-y there.

RS: It's all right. So did you find working on that in Wisconsin, did that satisfy the desire to--?

PP: Yes. It helped a lot because we saw impact. The out-of-home placements started to go down and it was because, I think, a direct effect of that training and to understand the history and the context and 'why' and the 'how' so that people approaching families were in empathetic, full understanding rather than a judgmental, short-term kind of assessment. I only had a couple of instances where I ran into pure racism, where they just didn't like Indians. Most people just didn't understand the history. They had no idea. And having that explained so they could understand had an impact on the way they did their job. So it was a good experience. I didn't stay to the bitter end because I got recruited, head-hunted. I got recruited to work at DIW as their Executive Director.

RS: What's DIW?

PP: Division of Indian Work. They're in town here there on Lake. They're part of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches. They're not their own 501(c)3. They're just the largest program of the GMCC.

RS: And what do they do?

PP: They started sixty-plus years ago as a food shelf during urban relocation when so many Native families were pushed into the urban settings. Minneapolis wasn't a targeted center--Chicago was--so there weren't any resources here. Church people

reached down to help those people and started a food shelf. Now they have a lot of youth kind of work: after-school programs, math programs. I'm not sure if they still have the program--they had a staffer who actually served in the school to be kind of a liaison between the school and the parents and the kids as far as catching excessive absences earlier. What else do they do? What did we do? When I was there we had two group homes: one for foster care boys and one for foster care girls. I know the boy one still continues but they closed the girl one after I left and last I heard they were renting it to a former employee just as housing.

RS: And then you came here from there?

PP: I did.

RS: So tell me what the Resource Center does?

PP: We are focused on healing whatever needs to be healed. We have a multitude of services. We have been in this space now, it will be twenty-five years in November but we've been around for thirty-one. It was started by three Native women and a man. I was like "Man!" For a while there he was taken out of the narrative which I found disturbing; we put him back in because we need both. We need both energies for success.

The oldest program is our training. They opened the center to help educate service providers who are working with Native communities to better understand the history, communication differences, cultures, stuff like that. The learning center is our longest program. We have that, and there's a library. People aren't as interested anymore because you can get stuff on the internet. It used to be we were a high source because we have some books and documents you can't get anywhere else that have to do with Native

tribes here in Minnesota as well Minnesota authors and stuff. That's on-site here, again, behind the receptionist, actually. We also have Nokomis Endaad, which is Grandmother's House in Ojibwe, and that is a co-occurring CD program so all of our clients have both a diagnosis of mental health issues--whether it's a chronic one or a situational--and they have a chemical dependency problem. What that program does is it's the only gender-specific--because it's only women--and culturally appropriate dual-diagnosis program in this federal region. Unfortunately, it's not inpatient. There's no residency component to it. At any given moment, up to eighty-eight percent of the women are homeless so it's crazy. They stay sober. They come in and do our program. It's also a three-tiered, eighteen-month program so it's a longer, extended program. They utilize an elder in residence. Donna is there. They do sweats. They go out ricing. They'll go out and gather sumac. They integrate culture. The other thing I think our agency does beautifully is we recognize the power and strength of blood memory; so even if I have clients who have not been raised traditionally, have never gone to the reservation, their families don't even really know where they're from or how to follow, when we start integrating ceremony and medicines, traditional medicines like sage, cedar, sweet grass, tobacco, it connects to them in a cellular level and that helps programming stick in a way so the other stuff can work.

We also do a lot of mind-body medicine work. Both of my elders are certified at the Center for Mind-Body Medicine out of San Francisco and DC, I think are the two places. They integrate those kind of integrated health modality work in with culture and tradition. Most of the things that these mind-body medicine groups do are actually historically traditional medicines and techniques that have been used by indigenous

people forever. Now it's wrapped up in a nice little program and everyone else wants to do it. But we are doing it very effectively. So that's Nokomis Endaad. It's the only gender-specific program that we have and that's because of our licensing.

We have our family stabilization work which is child protection. We try to prevent it through parenting classes, life skill, one-on-one case management, and in-home parenting is what we're doing a lot now because our clients are struggling so intensely with mental health issues they can't even function in a group. Our staff go out to their homes. We also have an ICWA position. Marie goes to court and gets assigned cases that go alive or go open and then she helps them manage services and case management and tries to kind of be that liaison to help explain. She'll go to court with them and assist and explain all that. It can be very confusing and complicated. I know from representing most families who are involved in child protection we all know someone who was involved and who never saw their kids again. There's really a strong misconception in a lot of ways. It's perceived that if child protection gets involved you lose your kids and that child protection gets involved earlier and more intensely with Native families. If you look at Minnesota, our disparity of out-of-home placement for Native kids versus non-Native, if you equalize it by population, we are the worst state in the nation and we are fast approaching pre-ICWA levels of the 70s. There's a huge disparity in the out-of-home placement of Indian kids but no one [laughs] seems to really want to acknowledge the 'why' that's really the systemic racism, the past trauma as well as the lack of any housing, affordable housing, living wage, that kind of stuff. So that's family stabilization.

Then we have our Healing Journey program, Sacred Journey. Sacred Journey is the second oldest program. A healing journey. These are for our women 21 and older.

It's a support group twice a week. They do culture [and] tradition but they also do curriculum on life skills. A lot of them, if they've lived on the street quite a bit, don't know how to grocery shop or how to manage a budget or how to manage a house and so they learn skills like that in there. Plus, it's not a dry program but they cannot be high when they come; however, the vast majority stay sober and keep sober throughout the time they're coming even though there's no CD quality [as a] component to that program. It's just that the reasons why they're drinking or using, we're identifying and filling. Those ladies make beautiful quilts. That dream-catcher was made by the ladies down there. They're constantly doing stuff. They're just amazing. There'll be an article in the Star Trib[une] about them pretty soon because we've had a reporter following them around for quite some time.

Then we have an Oshkiniiqikwe one and two. This is for women, girls really, under 21, and Safe Harbor. We have two positions funded through Safe Harbor. This is a risk-reduction, harm-reduction program for trafficking, to work with victims or suspected or to work with kids who are at very high risk, which is all of them. If you're Native and a youth, you're at high risk because the numbers there are hugely disparate. In 2013 one of the Minneapolis cops who does trafficking said seventy-five percent of his cases involve Native American kids and we're less than two percent of the population. So, huge, hugely overrepresented. So we do a lot of work there and then at Safe Harbor we have two positions funded through that. One through direct services and the other one is a tribal Safe Harbor. Minnesota, a couple of years back, passed the law that makes under 18 you can't convict someone for prostitution. It directs them towards services instead. We've been trying to work out the bugs of how that system is really going to

work but funding came along with it so we have a couple of positions funded through that work.

RS: When did you say that was placed?

PP: Oh, when was Safe Harbor? 2010 maybe?

RS: Okay.

PP: Look it up. I know we, it was before I started here. Suzanne, my predecessor, was highly involved with all of that. It has been around now for a few years.

RS: I'm interested in the legal changes that Minnesota has been making. I've been talking to some of the other people I interviewed about the Women's Economic Security Act. Was this organization involved in that at all?

PP: We have a serious problem and actually a couple of weeks ago myself and several other leaders from non-profits here in town had a meeting with the governor's chief of staff and various commissioners because in Minnesota part of the problem with the disparities in equity is the fact that the governor and the commissioners don't appear to recognize that it's not "white and other." In almost every instance they leave the Native American community out. Even by their own recordings, reporting, TV, newspaper, they are saying they are doubling down, they're focusing this money. They've created this whole new position because of disparities. Disparities are bad. And then they say, "So we're going to impact the African American community." Well, nothing about the Native American, nothing about the Asian American, or even anything about the new American. The Somali community that has come here has a completely different set of needs than the African American community who are based in slavery as a past and have been here forever. Again, to me it's that systemic racism. They really

only see color. Like black is black. And not seeing the uniqueness and differences within that and then assuming that whatever they do to help the black community will help the red community which will help the yellow. It's crazy. Nothing came out as far as what they're going to do to address disparities in the Native American community despite the fact we out-disparate the African American in almost every measurable category. We are killed more often by the police. We are overrepresented in prison at a higher level based on population. We have more homeless. We have fifty-one percent unemployment. Fifty-one percent of employable people in Minnesota are unemployed. Way higher. If you take the extreme out, like Prairie Island and Shakopee which have very high per capita, if you take that out our annual income is way lower than the African American. But no one talks about it. Or they talk about it in a way that pits us against each other which is ridiculous.

RS: So who is "they" when you say "they"?

PP: The government. Anytime they do an RFP, anytime they talk to the media about disparities, they don't acknowledge or recognize the differences within and right now if you Google it, all they say is African American. "We're going to impact the African American disparities." "We're going to increase business," do whatever, "with the African American." Frequently if we get invited to the table it's at the last minute. It's, you know it was an "oops! We forgot to invite the Indians." It's not with any kind of intentionality or authentic desire to really consult. That's what we brought forth to the governor's office. It's, "Listen, we know what we need to do. All you have to do is ask us instead of this top-down, 'we're going to fix you' or 'we're going to use this model from the north side that's worked beautifully with the African American community'." Well,

that's a different community. Just because it works there, it's unlikely quite frankly that it will work here. And without asking, too. That's another thing. They'll just drop stuff without asking the residents of Little Earth, "Do you really want...?" For instance, I'll give you a concrete example. Up on the north side, which is predominantly African American, they have followed up with domestic violence now with a day-after: a social worker and a cop will show up again to meet with them, to see how it's going, to talk to them about services, to see if they're knowledgeable and know resources they can reach out to, to get support and help. They have questions about orders of protection, restraint, all of that. They're there to do this. It's been successful. Kind of. Data is always skewed but it has had some success. The city has decided "You know what? That went so well let's do it in Little Earth," which is the highest, it's the largest housing development for Native Americans in the nation. Huge volume. People have lived there for generations. It's been around for a long time. But they never ever asked Little Earth how they would feel. I can tell you without a doubt that if a cop shows up the next day with a social worker, a non-Native cop, there aren't that many, no one's going to talk to him. They're going to think they're there to take their kids because domestic violence is grounds to remove your children. They do it all the time in the Native community. They're not going to talk to you. But they're going to invest money into doing this because they want to help us, right. And that was kind of the push-back, because we didn't think it was going to work on the Northside either but it's been successful. OK. Lucky you. It's not going to be successful here. It's not. Good luck but "no." We're invisible. We are invisible to systems, to media, to classrooms, to the government. We are invisible and have been for a long time.

RS: Your focus, the anger is focused on the government, the governor--. I guess my question is, some of the other women I've talked to have a lot of anger at what they see as the white women's movement. So around the WESA, the Women's Economic Security Act, there was lobbying and organizing and stuff that was done by the Minnesota Women's Consortium and other groups convened by the Women's consortium. Do you know were there Native women involved in--

PP: I'll have to look at the list. I was certainly not invited.

RS: But you don't--

PP: I don't--. And even when I say I'm angry at the government, I think it comes from ignorance. I don't think it's--you know, I joke when I picture that there's this group of white men somewhere that just laugh and point at how successful they've been at creating an environment where we think we have to fight each other for scarcity when there is no scarcity. That they pit us against each other so that it's "Black Lives Matter" or "Native Lives Matter". Even internally with our own agencies, it wasn't that long ago that OIC, Indian Center, MIWS in Little Earth, even though we're right here within blocks of each other, we're not collaborative. We won't collaborate. We are competing for funding, wouldn't tell each other, which completely defeats the purpose of serving the community. I'm glad we're not that way now but it wasn't that long ago.

I think its ignorance. It's not an intentional thing. I don't think anyone is intentionally racist but I think the system as a whole is because it's historically been. The capitol is sitting on stolen land. It is filled with artwork that is offensive, wrong and just inaccurate as history. They are only now, even rarely will they bring up the fact that there are indigenous people here or they'll say that the Lakota and the Ojibwe.

Historically, yes, this was land of the Ojibwe in the north and Lakota in the bottom; but now there are tribes from all over. People who live in the state, are residents of the state, we're not even counting them because they're not one of those two tribes. You're making an entire race of people invisible unless they fit your definition of what's an Indian, which is wrapped up in racism anyway, even if they don't realize it. The Native experience is a little different from some of the other communities of color.

For many of us we are at the point now where we'd rather fix ourselves and have support in doing that. Everyone else just stay away. You've done nothing but damage for hundreds of years now. Go away. For some, that puts them off a bit, too. There's so many well-meaning people in the world that just aren't educated, are ignorant to the reality of stuff. They want a simple story about entire groups of people in a way that serves them, that may get numbers on a chart to look like there's movement but really hasn't done anything. We joke: Minnesota has "wins," all these things, we're the best state for this and this, if you're white. They take out the bad data. "Oh, it's has the highest data for placement rates for children of color." "Has the most bicycle paths." Yes, and it has the most children of color who don't graduate from high school, who drop out. It's a good state to live in if you're white. White and you have at least $65,000 a year, or more if you want to live in the city. They just published that. So if you live under that and you're a person of color, not so much.

RS: Before we started recording we were starting to talk about the concept of, a lot of what you talked about that the Resource Center does is women and their families. And you were starting to talk to me about the concept of feminism and how that would or

wouldn't be recognized in the community. Can you tell me about that? Is that a concept or a word that's used here?

PP: I think in some of the younger groups "feminism" is a word that may come up more often. It's never been a word I've heard in my entire academic professional life up until fairly recently when it kind of bubbled up to the surface again. What's interesting to me is even when I'd see it bubble up, it was still more of a negative. It was more like calling out people who say they're feminist and point out how they're not. I despise that kind of stuff. I disengage from it.

RS: Where were you seeing that?

PP: In social media, in articles, on TV and the news reports. Usually some--what was the one I saw fairly recently? What's her name? [pause] Some young, like, musician person. Called herself a feminist and people were all over her on why she wasn't or why she didn't understand it. It's such a negative way to look at life. I just don't play that game. I just don't do it. It seems to me that most of the times I hear about feminism it's either in the context of pointing out how it's, how someone is not a real feminist, "You're not really a feminist because of" whatever, or I've seen a few things recently, and mostly because of my Move to End Violence, because Jamia Wilson does a lot of work here, on feminism in a digital--like with online bullying and that women experience far more of that, because she does blogs and she used to work for TED Talks. And how to legislate that, too. How do we get anti-bullying, cyber-bullying kind of stuff? But it's never been really in the framework of my thought process.

RS: So what is the Move to End Violence?

PP: Move to End Violence is--remember a few years ago when Warren Buffet gave his kids each a billion dollars to start philanthropy, to do good? This is Peter's money. So Peter and his wife Jennifer spent several years actually researching what could they really do to have an impact instead of just offering grants. And we like education. It was very well thought out, investigated. They brought in experts. They did roundtables. They really did think. I have a lot of respect. I've met with them and I was "OK. You guys are legit."

And what they came up with is that in order to truly change violence you can't just give short-term grants to services. That's not going to change the problem. What they needed to do and what they are doing is invest in a long-term commitment of essentially what they call "building movement makers." And so there are five cohorts every other year. I'm in the third. I'm right in the middle. The first defined what the focus would be and the ground rules. The second, well, one of the shootings happened during their convening and the Black Lives Matter movement kind of exploded within their cohort so that kind of became their focus, how they could support that. We came in and we're kind of a bridge. There's going to be two more cohorts. The idea is building these intense partnerships between each other so that we can move forward more movement-making, more transformative thought. Changing policy by changing the way people approach problems. It will interesting to see what--. The people they've selected--they've also been very deliberate in the type of people they're picking for the movement. That's why I went to South Africa. It was part of our learning exchange. It's very intensive networking but also doing strategic planning and having fun so that next week--of course, I can't go. I'm going to have to call them and they're probably going to be mad

at me because I have legislative stuff. Strategic, transformative forward thinking kind of workshop.

RS: So it's violence broadly defined. It's not violence against women?

PP: For them it is women and children but they've also been open to the idea that most of us do not see it as just women and children. Particularly with the two-spirit work we do. I was clear when I applied, too, that when you say "women and children" I include any self-identifying person who considers themselves a female entity of some sort. Even if they consider themselves a "they."

I don't see violence as solely a gender issue. I can empower women and children. I can. But "children," there are boys in there, too. I can empower women. Like, say she's in an abusive relationship. I can give her all the programming, empower her, get her to see what a healthy relationship is. She may leave him, but there's another one that takes her place and I've done nothing to end violence against women and children. I'm still only saving them one at a time. So to me the gender focus on ending violence is part of the problem. The men, at least in my community, and that's all I can speak to, also come from the same traumas that the women have: from the boarding schools, the sexual, the mental, the physical abuse, the trauma of not being able to be a man for your family, too, as Child Protection is taking them away. Your kids are going to boarding school. Your women are being attacked. And I can't imagine the impact because I'm not a man, but it's not a gender issue. It's a person, it's a trauma issue. We have to address the trauma. Not that I'm saying there aren't some evil people in the world. But I don't think there are all that many. It's so interesting to me. Some of the old school, even in the cohorts, still have that kind of "men bad" mentality. Empower women so we don't need

men anymore. I just, no matter what, I can't. I can't embrace that thought process. I've been obvious and they picked me anyway. I'm the voice of pragmatism even in [laughter] meetings.

RS: Tell me about two-spirit work. What does that mean?

PP: Well, LGBTQ. In many of the, well, some of them don't call it "two-spirit" which is why we do LGBT. If you're down in the Southwest at the Denali, "two-spirit" means you're crazy. So you have to make sure you're clear. In Lakota and Sioux, the idea is that if an individual, a male, is born with female qualities, that that's actually a blessing. They're a better person for it. Historically, prior to colonization, they were seen as elders or teachers or wise men or women. And to be married to one was beyond awesome. Then Christianity came with colonial people and that shifted. And so we're really trying to turn the discussion back to traditional ways of thinking of it and respecting and honoring the family and however they identify. We don't care. So on Saturdays we do groups now and we're starting an art show tomorrow. We'll have an all-day event, an educational community event with a gallery thing and a reception in the evening honoring our two-spirit community members.

RS: So if the younger women here use the word "feminism" and the older women maybe don't, is there a different sense of women's empowerment? Is that a, you know, I've seen some places where, let's say--I was talking to someone about some place in the Middle East and she was "We don't use the term 'feminism' but there's a very strong sense of what it is.

PP: Yes! Right, right. Exactly.

RS: Is that, would that--?

PP: Yes. The word "equality" is sometimes a struggle, too, because there isn't equality between genders anyway, just by virtue of nature.

RS: So there's difference.

PP: There is difference. Men are traditionally stronger because they have more dense muscles. There's a science to the differences, too. So I think sometimes there's push-back even in the community that saying that we're equal is a lie from the beginning. But it's more about respect. Are women respected and are they held at a position of equal authority, equal decision-making, equal competence as men? That said, I would say "Yes!" Even knowing that in the community there are some tribes with very defined roles for female and male. In some, the women are the caregivers. The men are maybe more the leaders. I found it interesting when we were prepping to go to South Africa, we had to do this kind of cultural competence because they wanted to make sure that the privileged Americans didn't go to South Africa and make asses of ourselves. One of the questions was: You're meeting with an NGO. There's women there and a man does all the talking, even when you try to engage with the women, the men intervene. And we had dialogue about it. Some were "Well, you know, that would be really hard. I'd wonder are they being abused." And what's funny, the patriarchy never hit me. It wasn't even on my radar. For me, I was thinking, well, chances are this may be a community where the men do all the talk because that's their role. But I had no doubt that when they go home, the women will either chew them out for saying the wrong thing or that--you shouldn't presume automatically some kind of patriarchal system just because the man is speaking and the woman is not. Maybe she doesn't want to. That, too; that is equality as well. Maybe I choose not to take on that role. That's equality too

because I had a choice. So defining it more from how are they viewed. "What are their choices? Do they have choices?" rather than "Am I an equal?" I don't want to be an equal with men. I don't. But I do want to be respected. I want my decisions to be heard, listened to. I don't feel that I'm not. Out in the community, I've never felt anything but respect and mutual reaching out even for advice from other men in the community.

I will share a story with you. [laughter] When I first took this role I was interim. There was a whole process of screening, of course. Another woman applied or others and then they got it down to the two of us and then they selected me. And I served on the board, too. I've known this agency for a long time. One of the board members, who I at the time considered a very good friend (I've since learned not so much because of things she's been doing behind the scenes), we met because she said "I really need to meet with you and talk to you. I want to kind of fill you in on things and let you know." So we went and had coffee and we were having a great conversation. Like I said, I thought she was a good friend. She said "I really need to bring something up. It's really uncomfortable and I don't want you to be upset but I just feel like I need to." I said, "All right." Now she's about ten years older than me, too. So this is a woman in her fifties. "Well, I'm just going to say it. You need to tone all this down because you're a beautiful woman and no one's going to take you serious because of that." And I remember the same look is going through my face of "Did she just--? What did she just say?" "OK. Thank you for the compliment?" I couldn't even process it. I had to go home and think about it, other than to say "Thank you. I'm glad you felt that you could be up front about that." But I thought, wow. And this is a woman who I would say if you asked her "Are you a feminist?" she would say "yes." She's adamant about this outward appearance.

She quit her job at the State because men were getting promoted over her and I'm thinking, "Wow. Are you really?" To me a true feminist would never have said that to me or even assumed it. And she's wrong. I have never had anyone treat me other than like I'm competent because I've proven myself competent despite of how I look. I did not tone this down, you know? It's just crazy.

RS: Is your--I'm almost done.

PP: No. No. That's alright. I just was--my clock up there says five till one. I need a battery. [laughter]

RS: Is this program a member of the Minnesota Women's Consortium?

PP: I'm not sure if we are or not, actually. It's interesting. I was just on a call. I was in Vegas and I called in and there's been discussion on coalitions. How can coalitions reach out better to communities of color and to coalitions of color? My advice to them on the call was I'm not in a coalition and so you're maybe not to me yet. You need to work that out among yourselves. If you're going to include service providers in this that's a whole other spectrum of stuff. You might want to keep it to coalitions. But until I'd sat in that call--because I just don't get involved much with coalitions--I didn't realize that dynamic was going on. And the two or three people on the call that were from Native-based coalitions, consortiums, whatever, felt that intensely. Did feel that they were excluded from national and weren't sure why or how that had happened. I think it's just we're invisible. In all areas. We're not thought of even. So I don't think it's intentional. And maybe that's my flaw. I never read intentionality into anything but I do think that just because of this lack of awareness of Native Americans as a living and breathing thing and not just a historic, that no mainstream, or even other communities of

color that have coalitions, don't think of us because they have no context to put us into. Everything they learn is made-up Pilgrim stories and made-up treks across the United States. I think it's all a carryover from that kind of mentality.

RS: Is there a network? I was talking to or emailing with Nevada Littlewolf. Do you know her?

PP: That name is very familiar.

RS: She's started something called Rural American Indian Leadership-something. Up in, I think, Virginia, Minnesota.

PP: Ah, yes. Up in the Iron Range. That's probably why her name sounds familiar. Because I am, we're a service provider, it is interesting, we tend to be kept out of the coalition work, too. It seems to me that coalitions are more focused on policy and training, awareness raising, campaign kinds of things and I'm busy serving people. Everyone who walks in the door. Housing. Mental health, chemical help. What is that problem? We're addressing it at the ground level. Sometimes I've also realized as I've been doing this longer and being--the other problem: I'm not very self-aware of stuff that is going on in the periphery unless I'm targeted on it. I don't know if that's the Asperger's defense. If it's outside my--I don't pay attention to it. So this coalition stuff work was never part of my experience whereas direct services has been, even when I was with the judge, when I was practicing. It was an intense part of my day-to-day. Those coalitions, oftentimes I hear now a discussion that--and it's what I said earlier, too, that so much has been invested in direct services as well as the professionalism of direct services--ensuring that staff earns degrees and whatever--that we need to undercut all that, too. We need to look to a new way. But the problem with that is I still have people who are homeless and

I still have people who are hungry and I still have people struggling intensely with emotional and mental health problems and so talk like that always makes me a little nervous. Similar to when I was at the Division of Indian Work and people would say "You know, that food shelf was just a crutch. You need to shut that down." I [said], "Yeah, but there's still people who are hungry and children--I cannot shut that food shelf down. I can't." In fact, the need is even more intense now with the working class than it was back when I was at DIW and it was mostly just serving homeless.

RS: Is that because of the economic crash?

PP: Yes, there's a lot of working people. Recently, to live comfortably in the Twin Cities, you have to have a salary of at least $65,000. Most don't. The living wage here, the minimum wage you need I think, what was it? You need to work--I want to say at least sixty-plus hours just to cover the cost of the apartment, the two-bedroom. That doesn't include anything else. So utilities, food, all of that. And the housing crisis is bad here. That's the strong need anyone identifies from any of our program. "We need housing. We need housing." Eighty percent of my Nokomis clients are homeless. They're bouncing from couch to couch and then they're trying to stay sober. Trafficking, if you really wanted to end sex trafficking, you could: more affordable housing and a living wage. If it's a choice between sleeping outside in the winter or sleeping with someone so that my kids and I can sleep at his house, I'm going to sleep with a guy because I don't want my kids to freeze to death. The worst case is when they don't want to sleep with me. They want to sleep with my sixteen-year-old daughter and that happens all the time, too. If you really want to end trafficking or if you want to end a lot of the crime, the drugs, end the conditions that cause it. Don't try to fix people. You can't fix

homelessness by the individual. If there's no house, there's no house. And so that's probably partly, too, why I'm shifting more into activist rather than advocate. It is a bigger thing. It is impacting everybody and trying to turn the narrative away from this fictitious, movie-of-the-week kind of single story of the problem and trying to get people to understand that, no, it's not kids getting kidnapped off the street. It's not bad moms. It is long-term oppression, long-term poverty, long-term lack of identity culture.

RS: So do you see yourself moving into that activist role in--

PP: It's how I raise money now. That kind of changing the dialogue is what I do now in this role. I still try to stay as informed as possible and connected with my staff because the other thing I don't want to happen and I think has happened a few times historically with the agency and with other agencies is the narrative produced by the leader of what's happening, isn't necessarily what's happening on the ground level. And that's easy to happen because if you're maybe only hearing one story and you kind of blanket over everybody or you know what you wrote in the grant. [laughter] You know? But you're not remaining connected with the on-the-ground people. It's very easy to make that mistake. And it is very important to me that what I say is what's happening here. Otherwise I'm lying and I won't do that. I don't care how much money you'll give me. I don't care if you'll give me a million dollars if I make up this story about us rescuing some girl from trafficking from the man camps. It doesn't happen that often. Kids aren't being kidnapped and taken to the man camps. They're going there willingly because they have no other options. That's what I want a million dollars [for]. Let me give them options. Not just to make you feel good because you think we've rescued somebody. That's not what's happening.

RS: Well, is there anything that we should talk about--[laughter; both talking at once]

PP: My goodness! I don't think so. I feel like I've not given you much about feminism, though.

RS: That's okay. I think it's interesting. I hadn't really--

END OF INTERVIEW