

6-30-2017

O'whahsa' - Protection, Comfort and Healing

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Rochester Institute of Technology

O'whahsa' - Protection, Comfort and Healing

by

Leah Shenandoah

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in
Metals & Jewelry Design

School of American Crafts
College of Imaging Arts & Sciences

Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY
June 30, 2017

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Abstract

Leah Shenandoah is an Oneida Nation multimedia artist, musician and scholar who conveys the concepts of protection, comfort and healing through music, sculpture, jewelry and fashion. On May 6, 2011, "O'whahsa" which translates to "hood" in the Onya'ta:aka Oneida language, was presented at the Hungerford Building in Rochester, NY. Over 250 attendees witnessed a transcendental space consisting of: five sculptures made of fabric stretched over a welded steel rod armature-painted in a vibrant and impressionistic fashion; five sets of clothing and jewelry worn by Shenandoah and four dancers; smoke, fog, multi-colored lights and a 45-minute set of original songs written and performed by Leah; and a studio loft painted to emulate outer space. Inspired by the Haudenosaunee creation story of Skywoman, Shenandoah utilizes modern and ancient concepts of extraterrestrial origins in her creations. Shenandoah's intense desire to create healing stems from her personal experience as a domestic violence survivor. Searching to regain a sense of self and healing through art and music, she utilizes the creative flow state to transmute pain and suffering into joy and healing.

1. Introduction

On June 11, 2007, I was held hostage by an ex-boyfriend for 13 hours by knifepoint. The severe anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) I have developed as a consequence of this event has forever changed my life. Luckily, I escaped and pressed charges, which resulted in a three-year jail sentence for the perpetrator. Unbeknownst to me, this was not his first charge of unlawful imprisonment. My sense of safety, confidence and trust has been severely compromised for the rest of my life. Janet Jacobs, an American sociologist specializing in gender and religion cites research by Burgess and Holstrom (1974) to assert, "... research into female victimization suggests that women who have been physically and sexually abused retain feelings of helplessness and powerlessness as a result of the abuse" (Jacobs, 1989, p. 266). This accurately describes my everyday life, which I strive to overcome.

After the domestic violence incident, I moved to New York City to attend Dubspot (a music academy), attending courses in electronic music production and DJ-ing on turntables. PTSD and anxiety made living in NYC difficult, so I decided to pursue my artistic passion for metals and jewelry at Rochester Institute of Technology. Retrospectively, my logic at the time dictated that my abuser's associates would not be able to locate and harm my family and I, as they had threatened our lives.

In lieu of traditional counseling, I was searching to regain my sense of self through art and music. An obsession with healing and creating a safe space through creative works is directly related to the intense amount of suffering I had endured. Through this method of self-discovery, I reverted to my earliest form of happiness, creating with my hands and singing. Gloria Flaherty argues "...the artist was a shaman, that is a poet, singer, actor, prophet, seer,

healer” (Flaherty, 1988, p. 534). I concur with Flaherty's statement, and wish to create with the intent of healing others and myself.

Thusly, “O’whahsa’ - Protection, Comfort and Healing” was born! O’whahsa’ translates to “hood” in the Onya’ta:aka, Oneida Nation language. My desire - to create a safe space, using sound, shape, color, dance to establish a transcendental space that transmutes pain and suffering into joy and healing.

2. Background

As a young girl, my earliest memories were of creating Indigenous art with my late Grandmother, Maisie Shenandoah an Oneida Nation Wolf Clan Mother. My late Grandfather, “Sonny” Elwood Falcon was an award-winning silversmith. My family travelled the Pow Wow circuit, creating Indigenous art, demonstrating dancing and singing to share our culture throughout the United States. Our Indigenous art has its roots in the beginning of time and the story of this place. It has meaning common to all people but is expressed in ways that reflect life on this continent. It is rooted in this earth and what comes out of it (Kellman, 1985, p. 34). My grandmother taught me to create wampum belts, moccasins, corn husk dolls and various other Indigenous arts to sell at her vending stand, “The Shenandoah Trading Post”. My grandmother passed on while I was attending RIT, which impacted me deeply. She is the most inspirational person in my life and gave me the foundation of what would become my life’s work- creating art with my hands.

3. Haudenosaunee Creation Story

My grandmother would often tell me legends as we worked, my favorite is the Haudenosaunee legend, “Skywoman”:

Before the beginning of time there lived humanlike beings in a place the Haudenosaunee call Skyworld. These were magical beings who were surrounded by a gentle light. They knew neither pain or death, nor were they ever ill. Earth years were but mere seconds to the Sky People. Yet they were similar to human beings and shared some qualities such as the ability to love and care for each other. They were like human beings in another way: they had the ability to dream.

One of the Sky People was a young woman named Iotsitsisen (pronounced Yo-ji-ji-sen) which means ‘Mature Flower.’ She was much loved by her parents and grew to be a beautiful and kind young woman. One day, however, Iotsitsisen experienced something no other Sky Person had ever felt: she became sick with a mysterious disease. Her illness caused her parents great concern because such a thing had never happened before and they had no idea how to make their daughter well again.

As hard as he tried, her father could not think of a way to make her well. One night, as he lay exhausted from worry, he had a magical dream. In his dream a spirit told him to take his daughter to a certain village where he would find a man called Taronhiawakon (De-lun-ya-wa-gon) or the “Holder of Heavens.’ This man would have the power to cure Iotsitsisen’s sickness.

When Iotsitsisen was brought to Taronhiawakon, he immediately fell in love with the young woman and asked her father if he could marry her. Iotsitsisen’s father agreed,

provided Taronhiawakon could heal her. Calling upon the most powerful forces of the Skyworld, the young man was able to restore Iotsitsisen to good health. During their time together she became pregnant with his child.

His wife was once again in good health, and Taronhiawakon was happy to learn he was to be a father. But one night soon after that he had a disturbing dream. He was told by a spirit in the dream that his wife was to leave their home and enter a new world. They would find the way into this world beneath the roots of the Great Tree of Light, which stood in the middle of their village. The spirit told Taronhiawakon that Iotsitsisen's recent sickness meant she would have to leave Skyworld that very day.

Taronhiawakon awakened and went to the Great Tree, which grew so tall no one could see its peak. Taronhiawakon used his great strength to reach beneath its roots. Grasping the roots in his hands, he braced his legs. Then with a mighty push he toppled the Tree onto its side. Beneath it he discovered a large black hole exactly as his dream had foretold. He was afraid to put Iotsitsisen into this blackness, but he knew if he ignored the dream he would bring great troubles to the Sky People. Taronhiawakon returned home to get Iotsitsisen. His heart was heavy with sadness as he gently placed her into the black hole. He spoke to Iotsitsisen softly, promising to protect her by giving her a beam of light to guide her while he watched over her from the Skyworld.

Iotsitsisen felt only sorrow as she looked back at her husband. In the next instant she was carried away on a beam of pure light. When she looked down she saw a dark world covered with a deep and endless sea. Iotsitsisen wondered what would happen to her

when she struck the water. She was afraid for her unborn child. (Shenandoah and George, 1998, p. 7-9).

4. Extraterrestrial Origins

Renowned physicist and author George Gamow has argued that it is natural to consider the existential question of humankind's origins:

It is characteristic for the human mind to speculate about the origin of the world we live in, and practically all ancient religions contain, in some form or other, a story of the creation of the world by an act of some divine power. (Gamow, 1958, p. 413).

The Skywoman legend often piqued my curiosity, where did we originate if not from this planet? I remember looking at the stars at night, wondering if someone was looking back at me from the Skyworld. According to Professor Stephen Hawking the answer is yes:

Alien life is almost certain to exist in many other parts of the universe: not just in planets, or even floating in interplanetary space.' The universe, Hawking points out, has 100 billion galaxies, each containing hundreds of millions of stars. Earth is unlikely to be the only planet where life has evolved. (Hawking, cited in Steiger, 2011, p. xiii).

My interpretation of this Skywoman is that humans descend from extraterrestrial or alien ancestors.

A recurring theme in my sculptures and jewelry is the amygdaloidal, or almond shaped form. To me, this symbol represents human and alien connectedness because the representations

of alien's face shape are so similar to a human's face shape. Furthermore, the alien (amygdaloidal) shape is quite popular in the rave scene:

Among the most common outer space icons, which range from planets to fantasy space ships to actual satellites and satellite dishes, is the friendly extra-terrestrial.

Anthropomorphic, neotonized, with massive forehead and long, slender eyes angled together in "V" formation, this friendly martian icon appears in a range of places-t-shirts, fliers, music videos, album cover art- and is the symbol of drum 'n bass record label Liquid Sky." (Hutson, 2000, p. 8).

When Skywoman fell from Skyworld, she grabbed seeds from The Great Tree of Light. These seeds are responsible for all the plant life on this Earth according to Haudenosaunee cosmology. The amygdaloidal shape utilized was also inspired by these seeds, which are represented repeatedly in the sculptures and jewelry created for "O'whahsa'."

"Chariots of the Gods," by Erich von Däniken, a well-known ancient astronaut theorist, has many captivating examples detailing that humans have been visited by extraterrestrials. One of which startled me because of its similarity to the Haudenosaunee creation story:

One of the great archaeological wonders of South America is the monolithic Gate of the Sun at Tiahuanaco—a gigantic sculpture, nearly 10 feet high and 16½ feet wide, carved out of a single block. The weight of this piece of masonry is estimated at more than 10 tons. Forty-eight square figures in three rows flank a being who represents a flying god. What does legend say about the mysterious city of Tiahuanaco? It tells of a golden spaceship that came from the stars; in it came a woman, whose name was Oryana, to fulfill the task of becoming the Great Mother of the earth. Oryana had only four fingers,

which were webbed. Great Mother Oryana gave birth to 70 earth children, then she returned to the stars. (von Däniken, 1980, p. 21).

I was fascinated to discover von Däniken describing other parallels in Indigenous mythology throughout the Americas indicating extraterrestrial origins:

Because the mythology of the Eskimos also says that the first tribes were brought to the North by “gods” with brazen wings! The oldest American Indian sagas mention a thunderbird who introduced fire and fruit to them. The Mayan legend, the Popol Vuh, tells us that the “gods” were able to recognize everything: the universe, the four cardinal points of the compass, and even the round shape of the earth. What are the Eskimos doing talking about metal birds? Why do the Indians mention a thunderbird? How are the ancestors of the Mayas supposed to have known that the earth is round? (von Däniken, 1980, p. 81).

Similar stories involving extraterrestrials throughout humankind in nearly every culture is quite intriguing and deserves acknowledgement. von Däniken states:

It is impossible and incredible that the chroniclers of the Mahabharata, the Bible, the Epic of Gilgamesh, the texts of the Eskimos, the American Indians, the Scandinavians, the Tibetans, and many, many other sources should all tell the same stories—of flying “gods,” strange heavenly vehicles, and the frightful catastrophes connected with these apparitions—by chance and without any foundation. They cannot all have had the same ideas all over the world. The almost uniform texts can stem only from facts, i.e., from prehistoric events. (von Däniken, 1980, p. 87).

Another example of extraterrestrial visitors by von Däniken, supports my belief that humans originated from another planet and have been visited by extraterrestrials (and are perhaps extraterrestrials ourselves):

Cuneiform texts and tablets from Ur, the oldest books of mankind, tell without exception of ‘gods’ who rode in the heavens in ships, of ‘gods’ who came from the stars, possessed terrible weapons, and returned to the stars.” (von Däniken, 1980, p. 46).

5. Thesis Show Description

Inspired by this notion of alien ancestors and the Skyworld, a transcendental experience was created, that brought the viewer to another dimensional plane filled with sound, visual and tactile experiences that feel alien. Shamanistic dancing, chants, ceremonies and rituals have the desired effect of connecting with the life force that runs through all of us, and resulted in a transcendental altered state. An atmospheric quality was created through the use of many different colored lights and fog to make the viewer feel as though they were in space. Suspended from the ceiling were four sculptures, designed to appear as if alien ancestors were watching and protecting us from the sky. Four dancers and myself wore outfits decorated with impressionistic paint and oversized hoods. Each of us were adorned with five different pieces of jewelry which were smaller versions of the sculptures and moved ecstatically on a loft suspended above the crowd while a forty-five-minute set of original songs were performed. Overall, this was an exceptional challenge, but the set went flawlessly (see media submission). The instructions for the dancers were simple: move intuitively in response to the music. Improvisational performance creates space for trance and flow like states, most often unable to be recreated (see media submission).

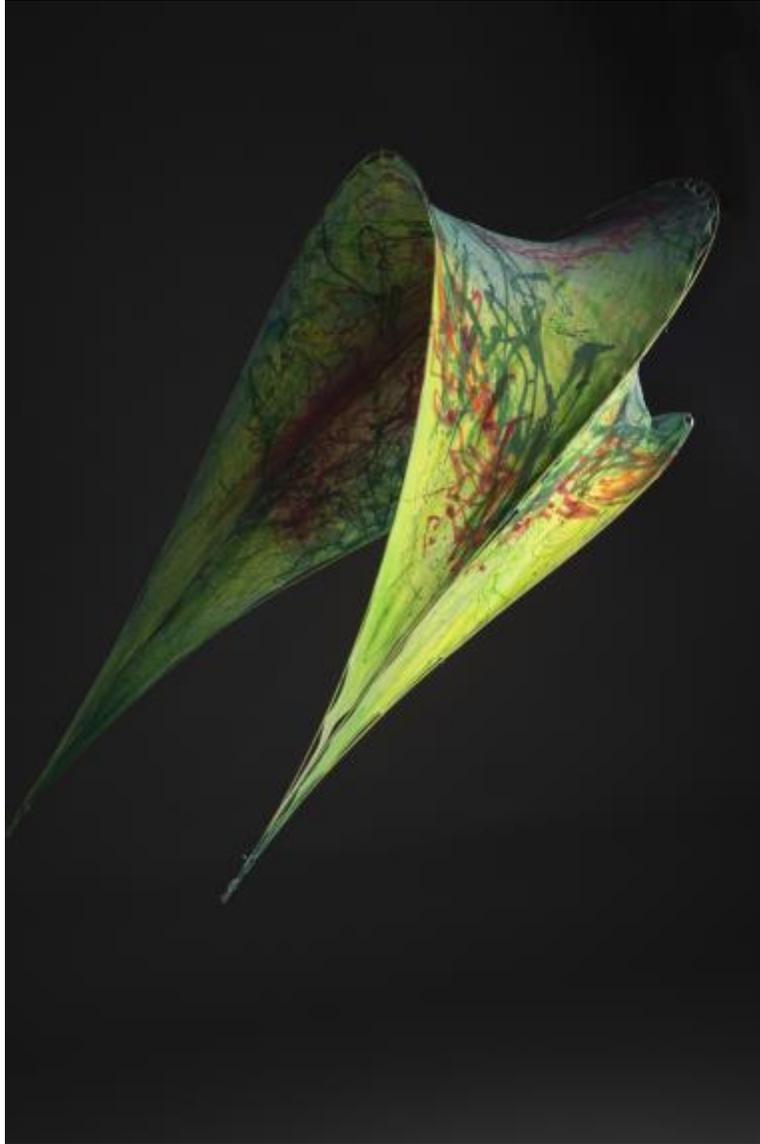
Prayers were implemented before the set to send the audience members healing vibrations. Timothy Leary, psychologist and writer states:

Prayer is the art of communicative union with all your inner selves. Prayer is compass and gyroscope. Prayer is the language that makes sense to your eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch; to your heart (thump thump), to your lungs (inhale-exhale), to your bowels, to your genitals, to your ancient cells, to your ancient selves-hairy, fanged, clawed, scaled, reptile, amphibious, protozoic. Prayer is the energy language of God.” (Leary, 1968, p. 171).

More than two hundred and fifty people came and received the healing energy from my "O'whahsa" thesis show at the Hungerford Building in Rochester, NY on May 6, 2011.

6. Sculptures, Jewelry and Clothing

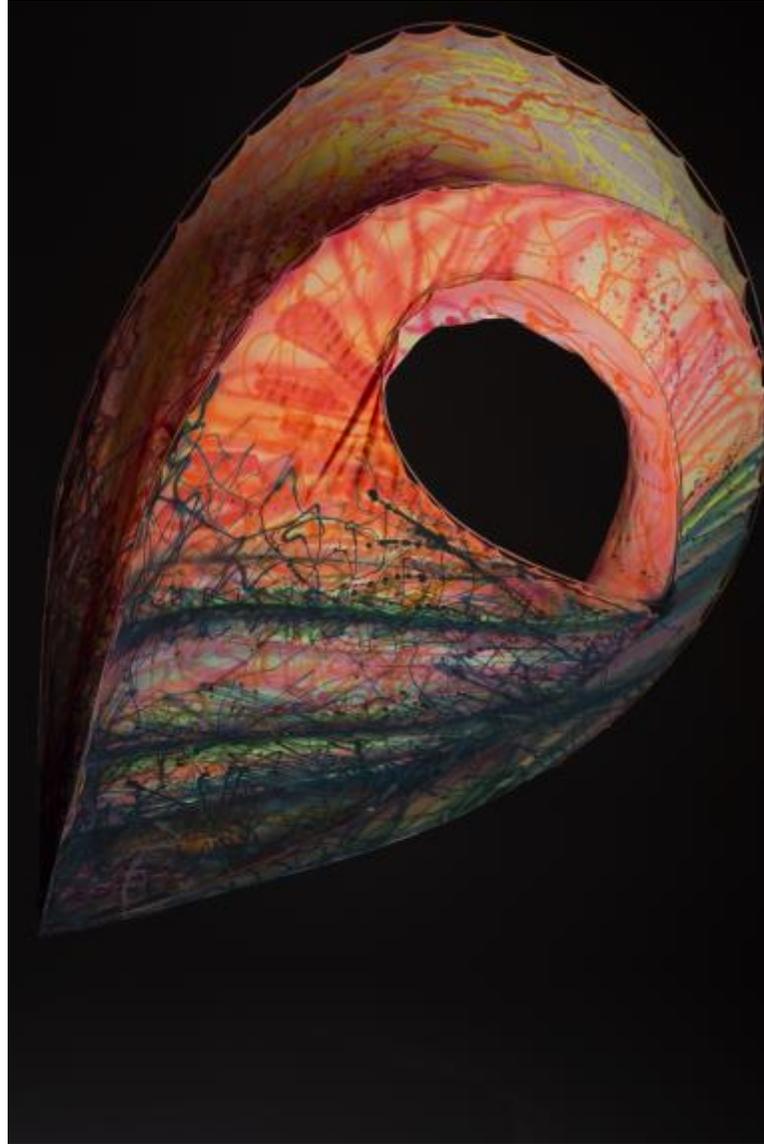
The sculptures were initially welded into shapes as smaller models using 14-gauge steel rod. Once the sculptures were TIG welded, a cotton-lycra blend fabric was hand-stitched over the armatures to give the sculptures form and volume. Each sculpture was named after the four directions in Haudenosaunee mythology.



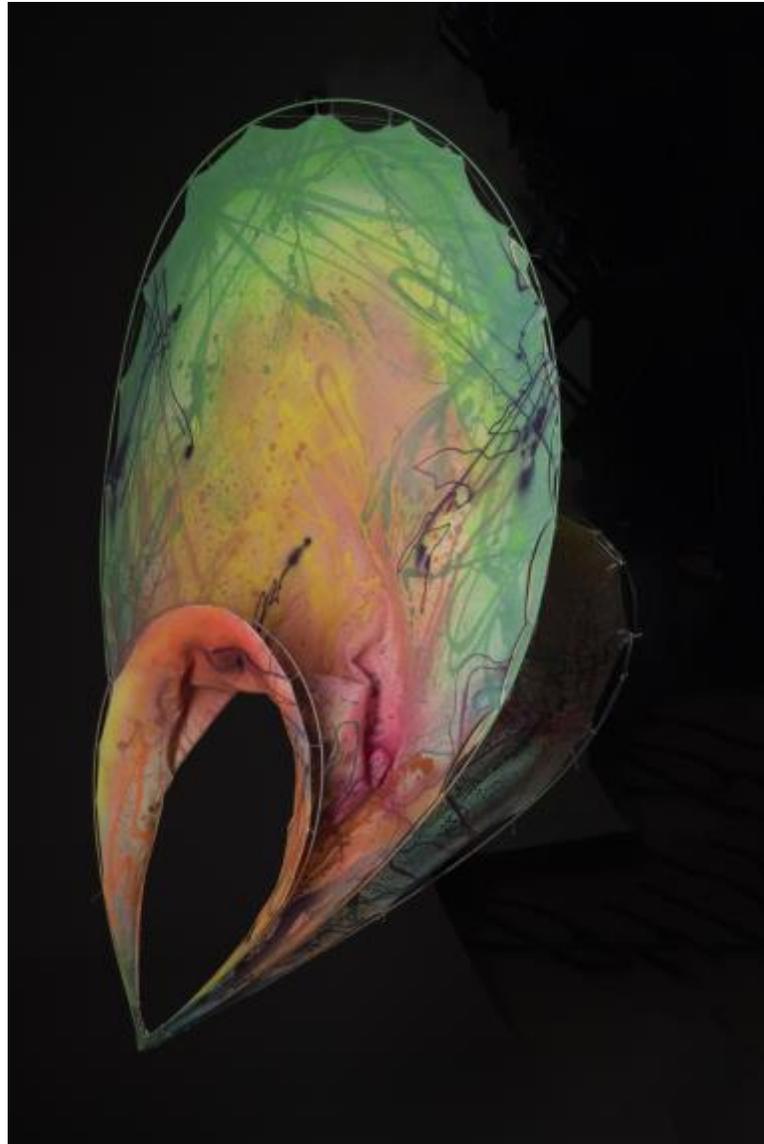
"Othole:ke" (North) 52"x36"x28" is three dome-shaped steel rods of varying lengths with painted fabric stretched across them, this creates a gateway that represents Skyworld with a green, yellow, pink and blue colorway. Finally, its base was covered with blue paper, secured with glue.



"Tsi' Tkake:tohse" (East) 43"x31"x33" also consists of three steel rod armatures of different lengths, however a repeated amygdaloidal shape was created by welding the ends and covering them in blue paper. This design creates a visual space, that embodies the intent of protection, comfort and healing. Pink, orange, green, blue and purple comprise the colorway and produces a calming and exciting effect simultaneously.



"Ati Nukwa:" (South) 72"x 50"x 30" is the largest and most powerful of the sculptures so that it appears to have a life of its own with an intense pink, purple, blue, orange and yellow colorway. The amygdaloidal shape created by the welded steel rods and painted fabric is repeated three times: twice in the base and middle of the sculpture, the foremost suggests the shape of a face.



"Tsi' Tawatshathos" (West) 63"x45"x53" consists of several amygdaloidal welded steel rods covered with painted fabric, while the welded joints were covered with dark blue paper applied with glue. The repetitive amygdaloidal shape in this sculpture is intended to emulate a living being. The colorway of yellow, blue, red, purple, orange and green creates movement and further develops a lifelike quality.

Prayers were said prior to each work session, so the pieces would be created with a loving intent. Once the fabric was sewn onto the forms, they were painted while electronic music played. Bright neon colors were utilized with the intent of emulating an otherworldly look when exposed to a black light. The painting style was very organic and impressionistic, influenced by the music. Overall, the sculptures appear to have a life of their own as they take the form of otherworldly beings that watch and protect us from the Sky.

Five sets of earrings were created, each one a miniature version of the sculptures. The earring/necklace I wore, however was unique: the amygdaloidal shape was repeated in an organic, repetitive pattern. Brass wire was soldered then painted. Next, fabric was hand-stitched over the brass armatures, which were also painted impressionistically. Four “Atà:tawit” (dress in the Oneida language) were constructed from the same fabric as the sculptures and contrasted with the fifth; the dress I wore was silk charmeuse. Each dress was assembled using a sewing machine, then dyed using a cold vat method. To be cohesive with the rest of the show all dresses were painted impressionistically, five pairs of sneakers were customized and painted in an impressionistic style. There were no shoelaces, to emulate the free flowing-improvisational feel of "O'whahsa'."

7. The Four Protectors

The four sculptures represent “The Four Protectors.” In Haudenosaunee cosmology, The Four Protectors otherwise known as The Four Sky Dwellers have a great significance. Tom Porter – “Sakokwenionkawas- The One Who Wins,” is a Mohawk Bear clan member. He describes the Four Protectors in this passage:

The number four has great significance for the Mohawk peoples. Like many other Aboriginal peoples, the Mohawk respect the four directions as messengers from the Creator, sent at the beginning of time. The Mohawk refer to the four directions as the Four Sky People, the Four Sky Dwellers, or the Four Brothers: East, South, West and North. Some believe that the North and East are twins and the South and West are twins. Together the four directions have the job of helping Mother Earth. South and West provide the climate for the growth of food for nourishment and survival, whereas North and East provide the relief and rest through cold and snow to allow Mother Earth to rejuvenate.

Four is also a number representing the four seasons, the four winds. All of these forces are intertwined to represent completion and wholeness, interconnectedness and interdependency, as none of these elements can be removed from the others; all work in unison to sustain life. As we need them for our survival, we are obligated to respect them and treat them with great sensitivity.

The Four Directions are considered to be messengers, as they help to communicate with people, as direct communication from the Creator would be so powerful it would overwhelm. Traditionally, the Mohawk believe, therefore, that important messages are received from nature, from plants and animals, from the wind and the water, and so on, as they see these energies as coming from the Creator. The messages are for protection and are taken seriously as having great importance... The Four Sky People are powers that dwell in the Sky World and can manifest themselves as people when necessary in order to communicate with people. Mohawk believe this happens at critical times in history when extremely significant events are to take place with great impact on this nation. The

interpretation of the messages is considered to be a responsibility of only the most respected individuals in the community. (Porter, 2012, p. xx).

8. Sculptural Form

While researching my thesis I was inspired by Seymour Lipton, an American abstract expressionist sculptor. Lipton's views on sculpture and art spoke to me on a visceral level, he seemed to capture my thoughts and emotions exactly. My work cannot be separated from my culture, my experiences or spirituality. To me, they are one and the same. The following statement captures my thoughts on this subject:

I feel my work grows from the web of my entire experience. The traditions of art concern me, the formal aspects of the visual world; man as an individual and social being, the dynamics of historical flow, the anatomy of the body and of the mind. They concern me in their tensional interplay with the problems of sculpture. For me, reality is a moving tensional order of things, and art is the spiritual plastic embodiment of this reality. It is this that the artist must seek to personalize through the plastic means if he wishes to express the dramatic or lyric excitement of the world. (Lipton, 2016, p. 52).

When creating I have a very instinctual and intuitive method. Often there are visions of works through dreams, inspiring a "feeling" from the materials themselves. Lipton describes this phenomenon further:

On an instinctive level, I explore new worlds of three-dimensional form, making drawings and small plasticene models preparatory to finished work. This is a withdrawal into a subjective, imaginative and almost automatic world of formal invention and discovery. It is a reaching for formal equivalents to the substance of experience. It is also

a realm of free play of forms for the sake of form. It is not an anarchic world, however, because it is guided somewhat unconsciously by the compass of previous experience.

(Lipton, 2016, p. 53).

The intent of my work is to evoke emotion, a visceral response in those who view and experience it. Ultimately, my desire is for the audience to receive a transformative, healing, positive energy. The Longyear Museum of Anthropology at Colgate University hosted "O'whahsa" in 2013, followed by a concert at the Palace Theater in Hamilton, NY. I became aware that I had succeeded when a local couple who lost their son in the army communicated to me that they had experienced a healing effect when viewing the show. The fact that this occurred while I was not present provided additional validation that I had achieved my intent to be both an artist and healer.

The complexities created with form, line, color and material are inspirational to my work. Lipton describes his creative method in a similar fashion:

I have looked for an interplay of tensions: of lines, planes, forms, spaces and suggested meanings to develop energy, and to evoke the mystery of reality. To attain impact, all this must grow as a materialization in the physical medium out of concretely felt, thought about and sharply observed aspects of reality.” (Lipton, 1949, p. 52).

9. Raves

At 8 years old, my Mother brought me to my first rave in Germany. D.J. Dag, an internationally known musician, was DJ-ing, playing my Mom’s music. The lights, lasers and music emanating from the sound system were instantly entrancing. The beat was felt deep within

my heart, reminiscent of a similar experience of listening to the Aztec drummers at a Pow Wow. This experience fostered a deep love and appreciation for electronic music. Scott Huston Ph.D., a professor at the University of Kentucky, describes the rave culture and its connection to spirituality:

At raves, young men and women dance to electronic music from dusk to dawn. Previous scholarship treats the rave as a hypertext of pleasure and disappearance. However, such a postmodern view does not attend to the poignant and meaningful spiritual experiences reported by those who go to raves. This article examines claims about altered states of consciousness at raves and the therapeutic results-“spiritual healing” – such states are said to bring. While physiological processes (exhaustive dancing, auditory driving) may contribute to altered states of consciousness, symbolic processes create appropriate frameworks for spiritual healing. Such therapeuticism can be more fully understood in the context of other modern western spiritual subcultures. Placing raves within the context of these other subcultures foregrounds questions for further research. (Hutson, 2000, p. 2).

Music dictates my life and is essential to my development as an artist. As Gordon Lynch states in “The Role of Popular Music in the Construction of Alternative Spiritual Identities and Ideologies,” “Music has, in the past, been an important cultural resource and practice” (Lynch, 2006, p. 3). As a professional singer, I am constantly amazed at the intricacies of music and its effect on people. My Mother-Grammy Award Winner Joanne Shenandoah, has had fans write to her stating that they did not commit suicide because of her music. Neurosurgeons, massage

therapists amongst many others enjoy the calming effect her music creates. This has always been inspirational in my life's work as a healer and artist. Lynch references De Nora regarding music:

...De Nora has argued that music plays an important role as a cultural tool through which people actively manage their identities, environments and emotional states- and that the meanings associated with listening to music are formed through a complex interplay between the musical sound, the quality of the listener's attention, the spatial and relational environment in which it is heard, and particular memories and other associations attached to the music through the individuals specific biography. (De Nora, cited in Lynch, 2006, p. 7).

Music and its powerful potential for transmutation demands great reverence. Humans have an instinctual desire to be in large groups, experiencing music together - the drumbeat creating a connectedness and a feeling of unity. Raves and many other music-based gatherings create this phenomenon. Lynch describes this idea as techno-shamanism:

Techno-shamanism, the notion of the rave as sacralized tribal gathering, Paganism and deco-spirituality, and even millenarian expectations surrounding the year 2012 as a time of global spiritual transformation are all in evidence in the narratives of psy-trance (rave) dance events organizers and various media surrounding the psy-trance (rave) scene.” (Lynch, 2006, p. 5).

Inspired by personal experience of transformative healing at raves, "O'whahsa" was created with the intent of creating a similar experience for the viewer. Lynch quotes Graham St. John regarding the rave as a spiritual, healing experience:

St. John thus provides a substantial account of how the global psy-trance (rave) operates as a social and cultural network within which various alternative spiritual discourses operate. He also refers to the rave as a 'difference engine,' a cultural mechanism through which participants may experience some sort of transformation, which may be referred to in terms of specific discourses such as raising of human consciousness, increased self-empowerment, deeper personal and spiritual integration, or reconnection with the sacred Earth." (Lynch, 2006, p. 5). Scott R. Hutson also describes the healing effects that raves can have on a participant, "...the rave can be conceptualized as a form of healing comparable both to shamanic, ecstatic healing documented in ethnographies of small-scale non-western societies, and to spiritual experiences in modern western subcultures. Our understanding of the rave, previously approached from a cultural studies of communications studies perspective, might therefore benefit from a perspective attuned to anthropological discussions of shamanism and spirituality." (Hutson, 2000, p. 3).

Many ravers have described their experiences at raves as being quite spiritual, "an exemplar of the idea that the rave is indeed a very meaningful experience to many of those who attend, I quote a raver named Megan: The rave is my church. It is a ritual to perform. I hold it sacred to my perpetuality...we in the rave are a congregation-it is up to us to help each other, to help people reach heaven...After every rave, I walk out having seen my soul and its place in eternity" (Hutson, 2000, p. 5).

While preparing to perform (DJ and sing) for "O'whahsa," the lyrics of the songs and music were carefully constructed with the intent of a transformative effect for the listener/viewer. Hutson describes the role of a DJ at raves:

Technoshamanism refers to the DJ's role as 'harmonic navigator,' 'in charge of the group mood/mind.' The DJ 'senses when it's time to lift the mood, take it down, etc., just as the shaman did in the good ol' tribal days.' In other words, through a tapestry of mind-bending music, the DJ is said to take the dancers on an overnight journey, with one finger on the pulse of the adventure and the other on the turntables. (Hutson, 2000, p. 5).

10. Lyrics by Leah Shenandoah

As the 'harmonic navigator,' a 45-minute set was composed with the following lyrics performed over the song titles listed (see attached Mp3 media files) (Hutson, 2000, p. 5).

1. "Nightlife" by Amon Tobin

Weight of the world put a curve in my neck,

Heart shattered from years of disrespect.

Recently discovered my true self,

hidden behind years of neglect.

I am my highest self

I am full of sunsets,

light shine bright beautiful and correct.

My feet don't waver my path is in step.

Dancing in the moonlight my energy connects,

swirling and churning galaxies stay yearning.

Our creation a memory in life's first breath.

2. "Dinosaurs" by Bonobo

You, beautiful wonder,

stars shine on your lips.

Kiss me and feel my cells emerge with yours,

a lovely union of souls continued bliss.

My heart is open to you,

your love my only wish.

Blessed as one we exist in heaven

one moment a lifetime.

3. "Ketto" by Bonobo

A feast for your ears so warm and inviting

Unlock dimensions with music's divine ring

Helping to see beauty in everything

Tumbling and churning

These heart sounds returning

Our true selves yearning

Perfection in learning

Beauty is everything

True love within ourself

4. "Ungodly Fruit" by Wax Tailor

Glowing with sparkle eyes

Focus on rain

I am in this life again

Each time more beautiful than the rest

I am a paradigm of love and kindness

My heart holds infinite shine

Galaxies intertwine

Giving birth to Earth Mother Divine

5. "Tinflower" by RJD2

Did you know then

your lover's hair was in that sword's breadth?

Did you see her

in the sunlight's gentle breath?

Glimmering water,

beckoning and mesmerizing,

she flows like the oceans tides.

Never to be lost

but found in each and every step.

She never left you,

her mind was one with you,

she held you when you slept.

Even when your heart cried,

felt so alone and overstepped?

United eternally, cyclic in life and death.

From your blood seeds grow in divine oneness.

Roots filled with universe glow,

filling souls with sacredness

6. "Song 2" by DJ Krush

Sap sprouts

emit knowledge

tree of life

hidden life

when she felt her belly was full

red and ink

our blood feeds the earth

nectar milk earthen transpire

shatter let go

don't suffer

planting seeds of our growth

7. "Anchor Steam" by Daedelus & Teebs

From behind the hooded eyes

secrets from many lives

hidden from the veiled lines

folds of cloth telling ancient story

precious joyful elements

reminders on your path to find

look just beyond

answers your truth

unwinds unravels un binds

8. "At the End of the Day" by Amon Tobin

Howl while universe keeps revolving

Galaxies mingling

Starburst take form of sparkling pathways

They like to illuminate

Loving impermanence of divine essence

Perfect chaos exchanged

With one heavenly interaction

Bliss is feeling every atom

We have always been here

And we will always be here

Vibrate on the wind

9. "Mind Eye" by Nightmares on Wax

I thank Creator for all my gifts

A higher purpose I now strive to live

Although sometimes the stars seem so far away

I know in my heart they are meant to be that way

My heart holds infinite shine

Galaxies intertwine

I thank Creator for all of my gifts

Divine they shine with my heart love and spirit

I succumb to the flow of the universe

I know in my heart they are meant to be that way

My heart holds infinite shine

Galaxies intertwine.

I channel ancient earth goddess

Helping to raise the vibrations felt

Many lifetimes have built to this one

I am reminded of how precious life is

10. "Recurring" by Bonobo

Move with me

flow with me

learn with me

I am here

you are next

hold me while I dance

with me I'm here

right now

transfixed

out of breath

tendrils shivers

glisten heart connect

11. "In Space" by Royksopp

First Light, First Thought,

Dawn, Fragrant air,

As the Lotus unfolds,

First Heartbeat, Synapses connecting,

Bones growing,

Fingers running through her hair One thought, Creation It starts here,

At the Eye's center, Fibonacci Spiraling outward

Stars glowing with radiant light,

Colors of Heaven

Fingerprints across the Galaxy,

Love is surrounding us

Creators Breath, filling us with life

12. "Sculpture" by Skalpel

I can still feel you in my bones

I saw your robe

Feathers and crystal shard

Chills without cold

Only one thing changed

Falling in love

I am beside myself

Glorious without you

Whispers from other lifetimes

Echoes from the past

We never truly are

Or were or is

Layers of illusion

Lie at our feet

We choose to pick them up

Wear proudly on our chests

We could breathe in sunshine

Like dying a thousand mini deaths

13. "Tree of Life" by Clint Mansell

14. "A Warm Place" by Nine Inch Nails

One evening, unable to sleep, the overwhelming urge to write resulted in the formation of the lyrics. A traumatic experience informed the words, emulating what I imagine true love to be. "O'whahsa" was created to share this loving space with the audience. While it may sound strange, essentially these are love poems to myself; it can be difficult to explain my creative process. I am grateful to have this gift as it enables me to express emotions while also healing. These manifestations of emotion could trigger something in others, which may foster love for themselves. Sometimes, a change in perspective is all that is necessary to find beauty in even the darkest times. Gloria Flaherty describes the power of the written word,

Our ideas of poetry-including, significantly, our idea of the poet-began to look back consciously to the early and late shamans of those other worlds: not as a title to be seized but as a model for the shaping of meanings and intensities through language. As the reflection of our yearning to create a meaningful ritual life-a life lived at the level of poetry-that looking-back related to the emergence of a new poetry and art rooted in performance and in the oldest, most universal of human traditions. (Flaherty, 2016, p. 523).

11. Process

I find it difficult to explain my creative process in a way that others understand because I have a personal, intuitive and spiritual connection to my work. Creating is a Divine act, a direct connection to the Creator. My visions and work seem to originate from a place outside of myself. Before creating, I ask to be a pure and open vessel for the Creator's Divine love and for light to

flow through me. In the book, “Shakti Woman: Feeling our Fire, Healing Our World – The New Female Shamanism” by Vicki Noble, describes a similar sentiment:

There is so much we don't know and can't understand, so much real magic. As Westerners we belong to a culture that tries to quantify and codify everything into systems that are simple and black or white, when nothing in the shamanic world is like that. Everything is metaphorical and consists of several levels happening at the same time, all of them equally important but not necessarily of interest to all of us all the time. The ego is threatened by such layering, such ambivalent symbols, as the scholars say. You almost have to be a poet or an artist even to be able to begin to handle such fluidity. Art offers a direct approach to communing with and having a conversation with the beings and the consciousness of the Mystery, even though it doesn't allow any of us to get on top of it with our intellectual minds. I remember the most important thing ... there are no mistakes. What happens during the process of making something is sacred and organic. When something breaks or goes outside the line or comes apart, it's part of the process of the thing that is wanting to happen through you. The only appropriate response is to get out of the way and appreciate the intelligence of the process itself and delight in the unexpected and occasionally extraordinary beauty that presents itself through our 'mistakes' or involuntary movements. Once the artwork is 'done,' it lives on to heal and impress the psyche because it has become the dwelling place of a living being who has chosen to inhabit it and who-if we could see- probably inspired the project in the first place. (Noble, 1991, p. 177).

12. Dancing, Color, and Sound

Dancing is an integral part of my creative process; it makes me feel as if an energetic release is occurring. The intuitive and fluid nature of synchronizing dance movements to the beat of a drum has a cathartic healing effect. Some of my favorite memories are in the Longhouse, when the participants are all dancing in rhythm to the beat of the drum or deer horn rattle, surrounded by reverence to the natural world. In these moments, I feel the heartbeat of “Yukhinulhà:” or Mother Earth. My spiritual connection with dancing corresponds with my love for dancing at raves. Alexander J. Dale, Janyce Hyatt and Jeff Hollerman state in “The neuroscience of Dance and the Dance of Neuroscience: Defining a Path of Inquiry,” “It is interesting to speculate that the combination of the intrinsic and spiritual nature of dance may also play a role in more modern dance phenomena, such as the rave” (Dale, Hyatt and Hollerman, 2007, p. 94). "O'whahsa" was created with the intent of forming unity and transformation for the audience, while experiencing the multi-dimensional performance.

In “The Rave: Spiritual Healing in Modern Western Subcultures,” Scott Hutson describes the effects of dancing:

Dancing is an important physiological factor because it is a motor activity. Extended rhythmic dancing and bodily movement brings on physical exhaustion, vertigo, hyperventilation, and other physiological conditions that may alter consciousness (Lee 1967: 33, Rouget 1985: 118). Csikszentmihalyi (1975: 43) argues that dancing and other forms of play are intrinsically stimulating because they produce a holistic sensation of total involvement- a sensation that he calls “flow.” Dance as flow merges the act with the awareness of the act, producing self-forgetfulness, a loss of the self-consciousness,

transcendence of the individuality, and fusion with the world (p. 49). (Czikszenmihalyi, cited in Hutson, 2000, p. 7).

Hutson's description of dance as flow corresponds with the intention of creating a transcendental space through dance, music, and art. Smoke machines and several different stage lights (black lights, strobe lights, etc.) were utilized to enhance the otherworldly effect during "O'whahsa'." Hutson explains the effects of lights and dancing in this statement:

Flashing lights, dancing and repetitive percussion, each of which are prominent feature so the rave, may physiologically produce altered states of consciousness. Walter and Walter (1949:63) note that rhythmic light can cause visual sensations (color, pattern, or movement) unrelated to the stimulus, non-visual sensations of kinaesthetic (swaying, spinning, jumping, vertigo) and cutaneous (prickling, tingling) varieties, emotional and physiological experiences (fear, anger, disgust, confusion, fatigue, pleasure), hallucinations, epileptic seizures and 'clinical psychopathic states.' Lights that flash to the rhythm of the music and other elaborate visual effects such as spinning lasers and wall projections of fractals, are frequent components of raves in both areas of my participant observation. (Hutson, 2000, p. 7).

13. Transcendental State

Using dance, music, and atmospheric quality, "O'whahsa'" produced a trance like state. Healing occurs when one is able to lose themselves in the moment of flow. Noble states, "Dance is probably the oldest and most widespread form of shamanic trance-inducing activity. Shamans in many parts of the world dance to raise the energy and change the consciousness" (Noble,

1991, p. 137). Many participants indicated they experienced a trance like state while witnessing "O'whahsa'." Noble also states:

Trancework brings the other world a little closer to us. What goes on in our dream lives, in the invisible and unconscious realms, becomes more accessible to us through this technique. Our facility in moving between the worlds grows as we practice, and this faculty is the central defining characteristic of shamans everywhere. Individually it is a relaxing way to heal the self, getting us in touch with teachers and guides for living a better life. As a consistent practice, it allows for more fluidity in the ego structure, so that eventually a person can begin to use the beings and forces of the invisible world for healing others in the family or community. A shaman is eminently sane but experiences an expanded reality; she may appear to be eccentric, but she is grounded in a real orientation to time and space. Unlike a schizophrenic person, a shaman knows the difference between here and there and is able to move back and forth between the two places at will. (Noble, 1991, p. 147).

Noble's description of utilizing meditation as a healing modality rings true in my personal experience. Meditation, trance work and flow state dictate creativity, which results in healing in my everyday life. James L. Henry, a neurophysiologist states in, "Possible Involvement of Endorphins in Altered States of Consciousness" that:

...there seemed to be some common elements to each type of trance state. The phenomena were usually characterized by two effects occurring simultaneously: one was a state in which the individual seemed to be experiencing a detachment from the physical

world and a preoccupation with an inner feeling of ecstasy or euphoria; the other was a pain-free state.” (Henry, 1982, p. 395).

This description of euphoria and a pain-free state is quite alluring, on an emotional and physical level. When in a flow state, I do not feel chronic pain, nor am I focused on the troubles of daily life. In a world that is sometimes tumultuous, it is my life’s goal to create a place of solace and comfort whenever possible.

14. Healing

Noble’s book on female shamanism resonates with my altruistic objective of generating healing through creativity. I have often heard that the path of a healer is difficult, because he/she must experience suffering to be able to help and identify with others. By healing oneself we are better able to be of service to others. Noble states:

Ultimately trance and other techniques of healing need to be for the good of the community and not simply for the expansion and deepening of individuals. Shamanism is a service occupation. Shamans learn practices and techniques of sacred work not because we are special or set apart from the rest but because we are called to carry a little more of our own load. Shamans do their own job in the community- farming, mothering, making art, whatever-and they do shamanic healing work as well. A ‘wounded healer’ learns to relate in a healing way to her own problems in order that any solutions she comes up with might be applied to the greater whole of which she is a part. A person who correctly uses the trance mode in her life becomes tangibly grounded and available for helping others, and others respond to this. The psychic field around her changes in response to the

amount of time she spends in trance, and this change has an impact on her community. She becomes more balanced, more aligned with her inner purpose in her outer life; she has equilibrium. We should all take up the practice of opening ourselves to trance states, not so that we can have exotic experiences that make us different from other people but because we need the contact the trance state provides with the unseen and the spirit realm. The practice of trance, if it were to catch on in Western culture, could actually facilitate world peace by creating large numbers of people who are not explosive and reactive without thinking but peaceful, contemplative, and (therefore) more effective in response to the problems facing them. (Noble, 1991, p. 153).

While I don't believe myself to be a shaman, I do consider myself to be a healer. Friends often come to me for advice, as I aim to create a compassionate, non-judgmental and supportive space. Being a compassionate witness and having empathy provides each individual space to come to conclusions of their problems. Timothy Leary describes this phenomenon:

... each person must work out all the answers himself. Each person must be his own Moses, his own Augustine, his own Einstein. You have to experience their confusion, their groping ignorance; you have to work out their exultant answers. You must do it yourself in the swirling crucible of the out-of-the-mind session after you discover to your terror that the answers you thought you had were canned chessboard symbols.” (Leary, 1968, p. 278).

Gloria Flaherty also describes this space created by shamans which fosters healing in “The Performing Artist as the Shaman of Higher Civilization”:

That creature, whether labeled a genius or a shaman in the 18th century, did not convince his audience logically. Nor did he persuade, like an orator. He was not really an imitator. Like Plato's Ion, he was a shaman or a kind of channeler-yet another word current in today's media and popular press. He somehow was or became the real thing in order to transmit his creative trance to that audience so as to transport them momentarily out of themselves into other cosmic regions where they themselves could experience the mysteries of the universe. In other words, the genius or shaman allowed the common person, if ever so briefly, to comprehend the meaning of birth, life, death, and regeneration. (Flaherty, 1988, p. 528).

Flaherty accurately describes the desired transmutation effect on the participant, creating space for healing via a flow state. This passage suggests that humans have been experiencing alternate realities through performing artists for hundreds of years.

15. Consciousness

As humans, naturally the metaphysical question remains...what is consciousness? How is my experience different from others? This inherent curiosity may arguably be what separates humans from animals. Roy Ascott, a British artist, addresses consciousness in the article, "Planetary Technoetics: Art, Technology and Consciousness":

Consciousness is the great mysterium that entices artists and scientists alike to enter its domain. It is the ultimate frontier of research in many fields, and probably only a truly transdisciplinary approach will allow us to close the explanatory gap, or, in our terms as artists, to navigate its many levels, to reframe our perceptions and experience. It is within our consciousness that our imagination is at work, and it is in imagination that we first

mix the realities of the actual and the virtual. Where consciousness evolves at the planetary level, a new sensibility arises, a new way of valuing ourselves, our attitudes and actions. It has begun to arise from our understanding of the dynamics of living processes, the flux and flow of nature, the transformative continuum of energies at both quantum and cosmic levels, which condition both our material states and our sense of being. (Ascott, 2004, p. 112).

Art is a method of self-discovery; individuals grow with their work. Certain pieces may hold memories and evoke emotion for the artist. As an artist matures and grows, they can look back and see the progress made in craftsmanship, as well as emotionally and spiritually. Some of the best work has arguably come from the most difficult times in one's life. While such conditions are not ideal, it does provide the opportunity for advancement. Leary states, "...our consciousness creates the universe we experience. We are the architects of the celestial and hellish stages we act upon" (Leary, 1968, p. 80). This statement brings up an excellent point - that we are not our experiences; we can decide what reality to create and focus upon. We can decide whether or not to suffer needlessly.

16. Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of creating healing through a transcendental, multimedia creative state was a success! Although still afflicted with PTSD and anxiety, I operate on a higher level of function than ever before. Through exercise, meditation, prayer, and transcendental flow states formed through art and music I have developed in many positive ways, despite the traumatic events that I have experienced in my life. I now prefer a calmer atmosphere, and barely attend raves anymore. I will continue the exploration of healing through

my life's work, while influencing others to do the same. To love oneself can sometimes be the most difficult thing to accomplish, my goal is to create a space where others are able to experience self-love.

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