

**DIVERSE PATHWAYS OF “GIVING BACK” TO TRIBAL COMMUNITY:
PERCEPTIONS OF NATIVE AMERICAN
COLLEGE GRADUATES**

By

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To the faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of
JUSTIN PAUL GUILLORY find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Chair

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Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5, 6)

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of “giving back” from a Native American perspective and the role it plays throughout the educational journeys of Native American degree recipients and beyond. Semi-structured interviews were used to illuminate the nuances of the *giving back* concept from a Native perspective. A total of twelve participants with a bachelor’s degree from four-year and graduate institutions in the Pacific Northwest and Midwest regions were interviewed. The participants in the study were selected based on the relative years they attended and graduated from college and were loosely organized into three groups: Recent Graduates, Experienced Workers, and Respected Elders. Data analysis revealed intergenerational similarities and differences among the three groups throughout their K-12 years, during college and after degree attainment. Several barriers and persistence factors were also identified. This study clearly demonstrated that the desire to give back played a critical role in the lives of the participants in this study. A key finding is that the concept of giving back is much more complex, difficult, and even painful, in the lives of Native American degree

recipients upon degree completion. For every rewarding experience that giving back provided, there was also numerous struggles in the process. The process of degree attainment often resulted in strained relationships between Native American graduates and their own communities.

The findings of this study are significant for two reasons. Although previous studies found that the desire to give back is a strong persistence factor for Native students in college, few studies specifically focused on the rewards and struggles associated with giving back for these students once they completed their degrees. The findings of this study clearly showed that the participants demonstrated a tremendous capacity of resiliency throughout their lives. However, the participants continued to encounter adversity when faced with the choice of *how* they gave back to their tribal communities after college. The participants gave back in diverse ways: some chose to “physically” move back home to give back while others gave back from afar. In unique ways, the same resiliency they needed while persisting toward degree completion was the same resiliency they needed to give back to the community after degree completion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
DEDICATION	ix
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Research Problem	3
Purpose of the Study	3
Significance of the Study.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	4
Delimitations.....	6
Limitations	6
Assumptions Inherent Within the Study	8
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE.....	9
Introduction.....	9
Part One: Historical Background of Indian Education.....	10
Colonial period.....	10
Treaty period.....	13
Federal period	13
Termination period.....	17
Self-Determination period	18
Part Two: Higher Education Experiences of Native American Students	22

Section One: Educational and Social Challenges Facing American Indian Students.....	22
Section Two: The Problem with Mainstream Student Retention Models	25
Section Three: Conflicting Values--Native Americans and Predominantly White Institutions.....	27
Section Four: Native Cultural Values	32
Section Five: American Indian Student Success in Higher Education and the Concept of Giving Back.....	40
Summary of Literature Review.....	44
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	47
Introduction.....	47
Theoretical framework.....	47
Cultural Capital and School Achievement.....	48
Native Capital	51
Comparing Native Capital and Cultural Capital.....	53
Research Design.....	54
Population and Sample	56
Procedures and Methods of the Study	57
Instrumentation	59
Analysis of Data.....	61
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	66
Introduction.....	66
The Participants	66

Recent Graduates	66
Experienced Workers.....	68
Respected Elders	70
Recent Graduates	73
Section One: K-12 Experience	73
Section Two: Transition to College.....	78
Section Three: College Life Experience.....	81
Section Four: Transition after College.....	86
Section Five: Defining Giving Back.....	88
Section Six: Giving Back: Rewards and Struggles.....	93
Experienced Workers.....	105
Section One: K-12 Experience	105
Section Two: Transition to College	112
Section Three: College Life Experience.....	114
Section Four: Transition after College.....	119
Section Five: Defining Giving Back.....	122
Section Six: Giving Back: Rewards and Struggles.....	127
Respected Elders.....	132
Section One: K-12 Experience	132
Section Two: Transition to College	140
Section Three: College Life Experience.....	143
Section Four: Transition after College.....	147
Section Five: Defining Giving Back	150

Section Six: Giving Back: Rewards and Struggles.....	154
Summary of Results: Intergenerational Comparisons	161
Summary of K-12 Experience	161
Summary of Transition to College.....	162
Summary of College Life Experience	163
Summary of Transition after College	163
Summary of Defining Giving Back	164
Summary of Giving Back: Rewards and Struggles	165
 CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
FOR FUTURE STUDY AND PRACTICE.....	167
Recommendations for Future Study	176
Implications.....	177
Discussion.....	180
REFERENCES	185
APPENDICES	203
Appendix A: Interview Sheet.....	204
Appendix B: Consent Form	206

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Sunny, Uriah, Jazen, and Eliana. You are the source of my inspiration. I am humbled to be your husband and father.

I also would like to dedicate this work to my parents, Jeff and Connie Guillory.

Thanks for believing in me.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“If I stay on the rez, I can use my education to help my people.”

American Indian College Fund campaign slogan 2006

In recent years, there has been a notable shift in the scholarship surrounding Native Americans in higher education. Specifically, a growing number of scholars are focusing on Native American student “success” rather than failure (Brayboy, 1999; Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Demmert, 2001; Garcia, 2000; Strand & Peacock, 2002). These studies have shed new light on how Native American students have overcome a myriad of obstacles to persist and graduate. Some of the key findings that have contributed to the discussion on Native American student success include strong family support (Angspatt, 2001; Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995; Garcia, 2000; Guillory, 2002; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Waterman, 2004), positive interactions with mentors (i.e., faculty, advisor, department staff members) (Brown & Kurpius, 1997; Tate & Schwartz, 1993), clear educational goals, personal motivation (Angspatt, 2001; Brown & Kurpius, 1997; Rindone, 1988), institutional support (Colbert, 1999; Saggio, 2000), and the ability to function biculturally (Benjamin, Chambers & Reiterman, 1993; Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995; Fuzessy, 1998; Huffman, 2001, 2003; Ness, 2002).

The emergence of the Native American student success literature has been significant for two reasons. First, this paradigm shift has challenged scholars to go beyond the purview of simply knowing why Native students leave college but explaining why they persist toward graduation (Tinto, 2006). Second, the focus on student success has elucidated the unique experiences of Native Americans in higher education. To illustrate, Tierney (1992) and Waterman (2004) found that staying connected to, not

separate from, one's home community is an integral part of American Indian persistence. In addition, Huffman (2001) and Willetto (1999) found that, in many cases, American Indian culture, which was long thought by assimilationists to be an obstacle to academic success (Wright & Tierney, 1991), is a central part of the success and achievement of Indians in college. Jackson and Smith (2001) and Huffman (2001) provide evidence that strongly suggests that Indians can and *should* draw upon their cultural identity to succeed and resist the notion that their culture is an impediment to their academic success. While these findings have been very helpful in understanding the complex factors that characterize the Native American student experience in higher education, another unique finding that is particularly interesting is the desire of Native American students who want to use their education to give back to their tribal communities after degree completion.

Several studies have revealed that the desire to "give back" to one's own tribal community was mentioned as a salient factor for students who persisted through college and completed their college degrees (Brayboy, 1999; Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Garcia, 2000; Garvey, 1999; Guillory, 2002; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Lintner, 1999; Waterman, 2004). Weaver (2000) observed that it is not uncommon for Native American students to earn degrees in "helping" professions such as social work, education, nursing and psychology for the purpose of helping their communities. Garvey (1999) discovered that a high percentage of Native American graduate students return back to work for their people after degree completion. Even Native American high school students have expressed the desire to give back. In 2004, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* featured an article on a college recruitment program for Native American high school students called College Horizons. Many students voiced the importance of getting an education to

improve the quality of life in their respective tribal communities. In another study of thirteen Native American students who graduated from Dartmouth, Garrod and Larimore (1997) reported that one common theme among all the participants was “the wish to use higher education to help their home community and the deeply rooted desire to contribute in some ways to its cultural survival” (pp. 3-4).

Research Problem

Historically, Native Americans have struggled to achieve academic success in higher education (Pavel, 1999) and have one of the lowest graduation rates among ethnic groups (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). While it is important to understand the educational and social barriers that Native American students face, “too often research has focused solely on deficits within Native communities” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 5). The problem with the deficit approach is that it attempts to “fix” the Native American achievement problem without incorporating the perspectives of Native Americans and tribal communities. There is a need for research designed to incorporate the perspectives and insights of Native American students and to understand the factors that shape their educational journey.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of “giving back” and the role it plays throughout the educational journeys of Native American degree recipients and beyond. Specifically, the following research questions were examined:

1. How do Native American college graduates define *giving back*?
2. How does the concept of *giving back* influence the educational aspirations of Native American college graduates throughout their educational journey?

3. What are the rewards and struggles associated with *giving back* after college?
4. What are the perceptions of Native American graduates as to the benefits, or gain, to their tribal communities as a result of *giving back*?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant at multiple levels. First, few studies have focused on how Native American students intend to use their college degree after graduation. Second, this study will help shed light on the educational aspirations and motivations of Native American students. Third, by understanding the educational aspirations of Native American students from culturally relevant perspectives, higher education administrators can use the findings of this study to better serve Native American students at the institutional level. Fourth, this study will help illuminate some of the challenges that Native American degree recipients face as they struggle to negotiate the landscape of higher education to improve a way of life not only for themselves but for their tribal communities, or Indian people, in general.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are pertinent:

Native American or American Indian are both accepted terms for referring to indigenous peoples of North America. This study refers to people who identify themselves as Native American at the time of matriculation at a respective postsecondary institution. In this study, the terms Native American, American Indian, Native, or Indian will be used interchangeably.

Tribal member refers to an individual that is officially enrolled as a member of a federally recognized tribe. Most tribes today use the benchmark of blood quantum to

determine tribal membership or citizenship (Horse, 2005). Typically, one must have a blood quantum of at least one-quarter degree Indian blood to be officially enrolled in a particular tribe.

Indian education refers to the official term used in legislation related to American Indian education and self-determination (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999).

Tribe refers to American Indian nations that have a unique legal relationship with the U.S. government. American Indian nations are “groups of people bound together by blood ties who were socially, politically, and religiously organized, who lived together in a defined territory and who spoke a common language or dialect” (American Indian Communities in Minnesota, 2006).

Tribal sovereignty refers to the inherent autonomy of Indian nations and their right to self-governance, self-determination, and self-education (Lomawaima, 1999). In addition, tribal sovereignty is the “recognition of Indian nations and the right of those nations to enact and enforce their own laws” (McClellan, Fox, & Lowe, 2005, p. 8). Indian tribes have their own governmental laws and judicial systems that govern their reservation boundaries and applies to their own tribal members. Tribal governments have the authority to determine who is or is not a member of a particular tribal nation (Horse, 2005).

Reservation Indian(s) refers to Native Americans who grew up on an area of land reserved for American Indians for all, or most, of their lives.

Urban Indian(s) refers to Native Americans who grew up in an urban area (mid-to large city) all, or most, of their lives.

Non-Native or Non-Indian refers to a person who has no documented proof of Native American ancestry (certification of Indian blood or tribal enrollment).

Reservation refers to an area of land reserved for the use of American Indians. A reservation is created through treaty, congressional, or executive order (American Indian Communities in Minnesota, 2006).

Indian Country refers to an area where the tribe has the power of self-government. As defined by federal law, this land consists of reservations, dependent American Indian communities, and American Indian allotments. The definition of "Indian Country" includes non-Indian owned lands within the boundaries of reservations (American Indian Communities in Minnesota, 2006).

Delimitations

This study is delimited to self-identified Native Americans who have graduated from four-year and graduate public or private institutions of higher education. All participants will have earned a bachelor's degree. Two-year degree recipients were not included in the study. Participants who began their undergraduate course work at a two-year institution and then transferred to a four-year institution and graduated with a bachelor's degree were included in the study. The focus of this study is delimited to the cultural phenomenon of *giving back* as opposed to other cultural phenomena.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following conditions:

The small sample used in this study limits generalizability. This study, like most qualitative studies, is not intended to be generalized to all Native American people.

However, the value of using a small sample is that it captures and illuminates the intricate

details of a phenomenon that are difficult to convey with large samples (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As such, qualitative methods can serve as a starting point for further research to incorporate the unique perspectives of Native American students and to consider the factors that shape their educational journeys that could be used in larger studies.

The researcher for this study is a first generation descendant of an American Indian tribe who was raised on an Indian reservation for the majority of his life, and was employed as a tribal college administrator for three and a half years prior to beginning a doctoral degree program. Although this can be greatly advantageous for the researcher to give an “insider” perspective (Anderson & Saavedra, 1995) that may not be afforded to non-Indians, on the other hand, this “insider” status can be interpreted as researcher bias, which can skew the results of the study. Bogdan and Biklen (1988) ironically call this phenomenon “*going native*.” The term “going native” is when a researcher becomes so engrossed with the participants and/or the study itself that he or she loses objectivity during the data collection and analysis phases of the study. Consequently, the results of the study may be interpreted as unreliable. To offset the effects of personal bias during the data collection and analysis phases of the study, a technique called “member checking” was used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This technique “involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility” of the interviews (Creswell, 2003, p. 203). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that member checking maybe the most crucial technique for establishing the credibility, or internal validity, of the final report. The researcher maintained the credibility and objectivity of the study by giving the participants the

opportunity to review and clarify the interview transcriptions for accuracy before the transcriptions are analyzed.

Assumptions Inherent Within the Study

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions apply:

- 1) The concept of *giving back* is not unique to Indian people; however, the uniqueness lies in how Indian people define giving back.
- 2) The concept of *giving back* is taught and held by the majority of tribal nations regardless of geographical region.
- 3) The concept of *giving back* is not gender exclusive, nor confined to a particular field of study.
- 4) The researcher can understand, collect, and document an accurate description of the cultural phenomenon of *giving back* through the words and experiences of the participants.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review is organized in two parts. Part one chronicles significant historical time periods in Indian education within the context of five overarching periods: colonial, treaty, federal, termination, and self-determination (Bill, 1987; McClellen, Fox, & Lowe, 2005). These five periods capture significant events that have shaped the contours of Indian education today. Indian education is more clearly understood when viewed within these historical, political, economic, and social contexts (Lomawaima, 2004).

Part Two of this literature review includes an examination of the existing research that is germane to the experiences of Native American students in higher education and is organized into five sections. In section one, educational and social factors that impact the academic performance of Native American students in higher education were examined. Section two addressed the problems with mainstream student retention models and their limitations in explaining Native American student departure. In section three, cultural conflicts that many Native students experience in college, particularly at predominantly white institutions (PWI's) were explored. The literature related to the unique cultural values of American Indian tribes, communities, and families were addressed in section four. In section five, the recent paradigm shift in the Indian higher education literature that focuses on Native American student success were highlighted.

PART ONE

Historical Background of Indian Education

Before the Europeans came, traditional education for Native Americans began in the extended family with the teaching of survival skills which allowed Indian children to learn how to procure food and shelter in a precarious environment and how to live in harmony with nature and their fellow man.

(Reyhner & Eder, 1989, p. 3)

The history of Indian education can be characterized as a history of proselytization, civilization, forced removal, assimilation and ultimately mis-education (Adams, 1995; Carney, 1999; DeJong, 1993; Deloria & Lytle, 1984; Lomawaima, 2004; Prucha, 1979; Reyhner & Eder, 1989; Spring, 2001; Szasz, 1974). For nearly as long as colleges have existed in America, American Indians have been actively recruited and encouraged to participate in the ritual of higher education. American Indians gradually, often abruptly, lost control of their traditional educational systems with the founding of European colonies (Bill, 1987). The founding of America's first colleges, namely Harvard, Dartmouth, and the College of William and Mary, characterize the tenor of this gradual transformation as these institutions incorporated the goal of formally educating American Indians in their mission statements.

Colonial period. In 1617, the Virginia Company of London, with the approval of King James I of England, raised funds and apportioned land to establish Henrico College for the "Children of the Infidels" (Wright, 1996). This venture ended five years later as the Powhatan Indians rebelled against the college and the Virginia Company of London redirected its subsidies to other economic interests (Wright, 1996). In 1654, a building for the purpose of educating Indian youth was erected on the Harvard campus (Stein, 1988). Listed among the original goals of Harvard was the "Education of the English and

Indian youth of this country in knowledge and Goodness” (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1989, p. 8). This ambitious endeavor, however, was a colossal failure, as only two of the original twenty Indian youth survived to receive their bachelor’s degree. The Indian college building was eventually torn down in 1693 (Wright, 1996).

Along with Harvard, colonial colleges such as Dartmouth and the College of William and Mary also made deliberate attempts to educate Native peoples. Dartmouth, led by Reverend Eleazor Wheelock, was arguably the most determined. The founding of Dartmouth, as stated in its charter, was “for the education and instruction of youth of the Indian Tribes in this Land in reading, writing and all parts of learning...for civilizing and Christianizing Children of Pagans...and also of English youth and any others” (Reyhner & Eder, 1989, p 20).

Reverend Eleazor Wheelock’s idea of Indian education was to remove Indian children from their homes to live with white families (Reyhner & Eder, 1989; Spring, 2001), a system known as the “outing system” and later used by General Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the well-known Carlisle Indian boarding school, in the late 1800s. Wheelock’s ambition led him to recruit a young Mohegan named Samson Occum who traveled to England to solicit funding to establish a new college on Wheelock’s behalf. Wheelock’s gamble paid off as Occum successfully raised over eleven thousand pounds—the largest endowment available to any college of that time—which was used by Wheelock to found Dartmouth in 1769 (Reyhner & Eder, 1989; Wright, 1996). Occum later severed ties with Wheelock after he learned that the money he raised “was never used for the education of young Indian men, instead the university became the

domain of the sons of the powerful White leaders of the community” (Taylor, 2005, p. 16).

The College of William and Mary’s mission for educating American Indians also never materialized. The majority of the Indian students rejected the rigid teachings of the “white man’s religion” and reverted to their traditional ways (Wright, 1996). Exact enrollment figures of American Indians prior to 1705 are difficult to verify due to the loss of records in a fire (Carney, 1999). However, it was reported that between 1705-1721, a total of sixteen Indian students attended William and Mary, none of whom graduated with a baccalaureate degree (Belgarde, 1996).

Despite the seemingly altruistic efforts of the colonial colleges to educate American Indians, the results were abysmal. This failure can be attributed to two reasons. First, the motive for educating American Indians was misguided given that the true intent of colonists, such as Wheelock, was to establish their own colleges for the dominant class (Wright, 1996). The desire to recruit and educate American Indians, therefore, was either nothing more than a byproduct of achieving that ultimate goal (Carney, 1999). Second, the failure is simply due to the recalcitrance on the part of the Indians themselves. In either case, in a combined eighty years of operation between their founding and the American Revolution, Harvard, Dartmouth and the College of William and Mary enrolled only forty-seven Native American students, with only four graduating (Carney, 1999). As Carney (1999) observed, “as unimpressive as the colonial period was regarding higher education for Indians, it would prove to be high point for interest in and effort toward Native American higher education” (p. 3).

Treaty period. Between 1778 and 1871, the U.S. government negotiated 645 treaties with various American Indian tribes (Bill, 1987). Treaties are legally binding agreements between two sovereign nations. The signing of treaties between the U.S. government and American Indian tribes solidified the legal and political status of American Indian tribes and also distinguishes tribal members from other U.S. citizens in this country (Horse, 2005). No other ethnic minority group has this distinction. Today, there are over 550 federally-recognized tribes with treaties still in place (Bill, 1987; Carney, 1999). These treaties resulted in what is known as a “government to government” relationship between Indian tribes and the United States. Many of these treaties included education-related clauses (Bill, 1987).

The United States used the treaty process to conduct diplomatic relations with Indian nations (Wilkins & Lomawaima, 2001). To this day, these relations have rarely been diplomatic as the American populace is still “struggling to understand (or fighting vigorously to deny) tribal sovereign rights to hunt, fish, tax businesses, or operate casinos in various contexts” (Lomawima, 2002, p. 281). During the treaty making period, the government attempted to “civilize” Indians by creating extensive programs in agriculture and manual training in exchange for land (Bill, 1987).

Federal period. The federal period spawned a new type of mentality toward the American Indian--governmental paternalism and forced assimilation attempts. In 1824, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was created and placed within the Department of War (later changed to the Department of the Interior) and gradually replaced missionaries from various denominations as the primary educator of Native Americans (Prucha, 1979). In 1830, the Indian Removal Act was passed and the government began the practice of

subjugating and forcibly removing Eastern tribes west of the Mississippi River (i.e., Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears). The implicit goal of the federal government's strategy regarding Indian education was to eradicate Native culture and systematically teach Indians how to be American citizens, if not white people (Adams, 1995).

By the mid 1800s, Indian education was primarily controlled by non-Indians. The exceptions were exemplary schools founded by the Cherokee Nation and the Choctaw Nation. In 1851, the Cherokee Nation established two seminary schools--one for males and one for females (Belgarde, 1996; Reyhner & Eder, 1989). The all-female school was modeled after the Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary in Massachusetts. The Cherokee Nation school system gained a reputation that exceeded that of schools in the neighboring states of Arkansas and Missouri (Reyhner & Eder, 1989). The Choctaw Nation also successfully developed a sophisticated system of tribal schools. By taking control of their own tribal school system, the Choctaw Nation was able to preserve its tribal language (Reyhner & Eder, 1989). The schools of the Cherokee Nation and Choctaw Nation were eventually taken over by the federal government and went into decline (Belgarde, 1996).

In 1887, the General Allotment Act (also known as the Dawes Act after Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts) was enacted without Indian consent. The Dawes Act was an attempt to impose European values of individualism and private ownership in order to facilitate the civilization of Indians (Lomawaima, 1994; Reyhner & Eder, 1989). From the vantage point of Indian people, the idea of *owning* land was foreign as the traditional Indian belief was "the land belonged to the Creator and people were merely stewards of it" (Friesen & Friesen, 2005, p. 18). The Dawes Act was devastating. In a

span of roughly 50 years, Indian people had lost an estimated 82,800,000 acres of land (Haymond, 1982 as cited in Pavel, Inglebret & Banks, 2001). Federal Indian policy tore at the cultural fabric of the Indian way of life. Languages were lost, families were scattered, and the overall result was the cultural genocide of many Indian tribes (Duran & Duran, 1995).

To accelerate the assimilation of Indians into the American mainstream culture, the federal government turned to the boarding school system. The majority of boarding schools could be characterized as a system of forced acculturation, as many Indian children were taken from their families and thrust into a repressive, militaristic work environment and received an education that “emphasized agricultural and manual skills for boys and domestic skills for girls over academic training” (Lomawaima, 1994, p. 3). The boys typically had to wear old military type uniforms, and the girls wore government issued school dresses. Students were given short hair cuts and were forbidden to speak their Indigenous languages. Those who broke the rules were subject to various forms of corporal punishment such as a restricted diet of bread and water for several days (Chalcraft, 2004). Many students resisted the oppressive environment and ran away (Lomawaima, 1994).

The typical off-reservation boarding school resembled the Carlisle Indian boarding school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, founded by General Richard Henry Pratt in 1879. Pratt’s main objective was to “de-Indianize” Indian students and assimilate them into white society, a goal shared by most of his contemporaries (Oppelt, 1990). One of General Pratt’s most effective strategies was the implementation of the “outing system” which was very similar to the idea used by Eleazor Wheelock a century earlier. The goal

of the outing system was to send Indian students to live with white families for as long as three years to learn the social etiquette of European Americans.

Between the 1890s and late 1920s, many off-reservation boarding schools had significant increases in their Indian student enrollment. The government eventually shifted from reservation day and boarding schools to public schools (Chalcraft, 2004). Although some defenders of the boarding school concept pointed out that schools, such as Carlisle, equipped many Indians with valuable skills to fill respectable positions in mainstream society (Chalcraft, 2004), the long-term results were futile as many Indians returned to the reservation only to find few opportunities there to utilize their skills (Oppelt, 1990). Many Indians encountered difficulty integrating back into their tribal communities (Oppelt, 1990).

In 1926, under intense pressure from reformers, the Department of Interior hired a University of Chicago professor named Dr. Louis Meriam to spearhead an investigation of its own Indian Service bureaucracy (Chalcraft, 2004). The investigation led to a report published in 1928 titled *The Problem of Indian Administration*, commonly known as the Meriam Report. This report sent shockwaves throughout the BIA and federal government as it exposed the deplorable practices that were occurring at boarding schools and other BIA funded schools. The report sharply criticized the boarding school system and “judged the schools grossly deficient in almost every category—reliance on child labor, meager rations, overcrowding, unqualified personnel—and suggested the possibility of widespread demoralization among students” (Chalcraft, 2004, p. lx.) Lomawaima and McCarty (2002) describe the report as “an excoriating critique of the work of the Office of Indian Affairs, and because of its impact the Meriam Report is still

viewed as a watershed in Indian education” (p. 284). This spurred a brief period of change as the Indian Reorganization Act (also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act) and the Johnson O’Malley Act in 1934 were passed and gave Indian tribes a voice in the services provided to them. This legislation, known as the New Indian Deal, subsequently terminated the allotment of Indian lands (Dawes Act) but did not increase Indian enrollment in higher education.

Termination period. The progress made under the New Indian Deal came to an abrupt halt in the 1940s and 1950s when the federal government returned to its assimilationist ethos. In a complete reversal, the federal government proceeded to terminate its government to government relationship with many Indian tribes, including the Menominee tribe of Wisconsin and the Klamath tribe of Oregon (Riggs, 2000). Policy makers abruptly truncated the funding of reservation based programs and poured money into relocation programs that sent American Indian families from reservation homelands to large urban areas such as Los Angeles, San Jose and Chicago to equip them with the requisite job-training skills to amalgamate into the American mainstream populace (Stubben, 2001). In reality, this “urbanization” was the government’s way of absolving itself of its treaty obligations by dumping American Indian families into huge cities with little or no urban city life experience, temporary financial support and housing, and low-level educational and employment opportunities, thus making long-term success near impossible (Duran & Duran, 1995).

The consequences of the termination period were demoralizing. Riggs (2000) stated that the “Klamath tribe disintegrated after termination, with many members ending up in prison or mental institutions” (p. 435). Miller (1979, cited in Stubben, 2001) found

that the urbanization of American Indian families fractured the extended family support structure that was characteristic of tribal communities. For many tribes, the termination era was a fatal blow to Indian education as many schools on reservations that depended upon federal funding soon found their funding cut and had no choice but to shut down.

By the early 1960's Indian higher education was at its lowest point, as nine out of every ten Native Americans dropped out of college (Szasz, 1974). Moreover, in 1961, only 66 Native Americans graduated from four-year mainstream institutions *combined* (Szasz, 1974). Although there were isolated instances of academic achievement, very few Indian students found success at the post-secondary level. Belgarde (1996) noted that Indian students were having a difficult time adjusting to a campus climate that was cold and unwelcoming. He observed:

Most [Native students] were finding mainstream colleges uncongenial, stopping out and returning to their Indian communities to regroup—convinced that higher education was useful, but questioning whether the alien culture of mainstream campus was worth enduring. (p. 5)

Self-Determination period. In 1966, the Economic Opportunity Act gave Native Americans the first legitimate chance to jumpstart Indian education programs, including Head Start for preschool children, Upward Bound, and Job Corps for teenagers (Hale, 2002). These initiatives also led to the founding of the first Indian community-controlled elementary and secondary school called the Rough Rock Demonstration School at the small Navajo community of Rough Rock, Arizona (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002).

As the Civil Rights Movement was gaining national attention, American Indian educators, leaders, and elders were devising an unparalleled movement of their own. The

result was the establishment of America's first tribally-controlled college, Navajo Community College (now Diné community college) on the Navajo Indian reservation in Tsaile, Arizona, in 1968. For the first time in American history, a postsecondary institution was created by Indians for Indians (Guillory & Ward, 2008). The founding of Navajo Community College ushered in the Tribal College movement. As America's first and now the largest tribally-controlled institution of higher learning, Diné "was the flagship school full of possibility and hope for Indian people" (Brewer, 2003, p. 90).

Today, there are 35 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) which serve over thirty-thousand Native American students, representing more than 250 tribal indigenous groups across the United States and Canada (AIHEC, 2006). Many tribes across the United States are currently discussing plans for starting their own tribal colleges and this number will undoubtedly increase in the near future. The cultural focus on the rebuilding and preservation of Native American culture has had a dramatic impact on the enrollment of TCUs. TCUs serve approximately 20 percent of all American Indian students enrolled in higher education (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2000).

The essence of the tribal college movement and the promise it holds for Indian people is best captured by Boyer (1997) in the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching report on Tribal Colleges and Universities:

At the heart of the tribal college movement is a commitment by Native Americans to reclaim their cultural heritage. The commitment to reaffirm traditions is a driving force fed by a spirit based on shared history passed down through generations, and on common goals. Some tribes have lost much of their tradition, and feel, with a sense of urgency, that they must reclaim all they can from the past

even as they confront problems of the present. The obstacles in this endeavor are enormous but, again, Indians are determined to reaffirm their heritage, and tribal colleges, through their curriculum and campus climate, are places of great promise. (p. 12)

In light of the various educational equity initiatives and the success of tribal colleges the past 30 plus years, the remnants of the political, cultural, economic, and social assault on American Indian tribes have significantly impacted the participation and achievement of American Indians at the postsecondary level today. Just over a decade ago, Tierney (1992) noted that for every hundred Native American students entering the ninth grade, sixty would graduate from high school, roughly twenty would enter a postsecondary institution, and three would likely receive a four-year degree. A decade later, the academic pipeline for Native American students is still leaking badly (Colbert, Saggio, & Tato, 2004). Nationally, Indian students comprise only one percent of the total college student population (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005) and only 10% will graduate from mainstream institutions (American Indian College Fund, 1999). American Indians have one of the lowest graduation rates among ethnic groups (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Astin & Oseguera, 2005). In a six-year study by Benjamin, Chambers and Reiterman (1993) of 166 American Indian college students at a mainstream institution, they found that only 49% completed their first year of college, 28% percent remained after 2 years, and 25% after 3 years. At the end of five years, only 13 of the original 166 graduated, and a total of 26 students (16%) had graduated by the end of the six-year study.

Over the last three decades, the number of Native American students enrolled in postsecondary institutions has doubled from 76,100 in 1976 to nearly 166,000 in 2002 (NCES, 2005). Despite this increase, Native American students continue to have lower retention and graduation rates than their white counterparts and other ethnic minorities (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 1999; Astin & Oseguera, 2005). To illustrate, the National Center for Education Statistics (2005) released an assessment report on the status of high school seniors in 1992 and tracked their educational progress until the year 2000. During this eight-year span, the report revealed that 11% of Native Americans earned bachelor's degrees, as compared to 31% for the general population, while 2% attained master's degrees, in comparison to 6% of the general population. In 1997-1998, Native Americans received only .6% of the bachelor's degrees, .5% of the masters degrees, and .4% of the doctoral degrees awarded in the United States (Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003). Hodgkinson (1990) reported that Indian students at the college level had drop out rates as high as 75 percent while Bowker (1993) estimated it to be as high as 93 percent. Typically, Native American students were more likely to begin their college journey at a community college and experience one or more stop outs during the degree path (Tierney, 1992). In addition, American Indians living on a reservation may be only half as likely as their White counterparts to persist and attain a degree (Pavel, Swisher, & Ward, 1995).

These deplorable statistics have lead many researchers to investigate the retention and graduation rates of Native American students and other ethnic minorities at mainstream colleges and universities who continue to lag below their white counterparts. Many scholars have concluded that for Native American students the source of the

problem is cultural conflict (Huffman, 1995; Swisher & Deyhle, 1989). Huffman (2001) argues that “no single factor has been more frequently identified as a contributing reason for poor academic achievement among American Indians” (p. 2).

PART TWO

Higher Education Experiences of Native American Students

Section One: Educational and Social Challenges Facing Native American Students

Several studies have examined the high stop out rate of Native American students (Falk & Aitken, 1984; Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Waterman, 2004). Brayboy (1999) identified four primary factors that impact the academic achievement of Native American students, including financial barriers, lack of academic and social preparation, lack of role models and cultural conflict on campus. Other factors found in the literature include low teacher expectations (Bowker, 1993), financial difficulties (Pavel, Swisher & Ward, 1995), lack of academic motivation (Rindone, 1988), and inadequate academic preparation (Falk & Aitken, 1984; Reyner, 1992). Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003) organized the barriers to the retention and graduation of Native American students under three categories: sociocultural factors, academic factors and personal factors. Sociocultural factors included racial hostility on campus, cultural incongruity with the school environment, and social alienation and isolation. Academic factors included low academic readiness and poor study skills. Personal factors included self-confidence, goal orientation, motivation and self-efficacy.

Jackson et al. (2003) observed that for Native students the path to degree completion can be characterized as nonlinear. Native students are likely to attend more than one college in the process of earning a degree and begin at the community college

level (Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995). In parallel, Native students are likely to stop out for two or more years en route to a bachelor's degree. Waterman (2004) found that the majority of students took more than a decade to obtain a four-year degree.

Institutional factors have also been found to impact Native American student retention. Huffman (1991) found that a high number of Native American students experienced overt racism, or harassment, at predominantly white campuses. Lin, LaCounte and Eder (1988) conducted a quantitative study of the effect of school environment on academic performance and graduation expectation of Indian students. They found that campus hostility and feelings of isolation had a significant impact on the academic performance of Indian students. Turner (1992) described the experience of students of color on predominately white campuses as "guests in someone else's house". Moreover, she described the overall university climate as "unwelcoming" and the labyrinthine college infrastructure as "problematic" (p. 367). For Native students, feeling like a "guest" on a predominately white campus is further exasperated given that they are usually one of the smallest student group's at most American mainstream colleges and universities on campus.

Huffman (2003) compared the college experiences of Indian students who were raised primarily on a reservation and those who were raised primarily in urban areas. He found that reservation Indians were more likely to have a difficult time transitioning to college than their urban Indian counterparts. He observed that:

Perhaps this finding is not too surprising given the fact that a persistent theme in the American Indian/Alaskan Native education literature has been the alleged inadequate

preparation for postsecondary education received by American Indian/Alaskan Native students from reservation schools. (p. 9)

Social dilemmas also pose a major challenge for academic success. It is not uncommon for Native students to grow up in areas where unemployment rates can vary between 45 percent to 90 percent (American Higher Education Consortium, 1999; Stein, 1992). In addition, high poverty and morbidity rates, rampant alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, and high suicide rates pose great challenges to both reservation Indians and urban Indians (Ortiz & HeavyRunner & 2003; Stein, 1992). In fact, Shalala, Trujillo, Nolan, and D'Angelo (1996) found that American Indian's are 465% more likely to die as a result of alcohol-related causes than the general U.S. population.

Family responsibilities also influence the academic performance of Native students. Butt (2003) found that American Indian students are leaving post-secondary education in part due to family obligations. Tate and Schwartz (1993) observed that almost 70 percent of Native students strongly agree, or agreed, with the statement that they had numerous family obligations to meet while in college and roughly one-third agreed that these obligations sometimes interfered with education. In a study on student attitudes and activities, Cibik & Chambers (1991) found that 56.8% of the 155 American Indian respondents indicated a need to go home often compared to 31.6% of African American students, 24.4% of Hispanics, and 16.7% Anglos. Furthermore, American Indians also reported a tendency to go home to help their families, or to attend ceremonies or special activities, even when such trips conflicted with class (Benjamin, Chambers, Reiterman, 1993).

Section Two: The Problem with Mainstream Student Retention Models

Tinto's model of student departure (1987, 1993) and Astin's involvement theory (1984, 1985a) are perhaps the most widely known and used mainstream models in the student retention genre. Tinto's Student Integration Model identified four stages in the life of a college-going student. These stages are separation, transition, integration and competent membership. Students go through a separation, or detachment, phase away from family and they must learn how to adjust and transition into the new college milieu. The next stage is a socialization phase where they assimilate into college and develop new behaviors and values in order to navigate their way through college. Finally, the students who successfully integrate into the social and academic fabric of the institution have the competency to persist and graduate. In parallel, Astin's involvement theory is centered on the idea that the more students were *involved* in the social and academic life of the institution, the more likely they will be academically successful in college. Although these theories have been widely used to explain student persistence, they have received their share of critique and criticism over the years by scholars who have found that these models are inadequate in explaining why some minority students persist and others do not.

The first critique is that these studies omit contextual or situational issues (Brayboy, 1999). The choices that students make and the manner in which choices are made are deemed inconsequential. As such, there is an assumption that students progress in a linear fashion and "pass from one stage to the next as if they are part of a manufacturing process in which they are placed on a particular conveyor belt which takes them to the next stage" (p. 12).

Other critiques point to the fact that, by and large, most of the student retention literature focuses on mainstream college students (Astin, 1984, 1985a, 1985b; Chickering, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) argued that these studies were inadequate in addressing the retention issues of students of color because: (1) there is a heavy emphasis on the retention of mainstream college students; (2) many of these studies were done by white males; and (3) these studies exclude students of color (including African American, America Indian, and Hispanic students) due to their lack of critical mass. Consequently, these studies do not take into account that minority students may be non-traditional, first-generation students, and/or work part-time.

Probably the most scathing critique of all is that these retention models infer that in order to be academically successful, students must assimilate into the social and academic culture of the institution (Rendón et al., 2000; Tierney, 1992). Brayboy (1999) has suggested that at most mainstream institutions, “there is an implicit assumption that underrepresented students will (and should) change or accommodate at any cost in order to succeed” (p. 16). In other words, for students of color, to accommodate means to act “white” and, consequently, if a student refuses to assimilate into the dominant campus culture, the cost is social isolation, alienation and eventually withdrawal (Wright, 1996).

These studies suggest that the real problem is not necessarily the academic demands that the college places on them but rather the pressure placed on students to assimilate into the new college environment. Saggio (2003) argues that it is “difficult for students of color to become involved when the social context of the academy is so strikingly different from the primary cultures of these students of color” (p. 7). This

brings to light the cultural conflict that many students of color, including American Indian students, encounter when they enter college. Below, several studies are examined that explore this cultural conflict that American Indian students encounter when they embark on their postsecondary journeys.

Section Three: Conflicting Values--Native Americans and Predominantly White Institutions

Huffman (1990) stated that “college is an institution of values, norms, and attitudes...[that] embodies a cultural milieu which reflects middle-class America.” (p. 8). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) observed that all students in varying degrees experience “culture shock” during the initial transition from high school to college. Ogbu (1982) has argued that the experiences of students of color go beyond the temporary feeling of culture shock to a more profound experience called “cultural discontinuity.” Huffman (1993) has contended that students who are members of different cultural groups begin college with many cultural values that are dissimilar to the middle-class values that pervade most mainstream institutions. As a result, American Indian students often struggle to adjust to the new campus setting and suffer from loneliness, depression and school failure (Sue and Sue, 1990).

Tierney (1991) has illuminated this cultural conflict of Native Americans at predominantly white institutions. He suggested that one of the root problems is the long held assumption of higher education institutions that social integration is the key to academic achievement. He identified five implicit axioms, or assumptions, held by universities that serve as the basis for most of their efforts to integrate the students into the ways of the institution:

- Post-secondary institutions are ritualized situations that symbolize movement from one stage of life to another.
- The movement from one stage of life to another necessitates leaving a previous state and moving into another.
- Success in post-secondary education demands that the individual becomes successfully integrated into the new society's mores.
- A post-secondary institution serves to synthesize, reproduce, and integrate its members toward similar goals.
- A post-secondary institution must develop effective and efficient policies to insure that the initiates will become academically and socially integrated.

These assumptions pose tremendous problems for Indian students because moving from one stage of life to another clearly implies that Native American students are expected to divorce themselves from their Native cultural values and tribal communities. This causes a role conflict for Native students that can be resolved by either rejecting one's culture or, more often, rebelling against the educational system (Rousey & Longie, 2001). Ogbu's (1987) study on marginalized ethnic minorities illustrated how student resistance against the school system led to poor educational achievement and low graduation rates.

Another problem with the social integration assumption is the racialized ideology that minority students suffer from cultural deprivation and mainstream American institutions attempt to "fix" minority students by conditioning them to conform to a mainstream ideology (Cajete, 1999). Indeed, as Cajete (1999) has pointed out, this has

been the predominant approach in the education of American Indians since the colonial period through the boarding school and termination periods.

The transition from home to the college campus can cause Native students to feel stranded between two cultures (Pipes, Westby, & Inglebret, 1993). This phenomenon is often described in the literature as “walking in two worlds”—one world being the tribal community and the other being the mainstream world. When Native students leave their tribal communities and venture into college, they take their tribal membership and cultural values with them, but they are expected to matriculate into an institution with its own rules and values that represent the dominant culture. Indian students find themselves in a precarious situation because many feel uncomfortable in the mainstream culture and disconnected from their Native culture. Consequently, the result is “cultural marginalization” (Pipes et al, 1993). Worse yet, Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) contend that when Native students enter college and then withdraw before completion, they are “branded by the university as a drop-out—a failure” (p. 5).

To better understand how Indian students cope with cultural conflict on campus, Huffman’s (2001) qualitative study of the experiences of 69 culturally traditional American Indian undergraduate students at a predominantly white institution is worth discussing at length. For this study, he used a theoretical framework called a cultural discontinuity framework, which emerged from the early work of anthropologists Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski (1974). The cultural discontinuity framework emphasized the differing and opposing micro-level cultural elements (i.e., communication styles, social value, interpersonal behaviors) that ultimately impact educational performance. Using a concept called *cultural masks*, he explains that a

“cultural mask is the process by which a person comes to construct a personal ethnic identity, which also includes the manner in which an individual uses and ultimately projects that ethnic identity” (Huffman, 2001, p. 3). He conceptualized how Native students constructed their ethnic identities based on one of four types of cultural masks. These four types of cultural masks included *assimilated* students, *marginal* students, *estranged* students, and *transculturated* students. *Assimilated* students were described as students who typically identified with the mainstream. *Marginal* students had characteristics similar to the assimilated students yet desired some identification and affiliation with more traditional American Indian culture. *Estranged* students identified strongly with their traditional American Indian culture and this loyalty often led to a position of active resistance and distrust of mainstream culture. *Transculturated* students also had a strong identification with traditional American Indian; however, unlike estranged students, these students used their ethnic identity as a source of strength and confidence. Of the 69 Indians in the study, the author reported that 26 were *assimilated* students, 21 *transculturated* students, 15 *marginal* students, and 7 *estranged* students.

Huffman observed that the *assimilated* students encountered little or no cultural difficulties while in college while the *marginal* students encountered a few problems to some extent. Interestingly, the *estranged* students (i.e., strong traditional Indian orientation and actively resistant to assimilation) and *transculturated* students (strong traditional Indian but used culture as a source of strength and confidence) experienced difficulties; however, each responded in totally different ways. Huffman explains that the *estranged* students went through a four-stage estrangement process of initial alienation, disillusionment, emotional rejection, and disengagement. “The social, emotional, and

cultural isolation felt by estranged students quickly developed into the final act of physical detachment from the institution” (p. 7). The *transcultured* students, on the other hand, went through a four-stage process of initial alienation, self-discovery, realignment, and participation. During the self-discovery stage:

The transcultured students came to realize they had succeeded because they were American Indian and had not attempted to be anything else. Most of the transcultured students could relate a specific time in their academic career when they made a deliberate decision to push forward while utilizing their cultural heritage as a personal anchor. Reaching this transculturation threshold was often an extremely difficult journey. However, the rewards at the end were enormous. (Huffman, 2001, p. 14)

As such, the *transcultured* students responded to the initial difficult adjustment to college by drawing on the strength of their culture. They displayed a “unique ability to interact within and between cultures as demanded by the situation” (p. 13).

This study demonstrated that the *transcultured* students were able to be academically successful without assimilating into the mainstream culture. This phenomenon is often described as *biculturalism*. Other studies have found that the capacity to function biculturally contributes to academic success (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Garcia, 2000; Waterman, 2004). Huffman’s study on transcultured students debunks the myth that minority students must abandon their ethnic identities and socially integrate into the mainstream campus culture to be academically successful. Trueba (1988, cited in Yazzie, 1999) speaks firmly against the common assumption that

academic achievement is attainable for minority students only if they assimilate into the mainstream culture. She suggests that:

Educators [should] not lose sight of the fact that *many* minorities succeed in school *without* losing their cultural identities or assimilating; therefore, teachers should seriously question theories that encourage assimilation or even partial acculturation. [emphasis in the original] (p. 87)

Trueba (1988) has noted that there are many mainstream values that are respected by Native educators, especially the idea that all children deserve a quality education. However, she has strongly advocated for a bicultural approach that provides a setting in which students are exposed to mainstream values and the values of communities of color are given equal recognition based on the contributions they bring into the learning environment. Trueba (1988, cited in Yazzie, 1999) is not alone in this position as there are many researchers, teachers, administrators and parents today calling for a reform in our education system at all levels to create culturally relevant curriculum and supportive learning environments for minority students, including Indian students (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999; Yazzie, 1999).

Section Four: Native Cultural Values

The aforementioned studies demonstrate that cultural conflict and other factors negatively impact the adjustment and persistence of American Indian students at predominantly white institutions. However, there is a growing body of research (Huffman, 2001, Waterman, 2005) that is revealing that Native students are overcoming these challenges by using their cultural values as a source of strength to persist through college. Cultural values including generosity and sharing, group orientation, maintaining

extended family connections, and commitment to community, have been identified by researchers (among others) as sources of strength resulting in such persistence. A brief summary of literature focusing on these values is presented.

Generosity and Sharing. A core value of Indian tribes is the belief and practice of generosity and sharing (Cuch, 1984; Peacock & Cleary, 1998; Sebastian, 1980).

Badwound and Tierney (1996) stated that “members of Indian communities demonstrate generosity through informal and formal means of giving or sharing” (p. 443). Cuch (1984), a member of the Ute tribe, explained that generosity is one of the central values of the Ute people. He described a helpful illustration of how Indians exhibit generosity through a cultural ceremony called a “give away”. At a *give away*, an Indian family usually honors a loved one when they have reached an accomplishment, a milestone, or received their “Indian name”. This ceremony is a process of giving away many cherished goods to others—relatives, guests, or visitors from other tribes. A *give away* is also done when a tribal member reaches a significant age in life, or when a tribal member passes on. Hence, a *give away* is a special way a family expresses thanks for the support their loved one received and the family gives away the best of what they have without expecting anything in return.

Carol Locust (1988, cited in Peacock & Cleary, 1998) explains how historically, the practice of generosity and sharing was more than a value but a matter of survival for Indian people.

This survival technique is still present in Indian communities, and it dictates behaviors that are frequently mis-understood by non-Indians. For example, the group’s survival depends on everyone working together and sharing. All

members work together and contribute to the group, supporting each other in times of stress, for they know that they will find the same network of support for themselves should they require. Children are expected to contribute to their group, as soon as they are mature enough to do so. (p. 327-328)

Generosity is also one of the cultural virtues of the Lakota people. In the Lakota language, generosity means *Wancantognka* (Whirlwind Soldier, 1996). “Wancantognka means sharing not only material good but generosity of heart, comfort, and support (Whirlwind Soldier, 1996, p. 12). Even one’s social status among the tribal community is often determined by one’s generous deeds. “The extent to which individuals acquire prestige depends upon the extent to which they share accumulated wealth with less fortunate individuals” (Badwound & Tierney, 1996, p. 443).

Cooperation. Peacock and Cleary (1998) interviewed sixty teachers, both non-Indian and Indian, over a three-year period who primarily taught American Indian children. One non-Indian teacher noticed how the Indian children’s affinity toward cooperation differed from her own upbringing. She stated, “There’s a real bond that I don’t think is there in white society. We’re taught to be independent and self-reliant, but it seems to me that they’re more family-oriented and do things for the benefit of all” (p. 43).

Swisher (1990) found that Native communities emphasize cooperation and sharing in both knowledge acquisition and the demonstration of learning. In a study of White and Indian students, Pavel, Larimore and VanAlstine (2003) found that White students were more competitive and independent. Even when “cooperative behavior was rewarded, they still preferred to compete with classmates rather than cooperate” (p. 194).

Group Orientation. Native American culture has been defined as a “we-based” culture as opposed to a “me-based” culture (Hoover, 2004). This orientation is evident in the classroom. Cajete (1999) explained that “Native American learners tend to respond best to learning formats that are group oriented” (p. 144). Wetsit (1999) described how mainstream classroom environments reinforced individual accomplishments by encouraging students to compete with one another. This approach “often conflicts with Native cultures, which place greater emphasis upon relationships” (Wetsit, 1999, p. 186) versus individualism.

Interdependence also is a key characteristic of Indian families (LaFromboise, 1998). The family structures within tribal communities are interdependent wherein the burdens of an individual are often felt (or shared) by the community at large. LaFromboise (1998) observed that when problems arise in American Indian communities, they become problems of the community, not just the individual. For example, it is rare to find a homeless person on a reservation because there is always someone who will take them in and provide shelter. Cuch (1984) described tribal communities this way, “One life is not valued over another. In short, if one Indian lived and prospered, all Indians lived and prospered. If one died of starvation, all died of starvation.” (p. 72).

Extended Family. In many ways, tribal communities are like one large family (McKinley, Bayne & Nimnicht, 1970). Stubben (2001) describes the American Indian family unit as the “preeminent institution” in Native culture. Whereas the European American culture emphasizes the concept of the nuclear family, (i.e., mother, father, and children), the Indian family is generally far more extended (Waterman, 2004; Wetsit,

1999). Peacock and Cleary (1998) noted that in the Anishinabe tribe many more individuals may be regarded as “family” within their tribal community than would be in non-Indian communities. They stated:

Conceptually there is no such thing as an uncle, particularly when describing the father’s brothers. Their brother’s and sister’s children are their children. Aunts are often considered to be mothers, uncles are called fathers, and cousins are seen as brothers or sisters. (p. 41)

In addition, it is also common in many tribes for grandparents to raise their grandchildren as their own (Peacock & Cleary, 1998). Wetsit (1999) emphasized the importance of family in Native cultures. “[Family] is expected to take priority over other values such as recreation, school, or even employment, depending on the situation. If a student is needed at home to help a sick family member, that takes priority” (p. 187). Garrod and Larimore (1997) stated that “for many Native Americans, personal and cultural identity, as well as spirituality, are inextricably intertwined with connections to family, community, tribe and homeland” (p. 3).

For counseling psychologists, family issues have long been understood to be crucial in working with American Indian clients. Attneave (1982) noted that strong familial ties and loyalty are core parts of the American Indian identity. Strong family ties foster a strong support system that produces interdependence which, in some cases, makes it very difficult for community members to leave when one encounters adversity. In a study of the postsecondary transition experiences of Navajo Indians, Jackson and Smith (2001) found that many of the students expressed a strong desire to stay connected to their tribal communities; however, this also had an impact on their career choice.

Many of the participants felt restricted in what careers were available to them on the reservation and “if a career was not available to them on the reservation, participants were less likely to see it as an option” (Smith & Jackson, 2001, p. 44). The results of the study also indicated that “family support, family problems and family financial concerns are strongly related to postsecondary persistence” (p. 43). Similarly, Juntunen, Barraclough, and Broneck (2001) found that the well being of the community and family may have a definitive impact on the career decision making of an American Indian individual, regardless of the level of education obtained.

Commitment to Community. Maintaining a sense of community is a salient characteristic in American Indian communities. In a study on American Indians perspectives on career choice, Juntunen et al. (2001) found that ten out of eleven participants in the study indicated that family influence played an important role in the career journey, with seven of those specifically noting a family emphasis on education. For the participants in this study, the support of parents, children, partners, and extended family helped them make the decision to pursue college education, or a particular work activity (Juntunen et al., 2001).

Even when Indians are separated from their tribal communities, many often find ways to maintain social networks with other Indians. During the relocation era in the 1950s, Indians in the large metropolitan cities such as Los Angeles, CA, Oakland, CA, and Chicago, IL, chose to associate almost exclusively with each other and did not seek contact with whites (McKinley, Bayne & Nimnicht, 1970). McKinley et al. (1970) observed that the *urban* Indians (a term commonly used today) “considered themselves to

be in a unique Indian social niche which was alien to the community social hierarchy” (p. 7).

This tendency of Native people to maintain social networks away from home has spilled over into higher education. Researchers have found that many students have expressed how they greatly benefit from student centers specifically designed to support Native American’s on college campuses (Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995; Guillory, 2002). Several studies have been conducted that provide evidence of the efficacy of these ethnic enclaves (Angspatt, 2001; Butt, 2003). These student centers serve as a “home away from home” for Native students to socialize and maintain close communities on campus (Dell, 2000). As a result, many colleges have created space on campus, or ethnic enclaves, to support these social networks and other student support services. Some of the support services include tutorial services and mentoring programs (Dell, 2000). In addition, many Native students also contribute their time and effort to student functions such as student organizations and pow wows to promote Native issues on campus (Brown, 2005).

Even Native American faculty members at mainstream colleges and universities find ways to contribute to Indian communities in some way. Many Native faculty members maintain close ties to the Indian community by offering their expertise and assistance to meet tribal needs, “even though that service might not be valued or recognized by the college or university” (Tippeconnic & McKinney, 2003, p. 247). Although maintaining these ties are important, many Native American faculty members express the difficulty in balancing the demands of the university and the needs of Indian people (Tippeconnic & McKinney, 2003).

Success. Even success is often defined by Native people in the context of cultural values, family, and community. Participants in the Juntunen et al. (2001) study indicated that the need to contribute to family and community members was a common theme and was frequently expressed as a primary benchmark of success. Success was not measured in monetary terms but based on the way in which their achievements contributed to their tribal community. More than half of the respondents in this study specifically selected careers that they believed would benefit their home communities to some degree. Several participants expressed intentions of going back home to help others after getting their degree.

In mainstream society, professional credentials, place of employment, job title, income, and educational level are often used to define success. In tribal communities, professional credentials mean very little if they do not benefit the people. As Lomawaima (2002) has noted, the mark of the Indian leader is not what he has done for himself, but what he has done for the people.

A powerful example of this dynamic is found in Garrod and Larimore's (1997) qualitative study of Dartmouth graduates. They found that the majority of the students admitted that the desire to:

Contribute to their home communities is what inspired them to attend college in the first place. However, when faced with the prospect of a four year education that seemed to have little immediate relevance to their lives and cultures, some lost the sense of purpose. (p. 15)

As such, they found that an "overwhelming majority of Native students would rather sacrifice their educational goal than abandon their cultural identities and values"

(p.15). Therefore, “the individualistic goal of earning a degree to acquire job skills and a lucrative position after graduation is not enough to sustain many Native students” (p. 16). The aforementioned studies demonstrate that the unique cultural values of Native American people, and the connections they have with their communities and extended families, are likely to influence their perceptions of success (Cajete, 2005; Horse, 2005).

Section Five: American Indian Student Success in Higher Education and the Concept of Giving Back

American Indian cultural values have long been blamed for the low academic achievement of Indian students since the early days of boarding schools (Lindsay, 1995). Typically, if “American Indian and Alaska Native students perform below the level of their white counterparts on some measures, the fault is laid at the feet of Native culture and not the schools” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 5). Deyhle and Swisher (1997) posit that “this deficit ideology, used by non-Native teachers and administrators suggested that Indian homes and the minds of Indian children were empty, or meager, thus rationalizing the need for ‘enriching’ Eurocentric experiences” (p. 123).

In 2001, the U.S. Department of Education published a document called the *American Indian and Alaskan Native Education Research Agenda* calling for major reform in Indian education. The report gave many recommendations including a change in the way in which research is conducted on American Indian and Alaskan Native student populations. Specifically, the report lamented the fact that the “history of educational research involving American Indian and Alaskan Native students and their communities has been predominantly directed by outsiders and, even if not the intent, has often focused on “deficits” rather than strengths” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 7).

Responding to this clarion call, there is a growing body of literature that is now focusing on American Indian academic success rather than failure. This trend marks a paradigm shift from a deficit-model perspective to an achievement-model perspective. At the forefront of this shift are Native American scholars who, in their own right, are living examples of academic success. Willetto (1999) found that Indian families positively influence the academic performance of Indian students. She notes that influences such as parental education, student's identification with their mothers, and family adherence to traditional cultural practices were salient factors to academic achievement.

Other studies corroborate Willetto's findings. HeavyRunner and Marshall (2003) developed the Family Education Model (FEM) to improve the retention rates of Indian students attending tribal colleges. At the heart of the FEM is the concept of *cultural resilience*. Tapping into the close-knit family structure that characterizes tribal communities, FEM is designed to "engage family members in the life of the community college by enlisting them as partners and involving them in cultural and social activities" (p. 30). Culturally relevant models such as the FEM are making significant improvement in the retention of Indian students at tribal colleges.

Waterman's (2004) qualitative study of the college experiences of twelve Haudenosaunee tribal members found that the students did have to break away from their past communities to achieve academic success. Waterman also observed that family support was the most salient factor for students on their educational journey. Ironically, her dissertation chair was none other than Vincent Tinto (1987), who helped popularize the retention strategy that assimilation into the campus culture and breaking away from one's home community is requisite to academic success. Tinto has since published a

recent article that acknowledges that for some students, remaining “connected to their past communities, family, church, or tribe is essential to their persistence” (Tinto, 2006, p. 4).

Another particular finding that has emerged out of the academic success literature is the prevalence of the desire among Native American students to use their education to *give back* to their tribal communities, or Indian people, in general. In fact, several studies of Native American graduate students revealed the theme of giving back. Guno (1996) found that the common denominator among the graduate students was the collective vision of giving back to one’s community. Tijerna & Biemer’s (1987-88) study on Native American doctoral students described how these students were driven by a “cultural need to give back to the community in time and money” (p. 91). Garvey (1999) discovered that a number of Native American graduate students intended to return back to work for their people after graduation. The concept of giving back was a strong persistence factor in Guillory’s (2002) study on Native American student persistence. Garcia (2000) also found that the theme of giving back and reciprocity served as a motivator among successful Native American doctoral students. Reyner and Trent (2002) noted that reciprocity and the sense of giving back is fundamental to Native learning and spirituality.

In Juntunen, Barraclough, and Broneck’s (2001) study on Indian families and their perception of career choice, one participant in this study stated that “to be successful, I believe, is going back to where you were raised to help the people that are there” (p. 277). One intriguing finding in this study was that even those participants who *did not* grow up

on reservations indicated a desire to work on a reservation, or to work in a way that would directly benefit Indian people.

In his study on two Indian Ivy League graduates, Brayboy (2005) described how they used higher education to equip themselves with the requisite skills and academic weaponry to help their tribal communities fight for autonomy and self-determination. A *US News Report* article (2000) ran a story about the rise of educational aspirations of tribal members on the Warm Springs reservation in Oregon. The article stated:

Jacob Coochise was one of only a handful at Madras High School to graduate in 1991, and when he left the reservation to go to college, he figured he'd never return. But by the time he completed a degree in business and economics--with the tribe picking up most of the tab--Coochise recalls, "I felt more proud of being an Indian, so I came back with the idea that . . . maybe it was time to give something back." (p. 31)

The *Winds of Change Magazine* (2006) covered a story on the College Horizons program, a highly successful college prep program geared for Native American high school students. In the article, Jeremiah Powless, an Oneida Indian from Wisconsin, and a graduate of the University of Utah, explained how he believed that:

Education is an important and viable way to help Native people....My motivation is knowing that I'm putting myself in a position to help myself, my family, and others...I strongly and sincerely feel that the education that I've received is not just for my benefit but for Native people in general. (p. 15)

While these studies and commentaries suggest that the desire to give back appears to have an overall positive influence on the educational experiences of Native American

students, other studies have shown it may have contradictory effects. Brayboy (1999) discovered that many Native students were motivated to succeed academically to use their education to benefit their people, but eventually paid a heavy price both personally and culturally. Brayboy found that despite the good intentions of these students, some had difficulty reentering their communities and lost their connection to the people. As such, Brayboy argues that for Native students, “the choice of attending an institution of higher education is much like a mortgage that students take out on themselves and their culture” (p. 26). In other words, in order to be successful in school, Native students feel pressured to sacrifice their cultural identities or “Indianness” in the process. Guillory (2002) also indicated that some students viewed the notion of giving back in a positive and negative light. While some wanted to eventually return to their tribal communities to help their people, others were reluctant to do so because they did not want to face the adverse social conditions such as the “strong prevalence of drugs, alcohol abuse, poverty, and lack of job opportunities” that plague reservations (p. 156). Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003) described the tension that Native Americans feel between leaving the reservation to pursue a higher education as “paradoxical cultural pressure” (p. 548). While pursuing a higher education was encouraged, some of the students expressed the fear of being perceived by the tribal community as selling out to the mainstream culture.

Summary of Literature Review

Lomawaima (1995) described the history of Indian education as “a 500 year old battle for control” (p. 331). Through the colonial, treaty, federal, and termination periods to the self determination period, the government’s unflinching goal of assimilating American Indians has led to disastrous results (Chalcraft, 2004). Many Native students

carry with them the historical memory of the cultural genocide that has decimated American Indian tribes for the past 500 years (Duran & Duran, 1995). Before the advent of the tribal college movement in the late 60s and early 70s, Indian education was not only moribund, it was described as a “national tragedy” (Kennedy Report, 1969). Although Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) are proving to be a viable option for Indian students, the reality is that the majority of Indian students today still attend predominantly white institutions. With the exception of TCUs, most educational institutions have failed to recognize and respond to the unique needs and challenges of Native American students (Angspatt, 2001). For Native students, access *to* college does not guarantee success *in* college.

The current literature also revealed that Indian students face numerous personal, social, cultural, and institutional challenges that impact academic performance. For the most part, numerous studies have focused on how the majority of these factors negatively impact the academic performance of Indian students. However, there is growing body of literature that is exploring how Native students are successfully adapting to the cultural environment of mainstream colleges and universities that is often vastly different than the cultural environments that Indian students come from. Two of the significant findings in this body of literature are: (1) Native students are overcoming barriers to degree completion by using their cultural values as a source of strength to persist through college, and (2) family support plays a major role in the academic performance of Native students.

The literature also provides evidence that many Native students have the desire to use their education to *give back* in ways that are beneficial to their tribal communities.

Three themes emerge with regard to the concept of *giving back* as illustrated in the literature: (1) the desire to give back can play a positive role in the educational journey of Native students; (2) the desire to give back may also have contradictory effects on the educational paths of Native students; and (3) Native students may have good intentions to give back; however, their good intentions may not always be perceived as such by one's home community. While the literature on Native student success is very promising and has yielded positive results by shedding new light on the experiences of Native students in higher education, the literature is also clear that there is no recipe for Native student success in college. The current scholarship on Native American student success has only scratched the surface with regard to understanding why some Native students persist toward degree attainment while others do not. Clearly, there is a strong need for more research that specifically explores the factors that play a positive role in the lives of Native students who have successfully graduated from college. One such factor that calls for a deeper understanding is the notable emergence of the desire to give back found in the Native student success literature. To be sure, if the desire to give back is frequently mentioned by Native degree recipients, then the logical step of inquiry is to examine this notion in greater depth than has been previously explored in the existing literature. This is the impetus of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Qualitative research takes time, but already too much time has gone by without an adequate volume of research on the experiences of Native American students. Native students need to be asked about their experiences and given an opportunity to tell their story.

(Lowe, 2005, p. 39)

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of “giving back” and the role it played throughout the educational journeys of Native American degree recipients and beyond. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Native American college graduates define giving back?
2. How does the concept of giving back influence the educational aspirations of Native American college graduates throughout their educational journey?
3. What are the rewards and struggles associated with giving back after college?
4. What are the perceptions of Native American graduates as to the benefits, or gain, to their tribal communities as a result of giving back?

Theoretical framework

This study was guided by a theoretical framework identified as *native capital* (Ward, 2005). A theoretical framework is “explicitly and systemically used to interpret a phenomenon” (Kilbourn, 2006, p. 545). This study sought to use the theoretical construct of *native capital* as the canvas on which to paint an accurate representation of the concept of *giving back*. As a sociologist, Ward’s concept of *native capital* builds on the concepts of *social capital* and *cultural capital*. In her study of American Indian high school students in Montana, Ward (2005) expanded upon the concepts of *social capital* and

cultural capital and developed the *native capital* concept as a way to understand how rural American Indian communities and families influence the academic achievement of American Indian students in three school districts. This chapter will begin by briefly explaining the concepts of cultural, social, linguistic capital and how these concepts relate to the development of Ward's *native capital* concept.

Cultural Capital and School Achievement

The educational achievement gap that exists among student populations at varying levels has long been reported and analyzed (Ogbu, 1988). Specifically, the achievement gap has been associated with class, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity (Delpit, 1995; Lareau, & Horvat, 1999; Ogbu, 1995). Numerous scholars have asserted that the perpetuation of the problem is in part due to the unequal availability of, and access to, various types of resources within certain social classes. Specifically, several scholars have framed this problem in the context of disparities in cultural, social, and linguistic capital between social classes.

The concept of *cultural capital* was popularized by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Cultural capital is defined as the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed from one generation to the next. Bourdieu (1977) suggests that cultural capital can be acquired in two ways, from one's family and/or through formal schooling. Central to this concept is the idea that children from upper and middle class families are privileged in the educational system because their families possess cultural knowledge and language skills that are valued by the school system and the dominant society in general (Bourdieu, 1977). This possession of cultural knowledge and language are converted and used to gain or maintain power and privilege in society

(Dumais, 2005). In this manner, Bourdieu argues that schools reproduce the class structures of society given that they socialize students to occupy generally the same position in the class structures as that of their parents (Macleod, 1995). The more or less cultural capital a student has can either facilitate or limit academic success, which can ultimately impact social mobility. *Social capital* refers to the network of relationships within a family, or within a community, such as a school (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). The accumulation of social capital hinges upon the access to and availability of “social connections”. For example, Bourdieu (1986) argues that upper and middle class parents use their social networks and cultural resources to support their children in school and to provide access to the specific credentials required for upper and middle class positions. In contrast, children from poor or working class families are perceived as lacking the requisite cultural capital to be successful in school because their parent’s have limited social connections and access to valuable resources. This serves as a disadvantage for lower class families given that the inability to utilize educational resources such as computers, tutors, books or trips to museums undermines their educational experiences. Particularly, since school systems generally reward students that are familiar with such resources. As such, just as economic capital represents the power to purchase products, cultural capital for parents in terms of their children's education represents the power to promote their children's academic achievement (Grenfell & James, 1998).

In parallel, *linguistic capital* refers to a common or shared language that allows the transfer of cultural and social capital from one generation to another (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Formal schooling, in particular, and the use of formal language has served as a vehicle for this transmission of cultural capital to privileged groups. For

example, children from upper and middle class families are exposed to the type of language that is similar to the language used in formal schooling. This exposure gives these children a clear advantage over children from working and poor class families because the language used in upper and middle class homes mirrors the language used in the school, which enables them to be successful in school. Language therefore is a form of capital because of the advantage it gives to certain families. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) explains that:

The influence of linguistic capital, particularly manifest in the first years of schooling when the understanding and use of language are the major points of leverage for teachers' assessments, never ceases to be felt: style is always taken into account, implicitly or explicitly, at every level of the educational system and, to a varying extent, in all university careers, even scientific ones. Moreover, language is not simply an instrument of communication: it also provides, together with richer or poorer vocabulary, a more or less complex system of categories, so that the capacity to decipher and manipulate complex structures, whether logical or aesthetic, depends partly on the complexity of the language transmitted by the family. *It follows logically that the educational mortality rate can only increase as one moves towards the classes most distant from scholarly language*" (p. 73).

[Emphasis added]

As such, students from poor or working class families are more likely to experience "educational mortality" than students from upper and middle class families since the language spoken in their families tends to be the "most distant" from the scholarly language spoken in formal school settings. Coleman and Hoffer (1987) posit

that the apparent lack of cultural capital among minority groups may negatively impact academic performance and hinder social mobility. Although Bourdieu primarily focuses on differences in social classes, other scholars have expanded the concept of cultural capital to include knowledge of appropriate dress, language, social roles and etiquette, etc. (Ogbu, 1988). In addition, cultural capital also includes shared knowledge of events, institutions, arts, etc.

Native Capital

The concept of *native capital* was introduced by Ward (2005) in a case study involving three cohorts of American Indian students attending three high schools—public, private, and tribally controlled—on or near the Northern Cheyenne reservation in Montana. Using a mixed-methodological research design, including ethnography and surveys, she examined the relationship between family, community and academic achievement among Northern Cheyenne high school students over a period of three years.

Building on the concepts of social and cultural capital, Ward uses the concept of *native capital* as a theoretical framework to understand how American Indians “adapt and create new responses to their participation in modern American institutions, particularly schooling” (p. 52). Ward defines the concept of *native capital* as:

The cultural resources of native peoples, the particular ways in which American Indian community members internalize tribal values and orientations, engage in social relations and cultural practices, and develop skills and abilities needed to achieve success within their communities (p. 53)

One of the findings in her study was that American Indians who reside in rural reservation communities live in a “double contradiction.” The first contradiction is that although Indians are culturally marginalized from the mainstream culture and Indian communities maintain a certain distance from the capitalist way of life commonly espoused in America, Indians participate in “both American institutions (such as the school and labor market) and the institutions indigenous to their communities” (p. 52). American Indians exist in a unique space between American society and tribal culture. As culturally marginalized participants in an expanding capitalist economy, American Indians have been able to adapt and find creative ways to “maintain elements of tribal culture and economic structures” (i.e., natural resources, tribal traditions) in spite of this expanding enterprise (p. 52).

The second contradiction is that while Indian people seek to maintain (in various degrees) their cultural values and practices by placing an emphasis on the production of cultural and natural resources, there is “a de-emphasis of personal accumulation of wealth for prestige” (p. 52). The contradiction is that this occurs within a capitalist system that is based on the idea of winners or losers. Instead of accumulating wealth for personal gain, community members exchange cultural and natural resources and redistribute this wealth within the tribal context so everyone benefits to some degree. Wards notion of *native capital* suggests that there is the “potential for resistance to assimilation and incorporation” into a capitalistic system (p. 53). The cultural well being of the tribe within a capitalistic society, therefore, is integral to the native capital concept. Using the concept of native capital will be important in this study given that it takes into account the cultural values of Indian people as they participate in Americanized institutions such

as educational school systems. Specifically, this concept will help to illuminate the particular values that are important to Indian people that may contrast with values that are important in mainstream society.

Comparing Native Capital and Cultural Capital

Although Ward's definition of *native capital* is built upon the concepts of cultural and social capital, there are some distinct differences. For example, Ward states that an individual's social status on a reservation "may be related to personal achievements, such as educational or occupational accomplishments, skills, or traditional knowledge...but an individual's social prestige is also affected by membership within his or her own extended family, the traditionality or honor of the family, and the resources at their disposal" (p. 127). Native capital, then, contrasts with Bourdieu's definition of *cultural capital* given that social status and mobility within tribal communities is not always determined by educational achievements. While cultural capital (i.e., educational credentials) maybe important in the larger mainstream context, this may not always be true in the tribal community context. In tribal communities, ones relationship to his or her extended family and cultural values is an essential component of native capital. In short, native capital in the mainstream society may have less currency in tribal communities and vice versa. This concept is useful to analyze the data in such way that will capture subtle nuances of Indian life that may otherwise go undetected using the cultural capital theory as defined by Bourdieu. For this study, the concept of native capital will be the primary lens through which the data will be analyzed and interpreted.

To Ward's credit, she used a mixed-method model in her study by adding qualitative data that sheds light on important contextual factors such as family,

community and cultural aspects. This addresses the criticism by Native scholars such as Brayboy (1999) who stated that the problem of conventional mainstream retention models in explaining Native American student attrition patterns is that they ignore contextual or situational issues. These models generally do not consider family relationships, cultural practices, or community relations that have been found to be critical factors in the experiences of Native American students. Ward makes a point of departure from previous mainstream models by looking beyond strictly quantitative characteristics such as GPA and income and incorporates a qualitative approach as a complimentary way to highlight important variables that quantitative methods may minimize or overlook. This study argues that one such variable that could easily be overlooked is the concept of giving back given its subjectivity and ambiguity. Therefore, like Ward posited in her study of the schooling experiences of American Indians, the concept of *native capital* will be very useful in this study given that social phenomena such as the concept of giving back is in many ways difficult to measure.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was determined to be the most appropriate model to investigate the experiences of Native American students and the concept of giving back. According to Creswell (1998), the qualitative researcher “builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 15). Crazy Bull (1997, as cited in Inglebret, 2001) asserted that qualitative research methods offer a means to describe and enhance understanding in a holistic manner that validates Native ways of knowing. Concomitantly, the concept of *giving back* in the Native American context is a multifaceted phenomenon and a

qualitative approach is the most effective way to capture the “complex, holistic picture” of this phenomenon. In addition, both Pavel (1992) and Tierney (1991) contend that qualitative research methods are highly effective with regard to understanding the educational experiences of Native American students.

Second, there is a paucity of literature about the post-graduate experiences of Native American students, which is at the heart of this study. As such, this study employed the use of personal interviews to document the “personal narratives and experiences” from the vantage point of Native American degree recipients. Reinharz (1992) asserted that “interviewing offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (p. 19). Personal interviews allowed for a full description which includes “thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas, situations that portray what comprises an experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47). In short, personal interviews empowered the participants to tell their own story.

Third, one of the hallmarks of qualitative research is that it permits the use of open-ended questions. Open ended questions give the participants the flexibility and freedom to let their own voices be heard--which is the strength of this study. Open-ended questions not only help to establish a connection between the researcher and participant, it also allows opportunities for spontaneous questions and points of clarification during the interview that may prove to be invaluable (Reinharz, 1992). Furthermore, open-ended questions create a comfortable space for both the researcher and participant to engage in the mutual construction of research material (Reinharz, 1992).

Finally, qualitative research is the most culturally compatible way to explore American Indian issues given that indigenous peoples have historically used oral

storytelling to pass on cultural values and teachings to children (Pipes, Westby, & Inglebret, 1993). Storytelling thus serves as a means to share sacred stories and traditions to new generations (Pipes, Westby, & Inglebret, 1993). Flynn (1996) stated that Indian people have endured “generations of being silenced, being unheard, and names the ongoing contemporary struggle to be acknowledged” (p. 2). Qualitative research thus serves as a method of inquiry that is culturally congruent with American Indian storytelling and allows the voices of the participants in this study were front and center.

Population and Sample

Purposive sampling was the primary sampling method used to select the participants. The objective of purposive sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study (Patton, 1990). Determining the appropriate sample size in qualitative research is rife with ambiguities (Patton, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that:

In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampling units; thus, *redundancy* is the primary criteria (p. 202).

For this study, twelve participants were determined to be appropriate sample size. However, if there was evidence that more exploration was needed for redundancy to be reached, the sample size would have increased. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) participants self-identify as Native American, (2) participants must have earned a bachelor’s degree from a four-year and graduate public or private institution, and (3) the year of degree completion. Participants that obtained two-year

degrees from community colleges and then transferred to a four-year institution and graduated with a bachelor's degree were included in this study.

The participants were selected based on the year of degree completion for two reasons: 1) to explore the educational experiences of participants that attended and graduated from college during varied periods of time; 2) to explore the experiences of participants not only through college but also their experiences after degree attainment. The twelve participants were loosely categorized into three groups based on the relative years they attended and graduated from college. Each group consists of four participants for a total of twelve participants. Group one is identified as Recent Graduates (RG), group two is identified as Experienced Workers (EW), and group three is identified as Respected Elders (RE). Participants that completed their bachelor's degree within approximately the past five to six years are identified as Recent Graduates. Participants that completed their bachelor's degree within approximately the past ten to twenty years are identified as Experienced Workers. Participants that completed their bachelor's degree approximately thirty plus years ago are identified as Respected Elders. The purpose for organizing the participants into three groups based on varied periods of time in which they attended and graduated from college is two-fold: 1) to shed light on the similarities and differences of the participants within each specific group that attended and graduated from college during generally the same time period, and 2) to illuminate the intergenerational similarities and differences among the three groups that attended and graduated from college during wide-ranging periods of time.

Procedures and Methods of the Study

Participants for this study were selected through personal networking and solicitation ads posted on selected Native American student and alumni listservs at selective four-year and graduate institutions in the Pacific Northwest. Native American student centers and Multicultural student centers at mainstream institutions were contacted and the permission to post a solicitation ad to recruit potential participants was obtained. Email listservs were an effective way to reach a large number of potential candidates in a short period of time given that many Native American faculty, students, and staff now actively use email listservs that are available through the university to advertise and promote various events such as pow wows, upcoming conferences, and other educational information. In cases where there was a listserv “doorkeeper” that monitored the content of email correspondences, the solicitation ad was emailed to the identified person and requested that the solicitation ad was posted on the listserv at his or her discretion.

Secondly, names of several potential interview candidates were obtained through personal networking at cultural and academic events such as pow wows or conferences and workshops held at local colleges and universities. Networking usually occurred with several Native American faculty, staff, students, alumni and also community members in the local area. Personal networking was an effective way to make contacts and secure interviews with participants because the informal nature of personal networking is common in tribal communities. The combination of personal networking and contacting various Native American student centers at various institutions was an effective means of obtaining a list of potential participants because it resulted in a snowball effect. The snowball effect occurred in two ways. First, when a potential interview candidate

responded to my emails, a follow-up email was sent to explain my background (familial, cultural and educational), the purpose of my research, and how they could make a valuable contribution. This resulted in a relatively large “participant pool” from which to draw from (Seidman, 1998, p. 41). Specifically, this “participant pool” enabled me to evaluate and select twelve participants most suitable for this study. The twelve participants were evaluated and selected based on the following criteria: college or university attended, tribal affiliation, year of degree completion, degree major, and gender. Through this process, a sample that included a relative balance of both males and females that represented a diverse number of tribal nations and degree holders from a variety of fields of study was obtained.

Potential participants were primarily contacted by email to solicit their participation in the study. Once contact was established, each respondent was invited to participate in the study. For those that agreed to participate in the study and verbally consented to be interviewed, I scheduled a time to meet each respondent in person at an agreed upon place to conduct the face-to-face interviews. Occasional phone calls were made for the purpose of finalizing the interview schedule. Virtually all of the participants indicated that they wanted to be interviewed because of the nature of my research topic. Many felt that by consenting to an interview, they would be helping out future generations of Native students by telling their stories. After obtaining IRB approval (January 19, 2007), the interviews began in February 2007 through May 2007.

Instrumentation

One on one, semi-structured interviews was the primary method of data collection. The impetus for using an open-ended interview approach is “having an

interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 1998, p. 3). The rationale for choosing the open-ended semi-structured interview approach was that it allows for a more natural, free-flowing conversation to occur between the interviewer and participant, yet flexible enough to gain a detailed understanding of the topic under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). All but one interview was conducted in person. The only exception is that one interview was conducted over the phone due to scheduling and financial constraints. Four interviews occurred on a university campus in an office or vacant room; three interviews occurred at the participant’s home; and four occurred at the participant’s work-site in an office. The one exception is the over-the-phone interview which the researcher and participant were separated by distance. Interviews ranged from 70 to 120 minutes in length. Respondents were informed that their anonymity will be ensured and any identifiable information will be withheld in the final report. Participants were given an informed consent form prior to the start of the interviews. Participants were given sufficient time to read the consent form and to ask questions if needed. Participants were asked to sign the consent form as an official acknowledgement that they understood what they read and more importantly, understood that their participation was completely voluntary. Participants were also asked to complete a general demographic sheet to collect information relevant to this research including the year of degree completion, tribal affiliation, institution(s) attended, degree major, etc. After the general demographic sheet was filled out, the audiotape recorder was turned on and the interview ensued.

All participants were asked the same interview questions from an interview sheet, which included a total of eight primary questions and nine sub questions. The first five

primary interview questions were designed to contextualize the educational experiences of the participants in the following stages: 1) K-12 experiences, 2) transition to college, 3) college life experience, and 4) transition after college. The remaining three primary interview questions specifically focus on defining the concept of giving back and the reward and struggles of giving back through the voices of the Native participants. Field notes were used to jot down important field notes during the interview session (i.e., long pauses, body language). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

A total of seven institutions were represented in this study. The institutions represented in this study were primarily located in the Pacific Northwest and secondarily in the Midwest. Of the twelve participants, ten attended institutions in the Pacific Northwest and two attended institutions in the Midwest. All but one of the institutions is comprised of a predominantly white student body with an enrollment of approximately 75% to 90%. The Native American student enrollment at all of the institutions ranged from .4% to 3%. A four-year liberal arts institution located in the Midwest was the only exception with a Native American student population of 18%, which is one of the highest non-Tribal College student enrollment percentages in the U.S. Institutional type and size varied including public colleges and universities, doctoral-granting institutions, land-grant institutions, a private Catholic institution, comprehensive master-degree granting institutions, and a liberal arts college.

Analysis of Data

The member checking technique was employed as the interview transcriptions were emailed to each respective participant for review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants were asked to review their own interview transcriptions and to provide

feedback, clarification, and/or correction if needed. This helped to ensure that the raw data was accurate and to ensure its validity and trustworthiness. The method of analysis that was used in this study is called the *constant comparative method* recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967). As a first step, the interviewer removed all identifying information from the transcripts to maintain confidentiality. Initially, the researcher reviewed the transcripts to gain a holistic impression of the responses followed by a succession of readings to collapse the data into brief statements that were then coded into categories. After grouping the preliminary categories for each participant on a sheet of paper, the categories for each participant were then rearranged under broad categories according to the appropriate group for further analysis (Recent Graduates, Experienced Workers, and Respected Elders). Additional reviews were conducted to ensure that each of the coded categories within each of the three groups was broadly supported by the data. If support was insufficient, the category was removed and data was realigned within other coded categories within each group. I also re-listened to several of the interviews to regain a sense of the tenor and nuances of the conversations. Categories and associated data were re-analyzed and realigned within each group. At this point, further review of the data and emergent categories occurred to identify deeper, overarching themes that encompassed a number of the categories. As key themes emerged from the data, the final step of analysis was the development and refinement of the emerging themes.

After the data analysis was complete, the resultant themes for the three groups were identified. The emergent themes are presented below.

The themes for the Recent Graduates were:

- *K-12 experiences*: encountering racism, challenges in the community and school, desire to leave reservation, and positive family influence.
- *Transition to College*: personal support, the positive impact of the Native American student center, overall size of high school, and cultural adjustment.
- *College Life Experience*: academic difficulties, the positive impact of the Native American student center, student involvement, overcoming multiple barriers, and community/ family discouragement.
- *Transition after College*: serving tribal communities and becoming role models.
- *Defining Giving Back*: giving back is defined by the community, giving back means leadership and role modeling, giving back is providing access, and the notion of giving back does not change.
- *Giving Back: Rewards and Struggles*: The primary reward was being role models. The struggles included becoming change agents in Native-serving educational institutions, the decision to not move back home and community/generational tension.

The themes for the Experienced Workers were:

- *K-12 experiences*: educational challenges at rural schools, positive family influence and high expectations, lack of support and negative reinforcement, desire to leave reservation, overcoming adversity, and peers dropping out of school.
- *Transition to College*: freedom from the reservation and personal support.

- *College Life Experience*: lack of academic preparedness of students from rural schools, the positive impact of the Native American student center, and community pressure.
- *Transition after College*: challenges reentering tribal community and the help of a community mentor.
- *Defining Giving Back*: giving back means sacrificing for the people and community, giving back is an obligation, giving back is about the Native youth, and giving back changes over time.
- *Giving Back: Rewards and Struggles*: finding a healthy balance with work, family and community; strained community relationships, and do I stay on the rez or do I leave?

The themes for the Respected Elders were:

- *K-12 experiences*: walking in two worlds: impact of the school system on identity, positive family influence and expectations, negative reinforcement, and encountering racism.
- *Transition to College*: difficult transitions to college and nonlinear paths to college.
- *College Life Experience*: motivational factors, financial barriers, and the lack of academic preparedness and study skills.
- *Transition after College*: serving as tribal leaders and continuing on to graduate school.
- *Defining Giving Back*: giving back is tied to Native culture, giving back to the community and giving back as a motivational factor.

- *Giving Back: Rewards and Struggles*: The primary rewarding theme was advocating for the people. The theme associated with the struggles of giving back was strained community relationships.

In the following chapter, the individual profiles of the twelve participants are presented. The twelve individual profiles are organized in three groups: Recent Graduates, Experienced Workers, and Respected Elders. Each group consists of four participants. To ensure the confidentiality of each participant, the participants were identified by group name (Recent Graduates, Experienced Workers, Respected Elders) and were assigned a number between 1 and 4. Specifically, the four participants in the Recent Graduates group are identified as RG1, RG2, RG3, and RG4, respectively. The four participants in the Experienced Workers group are identified as EW1, EW2, EW3, and EW4. The four participants in the Respected Elders group are identified as RE1, RE2, RE3, and RE4.

The results of the study are presented in a group format. Specifically, the entire educational and life experiences of the Recent Graduates are fully presented first, followed by the Experienced Workers and Respected Elders. The educational and life experiences of each of the three groups are presented in six stages: 1) K-12 Experiences, 2) Transition to College, 3) College Life Experience, 4) Transition after College, 5) Defining Giving Back, and 6) Giving Back: Rewards and Struggles.

Following the presentation of the results, intergenerational comparisons are made between the three groups.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter illuminates the experiences that each participant shared throughout their educational and life journeys. A total of twelve Native American degree recipients of four year and graduate institutions were interviewed for this study. The twelve participants were loosely categorized into three groups, with each group consisting of four participants. Group one is identified as Recent Graduates (RG), group two is identified as Experienced Workers (EW), and group three is identified as Respected Elders (RE). The four participants in the Recent Graduates (RG) group are identified as RG1, RG2, RG3, and RG4, respectively. The four participants in the Experienced Workers (EW) group are identified as EW1, EW2, EW3, and EW4. The four participants in the Respected Elders (RE) group are identified as RE1, RE2, RE3, and RE4.

Each group (Recent Graduates, Experienced Workers, and Respected Elders) had an equal representation of two males and two females in each group for a total of six males and six females in the study. Presented below are the individual profiles of the twelve participants.

The Participants

All participants are enrolled members of federally recognized tribes. The participants in the study represented nine different tribes from five different states. Six males and six females were represented in this study. All attended mainstream institutions as undergraduate students.

Recent Graduates

Three (RG1, RG3, RG4) of the four participants indicated that their ages ranged from 23-30 years old. Participant RG2's age ranged from 30-40 years old. The participants received their bachelor's degrees between the 2002-2005 school years.

- Participant RG1 was raised on a small rural Indian reservation in the Northwest. He attended and graduated from a public high school. He attended a large land-grant research university (out of state) right after high school. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in Psychology in 2005. His father did not attend college; his mother received a two-year degree at a tribal college. He currently works for an Indian-owned business in a large urban city. He plans to go back to graduate school but wants to gain more work experience.
- Participant RG2 was raised on a rural Indian reservation in the Midwest. During elementary school, his family moved to large metropolitan area on the East Coast for a brief period. After a few months, his family moved back to the reservation where he eventually graduated from a public high school. He became a father at age 18 and he did not attend college right after high school. As a non-traditional student, he attended a private Catholic university and graduated with a bachelor's degree in Theology (major)/History (minor) in 2002. His father graduated with a bachelor's degree from an American Indian art school in the Southwest. His mother attended multiple institutions and graduated with a bachelor's degree in Nursing. He is currently working full-time and is also pursuing a master's degree part-time.
- Participant RG3 was primarily raised on a rural Indian reservation in the Pacific Northwest. She attended a BIA-funded tribal school during her grade school

- years. At age 15, with the support of her mother, she transferred to a private Catholic prep school in a large urban city where she eventually graduated. She received a full-ride athletic scholarship to play basketball at a Division I university located in the Pacific Northwest. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Comparative Literature (major)/ Communications (minor)/ American Indian studies (minor) in 2003. Her mother attended a tribal college for two years and her father is currently working on a PhD degree in Clinical Psychology. She is currently serving as a director of a tribal program on her home reservation. She plans to go to law school and has a desire to run for tribal council down the road.
- Participant RG4 was raised on a rural Indian reservation in the Pacific Northwest. She attended and graduated from a public high school. After high school, she attended an out of state, Liberal Arts College located in the Midwest. This institution has one of the highest Native student populations in the country at 18%. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Psychology in 2003. Both of her parents are college graduates. Her mother has a bachelor's degree and her father has a master's degree. She is currently serving as a Native American student recruiter at a land-grant university in the Pacific Northwest. She plans to go back to graduate school.

Experienced Workers

Participant ages ranged from 30-40 years old. The participants received their bachelor's degrees between the 1992-1994 school years.

- Participant EW1 was raised on a rural Indian reservation in the Pacific Northwest. He attended and graduated from a public high school. After high school, he

- attended a mid-sized university approximately 100 miles from his reservation. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in Political Science. He was not only a first-generation college student but was the first person in his family to graduate from *high school*. He is currently serving as the tribal council chairman of his tribe.
- Participant EW2 was raised on a rural Indian reservation in the Pacific Northwest. She attended and graduated from a public high school. After high school, she attended a land-grant research university (out of state) roughly 40 miles away from her reservation. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in General Science in 1992. Both of her parents attended college but did not graduate. She has served as a director of a tribal program on her home reservation for over ten years.
 - Participant EW3 was raised on a rural Indian reservation in the Pacific Northwest. She attended and graduated from a public high school. After high school, she attended a large land-grant research university in her home state. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education in 1993. She was a first-generation college student and the first in her family to graduate with a bachelor's degree. She is currently serving as a tribal program director on her home reservation.
 - Participant EW4 was born in a large urban city in the Pacific Northwest. At the age of two, his family moved to a small rural community roughly 15 miles away from his home reservation. In high school, he moved to a city in the Pacific Northwest where he graduated from a public high school. He did not immediately attend college after high school. He later attended a community college and earned a two-year degree and then transferred to a public university. He

graduated with a bachelor's degree in Education in 1994 and he went on to earn a master's degree in 1997. His father did not attend college and his mother has a two-year degree from a community college. He is currently working full-time at a public university and is currently pursuing a PhD part-time.

Respected Elders

All participants indicated that their ages exceeded 55 years or older. Participants received their bachelor's degrees between the 1961-1984 school years.

- Participant RE1 was raised in a small rural community near her home reservation in the Pacific Northwest. She attended and graduated from a public high school. After high school, she attended a public university in her home state. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in French in 1972. She was a first generation college student and the first in her family to graduate from college. She also attended graduate school but did not complete the program. Both of her parents attended college but did not graduate. She later went to law school and graduated with a Juris Doctorate in 1981. She is currently working in the tribal court system on her home reservation.
- Participant RE2 began her early years living on a rural Indian reservation until age six. Her parents then moved to a large urban city in the Pacific Northwest where she graduated from a public high school. After high school, she worked for a large industrial company for several years. She later became actively involved in the Urban Indian center and eventually relocated back to her home reservation to live and work among her people. While working full-time, she attended college for the first time at the age of 40 and graduated with a bachelor's degree

in 1984. She also attended graduate school but did not complete the program.

She has been a longtime director for various tribal programs and has also served on the board of trustees for a tribal college. She indicated that she will be retiring soon.

- Participant RE3 was raised on a small rural Indian reservation in the Pacific Northwest. He attended and graduated from a public high school. He received a full-ride athletic scholarship to play basketball for a college in the Pacific-8 (which later became the Pac-10) conference. After one-year, he transferred to a 4-year college closer to home where he competed in track and field. After two years, he transferred to another 4-year college (out of state) after being offered a full-ride track and field scholarship. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in Art and Anthropology in 1961 and he went on to earn a master's degree in 1974. He was a first generation college student and the first in his family to graduate from college. His mother and fathers highest level of formal education was the sixth grade. During this lifetime, he has been employed in several jobs both on and off the reservation including serving on the tribal council. He is now retired.
- Participant RE4 was raised on a small rural Indian reservation in the Pacific Northwest. He attended and graduated from a public high school. He did not immediately attend college after high school. He later attended a community college for a short period and then transferred to a 4-year college where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in Anthropology in 1974. He went on to earn master's (1974) and PhD degrees (2004) at two public land-grant institutions, both in the field of Interdisciplinary Studies. He has lived and worked among his

people for many years including serving on the tribal council as a member and chairman. He currently serves in a dual capacity as a part-time faculty member and administrator at a public university.

RECENT GRADUATES

Section One: K-12 Experience

This section describes the emergent themes in the K-12 experiences of the Recent Graduates. The themes among this group included encountering racism, challenges in the community and school, desire to leave reservation, and positive family influence.

Encountering Racism

One of the most frequently cited factors among this group was dealing with some form of racism in the K-12 educational system both on the reservation and in urban areas. To illustrate, Participant RG2 recalls how he first experienced racism when his mother abruptly decided to move him and his siblings to a large urban city on the east coast when he was five years old. He stated,

[At the new school] I was the minority of all the minorities in the school and . . . going from a tribal school setting to a urban school setting was very, very interesting and maybe even hurtful [*Laughs*]. I was the only one who had long hair and so I recalled being the brunt of a lot of girl jokes.

Feeling lonely and alienated in this new environment, he was faced with the decision of fight or flight. He chose the latter. “I do remember leaving school when I was in Kindergarten, just leaving school right in the middle of class, left the school and never went back.” Shortly thereafter, his mother eventually moved the family back to the reservation. Interestingly, he mentioned that “when I came back to school on the reservation, in elementary, I found myself ahead, just far ahead than my peers” from an educational standpoint.

Participant RG1 reported that his school practiced a subtle form of segregation by separating the Indian kids from the white kids based on ambiguous test results. The students who performed poorly on the test were placed in an academic improvement program called Chapter 6. He stated,

We had this thing called Chapter 6...it was this program where they would send kids that weren't doing that well in school, they would just send them there. I don't recall ever being tested for it, but they just sent all the Indians there, or all the Indians that were in my class, we were all sent to that program. It was for kids that couldn't read or do math well. I don't remember how we were selected, I just remember one day there was a list of kids, [and] they [teachers] were like, "Oh all you kids have to go to Chapter 6." So we all went. I guess we would do reading practices and math practices and things like that.

Interestingly, he does not recall seeing "any white kids" in the Chapter 6 program, only Indian kids. As a result, this racial separation had a negative affect on his confidence. "I just always felt like I wasn't as smart as the other kids. Yeah, my whole experience was just really feeling like I wasn't as smart as the other kids, especially the white kids."

Challenges in the Community and School

In addition to dealing with racism, several of the participants discussed other challenges in the community and the school. Participant RG2 specifically talked about how difficult it was to see his classmates, many of whom were his cousins, drop out of school during each subsequent year. He explained,

I remember having about twenty classmates when I was in sixth grade and when I got to junior high school, some of them had begun dropping out already. I

remember my high school experience ... the class room size just dwindling until there were only 6 of us who graduated.

Some of the factors that contributed to the high attrition rate included alcoholism and teen pregnancy. He recalled, "I remember some of my classmates of course they became young parents. One of my friends, he and his girlfriend had their first son when they were in eighth grade."

While most of these participants' shared powerful stories of how they had to overcome various challenges such as dealing with racism and staying focused in school, one participant (RG3) faced a painful battle within her own tribal community. During her 9th grade year, Participant RG3 made the very difficult decision to move off the reservation and transfer to a private, Catholic prep high school in a large urban city. At first, she was torn between leaving her family and friends "because when you grow up that way, you're with your family and friends all the time and then not being able to see them until the weekend, that's really hard." However, she thought that going to a private school was an opportunity she could not pass up. She was particularly impressed with "all the great things they had to offer. They had this glamorous big gym, so many things there, including their art program, drama club. They just had so much going on and all these people were just so involved." Because her family could not afford to pay for the tuition cost to attend the expensive private school, she decided to ask her tribal council for financial assistance. She recalls,

I must have been 15, 16...I stood in front of our tribal council during a general membership meeting and I asked them why there isn't any support for young tribal people that want to get a good education. And there are some people in the

back, some elders even that stood up and said why give me money when they know I'm just going to drop out. They said, "Well, one of my grandkids, they tried to go to private school and they dropped out by their sophomore year. What are you now, freshman, sophomore?" I said, "Well, I'm a sophomore." He said, "Well you're going to drop out by at least next year."

Although this was a painful experience for her, particularly hearing the caustic words from some of the people she looked up to, she became even more determined to prove her detractors wrong and used the experience as motivation. She commented, "I took [their words] to heart and that just made me push even harder. I always tell people when they do push against you, it just makes you fight back harder because I turned around and became student of the year of that whole district."

Desire to Leave the Reservation

In parallel, each of the participants also shared other motivational factors along their educational journeys. Two of the participants (RG1, RG4) mentioned the desire to leave the reservation as a key motivation to go to college. Participant RG1 asserted,

I really wanted to leave the reservation and go experience other things. You know on the rez, they have two worlds, one on the reservation and one off the reservation. I really wanted to venture off and really just live somewhere else and experience living somewhere else so I really wanted to go out of state because I pretty much got accepted to all the in-state schools.

The desire to leave the reservation was also emphasized by Participant RG4. She asserted, "I knew I didn't want to be on the reservation at that time. I just turned 18 and I wanted to get out and see parts of the world." Participant RG4's also reported that

another reason why she wanted to leave the reservation was to escape the pressure of being a member of a prominent Indian family in her tribal community. She explained, where I'm from, my family's a really popular family and my dad was on the tribal council and he was tribal chairmen for 14 years and that brings a lot of pressure, you know. Wherever you're at, you're judged, or I felt that way. And so, I wanted some amount of freedom I guess is what I wanted. I kind of wanted to cut loose [*Laughs*] when I was 18.

Positive Family Influence

The participants also mentioned several people who were influential to them during their early years. The most influential people in their lives were typically their parents and extended family members, many of which went to great lengths to encourage them to pursue a postsecondary education. Participant RG3 was virtually groomed to go to college given that several family members were college educated and they went out of their way to expose her to various college campuses at an early age. She reported, "My grandparents, my dad, my aunts and uncles, they always took me to colleges and universities, they mostly took me to the [large public university in the Northwest]." She also indicated that her father, who is currently working on his doctorate degree, had a strong influence on her educational aspirations growing up.

Participant RG4 was also raised in a family with an impressive academic pedigree. She commented,

both of my parents are educated, my mom has her bachelor's and my dad has his master's, which is also very, very rare. And they're both Native and actually my

father's side of the family is very highly educated. My aunts are all professors and nurses and PhDs and all that good stuff.

Section Two: Transition to College

This section focuses on the experiences of Recent Graduates as they transitioned from their home community to college. Three (RG1, RG3, RG3) of the participants matriculated to college right after high school while participant RG2 gained a few years of work experience before going to college. The themes among the Recent Graduates included personal support, the positive impact of the Native American student center, overall size of high school, and cultural adjustment.

Personal Support

The experiences of recent graduates concerning their transition to college are varied. The most common factor among this group was the personal support they received during their initial transition to college. Personal support in this context is someone who encouraged or aided the participants in some way or another. The personal support that each participant received came from a variety of people who had influential relationships with the participants. The participants reported that they received personal support from extended family (RG3), an employer or boss (RG2), and parents (RG4). To illustrate the essence of personal support, participant (RG4) described how her mother went out of her way to introduce her to new people upon her arrival at the college and it made all the difference. She observed,

my mom was really helpful, she drove me down there [to college] which is like 20 hours. My mother said to the first Native person she saw walking by, "Hey come here, what's your name, where you from?" And she [the stranger] was an

Athabaskan from Alaska, and she was a freshman. And [my mother] goes, “This is my daughter.” And then we were best friends, that girl and me. We were both from out of town and that was it.

While most participants received some degree of personal support during their initial transition, one participant (RG1) lamented about the time he received a negative reaction from his own extended family when they found out he was going out of state to attend college. He reported,

I noticed before I went to college, when I was in high school, I planned on leaving and I got this negative backlash from my family because I was leaving and my family was . . . I don’t know why, but my family kind of took it in a negative way, like I was abandoning the family . . . not so much my mom and dad and sisters, but my extended family, my grandparents, my cousins, my uncles and aunts. They kind of saw it as something negative so they spread a lot of rumors and stuff like that.

The Positive Impact of the Native American Student Center

Another frequently cited response among this group was the critical role that a student center specifically for Native students played during their transition. Three of the four participants (RG1, RG3, RG4) discussed the positive impact that these types of student centers had on them not only during their initial transition to college but throughout their college careers. In addition, the participants also explained how it was important for them to see other Native students on campus early on during their initial transition. In fact, one participant (RG3) explained that during her initial visit to the university campus, she essentially based her decision to attend that particular university

based on the first conversation she had with a few Native students she talked with on campus. She commented,

they [Native students] told me how strong the campus is in the community and how it's very strong for Indian people and . . . they just kind of laid it out for me. All the clubs that were there, what they do, they have this big powwow, and I thought, wow that's something I need because I need to provide myself a base, a home away from home. And if there isn't that kind of base, then it really makes it hard for you. So I thought well, this is an easy choice; I just want to come here... and it's six hours away from home.

Overall Size of High School

Two (RG3, RG4) of the four participants reported that they had relatively smooth transitions to college while the other two experienced more challenges. Participant RG3 explained that the size of the high school she attended aided her adjustment to the university campus located in a large metropolitan city. She explained, "It was actually pretty easy because being at [preparatory high school], it was a pretty big school, not too big, but big enough for me." It should be noted that Participant RG3 attended a private Catholic preparatory school in an urban city. In contrast, Participant RG1 reported that it was difficult transitioning from a small, rural high school on the reservation to the large university campus. The sheer size of the student population was daunting. He reported, "In my high school, there was about 130 kids in my whole school, my class was like 17, and then I came to [college] and my class is like 3500."

Cultural Adjustment

Another difference was their perception of transitioning specifically to a predominantly white institution. Two (RG3, RG4) of the four participants who made a smooth transition to a mainstream institution did not directly mention it in a positive or negative way. As such, it appears that experiencing culture shock among this group was not a salient factor in terms of transitioning to a predominately white institution. Only one participant (RG1) mentioned having to make some level of cultural adjustment during their transition. However, ironically, the cultural adjustment was not necessarily to the mainstream white culture, but rather, adjusting to non-white students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This participant explained,

there was not a lot of diversity on the rez. You were either white or you were Indian. And so I started meeting African-Americans and Mexicans and Arabs and Samoans and so I think that was kind of my experience, just that diversity of not only whites but other races. I really saw it as an opportunity to just meet different people from different cultures and stuff like that. So I really embraced it.

Although it is clear that each participant had to adjust to a campus environment that was distinctly different from their home communities, it appears that the adjustment from a cultural perspective was not a major stumbling block during their initial transition. Personal support enabled most of the participants to make the formidable transition into the new college environment. Other factors that hindered or facilitated the transition to college included family criticism, overall size of high school, and the orientation to the Native American student centers.

Section Three: College Life Experience

This section describes the unique experiences of the Recent Graduates during their college years. The participants identified several factors that either assisted or hindered them during the process of degree attainment. The themes among the Recent Graduates included academic difficulties, the positive impact of the Native American student center, student involvement, overcoming multiple barriers, and community/family discouragement.

Academic Difficulties

Several (RG1, RG2, RG4) of the participants experienced academic difficulties in college. Keeping up in the classroom was a daunting task. Participant RG1 discussed the academic challenges he encountered during his first semester. He recalled, “my first semester was really hard. The way you are taught in high school and you come to college and it is totally different and harder. It was the test taking, the amount of work you have to do. It was a little overwhelming.” Participant RG2, who did not attend college right after high school, attributed his academic struggles to being out of school for so long. He stated that, “the hardest thing to overcome was getting back into an academic train of mind. I think that was the biggest challenge, being out of school and then jumping back into it.” Participant RG4, who described herself as a “social butterfly” in college, blamed her early academic struggles on an overactive social life. She remembered, “we were throwing the parties for the seniors, that’s how bad it was. It wasn’t all education based....we had too much fun. I was one maybe out of the twenty; there was probably only 3 of us that weren’t on academic probation that first semester.”

Positive Impact of the Native American Student Center

Three (RG1, RG3, RG4) of the four participants expressed how the Native American Student Center provided a strong support during their college experience. Participant RG3 specifically emphasized the importance of making a connection with the Native student groups associated with the First Nations center. She recalled, “if I didn’t get a hold of that group, I think it would have made it a lot tougher.” RG1 shared a story about a time when he was having trouble getting into a math class. After seeking help from several campus departments and getting no where, he turned to the Native student center for help. He vividly remembered how the Native American retention counselor responded to his dilemma:

The retention counselor just dropped everything and went over to the math department and talked to them and they ended up letting me in. It was kind of cool that he was kind of busy and had a lot of things to do and just dropped everything and helped me out and got me to that class. That just really made me feel like I had that support.

Student Involvement

Participant RG1 and RG3 reported that being involved in several student leadership activities deeply enriched their college experience. Specifically, they each discussed how they were able to learn valuable social skills such as networking by becoming actively involved in various student groups on campus. Participant RG1 explained,

in college, I took a lot of leadership positions. I was chair of the powwow, co-chair of [student group], the Council of Multicultural Student Presidents and I started noticing the more I collaborated with other people and other groups, the

more it would benefit me and it would benefit them so I started getting that networking mindset and I started making friends everywhere. I just started taking all these leadership responsibilities and it started building me up as a leader. I had to go out and make speeches, presentations, proposals, stuff like that. I think that benefited me, writing proposals and doing presentations and networking with people and collaborating and delegating things to members and getting all that leadership experience.

Participant RG3's involvement with student groups was nearly identical to Participant RG1. She reported,

I really got involved with all the student groups. I got involved with the student senate [as the] representative for American Indians and then [with] the American Indian Student Commission Director. And then I was co-chair of [Native undergraduate student group], which is nice because we're always involved in organizing events, including the powwow, music groups and dinners, so we kept busy. And when you get into that, you just love doing it.

Overcoming Multiple Barriers

The participants identified several barriers that hindered them in college. The barriers that were mentioned included working full-time (RG2), procrastination (RG3), dealing with jealousy (RG1), family problems (RG2), low academic motivation and alcohol (RG4). An example of how a barrier can gradually snowball out of control and significantly impact academic performance can be found in the story of Participant RG4. Participant RG4's overactive social life resulted in a struggle with alcohol that eventually caused her to withdraw from college for a year. She explained, "I was burning out on my

social life. I wasn't failing anything like that my first two years but I wasn't pulling the grades and I was basically wasting my time." However, things began to spiral out of control and she finally realized she needed professional help. "I mean it all came together with my education that I was a social partier or whatever, and I think I got a DUI when I was 19 and I even went to treatment, outpatient treatment for two years." After taking a break for a year and sobering up, she returned back to the same college with renewed vigor and dedication. The change was dramatic. She reported,

I was on the Dean's List and actually tried again and pulled some really good grades in my last two years. I was sober and all that good stuff. That really correlates with my grades and going to school and everything...you could see it in my grades. Oh, this is exactly when I stopped drinking. I got straight A's.

Community/ Family Discouragement

Participant RG1's struggle came from the way he was perceived by his friends back in his home community. Instead of being supportive of him as a college student, some of his friends treated him with contempt after he left the community for college. He recalled,

when I went back home, back to the rez, people kind of treated me different. They were like, "Oh [he] just thinks he's better than everyone because he goes to college now." There was a lot of people that used to be my friends and they really didn't want to talk to me anymore, so that was kind of sad. I'm trying to do something good and people didn't see it that way. That was one thing that was kind of a drawback, but I just kept going....

Participant RG2 also had to face hurtful criticism from people close to him when he decided to go to college. He recalled how his own auntie viewed his decision to go to a private Catholic university with cynicism. He remembered, “One of my aunties said I would never make it in college; I would never make it in the university. It was too high class, too demanding.” Furthermore, he recalled, “she had a negative outlook for my future.” Even though he admitted it was painful to hear her words, he used her negativity as motivation to achieve his goal. “I think that was a motivation. I don’t like when people say things like that about me, and I felt inclined to prove her wrong.”

Section Four: Transition after College

This section describes the transitional experiences of the Recent Graduates after degree attainment. Several of the participants encountered various challenges after graduating. Some challenges involved tension within families or places of employment, while others occurred within tribal communities. The themes among the Recent Graduates included serving tribal communities and becoming role models.

Serving Tribal Communities

At the time of this study, all four of the recent graduates were working in jobs that either directly or indirectly served tribal communities. In their own ways, each of them described the work they are currently doing and how the work is connected to tribal communities. Participant RG1 landed a job working for a prominent Indian-owned business that is considered “one of the top Native- American companies in the country”. He explained that the company’s goal is to help “Native-Americans on a national level and international level and really making small, but impacts in the Native community.” Participant RG2 has worked as a tribal college instructor for two years and has also

worked for the national park service as a service ranger for several years during the summer. His work at the state park was particularly significant given that he was able to share certain aspects of history from a Native perspective. He stated, “at [the] State Park, I can say in the history of that park, I’m the first Native who has ever done the historical interpretation at the military side of the park. I’m the first Indian. And it feels so good.”

Becoming Role Models

Another finding among this group is the topic of being a role model or being “visible”. Participant RG3 explained the reason why it was important for him to work as a service ranger for the national park service is because it was a public position that enabled him to represent Indian people. He explained,

I felt a moral obligation to represent our Indian people because there’s so few in those fields. And I felt like a hero, honestly. When we would have school groups or colleges and institutions that would visit and there would be Indians there, I felt like I’m in the right place because they can see me.

After Participant RG4 graduated and returned home, she was surprised that her former principal asked her to speak to the high school kids. She observed,

I was even shocked that my [former high school] principal asked me to speak at some [high school program] things when I got home and I was like, “Why are you asking me? Where’s all these 4.0 students that were here.” And he told me that very little graduated within a reasonable amount of time. And I was shocked, I was like . . . I was average, I was nowhere near the top. But he called me for all kinds of things, to speak and I would say just a small handful of my friends that were in my area have graduated from college. And those same handful are

working on their master's. But other than that, every time I go back to the rez, maybe a few have tried, but that's it.

Participant RG1 recalled how he initially received criticism from his extended family and friends when he decided to leave for college but this all changed after he earned his degree. Ostensibly, he suddenly became the golden-boy that everyone admired. He remembered,

I noticed before I went to college, when I was in high school, I planned on leaving and I got this negative backlash from my family because I was leaving and my family was, I don't know why, but my family kind of took it in a negative way, like I was abandoning the family. Not so much my mom and dad and sisters, but my extended family, my grandparents, my cousins, my uncles and aunts, they kind of saw it as something negative so they spread a lot of rumors and stuff like that. I don't know why they took it negatively but after I graduated and went back home, all my aunts and uncles were like, "Oh we're so proud of you, we always brag about you all the time." They were like, "Yeah, my nephew, he just graduated from college." All my cousins were like, "Yeah, we have a cousin who graduated from college." Every time I go back there they're like, "Oh we're so proud of you." The same ones that were really negative before I left and then after I had a degree they were always telling me how proud of me they are.

Section Five: Defining Giving Back

This section seeks to illustrate the ways in which Recent Graduates define the concept of giving back. The themes among the Recent Graduates included giving back is

defined by the community, giving back means leadership and role modeling, giving back is providing access, and the notion of giving back does not change.

Giving Back is Defined by the Community

Participants RG1, RG3, and RG4 defined giving back in the context of community. Participant RG1 stated,

We always have that mindset of always giving back to your community, within the Indian community you're always stressed to give back to your community.

Whatever, if you happen to hunt and you have more, you have a lot of extra meat, you give that to families that don't really have a lot of meat and food. If you come across money and you know some people in the community who are falling on some hard times, you'll lend them some money so, community is always giving back and we're always supporting each other.

It should be noted that two of the recent graduates, Participant RG1 and RG3, talked about giving back *before* I specifically asked them the questions related to the concept of giving back. Participant RG1 initially mentioned giving back when discussing how the support he received from the Native American student center and the mentor program motivated him to want to be an undergraduate mentor himself. He stated,

[The support of] the Native Center and the mentor program...I think that really made me want to give back. You know, that whole idea in the Indian community, you want to give back to your community, so just seeing that, that really made me want to be a mentor.

Participant RG3 initially mentioned giving back when responding to the question: What has been the most fulfilling thing you have done or been a part of since you graduated from college? She stated,

after college, the greatest thing, it could be a lot of things. Mentoring and tutoring the young kids, giving back I do that back home. I coach basketball, I try to give back in different ways. I guess it's just kind of tough to say because you just try to be involved with the community and maybe that could be something in itself, but we get so involved with everything....so that's just my accomplishment, working with our youth.

Participant RG4 suggested that going to college and then returning home to give back to the community was a pre-package deal. "when I think of giving back, I'm thinking of, the deal was to go get an education and help somewhere, help anywhere that needs help." When asked what she meant by the "the deal", she replied,

It came from my family. Like I said, I was not given a choice for a lot of things, that's just the way it is. This is what you're supposed to do when you're raised the way I was raised. You go get educated, you come back and you help. That's it, that's the bottom line, that's what you're supposed to do.

Participant RG1 alluded to the fact that Indian people are motivated to pursue a college degree for the purpose of giving back to their people. He stated,

I think with education, when you obtain a degree, a lot of times, you go to college to get a degree and go back and help your people. I think that's a lot of times, Indians are motivated to go to college because they want to go back and help their

community. When I think of giving back, I think of always giving back to the community.

Giving Back means Leadership and Role Modeling

Participant RG2 associated the concept of giving back with leadership and role modeling. Specifically, he talked about the importance of representing Indian people in the urban community where Indian representation is limited. He stated, “giving back, for me and my family today, that also means taking a leadership stance in the [urban] community. Working where I work, it’s a very public place and it feels good when people refer to me in their conversations or [mention that I am] doing this and he’s a strong, positive role model for our Indian youth in the [urban] region. And it feels good to see it and hear it, but it also feels good to do things for our people when my wife and I get a chance.” Further, he described why he and his wife chose to become foster parents and why, as an Indian, this was important to take on this responsibility:

[W]hen we became foster parents, it felt good to take a leadership role in that because we were the only Native-American foster family in the county area. And we’re still certified...and I like to be the one that actually does something. And so, it’s happened where someone says, “We need an Indian to do that.” And I have felt I have been called and put into a place in meetings where someone has said that and I put my hand up and say, “Well, I’m doing that.

Giving Back means Providing Access

Participant RG2 suggested that giving back had to do with looking for ways to help Indian people gain access to valuable opportunities that exist. Specifically, participant RG2 discussed how his job as a national park service ranger has enabled him

to reach out to the schools and inform his people about opportunities that they should take advantage of. He reported,

I feel giving back is me and my presence at the site I work and going to the schools as part of education outreach. I still go to the schools, I'm not a teacher anymore but I can go to the schools and still do some education outreach from elementary through the college level and it feels good. I can give back to our people that way and by opening up internships, I can still be a teacher too. I have students under me in my program out there and it feels good.

Participant RG3 used a metaphor she learned from her uncle to illustrate what giving back meant to her:

My uncle always taught me there's a door, and this is his metaphor. There's a door and we hold open that door once it's given to us. So when I was a young person, he was off and he got his degree at the [college] and he says his grandmother held that door open for him and he said, "There are people that hold open that door for all of us, and then they wait for us to take it." So he was waiting for me to take that door and said, "Once you get the door, you hold it open for your young people, hold it open for your cousins or your brother, whoever. So, you wait for it, and then you wait for that other person and when they're ready, they'll come take that from you. And they'll be the doorkeeper, so in turn, they'll help someone else. So that was the way I was taught. You give back what you have taken, that's the Indian way, so I've just been given a lot from all my aunts and uncles, my grandparents, my mom, my dads . . . just a whole lot. So I feel like I have a lot to give back and that's what I am slowly

trying to do, is give back to our youth. You know, my little relatives but if they're ready to take it, they'll take it.

The Notion of Giving Back does not Change

When responding to the interview question: "Has your idea of "giving back" changed over time, and if so, how?" all of the participants said no with the exception of participant RG2. Participant RG4 stated, "No, my definition is just to work with Native people in general and help in any way you can, so that's always been the plan, no matter what system you're in." Participant RG1 stated,

I think our community is really sharing. It was just always a thing, never a question; you always give back to your community. I don't see how that idea can change. I've always just had that ideology of sharing and giving back. I don't think it's really changed . . . I still think that I'm giving back to the community.

Participant RG2, however, stated that his idea of giving back has changed over time because *he* has changed. He is no longer the same person that he was growing up and he feels socially disconnected from his tribal community. Consequently, he feels that it would be difficult to live among his people once again. He explained,

Some days I do feel a real intense longing, I mean friends, and family, [but] there's a social disconnect now. Whenever I do go home I see friends and family from school or relatives, it's like I was the only one who has changed. They haven't changed at all, I'm the one who's changed. I can't go back.

Section Six: Giving Back: Rewards and Struggles

This section seeks to illuminate the rewards and struggles associated with giving back after college for Recent Graduates. The primary reward was being role models.

The struggles included becoming change agents in Native-serving educational institutions, the decision to not move back home and community/generational tension.

Rewards: Being Role Models

Participant RG4 stressed the importance of coming back home to serve as a role model to other Indian kids so they can see other successful Indians who live a positive lifestyle. She explains that the kids need to know that there are Indians who “did good things and had good families” and had to “overcome a lot of these different barriers [such as] abuse and neglect” to achieve their goals. This is crucial for kids to understand this, because a lot of these kids don’t think it’s possible [to achieve their dreams].

[They think] We’re going to be this way forever, and everyone I know is this way and there’s no other way so when you come back, you got to let them know there is a different side to life than just the typical rez life.

For Participant RG2, one of the rewards of giving back was being able to use his work as a service ranger to create internship opportunities for Indian people. Through this program, he was able to teach them essential skills, such as hospitality and communication, to be successful in any profession and also in life. He stated,

I can teach them skills that our tribal [people use]. . . hospitality being a big tribal Indian skill, but also it’s a skill that’s universally accepted, anywhere they go. And communication, we work with the public and our Indian people are generally introverted, so working in a public setting, they have to get along with their employees, they have to reach out and speak with the public on a daily basis. So to provide that, I’m able to break the shell, when I was in class, now I’m at my site with the interns, I’m able to do that and make them realize I can

communicate, it's the best skill ever. Going into any field you need to communicate.

Participant RG1 shared a particularly powerful story of how a Native-American recruiter at his alma mater told him that his successful college journey had a huge positive impact on his small town community. The recruiter shared the following story with Participant RG1 after a recruiting visit:

[He] showed up in [my home town] and went to the school and he was signing in at the front desk, because you have to sign in before you go in. So when he was there [the front staff people] were like, "Oh, so you're from [University]". They're like, "Oh, do you know [Participant RG1]?" He was like, "Oh yeah, I know [Participant RG1]." So he was walking down the hall and he was wearing a [University] sweater and someone was like, "Do you know [Participant RG1]?" He was like, "Yeah, yeah I know [Participant RG1]." So then he was meeting with a bunch of kids and they were like, "Oh, do you know [Participant RG1]?" He's like, "Yeah, yeah, I know [Participant RG1]." And then he asked this one girl, "Where do you want to go to school?" She's like, "Oh, I want to go to [University]." He's like, "Oh, why's that?" She goes, "Oh, because my cousin [Participant RG1] goes there." And then so she was like, "Oh, do you know [Participant RG1]?" He was like, "Yeah, I know [Participant RG1]." He's walking down the hall and this teacher came out of this classroom and, "Oh, [University], do you know [Participant RG1]?" [*Laughs*] He was like, "Yeah, yeah I know [Participant RG1]." And then he had to leave because he was doing a tour of all the reservations of [the state] to recruit. So he went to the store and

was pumping gas, this old man walked up to him and said “Hey, [University], do you know [Participant RG1]? He was like, “Ahh, yeah, I know [Participant RG1].

So when he came back he was telling me the story he said, “You must be a legacy back in [Participant RG1’s home town].” For participant RG1, this was a rewarding experience for him because his hometown associated this particular university with his college success. In many ways, when they think of college success, they think of one of their own.

Struggles: Becoming Change Agents within Native-Serving Educational Institutions

Participant RG2 and RG3 reported that one of the most difficult challenges they faced after graduating occurred when they worked at Native-serving educational institutions—a tribal college and a BIA tribal high school. Participant RG2 taught classes in the field of tourism and hospitality management at a tribal college. The first challenge he had as an instructor was trying to be inclusive to Native students who represent several distinct tribal nations. He stated,

[we had] Indian students from 86 different tribes across North America. So we all had different languages, all had different cultures and being in education, you need to be inclusive. How can you be inclusive to 86 different tribes? Sometimes even at once. My largest class I had about 45 [students]. I taught two 45 [student] intro classes and it was really tough.

The second challenge was maintaining high standards and expectations in the classroom. He set the bar high for his students but he became frustrated when the majority of the students were reluctant to rise to the level he expected. He stated,

the hardest thing was my expectations, my feeling is that if you have high expectations, and I believe in the Pygmalion effect where my expectation will shape and mold someone to fit that expectation, not forcefully, but with my deeds, with words, with my feelings, with my ideas I could shape someone to embrace my views on hospitality, on philosophy, just on general respect issues.

Unfortunately, the Pygmalion effect that he tried to initiate fell flat as many of the students “lacked motivation” and did not put forth the effort he tried to establish.

Furthermore, he felt the institution itself was partially responsible for the student’s lackadaisical attitude because the college fostered a culture of enablement by “coddling” the students. He stated,

I really felt frustrated for the students, too. The whole college is really good; you hear a lot of good things about [the tribal college], but I felt that they were coddling students. There’s students who go back there, repeat students, to get another degree, another associate’s, another associate’s, and they go there because someone is helping them get housing. Helping them with their children getting to school, helping them with transportation, with food . . . I mean even clothing, but the coddling I guess, what my take on it was, I didn’t see these students growing mentally or independently.

Another challenge he faced as an instructor occurred when he had to teach students that were much older than himself, which went against some of his cultural norms. He was raised in a culture where the tribal elders were revered and commonly regarded as wisdom keepers; but in an academic setting he was required to perform this

role because of his educational credentials. He describes the cultural tension he felt as an instructor:

It was just harder because as a Native person I grew up with the older person, and it was just difficult to teach or instruct an older person. Sometimes even grandparents because my place as [he used the term for “teacher” in his Native language], as the one who instructs, it should be them who is instructing. But it was very difficult; I had to break some of my own cultural norms I had grown up with. There was some ageism because I was young.

Participant RG3 also encountered serious challenges when she took a job back on her home reservation working at a tribal school for a college preparation program called the Gear Up program. The tribal school was comprised of 100 percent Indian enrollment, the majority of which were considered at-risk youth. She literally described the school as a last-chance option for students. She reported,

our tribal school on the reservation is not an alternative school, it’s an *alternative* to the alternative school. So, when they [Indian students] get kicked out of the public school, or can’t make it, the Indian students, they go to what’s called an alternative school and when they can’t make it there, they send them to the tribal school.

Like most college graduates fresh out of college, she entered the school with genuine enthusiasm and high expectations for these at-risk kids only to have her enthusiasm crushed under the weight of reality:

[W]hen I was first there, I was rah, rah, rah about education and, we’re really going to help these kids and get them through and we’re all going to get them to

college and those expectations were a little high for that demographic...it was horrible. The whole process was just mind-boggling to me...[the students] were doing 2 plus 2 still, and the kids still wouldn't finish. I was just, I was shocked. I couldn't believe it. The kids were walking out of class, you know, nobody cared sometimes. It just seemed to me that nobody cared. So it was not a great place to start.

Not only did she feel helpless to alter the fate of a student population that seemed destined for failure, she was even more troubled by the apathetic attitude displayed by the school's administration to do anything about it. She stated,

Every problem in the world that you could think of with that school, I don't know about BIA schools in general, but a lot of them aren't great. I'd say 80% of the staff are non-Native, most of the Native staff were secretaries and the cooks and the janitors. We had a few Native teachers . . . a few, and our superintendent was Native. She did very little there. I have lots of respect for the lady, I love her, I think she's even my aunt but she didn't do anything there. And the principal, he was horrible. He was biding his time until his wife graduated and moved away and got a better job. He actually told us that. And he told us things like, "Oh I'll suspend that kid, I don't care. I'll suspend him, I'll kick him out, I don't care." He actually told us that in a staff meeting.

She soon found herself burned out and completely demoralized because the problems that the students had to carry were too much to bear. She stated,

I mean I got burned out right away, I was just like I can't believe it's like this, we're supposed to be helping our kids. And I didn't like the herding through

process either. They can't read, they can't write, but let's graduate them anyway and rah, rah, rah. And I don't think that helps anybody. I just honestly . . . they can't even fill out a job application, and we're graduating them and trying to be happy for them? It was just really, really bad.

With heartbreaking detail and profound insight, she described the overwhelming obstacles that the youth at this school had to face on a daily basis:

And I know exactly how these families are, exactly how they were raised, and it's not the kids' fault at all. And some of these kids, they never had a chance at all. Their parents grow up drugging and alcohol, abuse, molestation, just every bad thing you could think of happens on their rez, and it's masked. You don't really hear about it too much. But these kids that come in, foster kids, when you see one or two of them really trying to make an effort with everything they've been through, that's why you want to be in education, it's for this handful of kids. And most of them, they wouldn't be like that, they want somebody to care. I mean nobody, you would never think it, but they have *nobody* that cares about them. I mean nobody. Their parents don't, they've been abused by aunts and uncles, [and] most of them are babysitters when they do live with their parents. They would be sitting outside of bars watching the kids, you know they've been up all night because their mom and dad were fighting, or their was a party at their house. Everything that you could think of that's bad for kids. I mean these Indian kids go through it everyday. And for them to even get up in the morning and get on the bus is a victory in itself. I mean really, it's the worst of the worst. So some of the kids that come and they try to do their homework and they try to participate in

these college preparation things and they're asking where they can go and what they can do, it's just amazing, really amazing that some of these kids push on. All of the bad things they have been through...they've been through it all.

The Decision to not Move Back Home

After graduating from college, participant RG1 struggled with the strong expectation from his extended family to “physically” move home and help the people right away. This presented a dilemma because he felt that he did not have to physically move back home in order to help his people. He stated,

Yeah, everyone asked me, “Oh are you going to move back to the rez and help your people?” I'm like I feel like I'm already helping my people where I'm at. I live in [urban city], and I feel like I'm already giving back to my people and I don't feel the necessity to move back to the reservation...to *physically* be there. I feel like I'm doing a lot, not only the people on my reservation, but all over the country and helping . . . just to make it . . . just improve the quality of life for all Indian people. So yeah, I think that was one expectation, “Oh, when are you going to come back?” There was an expectation to come and give back.

Finding a job was a source of struggle for Participant RG2. The lack of employment opportunities was a barrier and one of the reasons why he feels he cannot go back home. He explains,

Yeah, I had always thought I would go back and maybe even eventually become a minister like my grandfather, because I have the degree in theology, I would go back and minister or do some type of spiritual work with my people, or go back and teach. I also have a religious ed. minor, I can teach in a parochial school, but

a lot of teachers want to get into that. . . and you don't have to meet the state requirements for religious education, but that field is so competitive, I would likely not get a job there. Once a teacher gets in, they stay in, usually for life. But I always wanted to go back, but now I don't.

Community/Generational tension

When Participant RG3 moved back to the reservation community, she immediately noticed that there was generational tension between the “young” people and the older generation in her community. The source of the tension was the way in which each generation viewed change. The young people were motivated to change things for the better but the older people were resistant to the changes the younger people want to make. She describes how the older people reacted to her desire for change:

It's like, okay, who is this young person coming in here with all these ideas and making change? Yeah [the older people are] a little resistant to that, as a young person that's what we want. We want to make change, we want to keep developing, we want to keep moving forward.

Not only did she struggle with the slower pace but she became frustrated when the “older” people in her community appeared to be resistant to change and dismissed the energy and enthusiasm she had. She explained,

it was tough. I had all these ideas, as a young person you're so highly motivated and you just have this big shining light, and you try to go around and share that good joy, that motivation, that same light. And it's hard because the people are older, and they're kind of stuck in their ways and they almost see that as a negative thing because it's too challenging for them.

She also believes one of the reasons why the older people are resistant to change is due to the loss of culture, the lack of education, and the limited experience living off the reservation in the outside world. She explains,

If you are educated enough, everything else has to come with it, including culture and language and all the things that are necessary. A lot of people, even our old people kind of lost touch with that because I think when you're in that box for so long, and I mean the reservation when I say the box, because not too many people leave the reservation too often.

Sadly, she describes the time when she was called a "super Indian" by people in her own community. This is a negative term used to describe a Native person that assertively promotes the importance of learning one's traditional language and cultural ways of life in such a way that comes off as showy or condescending. She explained,

it's tough because when you come back holding these things [culture and language] so close, people are wondering, "Who is this *super Indian* person. Who are they to tell me that my culture and language is so strong, or that it's still here?" Because a lot of people don't even consider our culture alive or they don't consider our language alive anymore. Or why would we want to develop our language anymore, we speak English now . . . so you have a lot of that pessimistic outlook that there's no optimism and I can't say no for anything but very little . . . it's just more remnant amongst the younger people.

Although Participant RG3 had the education and credentials to easily secure jobs back at home, she found that there was a cost for being an ambitious college graduate. She initially struggled with the transition back to the reservation life because,

it's slower, the lifestyle is a lot slower because like in college everything is so fast. We moved so very fast compared to being home. [*Laughs*] But being home, everything's a lot slower so the pace is very slow and people's attitudes and motivations are a lot slower.

EXPERIENCED WORKERS

Section One: K-12 Experience

This section describes the emergent themes in the K-12 experiences of the Experienced Workers. The themes among this group were educational challenges at rural schools, positive family influence and high expectations, lack of support and negative reinforcement, desire to leave reservation, overcoming adversity, and peers dropping out of school.

Educational Challenges at Rural Schools

Three (EW1, EW2, EW3) of the four participants that attended a small, rural school on the reservation all felt that their educational opportunities were limited in some way. The rural schools rarely offered college prep courses and those that did, the classes were at a minimum. Participant EW3 describes her experience of not being able to take more advanced courses. She stated,

I always took the advanced classes [that were offered] . . . but even then it was hard because they would only offer certain classes every other year so if you didn't fall in the right cycle you never got the classes they said you always needed to go to college to make it look better.

Further exacerbating the issue is not only were there limited classes offered, there were even fewer teachers qualified to teach the courses. She stated,

the same teachers who taught algebra II and advanced math taught the chemistry, taught the physics...so everything else was just all the generic stuff. I mean by the time you got to your senior year you took the few basic classes and then it was

just like, well you've already taken everything so what's there to take? Besides shop and welding. I think it was very limited.

Participant EW2 witnessed a dropping out effect among her peers in junior high school. She reported,

[in eighth grade] then that's actually this point where a lot of the kids that went to school one time started dropping off and that was kind of strange too because you always assume that we're all going to get through this together we're all going to graduate together then that's kind of the reality...well actually some, some kids aren't really going to make it.

Other challenges mentioned by the participants that attended small rural schools included low academic standards and low teacher expectations.

Positive Family Influence and High Expectations

Another key theme that was frequently cited among this group was the positive reinforcement they received during their early years. Participant EW1 and EW4 specifically mentioned how their parents influenced them in a positive way. Participant EW2 stated that her parents, classmates and teachers all had "high expectations" for her in high school. She shared one story of how her fellow Indian classmates displayed their support for her:

[In] eighth grade, [the school] used to do assemblies like for honor roll students and they would announce, "Okay well, who in this semester got straight A's?"

And so, in my class they were saying all the students and then, I think I was one of the only Indian students that did and then I remember all the Indian students who were just really clapping and cheering for me.

This public support by her peers served as a positive reinforcement for her in school. Other positive factors that were mentioned included being involved in school activities such as sports and student government. To illustrate, participant EW2 reported,

In high school of course, once you start participating in sports and you pretty much have like a lot of structure. You play volleyball, you play basketball, you play softball. You know, so your time is pretty structured. And then also during that time, [I] saw as another important experience as far as [high school], is that once we start getting into eighth grade you start doing like, class elections. And everybody was always electing me for offices.

These extracurricular activities provided structure, leadership development, and a sense of responsibility that augmented her academic achievement in high school.

Lack of Support and Negative Reinforcement

Not all of the participants in this group received support from their families and community. To illustrate, Participant EW1 explained that in his family “education wasn’t really part of the discussion at the dinner table”. This attitude appeared to be a reflection of his community as well. He stated,

I mean growing up on a reservation with some of our elders and a lot of them didn’t go to school. So education wasn’t really stressed, I mean, I remember going to school and if a kid didn’t want to go to school, there’s a funeral, or a wake, I mean kids would miss school all the time. You got to be in school all the time to learn. If you’re going to start missing three or four days here, three or four days there...it was tough...[in my] family their expectation wasn’t really

high so I guess there wasn't any expectations to go on to college or even graduate from college for that matter.

Even the teachers in the school appeared to have an indifferent attitude toward education. He reported, "A lot of people didn't take it seriously enough, even some of the teachers...[a] lot of our teachers lived in [nearby urban cities] and they commuted back and forth, and I think that made it tough for kids to take school seriously."

Participant EW4, in particular, shared a powerful story of how his high school counselor tried to steer him away from college against his mother's wishes. He stated, my freshman year she [mother] made up a list of all the classes I should take as a high school student, to prepare me to go to college after I graduated. And she said, "Okay, I want you to register in these classes and make sure you tell your counselor that you want to get into these classes." So back then you used to meet the counselor and go through it and so . . . I go there and next morning it's like okay, here's the classes that my mom suggested I take. And she [counselor] looks at the list of classes that I'm taking so that, you know, pre . . . English and French or Spanish and whatever, math and all that. And she goes, "These are great classes. These are interesting classes, but these probably aren't the classes you want to take." And so I'm like, "Really, because my mom said I should take these so I should get ready for college." "Well these are really great classes but you should probably consider woodshop and auto shop because you most likely won't be going to college after you graduate high school. So I switched all my classes and of course I had to go home and give my mom my registration and my mom goes, "Where's the classes you took, let me see your registration. What'd

you do this for! I told you to sign up for these classes!” So, you know, ninth grade you’re still unsure...not that confident, so the worst thing that you could possibly have happen to you is to have your mom come to school with you [*laughs*]. Yeah, my mom shows up, takes me to school. I sit outside the counselor’s office. You know, my mom’s like yelling, swearing, all this kind of stuff. You know, changes my classes and everything.

Although EW4’s mother won the fight to reverse her son’s classes, she could not reverse the psychological damage that the counselor’s words had on his fragile mind. He continued to struggle with the counselor’s negative words years later. He stated,

the most devastating thing that I had to spend a lot of years thinking about later was that when she [counselor] told me that, that I most likely wouldn’t be going to college and that I should change my classes . . . that really set in motion the idea and what wasn’t really in my future. Even though I switched classes back and whatever . . . once she told me that, I really *believed* that. That I wouldn’t be doing that and that wouldn’t be my future.

Motivation to Leave Reservation

A key difference within this group was two of the participants, EW1 and EW3, were determined to leave the reservation and never come back while the other two, Participants EW2 and EW4, did not directly talk about wanting to leave the reservation. Participant EW3 was strongly motivated to leave the reservation and “make money” and “never look back”. She stated, “I don’t know when I really developed it but my goal was to get out of [home town]. That was a huge part of it. I just wanted to get out of here and

never come back.” For Participant EW1, the motivation to make money coupled with the fear of failure was a strong motivational factor. He explained,

That’s like one of the big things to go to college...the fear of failure. The fear of living from paycheck to paycheck or whatever seasonal job is available on the reservation and having a big family and so fear is what drove me in my early years. Because you read all the books and you see in all these papers, you know the American Dream. Everybody’s fighting for that and you grow up on a reservation [and]...education is not really pushed for. Having a good job is not really a push for . . . and so I fell into that fairy tale of what it meant to be successful. Successful means to make money.

For Participants EW2 and EW4, they associated being “successful” and “making money” with something that could be achieved off the reservation and not something that could be obtained within their home community.

Overcoming Adversity

Two of the four participants, EW1 and EW4, encountered several barriers growing up. Participant EW1 had several strikes against him: 1) he was raised in a low-income, single parent home, 2) his mother was an alcoholic, 3) he was the oldest of five kids and he often had to take care of his younger siblings, and 4) none of his family members had graduated from *high school*, let alone college. He stated, “I was a little bit ashamed of some of my family. I just wanted more.” By his definition, “more” meant anything more than to “live off welfare” and to live the “typical rez life”. He did not want to become a stereotypical minority labeled by society. He stated, “the dominant society always looks down on brown people in general . . . they’re stereotypical.” Based

on society's standards, he concluded that he and his siblings "would never going to amount to anything." Driven by fear and an acute sense of inferiority, he was determined to go college and make something of himself. He stated, "that was really my big motivator early on in my career was, I want to get an education and then move away from here."

Although Participant EW1 became the first in his family to graduate high school and enter college, many thought he would quit and return home right away, including his high school football coach. EW1 reported that the first time he went home for the weekend to watch a football game his old coach automatically assumed he had dropped out of college and returned home for good. He recalled,

I was up watching the high school football game, you know, the first couple weeks of September and he [the coach] goes, "Oh you're back already?" You know, like I dropped out and I couldn't handle it after two weeks or whatever it was. And that really pissed me off but it also motivated me too. You know, because it's that fear of trying to live in . . . but you know as I got older. . . that stuff doesn't bother me anymore.

Participant EW4 had to overcome his share of adversity as well. He grew up in a "historically white, fishing town" adjacent to his reservation at the height of what is commonly known as the "fishing wars". The "fishing wars" refer to the time when several coastal tribes exercised their treaty rights and fought to retain their fishing rights on tribal land. This action curtailed the encroachment of non-Indian fisherman on tribal land and limited their ability to reap the economic benefits that fishing provided. Thus, the war was on. This did not bode well for Participant EW4 and other Indian kids in the

K-12 school system given that several of the white teachers engaged in fishing during the summers to subsidize their income. This resulted in a conflict of interest as many of the teachers mistreated him and other Indian kids in the classroom because they represented an obstacle to their livelihood. He stated,

[The] teachers [taught] during the academic year but they have summers off. So what do they do for summer, they go and fish, they're all fishermen. And so, when you're fighting these fishermen, you know the tribal people . . .once they [teachers] find out you're Native they don't treat you as well as the other kids because they know that you represent something that's taking away their livelihood, you know, because teachers aren't getting paid that much and so they make a lot of money fishing during the summer, and so if they have to give up half their profits to these Indians, then you could see where they could be a little bit upset. [*Laughs*] So that's kind of the beginning of my educational career and . . .my siblings went through that as well.

The fishing controversy also strained his relationship with some of his white classmates, who were the children of the local fisherman. The racism was blatant. He remembered seeing the “kids wearing these really racist t-shirts that have these messages about fishing such as, ‘A salmon the Indians won't get.’ And it has a salmon stuffed in the guy's mouth.” This type of school atmosphere created “subtle divisions” between him and classmates but he learned to “accept” it.

Section Two: Transition to College

This section focuses on the experiences of the Experienced Workers as they transitioned from their home community to college. The themes among this group were freedom from the reservation and personal support.

Freedom from the Reservation

Two of the participants (EW1, EW3) described their transition to college in terms of “freedom” from the reservation. As such, it appears that it was not necessarily the transition *to* college that was important but the transition *away* from the reservation that was significant for two of the participants. Participant EW1 described it this way,

I packed everything in [my] car and I moved to [college] and I never moved home [during my college career]...I just lived in dorms the first year but then I got an apartment and I stayed even during the winter break . . . the long month off and I never came home after that. I didn't want that . . . again it was that fear, you know. Living at home, so I just never, I never moved back after that.

Participant EW3 described her experience in a similar tone, “my goal was to get out of [home town]. That was a huge part of it. I just wanted to get out of here and never come back.” These comments suggest that they were more determined to break away from their home environment rather than focus on transitioning to a new college environment. In other words, their eyes were on the rear-view mirror and not necessarily on the road ahead of them.

Personal Support

Two (EW2, EW4) of the four participants received strong personal support during their transition from family, siblings and a significant other. Participant EW2 followed the path of two of her older sisters and attended the same institution. Although her sisters

were only there doing her freshman year, they helped mitigate the “culture shock” she experienced upon her arrival at the large university campus. Even though the university was only 45 minutes away from her reservation, she described the campus like it was a “whole different world . . . a whole different planet to me.” The strong support she received from her siblings helped ease the anxiety that culture shock can induce.

Section Three: College Life Experience

This section describes the unique experiences of the Experienced Workers during their college years. The participants identified several factors that either assisted or hindered them during the process of degree attainment. The themes among this group included the lack of academic preparedness of students from rural schools, the positive impact of the Native American student center, and community pressure.

The Lack of Academic Preparedness of Students from Rural Schools

Three participants (EW1, EW2, EW3) reported that they were unprepared for the academic demands of college. They attributed their lack of college preparation with attending a rural high school on the reservation. Participant EW1 described his experience,

a big thing was my education at the public school was lousy. I mean the first year I had to take a lot of classes that didn't count towards credit. They were just intermediate classes or whatever they're called. But I stuck with it, and I worked hard at it but that was a big struggle, you know, coming from a small school, a rural school.

Participant EW2 suggested that one of the primary differences between high school and college is directly related to the expectations regarding home work:

[In] high school, what I really remember, and how it compared to college is like, I don't remember having homework. I don't really remember taking books home or having to write a paper at home. I think I graduated high school [with a] 3.65 which, wasn't a 4.0 but we just got it done in class. There was no preparation to have homework in college.

The low expectations of home work and the overall lack of academic preparedness eventually caught up to her. She reported,

I didn't know how to study. That first test [in math], I flunked. I never had an F before. But by the end of the semester I think I got like a C. Because I just didn't know how to study. Then after that, I really figured out okay, well I had to really scramble because the way I had studied before really didn't work.

Participant RG3 knew she was ill prepared for college within the first month of taking classes. She reported, "as far as academically that was like the worst because everything I had learned, I always told my family, it seemed like everything I learned in high school was covered in the first month of college." Participant RG3 commented,

I remember in high school, [when] we did a research paper we had the whole semester to write one research paper. They taught you how to write a research paper. [*Laughs*] Then when you get into college...you have a week, or whatever you know. [*Laughs*]

All of these participants implied that their peers were better prepared for college because they went to better high schools. Their responses suggested that other college students appeared to already know what to expect in the classroom while they did not. Participant EW1 asserted that, "some of these other kids that came from good families

and good school districts, you know, they stress education. They knew how to study right away...and I didn't know how to study." Participant EW2 stated that,

I remember in freshman biology, doing a lab, you know, the kids were like, "We already did this in high school." And of course, we [former high school] had biology, but we didn't really have lab equipment, you know? [*Laughs*] We didn't really have an area to do experiments and like, I'm trying to figure out how to do an experiment and they're like, "This is boring, we already did this." And so I guess I kind of had that feeling throughout of being a step behind. But then what I found out actually, and, you know, it's not until you're all the way done that you realize this.

These participants clearly struggled to keep up with the demands in the classroom and the fast pace took its toll on the confidence of Participant EW3. She reported, "even though I knew I didn't have the background like other kids did, I never considered myself stupid. And that's what I felt, I felt really stupid because I couldn't grasp, you know, all the knowledge they wanted me to have in such a short time."

The experienced workers reported several persistence factors including support from family and community, institutional support, student involvement, spirituality, sense of pride, and motivation for a better life. Participant EW4 reported that when it came to down to receiving financial support, the institution went "to bat" for him and helped to secure scholarships.

The Positive Impact of the Native American Student Center

Participants EW2 and EW4 both discussed how their association with the Native American student centers enriched their college experiences. For Participant EW2, her

strong connection to the “Native center” was gradual. She explained, “That whole first year I don’t even think I ever did go to the Native American Center. I think the second semester in my sophomore year, [was] the first time I went into the Center. And then after that, that was my home away from home.” She also indicated that she felt “safe” at the Center, partly because she could “hang out and laugh around” with friends.

Participant EW4’s first association with the Native American Student Union was unique, if not adventurous, given that there was no designated space or building for the Native students or students of color to congregate at the time. The actual Native American Student Union was only a student group. In addition, the only reason why he hung around the Native American Student Union was to visit his girlfriend. In fact, he was not even a student at that particular time. He described himself as a “community member.” During that time, several students of color were upset with the university’s lack of responsiveness to the request for a space allocated specifically for students of color on the campus. The students eventually organized a protest at the president’s office and Participant EW4 protested right along with them. He recalled, “We started making some strong movements as student groups, students of color to hold the university accountable. And so that was a big. That was like, wow I got to be a part of this. So then we sat in the president’s office.”

Soon thereafter, he officially enrolled as a student at the university.

Community Pressure

Participants EW3 and EW4 reported that they experienced a lot of pressure from their home communities due to the fact that very few community members even went to college. Participants EW3 stated,

back then there was very few of us [in college]. And it was a big deal that I was down there [in college] and so there's a lot of pressure in the community that, you're going to be the first one [to graduate]. Even in my class, the kids who were salutatorians and stuff, they weren't going on to four-year colleges, a lot of them were going on to two-year colleges so there was just kind of a lot of pressure but here I am going to [large university] and it was like a huge thing.

Participant EW4 described how going to college can impact an entire community:

A lot of folks kept their eye on what we were doing. Like all of us brothers and [my] sister...we're all attaining our higher education, and it's a big deal. I mean I'm not trying to shed light on myself but it's a big deal to have Native people get their degrees...more than I can ever imagine. Like I see other people and I can see how they are attaining their higher ed degree resonates through their whole community.

Spirituality

Participants EW1 and EW2 reported that spiritually played a critical role in their college life experience. Participant EW1 asserted that she had several "mini-miracles" due to a life devoted to prayer. Spirituality played such a significant role in her college experience she recommended that higher education institutions should support the spirituality of students of color in college. She proposed,

it's like those lessons you don't really know until after but, having that spiritual life. I think, like at the [multicultural] centers, to be able to, to support that in some way. And I know everyone's always worried about education crossing over into spiritual life, but I just think that, especially as our Native students, or your

Latino, Hispanic, you know, that we come from, cultures of that central core.

And so as college, college community, we have to be able to support that because

I don't know how many times that I relied on it over the years.

Participant EW1 also reached a point in his life during his college days where he needed spiritual guidance and strength. Because of the troubles that some of his siblings were experiencing back on the reservation, two of younger siblings actually moved in with him in college. However, working full-time and going to full-time proved too much of a burden to carry on his own. He recalled,

I mean God has really been a big part of my life . . . in '92 is when I first gave myself to the Lord but, and the reason I did was because I couldn't help what was happening to my mom or my siblings, I can fix it . . . I can't fix it and the only person that could fix it, says my wife, is God. So in 1992 I made a commitment to give everything to God and I just feel that God has given me everything that I need, you know. I have food on the table, I have a home, and so I don't need the big time salary and all that other stuff.

Section Four: Transition after College

This section describes the transitional experiences of the Experienced Workers after degree attainment. Several of the participants encountered various challenges after graduating. Some challenges involved tension within families or places of employment, while others occurred within tribal communities. The themes among the Experienced Workers included challenges reentering tribal community and the help of a community mentor.

Challenges Reentering Tribal Community

Three of the four participants of this group (EW1, EW2, EW4) chose to move back to their home communities after college. Participant EW1 and EW2 initially had difficulties finding a job with their respective tribes. Participant EW1 reported that he “kind of had this chip on my shoulder” because it took him about six months to find a job. He explains his frustration at the time: “they just kept slamming the door in my face, everybody was, I don’t know if it was my imagination or if it was really there, but it felt like everybody...any time you need me for a job, everybody was worried about if I would take their job.”

Participant EW2 reported a similar struggle of trying to find a job back at home; however, she was already prepared to deal with the possibility of not finding job right away. She was already forewarned by other college graduates from her tribe that she may initially face rejection by some members of the community. She stated,

when I graduated I knew *before* graduation about going back home that there’s people that would accept you and there’s people that would reject you because it’s like...well just because you have a degree doesn’t mean that you are qualified. Like, there’s people that would try to reduce what your degree meant. So I kind of knew that before because it’s just discussions with people in college about making that transition, and people who have gone before.

Moreover, Participant EW2 asserted that there was a subtle division within the tribal community between those with a college degree and those without a degree but have years of work experience. She explained,

Well, people who had degrees of course were like, yeah, you’re one of us. You got your degree and they really wanted to praise you. And some people, even

though they were like congratulations on graduating, they really wanted you to know that, “But I have experience and that’s what you don’t have yet...don’t think that you have a right to a certain position just because you have this degree. You have to work now.

Participant EW2 also suggested that one of the reasons why college graduates may be slighted by those without a college degree when they reenter their tribal communities is because recent graduates tend to arrive with cavalier attitudes. She explained, “there are some people with education [and] I’ve seen them where they come in and just because I have this, you know, I’m the expert, I should be identified . . . I’ve seen that part of it too”.

The Help of a Community Mentor

Another finding among this group is that during the transition back home, someone in the tribal community was willing to mentor them and help them find an employment opportunity they were seeking. Although Participant EW1 and EW2’s initial transition back home may have been difficult, both were given a chance by someone in the community that jump started their careers. Participant EW1 landed a job as the director of a tribal youth program that focuses on education, self-empowerment and drug and alcohol prevention. She only applied for the job after being urged by people who believed in her. She recalled, “actually even this whole job, getting into this prevention...it was other people who wanted me to apply. [I thought at the time] There’s no way they’re going to hire me, you know, and so somebody said in that interview, “Well, she’s just out of college, let’s give her a chance.” As such, she mentioned that

this employment opportunity was made possible because people were willing to “mentor me” and “help me move along.”

After struggling to find a job for six months, Participant EW2 was eventually given an opportunity by the tribal chairman to be his legislative assistant, which required him to move to Washington DC for one year. A year later, to his surprise, he was asked to be the tribal executive director back at home. He recalled,

they [his tribe] believed in me, and I remember looking at the job announcement, and I even look at some of the other tribes’ job announcements for executive directors and I don’t qualify, I wouldn’t qualify. And there is no way I should even be mentioned. But the tribe believed in me and I didn’t disappoint them....it’s weird how the tribe can slam the door [in your face] but also be your biggest supporter.

Section Five: Defining Giving Back

This section seeks to illustrate the ways in which Experienced Workers define the concept of giving back. The themes among this group included giving back means sacrificing for the people and community, giving back is an obligation, giving back is about the Native youth, and giving back changes over time.

Giving Back means Sacrificing for the People and Community

Participants EW1, EW3, and EW4 defined giving back in terms of sacrificing oneself for the people in time, money, and effort. Participant EW1 stated, “giving back to me is giving the tribe one hundred and ten percent. I would lay my life down almost for the tribe.” Participant EW3’s sacrifice came in the form of serving as a youth volunteer for a local tribal community program with no compensation. She reported, “I

just want to volunteer, I just wanted to be a part of [the tribal youth program] and, you know, I never got paid, never asked, never thought about being paid. This is just something I wanted to be a part of.” Further, she emphasized the fact that volunteering does help tribal programs survive. She asserted,

you need people to volunteer and how valuable it is to have someone to give you their time without any strings attached is huge....that’s what these programs need to survive. But I think that’s the one part that I enjoy is just being that volunteer....I think that’s where it kind of all came together. Then I just realized how much more is out there that you can give to your community.

Participant EW4 reported that the tribal elders model what it means to give back by the way they actively participate in community gatherings and events. He reported,

I want to give back to the community. And I’m kind of getting to that stage where I’m doing it and I’m trying to do as much of it as possible. And then, like for me, you look at some of these elders and how they give to the community, and you feel devastated. It’s like, wow, how do they do it? They’re like at every gathering, every funeral, you see them there at the big events. How do they keep giving like that? So you just reevaluate, you aspire to be as giving as they are.

One particularly unique way that Participant EW4 defined giving back was by “pulling” for one’s tribal community in a positive way. This idea of “pulling” is particularly meaningful for Participant EW4 because he is a member of a Coast Salish tribe, who are known for canoe pulling. In addition, each of his five siblings all work in various sectors of education at the K-12 or higher education level. According to one of his older

brothers, he learned the significance of “pulling” for other Native people by advocating on their behalf from inside of the college system. He explained,

my brother always said you can't *push* our Native youth to succeed; you have to *pull* for them. And it resonates well within our communities because we're all canoe pullers. So if you understand canoe pulling, you understand how you can pull for your community wherever you're at. Whether you're at [K-12 level] or here at [at the college level], we know that we're pulling on the same team. So, that's what I would suggest to somebody that is coming out [of college]. . . just get it down and how to maintain that connection....you just make your community stronger that way.

Giving back is an Obligation

Participant EW1 defined giving back as an obligation to his tribe and God for everything that has been given to him. He explained,

I feel obligated to the tribe, I feel I owe them. I feel obligated that I owe them because they have given me so much in the last ten years. They have given me the opportunity to brush up on my skills and really provide for my family and not only that, provide for my people. But the opportunity for me to move the tribe in a different direction, provide more jobs... so I am debtful [sic] to the tribe. I feel like giving back to them, I would do it in a heartbeat. I owe it to not only my people, but God because I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for God anyway, so that's giving back to me I guess.

In a similar tone, Participant EW2 stated that giving back to others was a duty because “people have invested in you.” In essence, she described giving back as the

willingness to help others because of the people that helped her when she needed it:
“when you went to college there’s people that helped you transition from college to work. So now since I had that new experience I’m one step ahead, now I have to give back, if I see somebody who needs mentoring to transition.”

Participant EW4 also defined giving back as an “ethic” and incorporates this ethic into his current job as the coordinator of a multicultural student center at a mainstream university:

I definitely operate the [multicultural] center like that. I don’t operate the center like, oh well, you’re going to get on this corporate ladder and get as far as you get. The orientation is like, you’re preparing yourself to give back to your community. I guess that’s what I always say. That’s definitely a philosophy I always coordinate or manage. So, yeah I definitely try to follow the ethic of giving back, that you’re preparing yourself to give back.

Giving back is about the Native youth

Participants EW2, EW3, and EW4 specifically defined giving back in the context of helping and supporting Native youth. Participant EW2 stated that “working with young people” is the “greatest thing.” Participant EW3 stated,

I just loved being able to give that support [to the youth]. Something I never had, you know, when they were taking those steps applying for colleges. And not limiting them to, you know, they want to go to [large universities] and all these different places. And I’m like, who has any right to tell you that you don’t have the right to go to those schools? Even though you’re from [a small town] and it is going to be hard, [but] you can make it.

Participant EW4 stated that he gives back to the youth as a way to “protect” them from the educational system. He explained,

I feel like I do that [give back] all the time. I travel all over the place and try to just give hope to young people about where they’re going, about what their options are. . . I really just cherish youth and so, when I think about giving back, I really focus on them and try to really protect them from the system of education that they’re getting into. I always say, whatever advice you get, make sure you get a second opinion. [*Laughs*] Always get a second opinion and make sure what they are saying is correct. And most likely, if you are a student of color, it’s not correct. Wow, giving back . . . I don’t know, I don’t even know how to differentiate between giving back and just giving. Because I like . . . I just spend a lot of time out with the youth and just enjoying them, just enjoying seeing where they’re at.

Giving back changes over time

When responding to the interview question: “Has your idea of “giving back” changed over time, and if so, how?” three of the four participants (EW1, EW3 and EW4) said it has changed. Participant EW1 stated, “I think it’s changed over time because at first I thought giving back to the community was coming in here and taking a pay cut and trying to teach, you know, but giving back to me now is giving up yourself.” Participant EW3 also stated that the idea of giving back changed for her over time given that she never wanted to return home in the first place. She slowly changed her mind after she got involved working with the youth and played an instrumental role in organizing a summer tribal youth program that was co-sponsored by several local youth programs. Participant

EW4 stated that the concept of giving back has become increasingly “complex” since he has experienced living in the “two worlds”—the Native world and the non-Native world.

He stated,

I think it’s definitely become more complex, how you give back. . .I don’t know if it exists in both [worlds]. But when you think about the two worlds, the Native philosophy and belief and that is definitely a strong belief, but is it in the [non-Indian world] I don’t know, but I guess that’s one of the ways things are becoming cohesive between the two worlds.

Section Six: Giving Back: Rewards and Struggles of Giving Back

This section seeks to illuminate the rewards and struggles associated with giving back after college for Experienced Workers. In this particular group, their experiences giving back suggested that for every rewarding experience, it was accompanied with struggle. The themes were finding a healthy balance with work, family and community; strained community relationships, and do I stay on the rez or do I leave?

Rewards and Struggles: Finding a Healthy Balance with Work, Family and Community

For Participant EW1, the concept of giving back is like a double edged sword. On one hand, he was selected as the chairman of the tribal council. As the leader of the people, he had the great opportunity to give his all to the community. On the other hand, his wife and friends often questioned why he gave so much to the people when he received little in return. He explained,

And it’s kind of weird because my wife questions me on that [giving back]...and even some of my friends, they say, “Why do you give one hundred and ten percent when the tribe won’t love you back one hundred percent either?” They’re

right, politics is funny, you know, and sometimes you can be out tomorrow, but that's okay. I mean, the tribe has blessed me, has given me the opportunity to do something that would have taken me years on the outside world to do what I've done in ten years, so giving back to me is working in a job that doesn't pay very well and listening to people complain and moan about this or that.

Despite being underpaid and carrying the burdens of the community, Participant EW1 described why he continues to give so much to the people,

They're hurting, you know, they're hurting. It's not as easy as, you know, we're always taught when we're in the school systems that oh, we can grab our boots by the bootstraps and we can do anything we want . . . [but] it's not always that easy.

And looking at these people who are hurting and who are sick and who have diseases...it really makes me have a heart for them.

Participant EW3 enjoyed working as a teacher at the local tribal school but she eventually had to quit after realizing that she no longer had enough time or energy to give to her own extended family. She recalled,

that was the only problem I had with it [working at the tribal school]. The hours were so long and I was like . . . I give, give, give to everybody else's kids. And I don't even give time to my nieces and nephews because by the time I get home, I'm like, don't talk to me. And all of a sudden they would be like, I need help with my homework and I was like, what am I doing? I can't even help my own family and that's when I was like, this is [the time to make a change].

For Participant EW2, she has devoted her career to the tribal community by educating the Native youth about the dangers of alcohol and drugs. She encourages the

youth to pursue a healthy lifestyle by making healthy choices and abstaining from substance abuse. However, she is frustrated knowing that there are prominent adults in the community who hold key positions that are using the very things she is trying to eradicate. Rather than being part of the solution, they are part of the problem. She explained,

we need to, as educated people, decide what our association with alcohol and drugs is going to be in our future. [We need to] start affecting [the] adult's use of alcohol and drugs [because] what if they're [the youth] aspiring to be that adult? I don't [want to] say names but we have some people in some key positions, role models, that are in that life [of using drugs and alcohol].

Struggles: Strained Community Relationships

Participant EW4 reported that is not uncommon for a Native graduate to have their academic accomplishments minimized by other Indian people when they transition back to the community. For example, he discussed one way to put down a Native persons educational accomplishments is by reducing the value of their college degree by suggesting that it's only a "white man's education". He explained,

You attain your degree and it's not the norm in your community and so people kind of look at that as a way to kind of put you down, or say what we think you are. You got your white man's education and trying to think you're better than us. I don't get a lot of that because I really try to live my life positively and the connections I make are pretty positive but I'm aware of that. I'm aware that some of my family members go through that . . . it's devastating.

When asked why some Native people would treat a college graduate in a negative way, Participant EW4 explained the behavior this way:

I always just say, we're living in this crisis management type of lifestyle as Native people and we're trying to do anything to try to level off. Trying to get our balance, our physical, mental, spiritual balance, whatever it is. And, anytime you see [somebody doing good]. . . you latch on to somebody who's like getting ahead and like...I got to latch on to them or I got to bring them down and you can see that...it's just devastating.

Despite the negative affects of those that may try to "latch on" and pull him down, he continues to strive to live a positive life by consciously staying connected to tribal communities. No matter where he works, lives or what level of education he attains. He makes sure to take time to participate in community activities and staying culturally grounded. He explained,

I'll go down [to the tribal community] and I'll try to be just like fooling around with the youth, you know, as a way to be connected. And we do all of our conferences and our career days and all of that stuff, but, you know that opportunity to just be involved or go down [and] MC events because they're [the youth] looking at you like, "Oh wow, you still come around here because you made it, didn't you make it? Why are you here?" But it's not about that, it's about sticking together as a community, we're in it together. As much as we can do to maintain that connection we have to be grounded, I have to be grounded spiritually.

Do I Stay on the Rez or do I Leave?

Participant EW3 also admitted that although she loves living on the reservation close to her family, she still misses the excitement of traveling across the United States and other countries during the eight years she served in the military. She enjoys the good things about living on the reservation such as family, culture, and community gatherings; however, she still struggles with the desire to leave once again and enjoy simple things that are not readily available on a reservation such as a late night trip to a local Wal-Mart. She explained,

I love everything about off the reservation but at the same time, I love everything about being here. But at the same time, it's not the same when I can't go to powwows or you're not there for a funeral. That was always nagging at me and that loss of . . . well I'm not there for my relatives or anything or I can't come back to these ceremonies because I don't have the time to come back. At the same time though, but I enjoy living in the city, I enjoy where I can go shopping at two o'clock in the morning and there's going to be grocery store open or a Wal-Mart somewhere close by that I don't have to drive an hour out of my way to go to. I'm just like, I love it [at home] but come seven o'clock when the store closes, you're out of luck. That's the challenge of living in a small, rural rez.

[*Laughs*]

RESPECTED ELDERS

Section One: K-12 Experience

This section describes the emergent themes in the K-12 experiences of the Respected Elders. The themes among this group included walking in two worlds: impact of the school system on identity, positive family influence and expectations, negative reinforcement, and encountering racism.

Walking in Two Worlds: the Impact of the School System on Identity

A salient theme among this group was how their identities were shaped and molded during the early schooling years. Illustrative of this theme were the insightful recollections of Participant RE4, who described the double curriculum in which characterized his early years. He explained, “It was a different education as you grew up. You still had your cultural influences from time to time and in the academic year . . . it intervened into what you learned with your culture. So you did kind of live a bicultural existence. You know, taking part with your contemporary life, but also with your cultural life-ways throughout the year, taking part with your cultural activities and ceremonies.” In parallel, he described the stark contrast between his home environment and the school environment. The school environment and curriculum “promoted a mainstream culture” and was absent of “our culture and traditions”. Conversely, his home environment consisted of “exposure to language, exposure to the traditions...the sweathouse complex, the Indian religion was held in the home.”

Furthermore, he described how the educational system placed undue pressure on the identities of the Indian kids in the school. He recalled, “it seemed like around the sixth and seventh [grade] we began to really feel the pressure of our identity in being

Indians because we came from the reservation and it seemed we were outsiders.” One of the coping strategies that he and his friends employed was to band together in order to survive in the school system. He stated, “it seemed like as we advanced to seventh, eighth and ninth grade it began to become more omnipresent in our lives that we were Indians and we were separate. And so we began to band together at that time, me and my friends.”

Although he and his friends found ways to survive in the school system, he did not realize that the line that separated the two worlds, which he described as an “invisible line”, would have lasting effects:

When you went to school, there was that invisible line between what was your home life, and what your education had promoted because there was nothing in the schools to reinforce your identity in who you were. And that began to really impact not only me but other Native American students that there was nothing there in the school system. You can't see the [invisible] line, but you can feel it.

At the time you don't really know it, but you do know that something's *wrong*. This cultural separation took a heavy toll on not only his identity, but also his fellow Indian classmates of his generation. He described how the federal Indian policies aimed at cultural assimilation negatively impacted his identity:

The school system didn't compliment our cultural values and that's why I think back it was very damaging for people of my age to, you might say being forced down to the mainstream, without no recourse. In my time it was very. . . just a bleak scenario. And it seemed at the height of enforcing federal Indian policy and we became the products of it. And it goes to show you can see that it had a

damaging effect on a person's identity. And that's why we always have Indians with such low self-esteem and low achievement. And they're expected to fail [*Laughs*]. There's no other way to say it. Discrimination and racism were there. And in many ways it's still there and I worry about the younger people today.

Participant RE3 also grew up in a type of bicultural existence. He was primarily raised by his grandparents who were members of two different tribes and spoke different indigenous languages. English was rarely spoken in the home and consequently, he struggled in school. He recalled, "when I was living with my grandparents, they were always talking both of those tribal languages and I got to be able to understand and talk those languages. So when I got to school. . . I didn't know much about English." He concluded that the reason why he passed from the first to second grade was not based on merit but because of favoritism. He stated, "I passed from the first to the second grade because I was [a] teacher's pet so to speak. What do they call it, social promotion?" His educational deficiencies, however, eventually caught up with him following year. "I got to second grade and I flunked because I couldn't read." He credits his love for sports as the primary reason why he stayed in school. He stated, "I really liked sports and that was the only thing that kept me in school. Otherwise I probably wouldn't be going."

Participant RE2 was the daughter of a white mother and a full blood Indian father. Her identity was shaped during the time in American society when it was considered taboo for Indians and whites to intermarry. She stated, "in those days it was also not allowed for Indians and whites to mix." Her parents experienced rejection from both the white and Indian sides of the family. "So when they did that they were really crossing

the line for both people, because the Indian people were not too happy about whites marrying into the tribe either. So they experienced that rejection from both sides of their cultures and parents . . . except my Indian grandmother.” Fortunately, her Indian grandmother accepted the marriage and became RE2’s most significant mentor in her life. She stated,

[my grandmother] was completely accepting of my mother and then I was the first grandchild so she was extremely happy to be having her first grandchild, and was really good to my mother and dad. And of course she ended up being my most important mentor. She was probably the most important person in my life that influenced me in the early years.

Positive Family Influence and Expectations

Several participants mentioned the influential role that their families played during their early years. For example, the academic success that Participant RE1’s achieved throughout high school can be traced back to the home. She adeptly described her home environment as an “incubation of education” which consisted of her siblings “playing school.” Their definition of school consisted of the older kids taking turns instructing the younger siblings about things they learned in school. She explained,

I come from a huge family so when we were young, we used to always play school before we’d even go to school. So we could all read and write before we were even 5, we were like 4 and we had to do it. We would be playing school. The older ones would come home and teach the younger ones what they had.

This ingenious learning environment or, “incubation of education”, was encouraged and modeled by the parents. She described her dad as a “math wiz” and remembered having several “books around to read” since her mom and dad were avid readers.

Although growing up in a bifurcated world put a tremendous strain on his identity, Participant RE4 credits the exposure to his culture, traditions and extended family as a source of strength for maintaining his Native identity. He stated, “many of us who were brought up in an extended family, we were fortunate because the traditions were kept up in the home...we all ate together. So that extended family was present when I grew up and I’m very fortunate now as I look back on it.” He continued to describe how his family encouraged him to actively participate in his cultural traditions. He recalled,

I was introduced to a lot of the culture when I was younger and that stayed with me. And that compelled me to stay at that participation. And that was important that my family had always impressed upon me to take part with traditions and customs and ceremonies. So that was just a part of me. And so that gave me a lot of exposure to elders...especially when my parents were gone. And so my uncles became very influential with me.

Family expectations were also a salient theme among this group. Participant RE1 recalled how her parents and extended family placed high expectations on her to go to college at an early age. When the conversation of college came up, she vividly remembered how her parents strongly promoted the idea that college was not just an option, but a certain part of her future. She explained, “Mom and dad would never say, “Are you going to college?” They would say, “Which college are you going to?” And it

was an expectation because of the ability I had. [I had] very good grades...it was just expected for me that I would be going.” Even her extended family recognized her academic abilities and they also expected her to go to college as well. She explained, “I think it was an expectation of not just my parents but of my aunts, my uncles and my grandmother. It was like tracking a child to go along, the family said here’s the one who has the ability to go to college, has the smarts to go to college.”

Negative Reinforcement

Although many of the participants reported that they received encouragement from their family and extended families to go to college, many had to overcome discouraging interactions with teachers and school counselors. Participant RE1 remembered how the school counselor used to deliberately try to steer the kids from going to a 4-year college and advised them to go to a community college. She stated, she was actually steering many people that way. That was her mantra I guess. I would talk to some of my other friends and she was trying to steer most of the kids into a two year college first, probably because we come from such a small school. I think she was afraid of the transition.

Even though participant RE1 was an excellent student throughout high school, the school counselor still recommended that she matriculate into a two-year college as a first step. “Even though I was getting straight A’s all the way through my senior year, the counselor was trying to get me to go to a two year college first to get my feet wet. I said, well, “It’s just a waste of time.” This type of self-confidence paid off as she ultimately rejected the counselor’s recommendations and began at a four-year college.

Two (RE1, RE4) of the participants discussed negative experiences with a teacher. Participant RE4 expressed that he received “no positive reinforcement” from his teachers in school. He went on to say, “And you knew they [teachers] didn’t care for you. When you know that, there’s no sense of even walking to the classroom if you got that attitude [*Laughs*].” Participant RE1 reported how she was once rebuked for being able to read at a level *above* her own age-group. She stated,

When I went to first grade we had a brand new teacher who was just out of school herself. And we would be sitting around in our little read chairs and my favorite memory, sitting around in the little red chairs with the big flip board, and Mrs. Jackson would point at it and say, “Now this says . . .” Then I would say, “Dick.” “Now this says . . .” And I would say, “Jane.” And about the third or fourth word she stops, “*You cannot read, I have to teach you how to read.* So 6 years old, I can’t read? I’ve been reading for two years but I can’t read because the teacher just said! I didn’t let that bother me, I just didn’t read out loud for her.[*Laughs*]

In this case, the novice teacher tried to deflate Participant RE1’s superior reading ability rather than building on (or at least acknowledging) her precociousness. Participant RE1 wisely resisted the demoralizing words of the teacher and managed the situation by *acting* as if she was being taught “how to read.”

Participant RE2’s challenges occurred at home. She painfully discussed the paradoxical lives that her parents lived as alcoholics and yet exhibited positive traits by believing in hard work, promoting education, and providing for the family.

She remembered,

I had grown up now, and you know, alcoholic family, both my parents eventually gone . . . they went alcoholic. And our family experienced that, they both continued to work full-time, which is not what a lot of Indian families have. Both my parents continued to work full-time, but at the same time, they still had problems with the drinking. And we see it as a physical problem. They would have been alcoholics no matter what they did . . . they just couldn't drink, that's all. It was a physical problem that they couldn't cope with it, especially my dad. So, having seen that, I just really forced to make decisions to make it at times when I really wasn't getting much support from anyone because alcoholism takes that away. But I had to keep going . . . I think it's because my relationship with my grandmother and also when my dad hadn't been drinking . . . he was a really wonderful role model. And he really believed in education, and I think that really stuck with me, no matter what.

Encountering Racism

Two (RE2, RE4) of the four elders spoke in detail about encountering racism at some point during their young lives. Growing up on a reservation, Participant RE4 explained that his community was virtually surrounded by racist towns. "I think back on those days because it seems like any town that's adjacent to a reservation has a high degree of racism and discrimination. And that's what I faced . . . I seemed to detect that when I was at a very young age." Participant RE2 who spent part of her pre-teen years in an urban city, painfully recalls how her biracial identity of being half Indian/ half white cost her a friendship. She stated,

[my family] moved to the [urban city]...and that was the first time I really learned that I was Indian. A neighbor girl that lived there next to us in [urban city] told me she couldn't play with me anymore, and I asked her why, and she said, "Because you're Indian." And I don't know what all was said, but I remember, I wanted to know why . . . I couldn't understand why. And it made me cry and I went home and my mother said what's wrong and I told her, and she said something like, "Well, you need to learn that other people don't always understand. I needed to understand that other people don't always understand. And that was the message I got from my mother from that first incident of learning that I was Indian and I wasn't always going to be accepted by people and until that point, I didn't really know what that felt like.

This nugget of wisdom helped her cope with the cruel reality that she may not be accepted or liked by people simply because she was Indian.

Section Two: Transition to College

This section focuses on the experiences of the Respected Elders as they transitioned from their home community to college. The themes among this group were difficult transitions to college and nonlinear paths to college.

Difficult Transitions to College

Two (RE1, RE3) of the four respected elders encountered difficulties during their transitions to college. Participant RE3 stated that he had "no support" during his transition to college. Perhaps the lack of support was due to fact that his parents only had a 5th or 6th grade education and he was the first in his family to attend college. After earning a full-ride basketball scholarship, he made a successful transition on the court;

however, he struggled in the classroom. He stated, “I flunked the first semester, I was on the freshman basketball team and everything else and [I] was making all my practices but I wasn’t studying.” After falling too far behind academically, he decided to transfer to a college closer to home.

From a social perspective, Participant RE1 had a successful transition. She initially moved into the dorm and made some good friends right away. She recalls, “I moved into a dorm and I loved college right away, I loved the independence, I loved the dorm life, so to speak.” However, at some point during the adjustment to college life, she encountered overt racism for the first time. She explained,

It was the first time I ever met face to face racism. That was very strange; I had never seen it before. Well, I’m sure there was subtle racism as we grew up. Because we were insulated by our big family and our attitudes . . . I didn’t really pay attention to it. This was out in your face, “Oh, you’re Indian.” “Oh, I’m *Indian*?” [She answered sarcastically.] [*Laughs*] And that was in the dorm, some of the women in the dorm who were from other parts, especially . . . I remember this one woman, young woman who was from Washington, southwest, she said, “Oh you’re Indian, I’ve never met an Indian.” I’m thinking, okay. And she goes, “Do you still live in teepees?” And I’m thinking, it’s 1968 what are you talking about? So that was a shocker, meeting up with racism, [I] never had that. I said, “We even have working toilets in our house!” [She again responds sarcastically.] [*Laughs*]

Nonlinear Paths to College

Participant RE2 and RE4 did not make a typical transition to college since they went to college later in life. They both held down jobs and gained valuable work experience after high school. After graduating from high school in 1954, Participant RE2 got married to a non-Indian man at the age of 21 and worked for a large airline company in Seattle, WA, for several years. During the 1960's, a new Urban Indian Center opened in Seattle and she lived what she called a "double life", as she volunteered at the Indian Center while moonlighting at the airline company. At the Indian Center, she became deeply involved in "Indian political activism" and "social justice." After a few years of being "completely absorbed" in various social and political causes related to Indian people, she and her husband eventually got a divorced. She stated, "it couldn't be helped because I was just being Indian and it wasn't comfortable for my non-Indian husband." She later landed a job as the tribal director of a community action program on a rural reservation just 50 miles away from her home Indian reservation. She remarried a member of her own tribe and eventually moved back to her home reservation to work for her people in 1969. She has been there ever since. While working as her tribe's first personnel director, she enrolled in a two-year degree program while working full-time. After being out of a formal academic setting for so many years, she credits her successful transition to college based on the flexible work schedule provided by her employer and the degree program that was tied directly to the community.

Participant RE4 also had a nonlinear path to college. Participant RG4's inspiration to go to college came during the time he worked as a firefighter. He was part of an elite team called the "smoke jumpers" and he was impressed with the sacrifices some of his fellow comrades made to go to college. He recalled,

I was associated with a lot of friends who were white friends and a lot of them were taking summer jobs because it helped their schooling, and I saw the sacrifices that they made. I was a smoke jumper, in 1966, and that kind of really did it for all my friends who were college educated, and I was the only Indian and they always liked me a lot. What I saw from them, there was a principal, there was professors . . . and I just always admired that elite group of firefighters and I saw what they did. And so based on that, when I came home after firefighting and I went to community college.

Interestingly, as the only Indian among an elite team of white firefighters, Participant RE4's motivation to go to college was inspired by the fact that his fellow firefighters were also successful professionals during the non-firefighting season. He did not have any college educated family members or relatives that he could follow and emulate. At the community college, he enrolled in two courses (accounting and art) and he successfully passed both courses. This boosted his confidence. He stated, "by gosh I made it. And that motivated me...that was a beginning." By successfully passing those two courses, his pursuit of a college degree was well underway at the age of 29.

Section Three: College Life Experience

This section describes the unique experiences of the Respected Elders during their college years. The participants identified several factors that either assisted or hindered them during the process of degree attainment. The themes among this group included motivational factors, financial barriers, and the lack of academic preparedness and study skills.

Motivational Factors

For Participant RE4, the “fear of failing” proved to be a motivational factor during his college experience. He reported that this fear drove him to get an education for his family and his people. He stated,

by going to school you always have the fear of failing. And that’s just not me, but I think it’s everyone. Because your family puts a high price on education. There was a certain pride he [his uncle] had in me when I went to school. So, I think that’s when you begin to do it for them . . . do it for the tribe, do it for this uncle and this aunt who really stood behind you and said go to school [and] get an education.

Participant RE4 also suggested that the combination of hard work and the positive relationship with a professor were key persistence factors for him in college. He reported, “if you really put forth the effort and really develop a partnership with your professor, who has a lot to do with you making it, and that makes a big difference.”

Personal motivation was also a persistence factor for Participant RE1 and RE2 in college. Participant RE1 discussed why she was so motivated to graduate from college. She bluntly stated, “Well I had no other choice [*Laughs*]. I mean eventually you have to finish it. My scholarship was four years; I was on a four year time table.”

Furthermore, she described how her parents instilled into her the work ethic and mind-set that anything less than graduating from college was unacceptable. She commented,

even though I was on a scholarship, mom and dad made sacrifices to get me back and forth and to send me a dollar here and there and so it wasn’t really . . . it’s sort of like going to school. Not are you going to school, but *where* are you going.

Are you going to finish was not a question, *when* are you going to finish was the question. It was the mindset.

Participant RE2 was also motivated to go to college; however, this occurred in her later years. She began college in her 40s while working full-time as her tribe's first personnel program director. She enrolled in a two-year degree program that was funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This degree program was directly related to her job, which was designed to train tribal members for upper management positions. She later was involved the development of a new community college in her tribal community and decided to pursue a four-year degree. She recalled,

I was asked to be on the board of directors for the opening of that college and again, as I was working with that board, and I was being asked to work in student personnel administration. There was a gap in between my personnel job and the college. And I decided I should go back to college and I did. So I got in about a year or so of college and I was getting closer now to earn a four-year degree. And it became a real goal, so even though I went back to work, I continued to work on college credit. I decided that I would have a four-year degree by the time I was 50.

She eventually achieved her goal by completing her degree by the age of 50. She reported that the primary factors that helped her through the process were a flexible work schedule, family support, and that the course work was directly tied to the community.

Financial Barriers

The major barriers reported by this group were finances and the lack of academic preparation. Participant RE3 described his financial struggles in college,

[I] didn't have much money, [I] got a little help from the tribe. My parents didn't have that much, we didn't have scholarships like they have today and I worked in the summer for the farmers or in the mills trying to supplement the majority of my financial needs.

Even though Participant RE1 received money from her tribe, she stated, "the money I got was never enough."

The Lack of Academic Preparedness and Study Skills

Two (RE3, RE4) of the four participants reported that they were academically unprepared for college. Participant RE4 stated that he was "lacking with the study skills." Participant RE3 attended three different institutions during his undergraduate years. He also played collegiate athletics at all three institutions. At the first institution, he received a full-ride basketball scholarship at a large college but struggled in the classroom. He stated, "I went to [college] at first, I still didn't know how to study. I was a provisional student. I flunked the first semester". He eventually withdrew and transferred to a smaller college closer to home. The smaller college environment proved to be a better fit for him and he began to take school seriously. "I had to buckle down, start learning how to study. And what made it even better was that there was a kid from [home town area]. He said, "Come to my room and we'll study for this test." So from that time on I really learned how to concentrate and realized the value and I really thanked him for that."

In contrast, Participant RE1 made a relatively easy adjustment to the academic demands of college; however, she had to make an uncomfortable adjustment from being

one of the smartest people in her school to being a relatively “average” student on campus. She confessed,

I freely always admit this...at school here [home town]...I was always one of the smartest. And so I got into this, “I’m so smart.” I’d go to take tests and my friends would say, “That was hard. How did you finish it so fast?” And like I said, it wasn’t as challenging as I thought. Then I got to college and I thought, “Oh my God, there are a bunch of smart people here, people smarter than me.” And so that was one of the good lessons I learned and used along the way.

Section Four: Transition after College

This section describes the transitional experiences of the Respected Elders after degree attainment. Several of the participants encountered various challenges after graduating. Some challenges involved tension within families or places of employment, while others occurred within tribal communities. The themes among this group include serving as tribal leaders and continuing on to graduate school.

Participant RE2 and RE4 returned to their tribal communities to work after degree graduation. Participant RE1 moved back to an urban city where her parents relocated and Participant RE3 served two years in the military before moving back home.

Serving as Tribal Leaders

Participant RE3 and RE4 were both elected to serve on their respective tribal councils. Participant RE3 served two years in the military before moving back home. Fresh out of the military with a college degree, he was eager to make a difference. He stated, “[serving on the tribal council] was a learning experience, especially the first year because I thought I would jump in there and do all kinds of good things, I was trying to

change the world and make a difference” His enthusiasm would be tested as he experienced the ugly side of tribal politics early on. He stated, “I learned all the different political maneuvers, all the back-stabbing that was going on.” When asked what he meant by this, he stated,

The good-old-boy system . . . some of my uncles that were in there. They knew I was wet behind the ears and I wanted to be at least a vice-chair if not the chairman but they’d just vote their buddies in. The only thing they’d let me be is maybe a chair of education or subcommittees or something like that. They had me running around all over the United States, all over the world doing a lot of things. I did a lot of good things for the tribe, but I wanted a little more recognition. I wanted to be able to assign authority but I was kind of a grunt I guess, but that was good though, that was a good experience, I learned a lot in politics.

Participant RE4 returned home and was elected as the vice-chairman of the tribal council. While serving in the tribal government, he decided to pursue a graduate degree. When asked about this dual role, he stated,

I felt this responsibility from my influences, to work for your people, they were there with me all the time. And when I went to [large] university, each step of the way began to just open up as far as the value of education. Because you begin looking at the statistics again and our students aren’t getting the educational opportunities. There’s an imbalance with providing educational opportunities to minorities and our Indian people. That makes you assert yourself a lot more

stronger, because you always have to try and make things better for the next generation to come.

Continuing on to Graduate School

Another commonality among this group was they all went to graduate school after finding out about scholarship opportunities earmarked for Native students to attend graduate school. While serving on tribal council, Participant RE3 was told by a friend about an opportunity to go graduate school on a full scholarship. He recalled, “I’m jumping on it, the door is open, I’m going in. I’m glad I did because once I got that degree, I came out and I had the opportunity to go to Washington D.C. and work over there in the education program and I did for a year, so I had that on my resume.”

Participant RE1 also heard about a graduate program that targeted Native students from the chairman of her tribe. Although she took advantage of the opportunity, she expressed her disappointment when she found that the curriculum was not relevant to Native populations. She reported,

I took the courses and everything and I kept waiting for it to become relevant to working with Indians and they didn’t have any Indians working with us and I finished over the period of the next two years. I finished all the course work, but a lot of other things were going on at the time so I never did the oral thesis.

A few years later she enrolled in law school through another scholarship opportunity called the Indian Education fellowship, and eventually obtained her law degree.

At the age of 50, Participant RE2 was encouraged to pursue a master’s degree by the president of the tribal college she was working for at the time. She stated, “the president of the college was trying to encourage [tribal members] to go on and get

master's degrees because there were hardly any available and he really preferred in the college to have master's level." She applied to two schools, one near home and the other several states away, and was accepted by both. She chose to stay close to home to help care for her ailing father. She received funding from the American Indian Scholarship program. She completed the course work but did not finish the thesis.

Participant RE4 first graduate school experience began when he enrolled in a teacher certification program as a part of a pilot program to increase the number of Native American teachers in the school system. During that time, he stated that he was "one of three enrolled tribal members who ever taught in the school system" in his local school district.

Section Five: Defining Giving Back

This section seeks to illustrate the ways in which Respected Elders define the concept of giving back. The themes among this group include giving back is tied to Native culture, giving back to the community and giving back as a motivational factor.

Giving Back is Tied to Native Culture

Participant RE1 and RE4 defined giving back in the context of Native culture. Participant RE1 stated,

Giving back is the way that the culture is, that [is the way] our cultures are. Everything is a gift to you, so it's just part of your culture, your nature that you should be able to replace it, you give that back. I was blessed with gifts, my intelligence and some of my writing abilities, and I need to use that for the community. It's not mine just to keep it and hoard.

For Participant RE4, the notion of giving back was inextricably tied to his cultural ways, which he learned from his elders and extended family. To illustrate, he explained how the concept of giving back is passed down from generation to generation through a cultural ceremony commonly known as a “give away.” He stated,

We’re famous for giveaways . . . people don’t understand that, they think they have to give you something right away. No. You’re giving something of value...and to make them feel good that you have respect for them. Like for this elder who stood up for me and my uncles, now they have grandchildren and they have great-grandchildren, and I have a responsibility. To me, if I could give back to what they taught me, to them, I think that would be something. I would really enjoy the opportunity. And when I speak at home, I would refer to the elders and I always want the children to understand that they have to promote their identity, and see how we were raised and to have more respect and be thankful for what we have. That is so vitally important.

Giving Back to the Community

Participant RE1, RE3 and RE4 associated giving back with the act of repaying the tribal community what the tribe has given them. Participant RE1 suggested that the practice of giving back was an “unconscious thing” to do among her people given that it is a part of her tribal nature. Furthermore, the desire to give back was also reinforced because of the financial support she received from her tribe as an undergraduate and law student. She stated,

So you have to come home eventually. And the other part, the unconscious thing of the giving back . . . well, I got my education through a lot of. . . well, I started

with a scholarship from my tribe and I get my other scholarships and fellowships because I'm a member of this tribe. That's using something that was given to me where you've got to give back. That's just again, part of the nature of us.

Participant RE4 stated,

we always mentioned paying back to your community for what the community had given you. You become a product of your community, but also how did you get to where you are today without returning something, whether it's knowledge, whether it's opportunities for the young generation.

Participant RE3 takes it further and suggests that giving back means that when a person gives something they should not expect anything in return. He stated,

Well, any time the tribe would ask me anything, it was just like I always addressed the elders, they've all given me so much. So whenever they asked for something, I would always try to give back, I mean I don't even ask for anything, favors, [or] something like that.

Giving Back as a Motivational Factor

Participant RE1 and RE4 indicated that in college they were motivated to give back with the intention of using their education to help their people. Participant RE1 stated,

when I was in law school and I would hang out with my law professors who were good friends of mine, some of them, they would say, "Well, [Participant RE1], you're getting a law degree, what's your goal?" And I said, in ten years I want to be Chief Judge of my tribe. Okay, it was two years [*Laughs*]. I had to reset a goal, but no, I always knew it was something I wanted to do was to come back.

Participant RE4 stated that as an undergraduate student, going back home and doing things for his people “was one of my motivations that [was] foremost in mind. No matter where I went or what path I followed and no matter what challenge it was...it was always there, they [his people] were there looming in my mind.”

As a tribal elder, Participant RE4 stated that the motivation to give back has become stronger with age. He stated, “the older you get, the more it seems to be more of a motivating factor. That almost comes as a burning desire. Because you kind of become afraid, if we lose all of this, what’s going to happen? When you go into eldership, you worry a lot about that.” Participant RE2 also referred to this sense of urgency to help future generations. She recalls growing up that the elders used to say, “We need our children to get educated so they can take over this work [in the community].” Now that she is an elder, she has a strong desire to “put more energy into protecting [the] children” by leaving the world “healthy and safe” for her “grandchildren and great grandchildren of the future, the children I’ll never see or know.”

Of all of the participants in this group, participant RE4 spent the most time discussing what the concept of giving back meant to him. He was raised in an environment where “doing things for the people” was a way of life. He stated,

It seems like the elders at home on my reservation, it seemed like they always lectured with you all the time. You wanted to do it for your, like my uncle said, for your people, that was there all the time. You do it for your people. When you go back and help your people in some way.

Not surprisingly, when asked what was the first thing that comes to mind when he hears the term giving back he succinctly stated, “my upbringing.” It should be noted that

Participant RE4 frequently mentioned the importance of giving back to his people several times throughout the interview before he was asked to describe the concept of giving back.

Section Six: Giving Back: Rewards and Struggles of Giving Back

This section seeks to illuminate the rewards and struggles associated with giving back after college for Respected Elders. The primary rewarding theme was advocating for the people. The theme associated with the struggles of giving back was strained community relationships.

Rewards: Advocating for the People

For Participant RE3, the most rewarding experience of giving back was when he worked as a health educator for his tribe. Working as a health educator was an ideal job for Participant RE3 given that he was a former college athlete, earned a master degree, was regarded as a role model, and also because he cared for the people. He explained, “being a health educator, one of our main things involved prevention, and I got to try to be a role model and also show people how to live basically from day to day with health in mind. I’d say, “Go to health!” [**laughs**]”. Furthermore, he was driven to educate the people about the importance of taking care of themselves by informing them about how the body and mind work hand in hand. He explained,

I would try to make everybody aware of their diets . . . their physical beings, any kind of exercise movement and good positive mental health because I don’t really believe in psychiatry and all these other stuff because I’ve never had to use it because I use our own traditional things [I learned from] smart elders.

As the personnel director for her tribe, Participant RE2 often found herself playing the role of an advocate, counselor or cheerleader on behalf of the “educated Indians” who worked for the tribe. She recalled how some of the community members would mistreat those who left the community and returned with college degrees. As such, she would often “bridge the gap” between the educated Indians and the tribal community. She explained,

When I saw someone feeling left out and not included because of their education or because they had special skills or something and I would [tell them], but that’s what [the tribe] needs you to do here and you’ll have to put up with some people not treating you well. And you’ll have to put up with the mistreatment. And that would mean to me, rising above it, which is not to say that you’re better than someone else, but it’s to say that there is something more important here than just me being treated the way I want to be treated, which is treated really well.

Participant RE4 expressed sadness when he described how the gradual erosion of the cultural teachings of his people has negatively impacted the young people. The young people did not learn the cultural ways that he learned growing up such as respect for the elders and respect for oneself. He explained,

Now, we have children who come from broken homes, dissolution of the extended family, so yes, our children are raised in a different time where there is a lack of respect. Not only for themselves, but you know, for elders as well, and it’s not their fault. But that’s why we have to work a little harder, to recreate a more, friendlier climate for our children and that’s up to us to do that, because our time was different.

However, to mitigate the negative affects of the cultural erosion of the youth, Participant RE4 stated that the most rewarding experience he had was bringing back the old religion of his tribal community and also promoting young Indian athletes. He commented,

we brought back our ancient religion in the early 1970's and we took part with the big drum and singing, and we promoted that as young adults. And I felt, to me, it was a way of, we always mentioned paying back to your community for what the community had given you. You become a product of your community, but also how did you get to where you are today without returning something, whether it's knowledge, whether it's opportunities for the young generation. And so what we did was, I felt that was really important because it went many directions from that point as a young adult. We highlighted sports, you do your studies and we created an athletic association and because it was lacking in the local area, but we promoted Indian athletes and we had some all-stars. And they succeeded and they did real well, but that was part of my upbringing to what I could do, me and my friends, when we took charge. We brought back the religion. That was a big turning point in my life, was to see Native students really get their recognition, and we stood behind them. And we didn't have a lot of money in those days, fundraising was just a part of life. We didn't have any grants or exposure or opportunities like that in our day, we went out, we had a baseball field, we took the rakes and the shovels [*Laughs*] and we made the baseball field.

Struggles: Strained Community Relationships

Given that the participants in this group come from large extended families in their tribal communities, the task of remaining objective in their jobs can be difficult, if

not impossible. Specifically, this was true for Participant RE1, who serves as the chief tribal judge for her own tribe. Because she personally knows so many people in the community, remaining objective is a very delicate matter when she reviews each court case. Regardless of how objective she is, she ultimately has to make difficult decisions which can easily hinder friendships. She explained,

You don't make a lot of friends sometimes in your decisions, but that was the challenge at the trial level too. You've got to be able to be objective, if there's a case that involves a person that I know, which is more likely to happen in tribal communities than in state or federal, on our level . . . you know . . . I know a couple of them that if their names come across the desk, I say I don't even want to deal with who gets to be on the case. It's like, who's against him? Well, they win. [*Chuckles*] So recognizing...as part of being fair and objective, you have to recognize when there are situations you can't, so you step out of it.

In addition, Participant RE1 struggled when she occasionally disappointed the elders in the community because "they don't really understand why you're following the law."

Of all of the participants in this group, Participant RE2 shared the most poignant, yet powerful, insight of how painful it can be for a Native college graduate to return home and to be judged unfairly. She recalled how difficult it was to observe the people in her community go out of their way enthusiastically to encourage the young people to go away to college only to give them the cold shoulder when they returned home with a degree. The community treated them differently because they thought the young, college-educated people had changed. She stated, "When the young people got educated, people would say, "Well they're different now, they're not like us anymore. So they

went . . . they were different now, and that's the problem with education. They say that we speak different or act different." In other words, being called "different" was essentially tantamount to being called a white person or non-Indian. Being labeled this way had serious consequences for members of the community because now you became distrusted, or even feared, to some degree. She explains,

when they came back, they weren't treated with the same welcome, trusting reception to work here and it seemed like they were more feared because they would speak American English, talk about things maybe over people's heads. The common phrase was, "Oh, they tried to talk over our heads." I heard people say that, and, "Oh they're using those big words." You know, three, four syllable words.

Although Participant RE2 eventually went to college, she was afraid of being rejected like several of her predecessors that went away to college.

I would hear people criticize some of the ones that did go away and get four-year degrees and there was one who actually had two master's degrees and wasn't well received here. That really worried me because I really wanted an education and didn't want to be rejected by my own people.

Just to make sure she was accepted by her community, she actually made a conscious effort to fit in by speaking and writing in simple ways because she was worried about sounding like one of *them* (i.e., an educated person). She commented, "And you know what, I practiced really hard to write and speak simple words and not use three and four syllable words [*Laughs*]."

Participant RE2 also noticed if the educated Indians endured the initial transition back home and landed a job with the tribe, the criticism did not stop there. There was further “testing” that they had to endure. She recalled,

And the ones who were wanting to come home and work here, very often after they did get a job. . . like some who got on the tribal council were really tested. They were really put through hard situations of criticism or ridicule at times, really hurtful. And I noticed they would eventually leave, they’d kind of fade away, and a few I’m afraid will never come back, so that bothered me a lot, and I really wanted to try to find an answer for it.

Participant RE2 suggested that one way for an educated Indian to cope with being mistreated by one’s tribal community is to understand that others may not feel good about themselves and so when they see someone else getting ahead they try to bring them down to make themselves feel better. She specifically mentioned the crab in the bucket mentality. She explained,

sometimes people are mistreating you and it’s not your fault. Sometimes they pick you as the target to blame. They don’t know it’s not your fault that you’re doing something better than them. That’s the part that’s hard to fix because when they don’t feel good about themselves, they’ll look for people to pick on who are doing well. One man had told me years before that--what he called it was the “keeping down with the Joneses” syndrome. [The urban city] drove me crazy because people were so materialistic. And he said, “At the reservation it’s keeping *down* with the Joneses.” Somebody gets too much, they will try to pull them down. And I thought, “that’s sick.” So they called it the [tribal name] crabs

in the bucket story and that was don't try to do too well, because you'll just have the rest of them grab a hold of you and pull you back down. You try to crawl out of this bucket, and they're going to keep you here and pull you back. That didn't sound well to me. So I had to work on overcoming that attitude, that syndrome, and I really felt that it was because they were so mistreated at some point in time that they could do that to their own people. If that was true, then we have to find ways to show that people can do better with their lives and that it's okay to do better with their lives. Yes, being happy for other people means being happy for yourself. Give credit for doing good, give them credit.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:
INTERGENERATIONAL COMPARISONS

Overarching Themes

The common themes among all three groups were the positive family influences and expectations, academic difficulties, encountering racism, and overcoming adversity. The concept of giving back was defined in the context of tribal community, family, culture, education, and helping the people. The process of giving back resulted in rewarding and challenging experiences as well. The rewarding experiences included becoming role models and advocating for the people. Strained relationships in the community were the primary struggle of giving back.

Brief summaries of the intergenerational comparisons between the three groups are delineated below.

Summary of K-12 Experience section

There were several similarities and differences that emerged in the K-12 experiences of the three groups. The common themes between the Recent Graduates and the Experienced Workers include the desire to leave the reservation, family influence and positive reinforcement, and peers dropping out of school. The common themes between some of the Recent Graduates and the Respected Elders include dealing with racism and the positive impact of family influences and expectations. The common themes between the Experienced Workers and the Respected Elders include receiving both positive and negative reinforcement from family and extended family. The common threads among all three groups were dealing with racism, overcoming various adversities, and the positive impact of family influences and expectations.

The salient differences that emerged between the three groups were the Experienced Workers were the only group that mentioned the inadequacy of attending a small, rural school on the reservation. They reported that the rural schools had limited educational offerings and did not prepare them for college. The other outlying factor was the Respected Elders did not mention a desire to leave the reservation like the other two groups. In addition, they also spoke at length about the relationship between the school system they attended and the impact it had on their identities as young Native people.

Summary of Transition to College Section

There were more differences than similarities between the three groups related to the transition to college. The common themes between the Recent Graduates and the Experienced Workers include personal support and cultural adjustments. There were not any clear similarities between the Recent Graduates and Respected Elders with regard to the transition to college nor were there any clear similarities between the Experienced Workers and Respected Elders.

By and large, the transitional experiences among the three groups were different in various ways. The salient differences that emerged were the Recent Graduates discussed the positive impact of the Native American student centers that are relatively common at mainstream institutions. In addition, they discussed how the size of their high schools they attended, whether small or large, had an impact on their transition to college. The Experienced Workers were the only group that mentioned that leaving the reservation gave them a sense of freedom. For the Respected Elders, one clear difference was that two of the participants were non-traditional students and they had uncommon transitions to college after being away from a formal school setting for many years.

Summary of College Life Experience Section

There were several similarities and differences that emerged in the college life experiences of the three groups. The common themes between the Recent Graduates and the Experienced Workers include academic difficulties and the positive impact of the Native American student center. The one common theme between the Recent Graduates and the Respected Elders was overcoming multiple barriers. The one common theme between the Experienced Workers and the Respected Elders was the lack of academic preparedness. The one common thread among all three groups is they reported some degree of academic difficulty in college as a result of the lack of academic preparedness and/or study skills.

Although one could argue that there were more commonalities between the groups, one could easily identify differences as well. The salient differences that emerged between the three groups were the Recent Graduates were more actively involved in student functions such as student organizations and leadership roles. In addition, the data suggested that the Recent Graduates were impacted by the scathing criticism from family and community members as well. Although all three groups experienced academic difficulties, a core difference was the Experienced Workers specifically identified the poor education they received at rural high school as the reason why they felt academically deficient. In addition, the Experienced Workers reported that they experienced community pressure as a result of going to college. Among the Respected Elders, the reported differences included financial barriers and the fear of failing as a motivational factor.

Summary of Transition after College Section

The results clearly indicate that the transitional experiences of the Recent Graduates after college were much more descriptive than the other two groups, particularly, the Respected Elders. Perhaps this is not surprising given that their transitions were obviously more recent and easier to recall. The one common theme between the Recent Graduates and the Experienced Workers was the challenges they encountered working for jobs that directly serve Indian people and/or reentering tribal communities. There were not any clear commonalities between the Recent Graduates and Respected Elders with regard to the transition after college nor were there any clear commonalities between the Experienced Workers and Respected Elders.

By and large, the transitional experiences were varied among the three groups. For the Recent Graduates, the salient differences that emerged were they specifically discussed the challenges they faced serving Native populations at the high school and postsecondary level. In addition, they discussed being role models and how the communities perception of an individual can change when a person obtains a college degree. The Experienced Workers mentioned the important role that community mentors play in reentering tribal communities after degree completion. For the Respected Elders, one clear difference was all four of the participants eventually decided to pursue graduate school.

Summary of Defining Giving Back Section

The results painted a nuanced picture of the concept of giving back from a Native American student perspective. There were several commonalities and overlapping themes among the three groups but there were also some subtle differences. The common themes between the Recent Graduates and the Experienced Workers was giving back to

tribal community was an obligation or “part of the deal”. Another commonality was giving back was tied to cultural values. The common themes between the Recent Graduates and the Respected Elders was giving back was tied to the tribal community and to the culture. Another commonality was that education was used for the purpose of helping the people. The common themes between the Experienced Workers and the Respected Elders was giving back was tied to the tribal community and was a strong cultural value that is grounded in the Native culture. In addition, giving back was connected to the youth or the young people and their perceptions of giving back have changed over time.

The salient differences that emerged between the three groups were the Recent Graduates specifically mentioned giving back in the context of leadership and role modeling. In addition, they differed from the two other groups in that most of this group stated that their perceptions of giving back have not changed over time. The difference among the Experienced Workers was they specifically mentioned giving back in relationship to self sacrifice and not expecting anything in return. A distinct difference among the Respected Elders is that as they have gotten older, there is a heightened sense of urgency to give back to the youth and the younger generations.

Summary of the Rewards and Struggles of Giving Back Section

This section focused on the rewards and struggles of Native American graduates associated with their experiences of giving back. Based on the results, the act of giving back was indeed a struggle that manifested itself in the lives of the participants in highly rewarding and painful ways. The common themes between the Recent Graduates and the Experienced Workers were dealing with the challenges living within tribal communities

on the reservation such as jealousy, finding a job, the struggle with the decision to live on the reservation or in an urban city, staying connected to tribal communities, and the pressure to physically move back to the tribal community. The common themes between the Recent Graduates and the Respected Elders were the notion of being “tested” or treated different when reentering tribal communities, and how loss of culture has impacted the youth and overall community. The common theme between the Experienced Workers and the Respected Elders was the desire to reconnect with the youth for the benefit for the community and the challenges of the dysfunctional behavior plaguing tribal communities commonly known as the crab in the bucket mentality.

The salient differences between the three groups were the Recent Graduates specifically mentioned how fulfilling it was to provide opportunities to help other Native people advance in their educational or professional endeavors. The difference among the Experienced Workers was they specifically mentioned how giving back requires great sacrifices of one’s own time and effort but receive little in return. This can put a strain on families. A distinct difference among the Respected Elders was they specifically wanted to promote and revitalize their respective Indian traditions and culture to help strengthen the identity of the young people.

The overall educational experiences of the Recent Graduates, Experienced Workers, and Respected Elders were complex. The data revealed several critical factors that assisted or hindered the participants before and after degree completion. In the final chapter, the conclusions of the study are delineated, followed by a discussion in light of the existing literature, and culminating with recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR FUTURE STUDY AND PRACTICE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of “giving back” and the role it plays throughout the educational journeys of Native American degree recipients and beyond. Specifically, the goal of the study was to investigate the following research questions:

1. How do Native American college graduates define giving back?
2. How does the concept of giving back influence the educational aspirations of Native American college graduates throughout their educational journey?
3. What are the rewards and struggles associated with giving back after college?
4. What are the perceptions of Native American graduates as to the benefits, or gain, to their tribal communities as a result of giving back?

Twelve Native American college graduates were interviewed to shed light on the aforementioned research questions. The participants in this study had a vast array of experiences based tribal affiliation, age, family structure, K-12 experiences, degree major, gender, institutional type, and the year of degree completion. The participants were loosely categorized into three groups based on the relative years they attended and graduated from college. The purpose for organizing the participants into three groups based on varied periods of time in which they attended and graduated from college was two-fold: 1) to shed light on the similarities and differences of the participants within each specific group that attended and graduated from college during generally the same

time period, and 2) to illuminate the intergenerational similarities and differences among the three groups that attended and graduated from college during wide-ranging periods of time.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that the concept of giving back indeed played a critical role in all twelve of the lives of the participants in this study. This finding confirms and extends the work of several studies that found that the concept of giving back to one's own community is a salient factor in the college-going process of Native American students (Brayboy, 1999; Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Garcia, 2000; Garvey, 1999; Guillory, 2002; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Lintner, 1999; Waterman, 2004). In fact, one-third of the participants talked about the importance of giving back *before* they were specifically asked the questions related to the concept of giving back. However, a key finding in this study is that the concept of giving back is much more complex, difficult, and even painful, in the lives of Native American degree recipients. That is, for every rewarding experience that giving back provided, there were also numerous struggles in the process. Although each participant explicitly expressed a desire to give back to their community after earning their degree, the process of degree attainment often strained the relationships between Native American graduates and their own community.

There were also several other important findings in this study that either corroborated or countered the findings of other studies on the educational experiences of Native American students. First, family support and encouragement was found to be a critical factor in the academic success of the participants (Angspatt, 2001; Davis, 1992; Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995; Garcia, 2000; Guillory, 2002; Jackson et al.

2003; Rindone, 1988; Waterman, 2005). Another positive influence, particularly for the Recent Graduates and Experience Workers, is the support from Native American student centers (Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995; Guillory, 2002). These student centers serve as a “home away from home” for Native students to socialize and provided opportunities for mentoring and tutorial support (Brown, 2005; Dell, 2000). In addition, the Native American student centers also provided opportunities for students to get involved in student organizations that promoted Native issues and culture on campus such as pow wows that can deeply enrich the overall college experience (Brown, 2005). This study confirmed the work of Willetto (1999) in that parent’s education level played a positive role in the educational aspirations of the students.

Several barriers were also identified. Racism was a consistent factor in all three groups at some point in their educational journey. Racism in the K-12 and college levels is still a significant problem that Native students have to face to this day (Huffman, 1991; Jackson, Smith, and Hill, 2003). This negative experience clearly suggests that over the period of decades, racism is not something of the past but is alive and well in the contemporary context.

Other factors such as financial challenges (Pavel, Swisher & Ward, 1995), lack of academic/study skills and social preparation were identified as barriers as well (Brayboy, 1999; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Reyner, 1992). Low teacher expectations were also identified as a barrier (Bowker, 1993). This study also confirms Huffman’s (2003) work in which Native American students from rural reservation schools were found to be ill-prepared for college. This area is fertile ground in need for further investigation.

The results also painted a nuanced picture of the concept of giving back from a Native perspective. By and large, the concept of giving back was defined in the context of tribal community, family, culture, education, and helping the people. The concept of giving back was also mentioned in the context of self sacrifice, leadership, role modeling and for the purpose of helping the Native youth. The process of giving back also provided several rewarding experiences for the participants. The rewarding experiences included becoming role models, advocating for the people, serving as tribal leaders, and providing access for other Native people. Another significant finding is that the desire to give back has contradictory effects (Brayboy, 1999, Jackson, Smith, and Hill, 2003). Despite the good intentions of these students to give back to their communities, several participants had difficulty reentering their communities after degree completion. The challenges included difficulty finding employment, jealousy and strained relationships in the community, pressure to “physically” move back home, struggling to become change agents, and generational tension between new graduates eager for change and community members who resisted change.

The findings of this study are significant for two reasons. Although previous studies found that the desire to give back is a strong persistence factor for Native students through college, few studies specifically focused on the struggles associated with giving back for these students once they completed their degrees. The findings of this study clearly showed that the participants not only demonstrated a tremendous capacity, or threshold, of resiliency throughout their lives, one finding is that the participants continued to face adversity when they reentered and gave back to their tribal communities. One way to summarize this study is such that virtually every participant

shared a story of resiliency. Some of the participants displayed resiliency during their K-12 years, some as they transitioned to college, others during their college years, and some after degree completion; but most, if not all, encountered many challenges during the process of giving back which required them to continue to be resilient in order to endure. Therefore, the same resiliency they needed to overcome adversity while pushing toward degree completion was the same resiliency they needed to give back to the community. As such, there appears to a relationship between the desire to give back and resiliency.

Another important finding in this study was that the strengths and limitations of the *native capital* theoretical framework were illuminated. The strength of the native capital concept is that it is meant to bring the cultural practices of tribal communities and schools to the foreground, which, from a conceptual standpoint, is a good start with regard to understanding the educational experiences of Native students given that these contextual variables have long been ignored or overlooked. Important contextual variables such positive family influence and expectations, which was a major theme in this study, clearly aligned with the native capital framework. Other forms of capital that were identified in the schooling process were networking, leadership skills, and communication.

The data also revealed that several of the participants in this study had *parents* that possessed college degrees, which is an element of cultural and native capital. This was particularly true among the Recent Graduates and Experienced Workers. The parents of most of the Recent Graduates had at least a college degree, while some had master's degrees and one parent was pursuing a PhD. Among the Experienced Workers, the majority of the parents had *some* college education. However, a key trend was that

the *siblings* of the Experienced Workers had a college degree or were pursuing a college degree. As such, this suggests that there may be a generational trend given that the Recent Graduates and Experienced Workers acquired cultural capital by virtue of the encouragement from their parents. In this manner, education was an achievable goal because many of the participants in these groups saw their parents going to college.

For the Respected Elders, however, this was not the case. During the time period in which they grew up, Indian academic success was essentially nonexistent as nine out of every ten Native Americans dropped out of college (Szasz, 1974). Perhaps this is not too surprising given that the parents of the Respected Elders were encumbered with the burden of trying to resist the assimilation-driven policies of that particular time. Moreover, Indian families they were less likely to be encouraged to pursue a college degree than their White counterparts (Miller, 1979). Native students that attended higher education institutions during the termination era experienced egregious forms of “cultural discontinuity” such as overt racism and marginalization (Ogbu, 1982). As a result, many Native students voluntarily left or were “pushed out” by an unwelcoming environment (Szasz, 1974). In this context, this is an important point to consider given that the parents of the Respected Elders lived through the end of the boarding school era, experienced the termination era and possibly witnessed the advent of the self-determination era. With this in mind, perhaps this may explain why all of the Respected Elders in this study went on to pursue bachelors, masters, doctoral and law degrees because their parents understood that they needed to obtain a college education in order to endure the mercurial social and political American context during that time and well into the future.

In this light, the fact that the Respected Elders even went to college was a major accomplishment. The academic success of the Respected Elder's generation is significant because the generations that followed (Experienced Workers and Recent Graduates) are the children and grandchildren of their generation. Given that this study revealed that the desire to give back was defined in the context of the family and tribal communities, one can deduce that the desire to give back is learned and acquired within the family and tribal community and then passed down from generation to generation. This is consistent with Bourdieu's definition of cultural capital since he asserts that cultural capital is passed on from generation to generation.

Although the data confirmed that there are positive cultural values within the concept of give back as defined by Native graduates that are passed down from generation to generation that are healthy for the tribal communities, the data also suggests that there may be some negative dimensions that are also being passed down within the tribal communities. As such, the native capital concept was useful in terms of demonstrating the possibility that both positive *and* negative dimensions of giving back are also being passed down within tribal communities that have resulted in dysfunctional and jealous behavior. An example of negative dimensions is the "crab in the bucket" theory mentioned in the study. Data revealed that living in a tribal community where negative dimensions are rampant can be described as a "crab in the bucket" type environment. In this type of environment, people that want to do good for themselves and want to get "ahead" are often the target of ridicule and rejection and pulled back down as a result of such aspirations (i.e., keeping *down* with the Joneses). This type of behavior is perplexing, especially for the Native graduates that have positive intentions of

earning a college degree for the purpose of helping the tribal community. Perhaps this is a tragic consequence of generations of colonization (Adams, 1995; DeJong, 1993; Deloria & Lytle, 1984; Spring, 2001; Szasz, 1974). Only this time, Indian people have taken on the characteristics of the colonizer and they are oppressing their own.

This leads to the critical analysis of the term *native capital* itself. The term native capital, particularly, the juxtaposition of these two value-laden terms, is in itself problematic. First, native capital is an oxymoron because Native people do not necessarily value or define certain terms, such as “capital”, in the same manner as mainstream society. For example, as demonstrated in the literature review, the term “success” was defined in contrasting ways between mainstream society and tribal communities. In mainstream society, professional credentials, place of employment, job title, income, and educational level are often used to define success. In tribal communities, success was not measured in monetary terms but based on the way in which their achievements contributed to their tribal community. Likewise, the term “capital” carries the undertones of ownership for individualistic gain. Thus the term “capital” refers to the Westernized notion of the competitive pursuit of monetary gain for the purpose of the accumulation of wealth, which reeks of colonizing practices. In this context, the term *native capital* itself maybe offensive and may draw the ire of Native peoples given that the core ideal of a capitalistic society is the acquisition of valuable resources, often at the expense of others. For this reason alone, the native capital concept was problematic from a theoretical perspective because the results of this study revealed that the value and worth of an individual’s educational achievement is linked to the ways in which it benefits the *tribal community* and extended family and not necessarily with

how it can facilitate social mobility and confer status. In this manner, education is valued, by and large, to the extent that the community will be the beneficiary of the knowledge and not solely for individual gain and personal achievement.

In summary, the results from this study suggests that obtaining a college education to help ones tribal community is being passed down generation to generation as means of rebuilding that which has been damaged or sullied within tribal communities. This process is often referred as decolonization. However, this study also revealed that Native graduates that choose to give back to their community in diverse ways must be resilient enough to endure the wounds from ones own family and/or community during this rebuilding process. As such, Native graduates may have to learn how to live in a world of contradictions.

How can Native people rebuild their tribal communities into functional, healthy environments once again? And equally important, can schooling actually assist in this rebuilding process? Particularly for Native students that attend predominantly White institutions? Clearly, there is a need for the development of additional theoretical *language* that maybe more efficacious in terms encapsulating the complex cultural values such as giving back that are passed on from one generation to the next. After all, language is power (Apple, 1982). Thus, based on the ability of the participants in this study to overcome numerous adversities throughout their lives, the term *Native Resilience* is recommended as a beginning point in the development of culturally relevant scholarly language that may encapsulate the numerous complexities and contradictions that occur in the lives of Native people. The suggested term of *Native Resilience* is timely given

that the construct of resiliency is gaining popularity in the fields of social sciences and psychology. This topic is briefly discussed in the following section.

Recommendations for Future Study and Practice

All of the participants had to overcome numerous adversities at various stages throughout their educational journeys and life experiences. Each of the twelve participants could have easily been another disappointing statistic in the genre of American Indian research. Nevertheless, for various reasons, they remained amazingly resilient and persisted toward degree attainment and strived to give back to their respective tribal communities, often at great personal struggle. Their ability to be resilient at critical junctures of their lives is one of the most important findings of this study. Given this finding, a more appropriate framework to explore the concept of giving back as a persistence factor would be the resiliency framework. The construct of resiliency is gaining popularity in the fields of social sciences and psychology. In fact, research is currently being done in the area of cultural resiliency by American Indian and Native Hawaiian scholars (HeavyRunner, 2003; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2005). Resilience has been broadly defined as the ability to overcome adversity or bounce back (McCubbin, 2001). Masten, Best, and Garnezy (1990) have defined resiliency in three ways: 1) good outcomes despite adversity, 2) sustained competence under stress, and 3) recovery from trauma. One can argue that the educational and life experiences of the participants appear to fit these criteria. In addition, given the insidious damage that the school system had on the identities of the Respected Elders in this study, one can also make the argument that they overcame historical trauma. This phenomenon of historical trauma is also being investigated by Indian and non-Indian scholars (Duran & Duran,

1995). An area that needs further investigation is the connection between culture and resiliency and the role it plays on the lives of Native American students.

This study raised a number of questions that warrant further investigation. Given that the mission of higher education is to promote civic engagement, one question that this study raises is: should higher education institutions market giving back with a cultural focus? Another question is: Does “giving back” differ for those who didn’t grow up on a reservation? Given that the majority of participants in this study grew up on rural reservations, it was difficult to discern if there was a significant difference. Another area that needs further investigation is the efficacy of Native American student centers at mainstream institutions. One participant described the Native center as a “safe” place. What did she mean by safe? Was this her way of saying that the overall campus climate outside of the Native center was unsafe? The efficacy of these types of Native student centers at mainstream institutions needs to be further explored. Finally, another area that needs further investigation is the negative role that a school counselor can play in terms of sidetracking the educational and career paths of Native students. Several participants indicated that they had negative experiences with a school counselor. In fact, those that did suggested that they went to college *in spite* of the advice of their school counselors.

Implications

There are implications for many entities in this study. There are some implications in this study which directly relate to higher education institutions, academic researchers, recruiters, retention specialists, and administrators. It also has implications for tribal communities and Native students.

A key finding is the positive impact of the Native American student centers. The positive role of the Native centers was a theme among the Recent Graduates and Experienced Workers. Both groups essentially stated that the Native centers helped them to adjust to the campus milieu because they felt comfortable and welcomed. Native student groups and leadership programs were not necessarily available for the Respected Elders in their day. The data confirmed that extracurricular activities provided Recent Graduates and Experienced Workers with unique opportunities to learn valuable skills such as networking and leadership skills. However, there is still much more work to be done. Racism was clearly a theme throughout this study. As such, the necessity of improving the racial climate at predominantly white institutions requires a sustained and concerted effort. Institutional racism is still pervasive and systemic change must be facilitated and embraced at the leadership level. Mainstream institutions need to move beyond mere words but rather send a strong message that cultural diversity is to be valued, embraced and expected. Anything less than this should not be tolerated. Existing policies need to be enforced and supported by the allocation of sufficient resources to eradicate institutional racism.

Furthermore, in order for colleges and universities to increase the recruitment and retention Native American students they should intentionally include the parents or extended family as an integral part of the recruitment plan. Mainstream universities would be wise to no longer just focus on recruiting the student but rather the student and his or her family. The Family Education Model (FEM) is currently being used by Tribal Colleges and Universities to improve the retention rates of Indian students in college.

Mainstream universities should look at ways to incorporate culturally relevant models such as the FEM to improve retention of Indian students.

The Respected Elders in this study all went to graduate school after finding out about scholarship opportunities earmarked for Native students to attend graduate school. This demonstrates that scholarships earmarked of Native students are a key mechanism to recruit Native students who otherwise would not pursue higher education. This is a certainly an area that mainstream institutions need to pay attention to. This study also showed that in the case of the Recent Graduates and Experienced Workers, mainstream institutions have made some strides in terms of providing resources, such as Native American student centers, that help facilitate the successful transition and adjustment of Native students into college.

There is a need for tribal communities to create formal mentoring programs in order for Native American graduates to reenter tribal communities. Community mentorship is only occurring on an informal basis. The help of community mentorship programs would help new a college graduate with the transition back home to secure employment. According to this study, the willingness of someone in the community to help new a college graduate reenter the tribal community and secure employment can make all the difference.

Tribal internship programs can help facilitate the process of Native graduates getting connected with the tribe and using their degree specifically for jobs that directly benefits the tribal communities. It would also help if tribal governments would delineate to their tribal membership which specific degree areas would meet critical needs of the tribes to

ensure employment. This would be a great incentive for the tribal members to pursue degrees in those identified areas.

For Native students, it is very important to find ways to stay connected to the tribal community while in college both socially and professionally. From a cultural/social standpoint, it is essential for Native students to show a commitment to the community. When students leave for college for several years without maintaining relationships and connections, people in the community may respond with distrust and indifference. To reduce the chance of being perceived as an outsider and thus, having difficulty reentering the tribal community, staying connected to the community in various ways is vital.

Discussion

This study demonstrates the strong connection that Native people have with their tribal communities. Indian people do not see themselves as separate from, or distinct, from their tribal community regardless of whether or not they live “physically” away from their reservations or tribal communities. From a cultural and communal perspective, Native people are inextricably tied to their communities in ways that transcend physical place, generations or distance. This is why Participant RE4 said he feels the pain of the youth today because many do not know who they are because they have lost much of their Native identities. He understands it is not their fault. He viscerally shares their pain because he personally knows what it's like to live in two worlds and to survive in a school system that was absent of, and had no respect for, Indian culture. Now, the Indian youth of today are the children or grandchildren of those who are products of the legacy of assimilation-driven policies. From this perspective, one can understand why the respected elders in their own ways feel a sense of urgency to give

back to the youth and future generations because by doing so, they can help reverse the damaging effects of the assimilation era. This optimistic viewpoint is best captured in the words of Participant RE4,

If you can make life better for the next generation, then I think that's always going to be the mission that's going to be carried on. . . if you impress it upon your family, then that will take hold, and to think about your people not in a narrow view, of just a nuclear family, but to look at the people as a whole, because you're bound to promote the welfare of all the people, all of the time. So that seemed to be a part of what was an influence upon me and impressed upon me and I would like the legacy that this would continue on, looking out for and always promoting the needs of your people, that is so important.

The participants in this study suggested that pursuing an education was for the purpose of helping the tribal community. Virtually every person in this study sought jobs that specifically benefited Indian people or tribal communities in some way. Prior research has long overlooked the important role that families and tribal communities play in the lives of Native students. This is why it is critical that we no longer investigate the educational experiences of Native American student from a deficit perspective. This is not to say that the current efforts of finding ways to improve the academic performance of Indian students at the high school or college level should be stopped. Rather, there is a need to address these academic trends using new approaches. When we continue to think of the academic performance of Indian students from a “sink or swim” perspective, we only increase our knowledge of why some students sink and continue to lack a sufficient understanding of why some students stay afloat. As such, we have become experts in

understanding why Indian students fail at various levels in the school systems.

Conversely, we are only novices when the academic discourse shifts to our understanding of why some Indian students are achieving academic success. Indian academic success then continues to be the exception, and not the rule. This practice has got to change in order to slow the leaking pipeline of American Indians in schools today.

For too long, there have been too many well-intentioned scholars who have studied the academic performance of Indian students from a deficit perspective. Conventional theoretical models that are commonly used to examine student attrition rates, such as Tinto's (1987, 1993) student departure model, needs to be reexamined and redefined, especially when used in the context of understanding the experiences of Native American's in higher education. To Tinto's credit, as previously stated in chapter 3, he has since stated that for some students staying connected to their communities is essential to their persistence toward degree completion, which is a contradiction of one of his core assumptions of successful college adjustment (Tinto, 2006). However, it is important to note that his views were not necessarily changed by his own research but rather by Waterman's (2004) research on Native American degree completers, who was one of his doctoral student advisees. Waterman, who is Native American, observed that family support and staying connected to ones tribal community were the most salient factors of success on their educational journey. This is just a clear example of how Native people can, and should, be at the forefront of changing the way research on the experiences of Native people in higher education is constructed, presented, and understood. As Cleary and Peacock (1998) states, "our Indian students need it, our collective wisdom demands it."

This study yields potential for even more unexplored factors that can provide insight into the challenges that Native American students experience in the process of obtaining a college degree. More research of similar scope and focus is needed if mainstream institutions are to better understand what motivates Native students to persist and graduate. One Native American college graduate can have a major impact on an entire tribal community. As in the case Participant RG2, the actualization of just one graduate can impact a community in such a way that creates a ripple affect like the proverbial pebble tossed into a pond. Ultimately, it is critical for mainstream institutions to understand that many Native students are not interested in building themselves but rather building their Tribal Nations.

In closing, I would like to honor and give the last words of this study to one of the many powerful voices that best encapsulates what it means for a Native person to make the educational journey for the purpose of giving back to the people. Participant RG4 describes the educational journey as a *vision quest*:

When you go away as a young person, a lot of times people are afraid to even leave the reservation, they're afraid to leave home, leave their friends . . . I did that at a young age and I did that for good reason because my grandma said that you have to leave the reservation just like a vision quest. She said they would always send their young people away knowing that they would come back. But. . . in terms of them going away...they'd have to do something, go up to the highest mountain or go somewhere they weren't familiar with and they would have to be out there for so long...a certain amount of days and they'd come back with a vision. But that also meant that if there was a man that came into their manhood

and a woman into their womanhood, so that's how it is for us young people these days. We go out to college, we leave the reservation, we leave our comfort settings and we go to the school and the university and whatever it is. It could be vocational training, just being able to leave the reservation, to leave your comfort zone and go off and learn something and to be able to bring that back . . . that in itself is like a vision quest because you come back with a certain knowledge and a certain direction that gives you this vision to do something good or do whatever you want with it to help your people and that's our basic ideology is that we come back to help our people as our one community or village. We're all related. So, that's what I tell our young people and I hope that they do hear this because that's something that needs to be taught. We have to have a vision and share that and bring it back to our people and try to do good with it.

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APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW SHEET

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROBES

Primary research questions and probes if needed:

1. What was your educational experience like from elementary through high school?
2. Why did you go to college?
3. What was the transition like from home to college?
4. Tell me about your educational journey in college.
 - 4a. What factors helped you make it through?
 - 4b. What kinds of barriers did you have to overcome to successfully complete your degree?
5. Tell me about your experiences after you graduated.
 - 5a. Describe some of the challenges you have faced after college.
 - 5b. What has been the most fulfilling thing you have done, or been a part of, since you graduated from college? Please explain.
6. When I say the term, “giving back”, what comes to mind?
 - 6a. Based on your experiences, what does “giving back” mean to you?
 - 6b. Has your idea of “giving back” changed over time, and if so, how?
 - 6c. Looking back on your life, what type of legacy would you like to leave?
7. What advice would you give to someone who was getting ready to graduate from college with circumstances similar to yours when you graduated?
8. Are there any further comments that you would like to add?

APPENDIX B:

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant:

Washington State University and the Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology support the practice of protection of the rights of research participants. Accordingly, this project was reviewed and approved by the WSU Institutional Review Board. The information in this consent form is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in this study. It is very important that you understand that your participation is completely voluntary. This means that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw from this interview at any time, or decline to participate in any portion of the study, without penalty.

The purpose of this study is to explore the educational experiences of Native American graduates of four year and graduate institutions. Specifically, this study seeks to explore the experiences of Native American graduates from home to college, and their experiences after college. For the study, your participation will be documented in the following manner: (1) you will be asked to fill out a brief demographic profile sheet, and (2) you will be interviewed individually for 1-2 hours to obtain qualitative data regarding your educational and life experiences.

As a participant, you may choose to have your interviews either audiotaped or recorded via researcher field notes. As principal investigator, I will be responsible for transcription and review of the audiotapes or field notes. You will be provided with the transcription of either your audiotaped session, or field notes, to review and edit if you desire. All audiotapes and/or field notes will be stored in a secure locked file cabinet in my dissertation advisor's office at Washington State University until the following date: May 2010, when they will be destroyed. During this period, I will have sole access to either the audiotapes or field notes.

This study poses no known risks to your health. Your identity will remain confidential and your name and tribal affiliation will not be associated with the data. Pseudonyms will be used for participants, schools, and communities in any and all dissemination activities (i.e., publications, conference presentations). If you have questions not addressed by this consent form, please do not hesitate to ask. You will receive a copy of this form, which you should keep for your records.

The unique perspective of the Native American educational experience is central to this study. As a participant, you will have the opportunity to share your story and to help other students, specifically Native American students, who aspire to pursue a higher education. My goal in pursuing this study is to help shed light on the educational aspirations and motivations of Native American students. By understanding the educational aspirations of Native American students from culturally relevant perspectives, higher education administrators can use the findings of this study to better serve Native American students at mainstream institutions.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Justin P. Guillory, Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology
Washington State University, (509) 335 1055, justing@wsu.edu.

CONSENT STATEMENT:

I have read the above comments and agree to participate in this study. I give my permission to be: _____ audio-taped, or _____ recorded via researcher field notes under the terms outlined above. This study has been reviewed and approved by the WSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subject participation. If you have questions about the study please contact the researcher listed above. If you have questions about your rights as a participant please contact the WSU IRB at 509-335-9661 or irb@wsu.edu.