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American Indian Professionals: Educational Decision-Making and Persistence

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AMERICAN INDIAN PROFESSIONALS: EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING AND PERSISTENCE

by

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PERMISSION

Title: American Indian Professionals: Educational Decision-Making and Persistence

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Colleen M. Burke
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To my late sister Patricia C. McCarthy and my younger sister Marcia G. Fleck

ABSTRACT

American Indian graduate students are experiencing a higher matriculation rate in higher education today; however, those rates are still lower than other underrepresented minority groups' rates. The purpose of this study is to conduct exploratory research to investigate the decision-making process of American Indian/Alaskan Native professionals who persisted to graduation from their graduate programs. This study explores the participants' graduate school experiences relating to education, tribal values, decisions, their social support, and perseverance. The theoretical framework of decision-making theory, i.e. Prospect Theory, was used to evaluate the educational decisions of the participants. Decision-making theorists include corporate culture in their discussions; however, those discussions are silent regarding ethnic cultures, specifically, American Indian culture. This study will encourage new threads in the decision-making theory discussions. The themes identified in this study are as follows: education and graduate school experiences, culture and tribal values, decisions, social support, and perseverance. From the data obtained from the interviews, two assertions were formulated. The data from this study can be used to inform educators, administrators, and staff about American Indian tribal values and their place in higher education.

Keywords: American Indian culture, graduate school, prospect theory, persistence, tribal values

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Many institutions of higher learning seek to expand diversity on their campuses by recruiting more American Indian graduate students. While diversity includes a multiplicity of people, diversity also includes underrepresented minority (URM) students who struggle with persistence to graduation. These URM students who are racial and ethnic minority college students (e.g., African American and Black, Hispanic and Latino/a, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and some Asian American ethnic groups) are often less likely to attend college or persist once there (Nora & Crisp, 2012; Tinto, 1993, 2012). These students face barriers that other students may not (Chavez, Ke, & Herrera, 2012; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Tierney, 2008). Consequently, the URM students, especially American Indian graduate students who are able to navigate those barriers, can achieve their goals of graduating with their degrees. What contributes to the success of these students is of interest to researchers as well (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). Discovering what works to promote academic success for URM students, particularly American Indian students, is essential since obtaining those degrees will empower students to improve their home communities as well as their personal lives.

Why racial and ethnic minority students are less likely to persist is complex, but there is evidence that a cultural disconnect or lack of sense of belonging to the dominant

campus culture is a factor in attrition (Gardner, 2008). Conversely, when students from the non-dominant culture feel a greater sense of belonging, they are more likely to experience a higher level of persistence (Ostrove, Stewart, & Curtin, 2013). Ostrove and colleagues posit that a sense of belongingness helps shape "the graduate student's academic self-concept and academic self-concept predicts the extent to which students are interested in pursuing a career" (p. 755). This result is also true of American Indian students (Brayboy, et al., 2012).

At the graduate education level, American Indian students make many educational decisions that influence both their own goal achievement and their families and home communities. Research indicates that American Indian graduate students take longer to achieve their degrees and, as a result, experience financial and familial stress. Research on graduate American Indian students (Gardner, 2008; Ostrove, Stewart, & Curtin, 2011) suggests that the intersection between cultural values and academic expectations may provide some explanation for this phenomenon. For example, family is a priority in American Indian culture (Gardner, 2011; Patel, 2014), and if an American Indian graduate student encounters family issues that threaten to interrupt his or her pursuit of a degree, the family may be prioritized even if it means postponing graduation. This postponement means that the student may have to retake classes older than seven years and may cause financial stress from having additional tuition payments for revalidating coursework. Renewing classes may also invalidate any scholarships, thus causing further financial stress. If the student cannot return to his or her community and use his or her degree for community improvement, the American Indian student's home community is affected as important services and necessary jobs (e.g., doctor, business

manager, psychologist) may not be sufficiently filled, contributing to a potential shortage (CHiXapkaid, 2013). Therefore, a gap may exist between academic culture and American Indian graduate students' individual ethnic culture. A student's decisions influence pursuit of his or her desired degree, such as encountering obstacles of a longer time-to-degree completion and financial stress, can affect persistence negatively.

While a significant amount of research has been conducted on educational persistence, few researchers have studied the persistence of American Indian students at the graduate school level. Furthermore, there is a paucity of research that explores the links between decision-making, culture, and the educational success of American Indian graduate students. This study will explore the narratives of American Indian professionals who successfully completed their graduate degrees by exploring their educational decision-making processes and the role of culture in those processes.

Persistence

Obstacles to Graduation

As American Indian students advance up the academic ladder to graduate school, they may encounter obstacles, such as belongingness, forms of racism (namely, micro-aggressions), and emotional distress (Clark et al., 2012). Other obstacles include extreme poverty on the home reservation and a lack of American Indian faculty role models (CHiXapkaid, 2013; Patel, 2014). These impediments may hinder American Indian students from achieving academic success and graduating with their chosen degrees, resulting in low numbers of graduates and a longer time-to-graduation.

Low Graduation Rates

Throughout the educational pipeline, the American Indian student population struggles to graduate and advance at acceptable rates The National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES, 2017) data reveal that currently 72% of high school American Indian students graduate. While this percentage has improved from the previous 33.4% in 2009, the American Indian students' graduation rate is still the lowest of the underrepresented minority groups. (See Figure 1.)

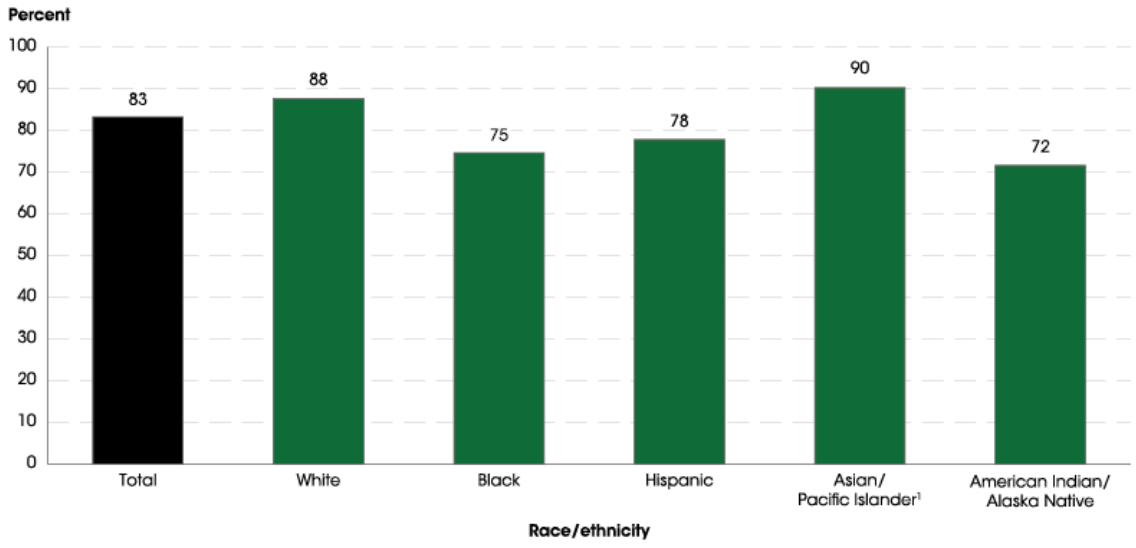

Figure 1. Graduation Rate for Public High School Students by Race/ethnicity for 2014-2015. (NCES, 2017, para. 6)

The gap between the other URM students is slowly closing. As a result, the graduation rate for American Indian high school students needs further improvement.

Postsecondary institutions are also struggling to retain and graduate American Indian students who enroll in college. While fall enrollment in 2009 was 1.1%, by 2012, this figure had dropped to .9%. The graduation figures for 2009 are shown as .8% and have been decreasing steadily, reaching .6% in 2014-2015. In comparing these figures to other URM graduation statistics between 2008 and 2015, the American Indian/Alaska Native graduation percentage is consistently lower than the other underrepresented minority students and *is significantly below White students* (NCES, 2016). (See Table 1.)

It is critical to recognize that during the time that there is a decrease in American Indian/Alaska Native graduation, there is simultaneously an increase in the graduation percentage of students who identify with Two or More Races (See Table 1). This increase in graduation rates for individuals who identify as more than one race mirrors an increase in the percentage of the population in the U.S. Census during the same timeframe that identify as multi-racial (Brayboy et al., 2012). This category only became available in NCES data after 2010. This increase in the Two or More Races category may help to explain the decrease in the American Indian/Alaska Native graduation percentage if more individuals who historically identified as AI/NA were identifying as more than one race after that category became available in 2010 (Shotton et al., 2013)). Yet, there is currently no literature to support this proposition.

Table 1. Bachelor's Degrees Conferred by Postsecondary Institutions, by Race/ethnicity: Selected for Years of 2008-09 through 2014-15.

Year	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Two or more races
2008-2009	100.0	73.6	10.1	8.3	7.2	0.8	---
2009-2010	100.0	72.9	10.3	8.8	7.3	0.8	---
2010-2011	100.0	71.1	10.4	9.3	7.3	0.7	1.2
2011-2012	100.0	70.0	10.7	9.8	7.3	0.7	1.6
2012-2013	100.0	68.8	10.8	10.5	7.3	0.6	1.9
2013-2014	100.0	67.7	10.6	11.2	7.3	0.6	2.5
2014-2015	100.0	66.5	10.6	12.0	7.4	0.6	3.0

---Not available.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Degrees and Other Formal Awards Conferred" surveys. (This table was prepared September 2016).
This table is adapted from full NCES Table No. 322.20. (NCES, 2016)

As many American Indian students enter college, they encounter a new and unfamiliar world. In this new environment, students may encounter hindrances to achieving academic success, such as racial micro-aggressions, non-belongingness, and marginalization (Clark et al., 2012). These challenges may contribute to the low persistence and graduation rates and reflect American Indian students' difficulty coping with their new environment. NCES (2017) indicates that American Indians received only 0.5% of master's degrees awarded from 2014-2015. (See Table 2.)

Table 2. Master's Degrees Conferred by Postsecondary Institutions, by Race/ethnicity of student: Selected years, 2008 through 2014-15.

Year	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Two or more races
2007-08	100.0	74.1	11.8	6.6	6.8	0.7	---
2008-09	100.0	73.4	12.2	6.8	7.0	0.6	---
2009-10	100.0	72.8	12.5	7.1	7.0	0.6	---
2010-11	100.0	71.8	12.5	7.3	6.7	0.6	1.0
2011-12	100.0	70.6	12.9	7.6	6.8	0.6	1.5
2012-13	100.0	69.4	13.4	8.1	6.8	0.6	1.8
2013-14	100.0	68.3	13.6	8.6	6.8	0.5	2.1
2014-15	100.0	67.5	13.6	9.1	6.9	0.5	2.3

---Not available.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Degrees and Other Formal Awards Conferred" surveys, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Completions Survey" (IPEDS-C:90-99); and IPEDS Fall 2008 through Fall 2015, Completions component. (This table was prepared September 2016.)

This table was adapted from NCES Table No. 3223.20 for Masters' degrees awarded. (NCES, 2016)

NCES (2017) data shows that for doctoral degrees, American Indian students were awarded .6% of those degrees. This percentage is down from 2008 when .7% doctoral degrees were awarded. (See Table 3.)

Table 3. Doctoral Degrees Conferred by Postsecondary Institutions, by Race/ethnicity: Selected years, 2008 through 2014-15.

	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Two or more races
2007-08	100.0	75.0	7.3	5.3	11.7	0.7	---
2008-09	100.0	74.6	7.5	5.5	11.7	0.7	---
2009-10	100.0	74.4	7.4	5.8	11.8	0.7	---
2010-11	100.0	73.2	7.5	6.0	11.8	0.7	0.9
2011-12	100.0	72.5	7.8	6.1	11.9	0.6	1.0
2012-13	100.0	71.6	7.8	6.5	11.9	0.6	1.6
2013-14	100.0	70.4	8.1	6.8	12.2	0.6	1.9
2014-15	100.0	69.3	8.4	7.2	12.2	0.6	2.3

---Not available.
\1\Includes Ph.D., Ed.D., and comparable degrees at the doctoral level, as well as such degrees as M.D., D.D.S., and law degrees that were formerly classified as first-professional degrees.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Completions Survey" (IPEDS-C:90-99); and IPEDS Fall 2008 through Fall 2015, Completions component. (This table was prepared September 2016.)
This table was adapted from NCES Table No.324.20 for doctoral degrees awarded. (NCES, 2016)

Relative to the number of graduate degrees being conferred, very few are awarded to American Indian students compared to other URM students. In addition to the low number of graduates, a longer time-to-graduate is another factor.

Time to Degree Completion

At most universities students must complete their degree within seven years; otherwise, they are required to re-validate classes previously taken. American Indian graduate students took an average of 9.9 years to complete their doctoral degrees, which "…significantly impacts individuals, communities, and nations. The extended time to completion places heavy financial and personal pressure on the student and delays the number of graduates available to work in Indigenous communities" (Brayboy, et al.,

2012, pp. 75-76). CHiXapkaid (2013) asserts that universities need to be concerned about the extended time factor. Moreover, Bell (2010b) reports,

> The median number of years between starting graduate school and receiving the doctoral degree was 7.5 years. Among US citizen and permanent resident racial/ethnic groups, the median time to degree was shortest for multi-race (7.6 years), White (7.7) and Asian (7.7) doctorate recipients, and longest for American Indian [recipients] (9.6). (p. 4)

When American Indian students take additional time to complete their degrees, one consequence is that their communities and families may bear monetarily heavier burdens (CHiXapkaid, 2013). Monetary burdens occur because the students who need to revalidate classes are required to pay additional tuition for those classes, and individual burdens occur because the requirement to retake classes takes time away from their families and communities.

The consequences of taking between 7.5 and 9.9 years places many stresses, such as financial, cultural, health, and family well-being, on American Indian graduate students. In order to understand why the extended time to degree completion continues to emerge for American Indian students, researchers need to understand factors that specifically affect this particular population. One element to consider is the American Indian cultures of the students.

American Indian Cultures

Many American Indian students enter into postsecondary education with a strong cultural and ethnic identity. Important elements of American Indian cultures include placing "a high priority on family, social network, and community obligations" (Patel,

2014, p. A13). Because of these strong ties to family and home communities, American Indian students experience conflicts, having to decide between honoring family and community responsibilities and academic commitments.

Importance of the American Indian Family and Home Communities

Family is considered a priority in American Indian cultures. Academic responsibilities, such as accomplishing research necessary to complete a dissertation study as well as performing any laboratory work involved, can conflict with parenting responsibilities, such as caring for a child or children and spending time with a significant other (Gardner, 2008). While these factors are true for many graduate students, American Indian graduate students also have responsibilities that include assisting extended family, who are considered a part of their family group, for example, friends, and other tribal and clan members. These relationships play an important part in the tribal interdependence (Gray & Rose, 2011). These family bonds strongly unite the individual with the tribe.

In addition to the importance of family, American Indian students also hold community responsibilities as a priority. Brayboy (2005) maintains that one of the reasons American Indian students desire a degree in higher education is the belief that they must better serve their community as well as their families. He also asserts, that because of those community responsibilities, American Indian students may need to step away from their academic pursuits to fulfill their personal obligations. Alvord and Van Pelt (1999) agree with Brayboy that Native students feel the responsibility to return to their home communities to help those tribal communities survive.

American Indian students also have commitments to their home communities, such as spending time with youth groups, where they serve as role models and "share

their information and resources for the good of the whole" (Tippeconnic & Tippeconnic, 2012, p. 849), which helps ensure the survival of their communities. Flynn, Duncan, & Jorgensen (2012) report that American Indian students value tribal encouragement. This family and community support will help the American Indian students succeed in the academic culture.

Academic Culture

Xi and Xianghong (2012) characterize universities as having campus and academic cultures and define academic culture as follows:

> Academic culture on campus is actually the external manifest of the common values, spirits, behavior norms of people on campus who are pursuing and developing their study and research. This kind of culture can be embodied in the rules and regulations, behavior patterns and the material facilities. It mainly consists of academic outlooks, academic spirits, academic ethics and academic environments. (p. 61)

In essence, academic culture reflects the values of the institution where students and faculty are expected to comply with the university's standards. However, what happens when a student's individual cultural beliefs, which may develop into a conflict with the academic cultural principles?

American universities and colleges embody academic culture that "is based primarily in Northern European epistemological foundations" (Chavez, Ke, and Herrera, 2012, p. 777). Academic culture is described as valuing competition and individual success (Brayboy, et al., 2012), which is often in contrast to the cultural and ethnic values identified as central to American Indian communities. Values, such as prioritizing their families and

communities, may conflict with the scholarly and individualistic elements of academic culture. Tachine and Francis-Begay (2013) maintain that the American view is distinctive and independence-based while Native American students come from "an interdependent value system" with "deep rooted cultural values and strong ties to their tribal communities" (p. 27). Therefore, when underrepresented minority students arrive at the college of their choice, they may encounter adjustment to an unfamiliar environment as well as encountering a cultural gap. Conflicts and feelings of not belonging may result because of the gap that may exist between academic culture and underrepresented students' individual cultures for many American Indian students (Ostrove, Stewart, & Curtin, 2011). Some manifestations of this gap are a) low graduation rates and b) longer graduate degree completion rates to meet the graduate school expectations to become an academic scholar (CHiXapkaid, 2013; Gardner, 2008; Ostrove, Stewart, & Curtin, 2011). These manifestations occur while American Indian students are adjusting to their new college environment; consequently, American Indian students will need to make choices that will affect their educational success. When American Indian students make their educational and personal decisions, they will follow a path that is logical to themselves. This path or system of decision-making needs to be explored, which will help educators understand the process and will be able to help the students receive the support they need to succeed academically.

Decision-Making Theory

Background

Making decisions in an educational capacity is a process and a skill in which every college student involves him- or herself. Morris (2011) and Bryde (1971) assert

that decision-making is both a conscious and an unconscious process. The unconscious aspect of making a decision considers the values and costs surrounding the decision in question. The conscious mind involves experiencing the consequences of feeling pleasure (a reward) or pain (a punishment). Moreover, the conscious mind will also consider high-level strategies to solve this dilemma (Morris, 2011). For example, a graduate student needs to decide whether or not to stop out for one semester because of financial difficulties. Will the pleasure of taking a semester off to earn additional income be greater than the pain of pushing out his or her graduation date, thereby delaying making a higher income in the future?

While the mind is unconsciously working on this decision, the conscious mind is considering strategies to resolve the complex and multifaceted issues. Morris (2011) asserts that the difference between the unconscious and the conscious is that the conscious mind has the freedom to act. This description illustrates an optimal decision strategy, which "depends on consideration of *a priori* probability, evidence and the values and costs associated with correct and incorrect decisions" (Morris, 2011, p. 257). The first step is to identify the problem, the next step is to analyze it, and, lastly, the student needs to determine whether or not the pleasure (value) or costs (pain) of the outcome will be greater. Morris (2011), along with McDermott, Fowler and Smirnov (2008), posits that human beings will choose pleasure over pain. For example, in American Indian cultures, family is most important. If a graduate student receives a call from family informing him or her that a loved one has passed on to the spirit world, the family expects the student to return home for the internment ceremonies, which can take at least a week and sometimes longer. If this call comes at the end of a semester, being

away from school presents an enormous dilemma. In setting out the choices, a student can choose to not go home, thereby incurring the disapproval of his or her family (a cause for pain). A second choice would be for the student to go home (a cause for pleasure). But, as a result of leaving school for a week to 10 days, the student would miss end of semester paper or project deadlines, thereby potentially negatively impacting his or her GPA (a cause for additional pain when returning to the academic community). According to Morris's optimal decision strategy, the student would ultimately choose to go home, choosing the pleasure associated with his or her family's approval and avoiding immediate pain (only postponing the scholastic negative effects). Since there is a paucity of research regarding higher education and decision-making, the influence of American Indian cultures in making educational decisions has not been studied.

Morris (2011) describes optimal decision strategy, which can also be applied to prospect theory, as a type of decision-making theory, which McDermott, Fowler and Smirnov (2008) define as viewing the results from making certain decisions in terms of pleasure or pain. McDermott and colleagues maintain that situations may psychologically determine whether the choice will either avoid or seek certain outcomes. For example, McDermott et al. uses the argument that "tendencies for risk propensity lie more deeply rooted in human evolutionary psychology" (p. 336). First, they posit that an individual's biases are ingrained and not easily surmounted; secondly, an individual may not learn through experience. Lastly, people can be manipulated through emotional threats. Additionally, Fredrickson (2012) asserts that prospect theory has not been studied within higher education until her study linked prospect theory with "the gain-loss framing of costs and its associated influence on [student] satisfaction" (p. S111). No

research was found on prospect theory that related to graduate students. The relationship between decision-making theory's unconscious/conscious mind and the gain-loss viewpoints dovetail effectively. In other words, prospect theory focuses on gains or losses in making certain decisions and dovetails with the psychological belief of the optimal decision strategy of feeling satisfaction from making a correct decision or guilt or sadness when making an incorrect decision.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct exploratory research to investigate the decision-making process of American Indian professionals who persisted to graduation from their graduate program. To achieve this purpose, this research study accomplished the following objectives: a) explored the participants' experiences as they journeyed through their graduate studies; b) investigated the relationships between the participants' educational decisions, cultural and ethnic influences, and persistence; and c) contributed to the literature on American Indian decision-making in an area that remains relatively unexplored.

Significance of the Study

This study will inform educators, administrators, staff, and future students about American Indian students' persistence decisions. Contributing new knowledge about the decision-making process will inform future research relative to how cultures influence American Indian graduate students' decisions. Possible benefits of this research include new knowledge, which will, in turn, help American Indian graduate students understand their decision-making process and, through this understanding, make decisions that

promote persistence to graduation. Additionally, universities can offer a better, more efficient support system to American Indian graduate students.

Research Questions

The key research question directing this study is as follows: How did American Indian professionals make their decisions to persist to graduation with their master's and doctoral degrees? The three sub-questions, relating to the main research question, are as follows:

1. How did American Indian professionals navigate the graduate education system, including their degree programs, to succeed in achieving their educational goals?
2. How did American Indian graduate students make their educational decisions and what influenced those decisions?
3. In what ways did culture influence the students' educational decisions and successes?

This qualitative study used a narrative method where interviews were conducted to gather data to explore how the American Indians' decision-making process contributed to their academic success.

Definition of Terms

American Indian/Native American/Native/Indigenous: Refers to the indigenous population in North America and can be used interchangeably (Shotton, 2013.)

Culture: A common way of life of a people

Tribe: A community of people connected by blood or heart, by geography and tradition, who help one another and share a belief system (Bryde, 1971)

Value: Things and actions people prefer over other things and actions (Bryde, 1971).

URM: Underrepresented Minority

Worldview: Collective thought process of a people or culture (Cross, 1997).

Conclusion

Persistence is one of the essential elements to reaching graduation goals. Inherent in persevering to graduation is making academic decisions, such as class choices, conflict resolution, emotional choices, and finances. This study explores the decision-making processes used by American Indian professionals as they looked retrospectively at their graduate school experiences. Chapter II will present a body of literature relating to diversity, persistence, decision-making theory, and cultures. Chapter Three will describe how the data for this study will be collected. A qualitative study with narrative interviews was conducted, gathering data from interviews of American Indian professionals who have graduated with their chosen degrees (i.e., Master's and Doctorate of Philosophy).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides insights into how American Indian professionals traversed the graduate school system and emerged successfully with their degrees. The first section defines diversity and its importance in higher education, and the second section examines persistence of students in graduate education and of American Indian students in particular. The third section examines the decision-making theory and the processes involved in making educational decisions, and the fourth section explores academic culture and its relationship with American Indian students' racial and ethnic cultures. Reviewing the literature offers insights into diversity, persistence, American Indian cultures, academic culture, and decision-making as well as their relationships to each other. This review seeks to discover new connections in understanding how decision-making can affect American Indian graduate students' academic success.

Diversity

Importance of Diversity

Diversity is a topic at the forefront of university discussions and is important not only for university administrators and staff but also for the students who are preparing to enter the work world. The National Education Association (NEA) (2015) defines diversity as "the sum of the ways that people are both alike and different. The dimensions of diversity include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, class, and immigration status" (para. 1). Clark (2011)

reflects that diversity has become so important that universities are beginning to create positions, such as a Chief Diversity Officers (CDO). Williams and Wade-Golden (2008) assert that the role of this person is "integrative: to help the institution become more active in increasing diversity, whether the goal is defined in terms of increasing access, building international relationships, improving learning, or any of a number of other ways" (p. 1). The allocation of resources to fund the CDO position is another indicator of diversity's importance.

Moreover, Ghosh (2012) in her presidential speech to the Comparative International Education Society posits that diversity allows students to be exposed to a variety of cultures, viewpoints, and beliefs. She also maintains:

> a diverse student body enriches the educational environment for both the dominant group and the minority students alike, but only recently have the educational and social benefits of diversity in higher education and the links between diversity and learning, have been researched and supported with empirical data. (para. 28)

As research continues to contribute to the diversity issue, scholars will continue to debate its value.

Value of Diversity

Diversity on higher education campuses is often valued by administrators, staff, faculty, and students because it allows for diverse viewpoints, which permits everyone to grow intellectually as well as personally (Clarke & antonio, 2012; Liew, 2004). When a person is exposed to other viewpoints, he or she can develop a more open-minded worldview, which helps to cope in today's diverse and rapidly changing world (Clarke &

antonio, 2012; Hurtado, Mayhew, & Engberg, 2012; Nieto & Bode, 2008). Students in higher education need to be prepared to reside and work within this world's changing environment. The value of diversity is to provide the insight and knowledge so that persons can be comfortable living in a global society.

A significant argument for promoting diversity in higher education is to provide knowledge and skills to students so that they can flourish through cross-cultural relations in a global economy (Clarke & antonio, 2012). The socialization of students with members of different cultural groups can provide them with positive, meaningful experiences, which can help them to adapt to the multicultural environments in the world (Bowman & Denson, 2012; Clarke & Antonio, 2012). These cross-cultural experiences in the classroom and in extracurricular activities provide students with additional communication skills in this world's fast-growing society.

In addition to providing intercultural knowledge and skills, diversity in the classroom presents opportunities for students to explore new ideas and modes of thinking, such as different viewpoints on current issues being discussed locally or globally (Clarke & antonio, 2012). These approaches to examining ideas may be uncomfortable for both students and faculty; however, arising out of this discomfort, the opportunity for exploring those ideas may create more open-mindedness. Concurring with Clarke and antonio, Collins (2011) reports that in today's information-based world environment, the United States has "become an increasingly diverse society as evidenced by expanding ethnic, racial and religious groups comprising the population of the United States" (p. 101). This open-mindedness allows the students to reach out inter-culturally to

other students and may create lasting friendships that may not have been possible in the past.

Cultural Diversity including American Indian Cultures

A diverse population on university campuses includes cultural diversity, which is comprised of many different cultural beliefs among students. This cultural diversity is important because the students represent a variety of viewpoints. Different ethnic groups may include African Americans, Hispanics, Latino/as, Asian Americans, and American Indian/Alaska Natives. This diversity also includes foreign exchange students; however, those students' issues are beyond the scope of this study. In the American Indian group, for example, the National Congress of American Indians (2014) reports that 562 tribes are federally recognized in the United States: Alaska has 229 tribes, and the remaining tribes on reservations are found in 33 other states. Each tribe has its own language (although some of those tribal languages are disappearing), traditions, ceremonies, and culture; however, these tribal nations do share some commonalities, such as placing a high importance on family and community (Patel, 2014). In addition, these tribal communities share similar values known, in the Ojibwe Nations, as the seven grandfather teachings--humility, truth, courage, honesty, respect, love, and wisdom (Red Lake Nation College, 2017). Many tribes observe these teachings; however, other tribes may have different names for or conceptions of similar teachings.

Moreover, many American Indian students believe that commitment to their communities will ensure the survival of their tribes. Brayboy et al. (2012) affirm that American Indian students who have a goal of giving back to their tribal communities are more persistent in completing their degree programs. While a small population (Brayboy

et al., 2012), research into the inclusion and persistence of American Indian students on campuses are critical because the population's persistence and success rates are among the lowest of these underrepresented groups.

American Indian Undergraduate Students

When American Indian students arrive at colleges and universities that have a predominantly White population, they may experience culture shock. Brayboy et al. (2012) explain that American Indian students are expected to understand the Western-oriented campus norms, such as how to schedule appointments with staff and administration as well as exchange the tradition of cooperation for one of competition and individualistic behavior. American Indian students need a place where they can gather to provide social support for each other (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). This social support can provide comfort for students in a disconcerting environment where students may struggle to persist. This uncertainty of succeeding requires that American Indian students need a place, such as an American Indian Center, where they can provide support for each other (Clark et al., 2012; Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013).

The percentages of students working towards their undergraduate degrees are low. NCES (2017) data reveal that 72% of American Indian students completed high school; in 2010 only 41.4% of American Indian high school students went on to enroll in college after high school. Since then, this figure has been fluctuating between 23.5% and 35.4%. (See Table 4.)

Table 4. Percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds Enrolled in Degree-granting Postsecondary Institutions, for 4-Year Institutions for Race/ethnicity of Student: 2008 through 2015.

Year	Total--All Students	4-year	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Two or more races
2008	39.6	27.8	44.2	32.1	25.8	59.3	27.3	21.9	45.7
2009	41.3	29.6	45.0	37.7	27.5	65.2	33.4	29.8	39.3
2010	41.2	28.2	43.3	38.4	31.9	63.6	36.0	41.4	38.3
2011	42.0	30.0	44.7	37.1	34.8	60.1	37.8	23.5	38.8
2012	41.0	28.3	42.1	36.4	37.5	59.8	50.3	27.8	39.4
2013	39.9	28.3	41.6	34.2	33.8	62.3	32.9	31.8	44.7
2014	40.0	29.4	42.2	32.6	34.7	65.2	41.0	35.4	31.6
2015	40.5	29.9	41.8	34.9	36.6	62.6	24.1	23.0	38.3

This table was adapted from NCES Table No. 302.60. (NCES, 2016).

To put the low graduation percentages into perspective, Brayboy et al. (2012) explain, "for every one American Indian or Alaskan Native who has a bachelor's degree, seven White individuals do" (p. 56). These low undergraduate enrollment and graduation percentages partially explain the low American Indian graduate student enrollment.

Colleges and universities must meet the challenges they face when academic culture intersects with students' ethnic cultures, for example, American Indian cultures. American Indian tribes in the United States have their own histories, cultures, and languages, which makes it difficult to generalize about American Indian cultures (Brayboy et al., 2012). However, American Indian cultures do share some basic values, such as respect for the people and environment, spiritual belief in the Creator or God, and community survival (Martin & Thunder, 2013). To achieve community survival, students want to graduate, thus allowing them to return and become productive members of their home communities.

Persistence and Departure

Persistence in higher education for most students means that they have achieved or will be achieving one of their goals of graduation with a degree. A plethora of research has been conducted on college students' persistence; however, in particular, Tinto's (1993) model, "A Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure*,"* describes an undergraduate student's possible college experiences. Tinto divided these elements into the following categories: a) pre-entry attributes; b) in-going goals/commitments, c) institutional experiences; d) integration; (e) outgoing goals/commitments; and f) outcomes. In his model, Tinto describes the journey students make through colleges and universities. The first two categories (i.e., pre-entry attributes and goals/commitments) label the pre-college categories that students describe before entering the college environment. The next two categories address students' formal and informal experiences in college, including academic and social integration. These two forms of integration likely include both positive and negative experiences, such as not belonging in the academic community and racial micro-aggressions. The sixth category is the outcome of those experiences. Tinto (1993) explains that positive experiences strengthen the students' persistence efforts. On the other hand, negative experiences may result in students' departure from the institution. Tinto suggests that students who have strong community ties may act to offset any negative experiences that happen within the college; however, those experiences may also indirectly influence the students' decisions to leave (i.e., "being pulled away" (p. 116)). Tinto's reference to "being pulled away" concerns students who have familial and community responsibilities, which influences their decisions to step away from their academic careers temporarily. In other words,

Tinto claims that having strong community bonds can act as an either/or effect on the students' decisions to stay or leave. However, Tinto (2012) later revised his statement to include that family and community can be supportive, claiming they are important to a student's success and persistence.

On the other hand, Duckworth's (2016) research found that, when a person has a combination of passion and perseverance, he or she has *grit* (p. 8). When Duckworth analyzed her research about the West Point cadets, she emerged with what she titled the "Grit Scale" (p. 9). In her research, Duckworth found out that "what matters is grit" (p. 10) and that "grit predicted who stayed and who left" (p. 11). Duckworth's findings seem to indicate that the participants in this current study had grit since they overcame their roadblocks and were determined to succeed.

Persistence is a necessary element to achieve the goal of graduation in higher education. Once American Indian students gain access to an education at colleges and universities, they encounter possibly new and unfamiliar situations (Ross, Kena, KewalRamani, Zhang, Kristapovich, & Manning, 2012). Support provided by their families and home communities may help American Indian students to persist to graduation once they overcome the barriers, such as micro-aggressions, which may prevent their success.

Obstacles to Persistence

The ability of American Indian college students to persist in achieving their educational goals is challenged for a myriad of reasons. Among those reasons, such as racism, emotional distress, and financial difficulties, racism appears to be particularly

salient. These obstacles can prevent American Indian students from succeeding academically.

Racism

Racism and other forms of oppression can present challenges to underrepresented college students' persistence. It is defined as "conscious or unconscious, and expressed in actions or attitudes initiated by individuals, groups, or institutions hat treat human beings unjustly because of their skin pigmentation. Racism is expressed in attitudes, behaviors, and institutions" (Colin & Preciphs, 1991, p. 62). Additionally, Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) add, "Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans all must grapple with discrimination and oppression based solely on their not being part of the White mainstream" (Lee & Johnson-Bailey, 2004). In other words, racism stems from one group of people who believe they are superior to others, and this belief can result in harm to others. These beliefs and/or behaviors are detrimental to student success because they create "a hostile learning environment for American Indian students" (Stegman & Phillips, 2014, p. 1) and "decreases students' overall academic achievement and ability to succeed" (p. 5). One form of racism that can be difficult to identify but is a common experience for students of color is racial micro-aggressions.

Racial micro-aggressions. Racial micro-aggressions are defined as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group often unconsciously delivered in the form of subtle snubs, or dismissive looks, gestures, and tones" (Sue & Constantine, 2007, p. 273) See Table 2. Some researchers claim that, instead of having a racist connotation, these behaviors are unintentional or just misunderstandings (Schacht, 2008; Thomas, 2008).

However, if a person of color feels demeaned, the micro-aggression needs to be addressed. Sue and Constantine (2010) identify three forms of micro-aggression: (a) micro-insults defined as offensive race-based comments, (e.g., statements, such as "you are so articulate"); (b) micro-assaults defined as statements meant to hurt or insult, for example, using a racial slur or posting a racially insensitive sign; and (c) micro-invalidation defined as invalidating a person's feelings, experiences or beliefs. These micro-aggressions can be particularly harmful to underrepresented minority students, because they contribute to the stress levels these students are already experiencing (Clark et al., 2012) and may have a detrimental impact on American Indian students' persistence as well as creating emotional distress. Clark, Mercer, Ziegler-Hill, and Dufrene (2012) found in their study of Psychology graduate students that the students experienced negative race-related incidents, which caused higher emotional distress and feelings of alienation. These negative effects ultimately affect the students' persistence efforts.

Another example of a micro-aggression (i.e., micro-assault) is the American Indian logo and mascot issue. The harm caused by the use of this type of logo and mascot can cause feelings of low self-esteem in students, which can affect their academic success (Stegman & Phillips, 2014). This harm is particularly true for American Indian graduate students who not only must develop their academic identity as a scholar but also, at the same time, work to maintain their personal ethnic cultural identity. Because the logo and mascot use perpetuate negative stereotypes (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2010), the American Indian graduate student must also counter those stereotypes, causing further emotional distress.

Table 5. Micro-aggression Types and Descriptions.

Type	Description	Example
Micro insults	Race-based statements: rude and demeaning	"You are so articulate," implying that an ethnic minority can't speak intelligently.
Micro-assaults	Meant to hurt the intended victim and may be verbal, behavioral, or environmental	Verbal—using an ethnic slur Behavioral—making an ethnic student wait (who arrived first) while assisting a majority student Environmental: Posting racially insensitive posters or signs in an area frequented by ethnic minorities
Micro-invalidations	Statements or actions that invalidate or nullify a person's feelings, experiences, or beliefs or race based on race	"I don't see race when I look at you; I just see a human being."

Note: Information adapted from Clark et al. (2012, p. 177).

Emotional Distress

Emotional angst can result from micro-aggressions as well as from being ignored or discounted in the classroom (Clark, et al., 2012). Sue and Constantine (2007) indicate that a conversation about racism in the classroom, if badly handled, will end in "anger, hostility, silence, complaints, [and] misunderstandings" (p. 136). These negative emotions can cause much distress for graduate students who are already coping with other stressors, such as a heavy academic assignment load, family problems, and social situations (or the lack thereof) in their lives. The emotional turmoil caused by the emotional upheavals can have negative consequences for American Indian graduate students successfully completing his or her degree program.

Finances

The cost of a college education continues to rise, and many students will seek financial help to cover those costs. Various resources are available, such as government and private student loans, scholarships that can be more generally directed or more specific in their requirements (i.e., directed towards a specific group of people). Other funds are available from certain groups, such as tribal funds for American Indian students (Brayboy, et al., 2012; Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). Even with the various funding resources, students may still not be able to cover their educational and personal expenses.

Resources for American Indian students are available, but they may not have the skills to locate and apply for that aid (Brayboy et al., 2012). American Indian students receive slightly less than other students when accepting their awards (Tierney, Sallee, & Venegas, 2007). (See Table 6.)

Table 6. State and/or Federal Awards Comparison for Year 2016.

Student	Aid for AMERICAN INDIAN Student	Aid for Average White Student	Difference
Federal Aid			
Grants	$9,650.00	$9,360.00	$290.00
Loans	$8,260.00	$10,620.00	$2,360.00

Note: Data extracted from Musu-Gillette & KewalRamani (2016).

This difference in state or federal aid awarded could mean that an American Indian student can make one of several choices: (a) choose to not pursue a postsecondary education; (b) choose to accept the award and seek additional sources for funding, such

as scholarships; or (c) choose to accept the award but have to find a job to pay for additional expenses, such as rent, food, or others items (Tierney, Sallee, & Venegas, 2007). Additionally, for American Indian students whose homes are on the reservations, further costs will be incurred by traveling home. Brayboy et al. (2012) indicate that a student's family may not be able to help the student financially, since unemployment and poverty rates are high on the reservations (U. S. Census, 2010).

American Indian graduate students. Enrollments in graduate programs have been increasing over the past 30 years (NCES, 2017), but American Indian graduate students still only represent 1% of the total national graduate enrollment numbers. See Table 1 for the Total Graduate Enrollment. This underrepresentation of American Indian students needs to be explored to understand what any underlying issues may be present.

The high cost of an education for a graduate degree usually requires an American Indian graduate student to seek some additional financial assistance. This assistance for graduate students can take different forms, such as stipends, fellowships, tuition waivers, graduate teaching or research assistantships, and other awards (Shotton. Lowe, & Waterman, 2012). However, these sources may not always be available to American Indian students. Financial assistance from the tribal community requires American Indian students to be enrolled in their particular tribe; not all students have this particular connection.

In addition to or instead of financial help from tribal communities, other sources for financing an education are scholarships and federal aid, which may be available to undergraduate and graduate American Indian students (Brayboy et al., 2012). Another source of income can involve working at a job within the surrounding community. While

this choice of funding is reasonable, the American Indian graduate student may find the work demands on his or her time to be difficult, especially taking into consideration the academic demands of the degree program. The graduate student also may have family responsibilities. All of the demands on his or her time may be exhausting, thereby affecting his or her persistence efforts.

Promotion of Persistence

In spite of experiencing barriers to their success, American Indian students, specifically graduate students, cope and achieve their graduation goals. Some of the more important elements of this persistence are belongingness, resilience, the importance of cultural traditions, academic and American Indian identities, and support systems.

Graduate School Preparation

Several graduate school preparation programs exist for underrepresented minority students who aspire to obtain graduate degrees. Many of these programs have been created to help URM students achieve their educational goals. However, American Indian students are only a small percentage of those students applying to these programs.

Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program. The McNair program is one of the programs funded through the U. S. Department of Education to assist students who want to earn a doctoral degree through research and scholarly endeavors. The eligibility requirements for acceptance into this program as set out by the U. S. Department of Education (2017) are as follows:

> Students who qualify for McNair must be enrolled in a degree-granting program at an eligible institution. In all projects, at least two-thirds of the participants must be low-income, potential first-generation college students. The remaining

> participants may be from groups that are underrepresented in graduate education. (para. 2)

Students who come from a disadvantaged background but who have strong academic capability are considered for admission to this program. The McNair Program has a wide range of pursuits, for example, research activities, summer internships, seminars, and activities that will prepare the students for doctoral studies.

National Institute of General Medical Program: Post-baccalaureate Research Education Program (PREP). This graduate school preparation program is funded by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, and awards are made to students who hold a baccalaureate degree in a biomedical-related science and who want to pursue a research doctorate. The goal of this program is to "strengthen the research skills and academic competitiveness of participants for pursuit of a graduate degree while also stimulating them to have an interest in addressing the health problems that disproportionately affect minorities and the medically underserved in the U.S." (para. 1). The time period of this appointment is for one year; however, exceptions can be made for a second year.

National Institute of Health: The STEM Pipeline. This program is funded by the National Institute of General Medical Program (2017) and its goal is to increase diversity in the biomedical sciences. A note on their website indicates "that training grant programs supporting only graduate-level students and/or postdoctoral fellows are not required to address disadvantaged individuals in their Recruitment and Retention Plan" (para. 2). This program has a broader mission than just being a preparation for

underrepresented minority graduate students; however, it could be a starting place for some universities seeking to increase their student diversity.

PLSI (Pre-Law Summer Institute) Pre-Law Summer Institute for American Indians and Alaska Natives. This program is sponsored by the American Indian Law Center (AILC) located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and "concentrates its content into eight weeks of instruction, research and study, teaching students the unique methods of law school research, analysis, and writing" (AILC, 2017). PLSI does not charge tuition but does provide a moderate living allowance, whose amount depends upon the number of students in attendance, but it not funded by the tribes. PLSI receives private donations from the Law School Admissions Council as well as from several law firms. The textbooks are provided by PLSI and become the property of the students. Regarding academic credit, the students receive no academic credit, which does not impact acceptance to law school; however, the disadvantage is that students do not receive waivers of repayment of academic loans. PLSI requires full-time attendance, and outside classes and employment is not allowed.

Belonging

A sense of belonging is described by Clark, Mercer, Ziegler-Hill, & Dufrene (2012) as a feeling of being part of a specific group and relates directly to educational persistence. Ostrove, Stewart, and Curtin (2011) posit that those students who feel isolated or alienated may feel that they do not belong in the educational community, thus affecting academic achievement. Concurring with Ostrove and colleagues, Gardner (2008) conducted a study focusing on graduate students where four students of color "repeatedly remarked upon issues of integration and a general lack of satisfaction in their

overall experiences" (p. 132). Gardner also found that older students were concerned that they "didn't fit the mold of graduate school" (p. 132). Not only did these students feel alienated, URMs also experienced this same feeling of not belonging. Ostrove et al. maintain that if a student feels engaged and integrated in his or her program, that graduate students can develop "a strong sense of academic and personal intellectual prowess" (p.752). He or she can strive to become "a future member of the faculty at a research university" (p. 752).

When the academic culture aligns with the student's racial and ethnic culture, success can be possible. However, when the academic culture conflicts with the American Indian students' ethnic cultures, success may become more problematic because the sense of belonging is not present. A graduate student needs to feel that he or she belongs to the academic community while trying to develop his or her own scholarly identity. This gap needs to be addressed through more research; hence, this current study is essential.

Resiliency Factors

In addition to belongingness, cultural resilience of Native Americans is defined by Strand and Peacock (2003) as "the incorporation of traditional practices and ways of thinking as a means to overcome oppression and other negative obstacles faced by this population" (p. 2). Additionally, Montgomery, Miville, Winterowd, Jeffries, and Baysden (2000) found that resilience is an important factor for American Indian students to persist in achieving their educational goals. These factors include the following items: (a) a caring mentor, (b) teachers who focus on the holistic health, (c) strong spirituality, and (d) low stress in their family lives. Moreover, Bowker (1993) found that a strong ethnic

identity in any student promotes academic persistence, and American Indian students value learning from other students' experiences (Chavez, Ke, & Herrera, 2012; Garrod & Larimore, 1997). Additionally, Drywater-Whitekiller (2010) found that spirituality is also a factor in persistence. Success stories of role models and mentors help American Indian students and bolster their determination to graduate. The stories of success also encourage future students to contemplate applying to graduate school.

Cultural Resilience

Strong cultural ties include cultural resilience, which can lead to graduation (Brayboy et al, 2014). The American Indian student populations persist to graduation through the use of cultural resilience in which Drywater-Whitekiller (2010) includes "spirituality, family strengths, elders, ceremonial rituals, oral traditions, tribal identity, and support networks" (p. 3). These traditions help American Indian students to cope with a potentially unfriendly environment, which could include racial micro-aggressions, such as "ascription of intelligence," "assumption of inferior status," "assumption of criminality," "assumed superiority of White cultural values," "assumed universality of the ethnic experience," "denial of individual racism/colorblindness," and "myth meritocracy" (Clark et al., 2012, p. 180). These micro-aggressions from other students can create an unfriendly campus environment. Yet, through cultural resiliency, American Indian students can persevere by developing the skills to survive the academic environment.

Truong and Museus's (2012) study explores how students of color developed coping strategies to alleviate some of their emotional distress. They found that some of the coping mechanisms were to use social support, avoid racist environments, turn to

religious or spiritual sources, seek counselling and, lastly, become advocates for peers of color (Truong & Museus, 2012). Emotional distress, if ignored, can result in not persisting in achieving their academic goals.

Importance of Cultural Traditions. American Indian students' cultural traditions help them to create a supportive self-dialogue. Montgomery et al. (2000) describe this *traditional self-talk* as "one's internal dialogue of encouragement and empowerment in dealing with daily experiences in life" (p. 390) as well as "including conventional wisdom that was carried down from their family or the tribe" (p. 390). This inner voice, which helps students to make academic and personal decisions, is rooted in students' cultural beliefs (Patel, 2014). Cultural traditions help American Indian students keep their own cultural identity while becoming ensconced in the graduate school culture. These traditions, including the seven grandfather's teachings (Red Lake Nation College, 2017), may provide the needed support to navigate the obstacles they encounter and persist to graduation.

Academic and American Indian Academic Identity. In a study completed by Montgomery et al. (2000), two themes emerge: (a) retention of the American Indian student's cultural identity while developing a new scholarly identity and (b) completion of a degree program through American Indian traditional ways of knowing. The participants in this study described their struggles with the first theme as having to choose between participating in the academic culture and being a part of their traditional community. In regard to the second theme, one of the participants described how the academic culture often forces American Indian students to choose between the academic and the Indian cultures, and it seemed to be a battle to persist. Montgomery et al. suggest

a third choice: where the student moves between the academic culture and the ethnic culture while not losing his or her American Indian identity. They suggest that "the student develop an academic identity in an Indian way" (Montgomery et al., 2000, p. 393). Montgomery et al. seem to suggest that students can become bicultural, that is, keeping their own cultural identity while developing a scholarly academic identity.

American Indian Cultural Beliefs

Most people learn their values, including tribal values, from the time they are born, throughout their childhood, and into adulthood and are learned from family and community. While those values can be cross-tribal, Bryde (1971) identified four overarching values in American Indian cultures and lists those values in their order of importance: The Creator or God, Myself that includes family and extended family, fellow man, and the World. Many tribal communities adhere to these teachings; however, these values can be regionally or tribally significant, and some tribes have values and teachings specific to their own regions. An example of one region is the Red Lake Nation, which is an Ojibwe Nation. While these values are overarching ones, Red Lake Nation College (2017) identifies the grandfathers' seven teachings, which are regionally and culturally specific values. These values are as follows: Humility, Truth, Courage, Honesty, Respect, Love, and Wisdom.

Humility. Red Lake Nation College (2017, para. 4) identifies the value of humility, which teaches that a person needs to be modest and show compassion to other people's needs. This teaching also explains that a person needs to recognize him- or herself "as sacred and a part of the Creation." This value also instills the need "to practice good listening and observation skills."

Truth. Red Lake Nation College (2017, para. 5) identifies this second value of truth, which teaches that a person "speak the most honestly one can, according to our own perceptions." This value also teaches a person "to be loyal in all our relationships and to avoid hypocrisy." Hypocrisy is defined as "behavior that contradicts what one claims to believe or feel" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2017, para. 1).

Courage. Red Lake Nation College (2017, para. 6) identifies this third value of courage, which imparts that a person needs "to face difficult situations with bravery in spite of our natural fears [and] to acknowledge one's personal weaknesses and develop the strength to combat them." Additionally, the courage value instills the need in a person "to develop the ability to take initiative and to speak forthrightly." This value helps a person to approach difficulties without choosing to take an easy way out.

Honesty. Red Lake Nation College (2017, para. 7) identifies this fourth value of honesty, which clarifies what is required for a person to be honest. Honesty includes the need to "to maintain truthfulness, sincerity and fairness in all of our individual action" [and] to possess the ability to manage confidential information." Additionally, honesty also includes the skill "to communicate with others and transmit information fairly and truthfully." Lastly, honesty allows people "to recognize our own strengths and weaknesses and acknowledge the capacity for self-growth and change."

Respect. Red Lake Nation College (2017, para. 8) identifies the fifth value of respect, which teaches that a person needs "to be respectful of the thoughts and ideas of others [and] to accept cultural, religious and gender differences." Furthermore, this teaching requires a person "to maintain high standards of conduct at all times." Lastly, this value instills a need "to safeguard the dignity, individuality and rights of others."

Love. Red Lake Nation College (2017, para. 9) identifies the sixth value of love, which imparts that a person "show kindness and compassion toward others [and] work cooperatively and harmoniously with others." Additionally, this value instills in a person the need to "demonstrate acceptance and the empowerment of others." Lastly, this value explains that a person needs "to offer hope, encouragement and inspiration to others."

Wisdom. Red Lake Nation College (2017, para. 9) identifies the seventh and final value of wisdom. This teaching imparts the necessity "to persist in acquiring knowledge and improving skills [and] to strive for the accomplishment of goals and dreams. Furthermore, this teaching instills the need "to seek guidance from elders and qualified advisors" and "to acknowledge the opportunity to learn from others." Lastly, the value of wisdom teaches that a person should "practice ethical behavior at all times [and] take time to reflect on all our experiences."

These teachings are common to American Indian tribes; however, each tribe has its own traditions and ceremonies that may differ from those of other tribes. The manner of imparting these teachings may also vary. Nonetheless, the teachings' basic goals are to give each person guidelines for his or her beliefs and behaviors.

Bryde (1971) indicates that parents teach their children these values and also goes on to explain the complexities of communities with both American Indian and the Western cultures existing in close proximity to each other. Because of the interactions between these communities, cultures change. These changes involve borrowing ideas from each other; for example, American Indians have borrowed the ideas about technology, such as the telephone, automobiles, television, education, and clothing styles. Western culture, in turn, borrowed the ideas of respecting nature, spirituality, pipe

smoking, social security (elderly people were valued), and government principles. Cultures overlap. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Cultural Overlap. This figure was adapted from Bryde, 1971.

Worldviews. Making decisions can be difficult when the outcomes determine a student's future. Additionally, those decisions are influenced by students' beliefs held that use both conscious and unconscious processes. The progressions of thought are induced through cultural beliefs that are learned from their families and extended families throughout the years they were maturing into adults. The cultural worldviews described here include views of the American Indian and the Western cultures.

American Indian worldview. *Worldview* is a way of looking at life and the world. Bryde (1971) informs his readers that in the American Indian world, worldview means it is "how you look at and organize your life toward a) God, (b yourself, c) other men, and d) the world (the earth, animals, moon and stars, etc.)" (p. 17). He continues on to explain that religion affects how people think about life and God as well as how they act towards other people. In American Indian cultures, following the four basic aspects—God, individual freedom, generosity of sharing, and adjustment to nature are important because these aspects allowed the American Indian people to survive. Bryde asserts, "in order to survive, they had to share with and help one another. For this reason, they

treated one another kindly and never thought of killing one of their friends or relatives" (p. 17). Survival was the ultimate goal in life. Additionally, Cross (1997) asserts that American Indian cultures can be referred to as having a relational or cyclical worldview. He explains that "it is intuitive, non-time oriented, and fluid. The balance and harmony in relationships between multiple variables, including spiritual forces, make up the core of the thought system" (para. 3). On the other hand, American Indian culture contrasts sharply with American culture.

Western worldview. The American worldview differs profoundly from American Indian cultures. In American culture, competition instead of cooperation is the rule. Cross (1997) explains that the Western culture can be referred to as having a linear worldview. This type of worldview can be explained as "logical, time oriented, and systematic, and has at it's [sic] core the cause-and-effect relationship" (para. 2). The individual person's survival is key, and other people are secondary or tertiary to the individual's interests.

These overviews are generalizations, and not every person within these cultures has the same beliefs and the same individual goals. The similarity is that everyone wants to survive. How people go about achieving that goal differs sharply.

Support Systems

Having support systems is an important factor for students in persisting to graduation. Researchers who have studied academic persistence have found that several factors are important: family support, peer support, and faculty mentoring (Brayboy, 2012; Heavy-Runner & DeCelles, 2002; Montgomery et al, 2000; Seidman, 2012; Tinto, 1993). These types of support contribute to American Indian graduate students' success.

Family support. For American Indian students, family support needs to provide encouragement when encountering stressful situations in college life and managing academic experiences. Montgomery et al. (2000) maintain that the parents or grandparents can provide support through stories about traditional values or wisdom. Participants in the Montgomery et al. study said, even though their parents did or did not complete high school or college, their advice to them was to get their education. Other participants indicated that the emotional support they received from their spouses and children was also extremely important.

Peer support. Peer support was also conveyed as being important. One of the participants in the Montgomery, et al. (2000) study stated that peer support from other students as well as for other students was beneficial. In addition, CHiXapkaid (2013) says that both the students and faculty benefited from "a shared passion and commitment among highly cooperative colleagues, [which] made positive things happen" (p. 129). This support and interaction helped students feel that they were not alone and that other students were experiencing similar situations.

Academic support. Lastly, faculty and peer mentoring have been identified as a factor in American Indian academic persistence. CHiXapkaid (2013) recalls that when he was a graduate student, he felt that he was able to cope with the graduate school environment when faculty, especially Native faculty, were involved in his life. This interest from Native students also helped Native faculty succeed. Other institutional support may come from student success centers, writing centers, American Indian centers, and programs, such as TRIO, McNair Scholars, etc.

Academic Culture

Academic culture reflects the values and standards of the institution where the students are studying, pursuing research projects, and developing their identities as scholars (Xi & Xianghong, 2012). Through these standards, students learn about life as a scholar, a researcher, a teacher, and the life that those positions entail. For example, Xi and Xianghong explain that academic culture consists of four areas: outlooks, spirit, ethics, and environments. They further provide awareness of the campus culture, which they describe as the joining of the "material, institutional, and spiritual cultures" (p. 62). Xi and Xianghong posit that this joining enriches the campus culture. Alternatively, academic culture can be limited by the campus culture. Xi and Xianghong identify those restrictions as emanating from the human elements and the environmental campus conditions. They further explain that the students enrolled in the college are there to be "remolded" (p. 63), (i.e., they are to gain a new identity in some form-- a new academic identity).

When the students' racial and ethnic cultures come into conflict with the academic culture, students' persistence efforts can suffer (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). In particular, when American Indian students enter graduate school, they will learn to become academic scholars, an expectation of the academic culture (Gardner, 2008). Gardner asserts that many underrepresented graduate students leave their programs because they do not feel that they are "fitting the mold" (p. 126) that is expected by academic culture. This attrition applies to American Indian graduate students, because they are considered an underrepresented student group. A disconnect can result when the academic expectation clashes with the American Indian cultural and

ethnic beliefs. For instance, an American Indian graduate student is expected to give up his or her ethnic culture to fit into the academic culture, and this assimilation opposes the student's *sacred beliefs,* defined as those beliefs that will not be violated (Hanselmann & Tanner, 2008). The graduate student is faced with a decision that may harm himself or herself. These expectations will play a large role when American Indian students make their decisions to persist to graduation.

Decision-Making Process

Making decisions is a psychological process, using both conscious and unconscious elements. Morris (2011) describes these elements as part of the psychological progression when arriving at a particular decision. On one hand, Morris also maintains that the student's unconscious process is automatic, involves information processing, and determines costs and values. On the other hand, the student's conscious process determines if the choice will bring pleasure or pain, but he or she is also free to decide upon the desired action. American Indian students experience the same dilemmas when making their academic decisions; however, literature suggests that their ethnic cultural beliefs, which include their family and community, will need to support those decisions.

Prospect Theory

In addition to the psychological process, several decision-making theories may apply to making educational choices. One theory that applies to this current study is prospect theory because of its potential utility in the analysis of educational decision-making. Payne (1985) defines Prospect Theory as distinguishing between two phases of a risky choice process: Phase I includes editing, making the decision problem easier to

evaluate, and operations; Phase II includes evaluation of the edited prospects. (See Table 7, which further explains these phases.)

Table 7. Prospect Theory Phases I and II.

Phase	Description
Phase I--Editing	1. Editing involves (a) coding where the perception of each gamble outcome is viewed as a gain or loss 2. Cancellation where certain components of each gamble can be discarded 3. Combination where the information display and framing effects are stressed 4. Detection of dominance or which outcomes look best
Phase II--Evaluation	1. Evaluation of the edited prospects taking place, which properties involve value function and decision weights (positive or negative ones).

Note. Information extracted from the study of Payne (1985)

These two phases describe the psychological process for making a risky decision. For example, in Phase I, when a graduate student is faced with deciding to stop out (defined as a student who temporarily leaves school) for a semester for financial reasons, he or she will *code* the problem (i.e., viewing the outcome as a gain or a loss). The *cancellation* aspect will entail deciding which parts of the problem can be discarded and which information and its effects of *combining* information *(*i.e., a blend of information and how it is framed*)* can be stressed. Lastly, the student will need to decide on the best outcomes.

In Phase II, the student will *evaluate* the best outcomes by considering the value and adding decision weights, namely, whether the outcomes are positive or negative. Ultimately, the student will need to decide whether stopping out to earn additional

income to alleviate financial stress will be worth adding an extra semester to his or her time to graduate. Prospect Theory is the best theory for my study because it gives a more detailed explanation of the thought processes than other theories. This understanding of what is involved in decision-making thought processes will be helpful in understanding how American Indian students make academic decisions.

Prospect Theory is a type of decision-making theory relating to gains and losses. Mowrer and Davidson (2011) describe Prospect Theory as "people's decisions are substantially influenced by the subjective values they place on outcomes" (p. 289). Hanselmann and Tanner (2008) suggest that these subjective values can be sacred values (i.e., beliefs or ethics that a person will not violate) or secular values (i.e., beliefs that can be negotiated). They found that the sacred values became a difficulty when the participants in the study struggled to make the decision for the posed scenario. This difficulty, involving sacred values, mirrors real life, since many people are in situations where they need to make difficult moral decisions. In another study by Young, Goodie, Hall and Wu (2012), time pressure is involved in making decisions.

In a study involving decisions made under time pressures, Young et al. (2012) explain that their study examined decision-making related to time pressures and risk. Young et al.'s study can be linked to Hanselmann and Tanner's (2008) study that discusses the link between needing more time to make decisions and not having enough time because of deadlines. They found that time pressure influences people to take risks when the risks are positively stated but are more cautious when the risk is worded negatively. This study gives researchers a better idea of how people make decisions in everyday life and under time pressure.

A study by Mowrer and Davidson (2011) explains how decisions were made in an undergraduate educational situation. Mowrer & Davidson's (2011) study had the participants decide about three different scenarios in the educational field. They posed initial educational scenarios to the participants regarding class attendance. The scenarios would change for each group of participants covering topics, such as changing majors, assuming a position as a group leader, designing a grading scheme for a term paper, and withdrawing from a course. They found that "losses are weighted more heavily than a possible gain" (p. 299). Mowrer and Davidson's study may be helpful in understanding why students make certain decisions when weighing the odds of making one academic decision over another one.

Prospect Theory was used as a lens through which to explore academic decisions made by American Indian graduate students. Mowrer and Davidson's (2011) study examines the probability of gains and losses in scenarios given to undergraduate participants regarding academic decision-making. Thus, this proposed study sought to use Prospect Theory to discover relationships about diversity, culture, persistence, and academic decisions made by American Indian graduate students. Exploring the academic decisions of American Indian graduate students is central to this study. Through using a Prospect Theory framework, this current study can help faculty, staff, and administrators to better serve American Indian graduate students by understanding how students make their decisions in terms of gains and/or losses. This understanding can also help educators to aid in the development of institutional policies for inclusion of American Indian graduate students. Furthermore, this insight may lead to enhanced persistence and higher graduation percentages. In addition to decision-making theory, this researcher

will explore if and how culture plays an important role in exploring those educational decisions. While Prospect Theory has been used in two educational studies with undergraduate students, no studies could be found where this theory was used in regard to graduate students with an ethnic cultural focus.

Conclusion

This review examined the body of literature related to diversity, academic cultures and American Indian cultures, persistence, and decision-making theory (specifically, Prospect Theory). Decision-making theory is only beginning to be used in relation to making academic decisions. The study by Mowrer and Davidson (2011) investigated academic decisions made by undergraduate students, relating to gains or losses that the students would have experienced if these scenarios had been real. Mowrer and Davidson theorized that options presented in course catalogs and/or syllabi wording can influence undergraduate students' academic choices. However, no studies could be found where a prospect theoretical framework was used in connection to American Indian graduate students or to determine how culture influenced academic decisions being made.

This dissertation seeks to explore the relationships that exist among diversity, culture, persistence, and Prospect Theory. Through exploring Prospect Theory as it relates to academic decisions, researchers may expand their knowledge about educational decisions being made by American Indian graduate students. Through this exploration, educators may better understand where a disconnect seems to exist between the perceptions of those persons from the academic culture and the ethnic cultures of American Indian graduate students. To that end, Chapter III explains the qualitative

method, employing narrative interviews used in this study to investigate those relationships.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this research study was to conduct exploratory research to investigate the decision-making process of American Indian professionals who persisted to graduation from their graduate program. This qualitative study explored how American Indian professionals made their decisions to complete graduate school and earn their graduate degrees (i.e., Masters and Doctorate of Philosophy). This researcher used narrative interviews to gather data through audio-recorded interviews and explored how the participants' decisions were influenced by their beliefs, both ethnic and academic. Further, these data were used to understand how academic obstacles created difficulties and how the students' decisions affected the navigation of those barriers. Using narrative interviews aided in gathering rich, thick descriptive data to help educators gain a better understanding of the educational issues and strategies, which American Indian participants faced as they obtained their degrees.

Research Questions

The following research question and sub-questions guided this study:

How did American Indian professionals make their decisions to persist to graduation with their master's and doctoral degrees?

The three sub-questions, relating to the main research question, are as follows:

1.) How did American Indian professionals navigate the graduate education system, including their degree programs, to succeed in achieving their educational goals?

2.) How did American Indian graduate students make their educational decisions and what influenced those decisions?

3.) In what ways did culture influence the students' educational decisions and successes?

Conceptual Framework

Four paradigms of qualitative research exist. Guba and Lincoln (1998) identify these paradigms as "positivism; post-positivism; critical theory and related ideological positions; and constructivism" (p. 195). They further define the constructivist paradigm as "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontological and epistemological ways" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 195). The best approach for conducting this research study is constructivism because this lens helps researchers gain insight into how participants gain knowledge and of what that knowledge is (Fosnot, 1996). The constructivist lens is described by Fosnot (1996) as "both what 'knowing' is and how one 'comes to know'" (p. ix). Additionally, von Glaserfeld (1996) posits, "we cannot afford to forget that knowledge does not exist outside a person's mind" (p. 5). Merriam, Cafferella, and Baumgartner (2007) assert, "a constructivist stance maintains that learning is process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience" (p. 291). In other words, how an individual knows something or comes to know something is constructed within each person's mind.

Researchers may use epistemological, ontological, and/or axiological approaches in a study. Guba and Lincoln (1998) state that the researcher "must value freedom in order to discover 'how things really are' and 'how things work'" (p. 201). By examining each participant's experience, the principal investigator learned how things worked in the participants' lives. Each person understands his or her experience differently from another person's. For purposes of this study, the principal investigator used an epistemological lens meaning that, when people learn, they acquire knowledge and in this process give meaning to that knowledge, people can assess that knowledge either internally or externally.

Method

The researcher for this qualitative study used narrative interviews to gather data. The participants relayed their stories about how they made educational decisions to maneuver around obstacles they encountered. This method is holistic because the participants' language expresses their graduate student experiences in how the occurrences in their lives were meaningful to them. Their initial verbal expression ultimately became written words after this researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim where they became field texts. Clandinin (2013, p. 46) defines field texts as "co-compositions that are reflective of the experiences of researchers and participants, and they need to be understood as such—that is telling and showing the aspects of experience that the relationship allows," and she also posits, "Field texts allows us ways to see how others make meaning from experience and may also point us to possibilities of diverse final research text-that is, the diverse ways we might represent retold stories." These stories will lead researchers to understand the participants' experiences.

Procedures

Participants

In this study this researcher used a homogeneous, purposeful sample. The criteria for the participants of the study were American Indian professionals who graduated within the last five years with their graduate degrees and who grew up or lived on their reservations for an extended period of time. Four individuals worked in their discipline area for a minimum of one year and were interviewed three times. Additionally, they have the background of having grown up in a reservation setting in the Northern Plains region. Though some participants may live outside of the Northern Plains region today, their participation in this study is acceptable because they have ancestral roots in the area, thereby ensuring that the participant group had a similar cultural and ethnic background. As graduates who succeeded in achieving their academic goals, they met the criteria for the study and answered the research questions posed in this study. (See Summary of Participants' Biographies in the Appendix E.)

Backgrounds of the Study's Participants

The requirements needed to be a participant in this study were as follows: graduated within the last five years, grew up or lived on a reservation, and employed for a minimum of one year within their degree discipline. Each participant met these requirements. The participants may be well-known within the tribal communities, so the following biographies are narrated in more general terms to preserve the participants' anonymity. Three of the participants are from the same tribe while the fourth participant was from a different tribe. Additionally, this researcher gave the universities pseudonyms

to protect their anonymity as well: Midwest Research University (MRU) and Pacific Research University (PRU). The following four individuals were each interviewed three times to obtain the data for this study.

Joshua Aspen

Joshua Aspen completed his Master's Degree in Educational Leadership at MRU in 2014, and he is a member of a federally recognized tribe in the upper Midwest region. Although Joshua is an only child, he grew up very family-oriented. As he learned about his tribal culture's traditions and beliefs, he became someone who educated other Natives and non-Natives about his Native culture. He is currently using his Master's degree as a director of an American Indian studies program at a community college and has plans to eventually earn his Ph.D. in educational leadership.

Emily Willow

Emily completed her Masters of Science Degree in Environmental Management at PRU on the United States' western coast in 2014, and she is a member of a federally recognized tribe in in the upper Midwest region. When she was in high school, her family moved to the Pacific coast where she finished high school. After she graduated, she came back to her home state to earn her Baccalaureate Degree in Science from MRU. After graduating from MRU, she and her daughter then returned to the Pacific coast to work on her Master's degree from PRU. When she returned to her home state, she intended to pursue her Ph.D.; however, due to family obligations, she has postponed her educational plans in order to take care of her sister's children.

Steven Cedar

Steven Cedar completed his Ph.D. in Educational Leadership at MRU in 2014 and is also a member of a federally recognized tribe in the upper Midwest region. Steven's parents were in the military when he was growing up, but he spent his summers living with this grandmother and aunties in his home state. He and his wife have several children; he believes that he is serving as a positive role model for his children and giving back to his tribal community by working with Native youth.

Chelsea Maple

Chelsea Maple completed her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership at MRU in 2015, and she is a member of a federally recognized tribe in the upper Midwest region as well. When Chelsea was growing up, her mother was not able to care for her children. This responsibility fell to Chelsea; she would get her little sister ready for school. Chelsea figured that, as long as she was up, she might as well also go to school. She indicated that her father was incarcerated, and her mother was alcohol-dependent. Chelsea's high school counselor told her that she was assigned to special education classes because she had become a student with behavioral problems. Chelsea started out her life at a great disadvantage, but with the help of her boyfriend and his parents, she was able to surmount her obstacles and earn her Ph.D.

Data Collection

Research Sites

In this study this researcher conducted each interview in the participant's home or work office where the person felt secure and where his or her privacy was safeguarded.

For example, since this researcher conducted interviews for two Ph.D. degree participants via Skype, the participants were interviewed at home. The participants' homes provided their desired privacy. Additionally, this researcher conducted the interviews of two participants who earned Master's degrees in a closed office setting, thereby ensuring privacy in a work environment.

Recruitment

This researcher identified and selected the participants through referrals from staff at the American Indian Center and faculty at a university in the Northern Plains region. This researcher's criteria for selecting participants were that the participant have Native heritage, must have graduated within the last five years, and have grown up or lived on a Northern Plains reservation. The staff and faculty contacted individuals to verify their interest in participating in the study. The American Indian Center staff provided me with telephone and email contact information with the participants' permission. One faculty person emailed two participants who indicated they were interested in participating in this study and who gave their permission to the faculty person to forward their contact information to this researcher. This researcher contacted the American Indian professionals via email to verify their interest. The Consent Form and purpose of the study were included (See Appendix D for the contents of the email.). This researcher described the study and interview protocol for the participants. We exchanged contact information and arranged the first interview.

In-Depth Interviews

This researcher interviewed the participants using semi-structured questions. The answers to these questions provided thick and rich descriptions (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2013) as well as insights into American Indian graduate students' decision-making processes. This researcher interviewed the participants three times each for a total of two and one-half hours. The purpose of the three interviews was to explore the thought processes that took place while the participants were making their educational decisions. The investigator gave each interviewee a copy of the Institutional Review Board's Consent Form, which they read and signed, giving me permission to interview him or her for this study.

In this study this researcher asked each participant to reflect on his or her years as a graduate student, about how he or she approached any situations relating to the successful completion of his or her degree program, what processes were used to navigate barriers, and what influenced his or her educational decisions. Examples of interview questions include the following: What do you think contributed to your success in obtaining your degree? While problem solving, how would you describe the process you used to make your decisions to complete your program of study? Participants emailed their signed Consent Forms, but each interview also began with a review of the Consent Form and Interview Protocol. This researcher electronically recorded and transcribed the interviews.

Consent and Confidentiality

This researcher maintained the participants' privacy and confidentiality by keeping confidential information separate from the electronic data, including the interview transcripts. This researcher also kept the electronic data in a password-protected external hard drive, which the investigator also kept in a locked file cabinet. The paper copies of the transcripts were secured in a separate locked file cabinet. This researcher and her dissertation chair were the only persons who had access to the data. The audio recordings of the interviews as well as any hard copies of the data will be deleted or destroyed after three years. This researcher assigned pseudonyms to the participants to ensure anonymity. No unforeseen risks arose in conducting this study.

Data Analysis

Coding and Analysis

Options for analyzing data include "memos, categorizing strategies (such as coding and thematic analysis), and connecting strategies (such as narrative analysis)" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96). Maxwell also describes the purpose of coding as to "fracture" (p. 96) data into categories and then identify the applicable themes. Additionally, researchers need to go beyond the original organizational categories (i.e., broad areas identified before the interviews began) (Maxwell, 2005).

This researcher identified some *a priori* organizational themes (Maxwell, 2005) before interviewing the participants. This researcher kept these *a priori* themes in mind while coding the data contained in each individual transcript; however, the coding was not limited to these themes (See Excerpts from Codebook in Appendix C). This

researcher coded each interview, then assigned a category to each of the codes. After this researcher completed categorizing the 12 transcripts, she combined them into one Excel spreadsheet file and identified different themes. In this way, this researcher was able to see the relationships as well as the similarities and differences between the Master's and Ph.D. degrees participants' categories and themes.

Thematic Analysis

Once coding was completed, this researcher began identifying themes. As the themes emerged, the relationships between the themes began to develop. (See Table 8: Themes Developed from Data Analysis below.)

Table 8. Themes Developed from Data Analysis.

Theme No.	Theme
1	Education: Graduate School
2	Culture and Tribal Values
3	Decisions
4	Social Support
5	Perseverance

Additionally, Table 9 below presents the categories, which are divided into themes and the resulting assertions, which are as follows:

1) Family, ethnic traditions, and cultural beliefs positively influenced the educational decisions made by American Indian graduate students who were successful in earning their chosen degree, despite barriers encountered.
2) Prospect Theory helps researchers to understand American Indian graduate students' processes in making their educational decisions while in graduate school

not only by taking into account the positive and negative outcomes but also taking into account the tribal values.

American Indian graduate students' perseverance is enhanced by motivation, determination to overcome educational obstacles, and improve life for members in their tribal communities.

Table 9. Categories, Themes, and Assertion Map.

Theme 1 Education Categories	Theme 2 Culture Categories	Theme 3 Decisions Categories	Theme 4 Social Support Categories	Theme 5 Perseverance Categories
Time Management Advisor Selection Committee Selection Academic Support Academics	Family/Extended Family/Tribal Values Beliefs/Traditions Environmental Factors	Problems Analyses	Family/Extended/ Family Cohorts American Indian Centers	Determination Motivation

Assertions

1. Family, ethnic traditions, and cultural beliefs positively influenced the educational decisions made by American Indian graduate students who were successful in earning their chosen degrees, despite barriers encountered.
2. Prospect Theory helps researchers to understand American Indian graduate students' processes in making their educational decisions while in graduate school not only by taking into account the positive and negative outcomes but also taking into account the tribal values.

Table 10. Examples of Quotations Supporting the Themes.

Theme	Category	Quotations
1: Education	Support	"Here at [MRU] we have this space. If you like, you can walk in here and be able to freely express yourself. You feel like you're point of view will be reciprocated because there will be at least one other native that relates to you; whereas when you're you know with others, you kind of you have to explain and then you have to explain the history and then you have to kind of explain, to educate people."
2: Culture	Family	"When you're raised by your aunts because you're an extended family and the sisters are all like grouped together. You all live together. You all travel together. They [Non-Native people] don't really understand how close you become."
3: Decisions	Dilemmas	"For me, what I noticed even as an undergrad and then as a graduate student is that you then have to make very difficult decisions about whether or not you're going to give up your time to become professionally successful, or where you're going to give up your time of being a parent."
4:Social Support	Academic Environment	"And I mean, you know, being older and having a family already of my own, I guess I was different. I was always a . . .I remember the first time I went to college, when I transferred to UND. I was pregnant with my 3rd child at that time, and I was 27. And I felt like such an old person in the class."
5: Perseverance	Motivation	"The most memorable was the fact that we started with 23 or 24 in our cohort with six remaining. I was the first to get this degree in this program."

Trustworthiness and Reliability

In qualitative research, several methods exist to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, such as member checking, triangulation, internal auditing, and external

auditing as well as other methods (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Stake, 2010). Stake (2010) maintains that multiple points of view are needed to verify the accuracy of the data. This triangulation includes external auditing and member checking. This researcher worked with a staff member who has a Doctor of Philosophy and has conducted qualitative research at MRU; this staff member reviewed the coded interviews to verify that no codes were missed. Consequently, this person found two additional codes to add to the analysis. In addition to external auditing, this researcher used member checking and emailed the participants their transcripts so that they could check them for errors and ensure their accuracy.

Ethical Issues in Graduate Research Projects

Potential ethical issues can be a threat to research projects (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2005, 2013; Stake, 2010; Wertz et al, 2011). In narrative studies especially, issues may arise concerning authenticity of the stories, inability to relate or recall event(s) due to emotional trauma, distortion of event(s) or memories, or participants' fear of reprisal or backlash (Creswell, 2012; Wertz et al., 2011). Moreover, researchers may raise questions about the participants' stories as well as a privacy issue and permission to use the stories (Creswell, 2012; Wertz et al., 2011). This researcher considered these issues and the effect that telling these stories could have on the participants. A researcher must remain aware and alert during the interviews to minimize emotional damage, such as taking a break during the interview, stopping the interview, and setting up another appointment. The participant may also opt to withdraw from the study (Wertz et al., 2011). Researchers may handle the issue of ownership of collected materials using the

Consent Form (Creswell, 2012; Wertz et al., 2012). Lastly, researchers need to consider the issue of the investigator gaining something at the expense of the participant. Creswell suggests reciprocity or giving something back to the participants to create a feeling of balance. This researcher gave the participants a sage bundle and a smudge stick in appreciation for their taking the time for these interviews.

An ethical issue pertinent to this study was the participants' retrospective memories, which may have involved an altered view of the actual experience, especially if emotional trauma resulted. A participant may not want to relive those particular events; therefore, the participants' narration may change. An approach to avoiding this story distortion is to develop a trusting rapport with the participant where he or she will feel safe in sharing any emotional trauma (Creswell, 2010). This researcher conveyed to the participants that the information would be kept confidential, which helped the participants feel safe in revealing any deep emotions. This researcher also reassured the participants that their information would be confidential and their identities anonymous.

A second ethical concern involved permission to use the story information gained from the interview. The story data contained key pieces of information pertinent to the study's final assertions. If the participant was not comfortable giving his or her consent, this researcher respected those wishes. However, one of the other participants may have told a similar story and be willing give his or her permission. These issues did not arise in this study; this researcher's participants shared their experiences, both positive and negative.

Biases

When conducting research, all people have some biases. Stake (2010) posits that researchers need to be especially careful about recognizing their own biases and learning how to handle them. Not all biases are against something; for example, I side with American Indian people. Stake (2010) and Maxwell (2005) also state that useful strategies for dealing with bias is to identify and examine the bias, write it on paper, type it on a computer screen, and define terms explicitly. I used the strategies of identifying my biases and wrote that information on paper, which I then transcribed into an electronic document. In examining my biases thoroughly, I tried to minimize their influence on my study. I identified and examined any biases I had about the topic of my study. My bias centers on belonging. Discovering my bias was difficult; however, this discourse needed to occur.

My bias is concerned with a sense of belonging. No one should feel that they are being tolerated—whether in a group or in a classroom or in any campus activity. I saw this behavior on campus with traditional students who show disrespect towards American Indian students and made hurtful comments through micro-aggressive behavior in the classrooms as well as around campus. While not all students engage in these behaviors, they do occur. This lack of respect not only hurts the American Indian students but also others, and I get upset when I see this behavior. Being aware of my feelings will help me to keep my objectivity more balanced. I have written extensively in my journal about why I feel this way. All people have the right to be accepted for themselves—not shunned because they are different in some way, such as coming from different cultures,

having different beliefs, or looking different or older than the traditional students. My literature research review suggested students succeed when they feel that they belong.

Establishing a trusting rapport with the participants was a concern since I am non-Native. My American Indian friends helped me to understand why ceremonies are conducted and their meanings; however, I am still a guest at their cultural activities. One of the ways that I received help in establishing a trusting rapport was to consult with my American Indian mentors who guided me through the process. Before each interview, the participants and I chatted informally, and these conversations helped develop a good rapport.

Reflexivity

My Native mentors patiently answered my questions over the previous 25 years, and their answers were, many times, confusing. Eventually, I understood what they were teaching me about time, space, and relationships to others and to Mother Earth. They taught me that time is circular, giving examples in the Midwest of Mother Earth's seasons. Winter is when Mother Earth sleeps, and spring is when she comes alive. Summer is when Mother Earth grows plants and nurtures the animals with her bounty. Autumn prepares Mother Earth for the coming winter by showing us the beauty of the leaves turning multiple colors of gold, red, tan, and brown. My mentors explained that we walk in a circle where we are always moving forward. The circle begins at birth and continues as a person walks through life; he or she comes to where the circle stops at death when people are reunited with their ancestors. The circle continues on, beginning again at birth.

The Native concept of time is three dimensional in space and is in direct opposition to American society's concept of time that is linear; that is, we go in a straight line from Point A to Point B when the day begins to when the day ends. I make this comparison because, when American Indian students enroll at a predominantly white college or university, they are required to live in the linear time structure that is contrary to the belief of circular time, which they learned from birth. The administrators at the university expect all students to comply with the rigid schedules set for class times, beginning and ending; set times for meetings to start and finish; for semesters to begin and end on certain days; and for people who have lost a loved one to grieve for three days. Professors expect students to come back to work or class ready to continue to excel and to put their grief aside. My participants all indicated that, because of the closeness of their families and extended families, they found it frustrating when administrators and professors expected students to comply with university funeral policy.

In addition to the concept of time, my mentors also talked about the idea of space. We live in a three-dimensional world with the Earth under our feet, nature and the environment surround us; the sky overhead can be sunny, rainy, or cloudy. The Native concept of space also includes a spiritual dimension. When a person offers prayers and burns sage, tobacco, and sweet grass, the eagle carries the prayers (along with the smoke) to the Creator through the veil that separates the Earth from the spiritual world.

In addition to time and space, my Native mentors also discussed the value of relationships. They relayed how important relationships are with other people, other beings (for example, four legged, winged, and finned), and Mother Earth. Everything

stems from those relationships; for example, how a person relates to his or her family, including extended family, shapes who that person becomes. People can see relationships as a positive factor or a detrimental one. My mentors expressed how almost everything stems from how a person develops and maintains his or her relationships to others.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the methods that I used when beginning my study. The qualitative method employs a narrative strategy to answer this study's research question. This approach has merit because the data obtained provides a more informative description for educators to gain a better understanding and awareness of the underlying causes of the low graduation rate for American Indian graduate students. Additionally, this study provides further insights into how a student's ethnic culture and beliefs influence those decisions to complete their degree programs. Completing this study was a responsibility that I could not ignore. Some American Indian scholars have called for more qualitative studies to be undertaken, because many quantitative studies have addressed the issue of low graduation rates through statistics. Other American Indian scholars want to focus on the positive aspects for American Indian education, and they have also called for more non-Native people to help research American Indian educational issues. The next chapter, Chapter IV, will discuss results of this study through the findings of the data collected in the participants' interviews.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter introduces the participants in this study and presents themes with the supporting evidence from the participants' interviews. Four participants contributed to this study--two with Master's degrees and two with Doctors of Philosophy. This researcher identified five themes from the data: Education and graduate school experiences, culture and tribal values, decisions, social support, and perseverance. Each theme will be discussed in detail. The purpose of this research study was to conduct an exploratory study to investigate the decision-making process of American Indian professionals who persisted to graduation from their graduate program. This qualitative study explores how American Indian professionals made their decisions to complete graduate school and earn their graduate degrees (i.e., Masters and Doctorate of Philosophy).

Overview of Themes

The five themes encompass significant aspects concerning both negative and positive graduate student experiences of the American Indian graduate students as they progressed through their graduate school educational experiences while earning their Master's and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. The themes address issues raised in the main research question and the three sub-questions. The five themes include education

and graduate school experiences, culture and tribal values, decisions, social support, and perseverance of the American Indian graduate students.

Theme One: Education and Graduate School Experiences

This first theme, *Education and Graduate School Experiences*, includes the categories of time management, selection of advisor and committee members, academic support, and academic culture. The participants identified the categories as important facets of their graduate school experiences, and the data are supported by the participants' interviews.

The value of education was highly stressed by the participants, their families, and mentors throughout their educational experiences. Each theme's categories played a major role for the participants in achieving success and graduating with their degrees. Time management was the most valued element in successfully completing their educational goals. The next most important aspect for both the Master's and Ph.D. students was the selection of their advisors; for the Ph.D. students, committee selection was the next most important aspect that contributed to their success. Another important facet was academic support. In one instance, the lack of tutoring for the cohort became an obstacle. Lastly, academics with a subcategory of academic environment became an obstacle that was eventually overcome.

Time Management

The first category in Theme One: Education and Graduate School Experiences is time management. Jussila (2016) defines time management as "a skill to help an individual manage his time to accomplish his tasks, reach his goals, and still make time

for himself" (para. 10). Jussila indicates that the seven skills included in time management are managing goals, managing tasks, prioritizing, using a calendar, managing procrastination, and utilizing a reminder system for due dates and follow-up.

Challenges to time management. The participants faced many challenges in graduate school. The participants spoke about how time management was crucial to their graduate school experience. Negative and positive experiences with managing their time in relation to their educational and personal lives were challenging but when managed well allowed them to succeed. American Indian cultures view time differently from Western cultures, and this view may contribute to time management being problematic for Native students.

Procrastination. Procrastination can be an especially difficult challenge for scheduling strategies in time management and can be detrimental to the accomplishment of individual academic goals. Joshua Aspen, one participant in this study and the only one who discussed this topic, described his self-identified procrastination logic:

> I was a big procrastinator to be honest. If I could wait until the night before to get a paper done, then that's what I would do and that's what I did. I would go sweat [at the sweat lodge ceremony] rather than write the paper. I would get up at 5:30 in the morning. I had class at 10 or 11 am, and I had confidence that I could get that done. But sometimes I didn't get it done. Sometimes I had to turn it in after class or turn it in a day later, and, of course, I would be docked points. [pause] If I could do it all over again, that's one of the things that I would do is not procrastinate so much I guess.

Joshua believed that he could have reduced his procrastination if he had been trained more thoroughly in time management techniques. For example, he supposed that keeping track of his assignments and due dates on a calendar would have helped him to stay more focused. He also believed that having that calendar, showing his deadlines in writing, would have helped him reduce his procrastination.

Prioritizing Tasks and Events. Another challenge the participants faced was keeping track of the many different academic deadlines as well as social and family events. These social and family events may occur on the same day as the deadlines for papers or presentations. Plotting these items on a calendar can identify the conflicts so that the participant could notify his or her professor or make alternative arrangements. Chelsea Maple explained her strategies:

> It made me become very organized in managing out my day and scheduling, going, putting the things that are my priority to get done during the day. Then it would come time for me to do my homework. So it was always late nights. My weekends, like I said, I had to put a lot of my life on hold. I couldn't just sit home or go visit on a weekend; I always had work to do. Or when somebody would call and say let's go do this. Well, I can't do that because I have a paper to get done or I have research or I have a book. So I really had to prioritize my days and my weekends on what's important and what I need to get done at that time.

Not only did Chelsea have to prioritize her tasks, but she also needed to adhere to her plan. Even though she would be missing family events, such as baby showers, weddings, and her children's school sporting events, Chelsea knew missing those events would only

be temporary—three years, and, yet, she felt guilty about missing those events. The realization of graduating helped her cope with the frustrating times.

In addition to Chelsea's strategies, Steven Cedar shared his strategies for prioritizing his tasks:

> Once I got into grad school into the Ed. Leadership program, I really refocused myself and took extra time even if it took [pause] even if it was a week early or a couple days early [to complete assignments].

Steven indicated that he had to keep a calendar that planned the entire semester because of his work and academic deadlines as well as family and his children's events. He said his calendar was essential in keeping his sanity, balancing his 12-hour days.

Accessibility and financial issues. In addition to the procrastination challenge and prioritizing tasks, reliable transportation was an additional issue. Transportation involved the use of the participants' automobiles, and this issue had both negative and positive sides. On the negative side, Emily's car broke down, and she did not have any financial resources to have it repaired or to purchase a different vehicle. Chelsea also drove from her home town to the city where her classes were held, a four-hour trip one way driving which she incurred gasoline expenses. However, the positive side for Chelsea was that, while in her route to class (a four-hour drive), the travel time allowed Chelsea to review what she needed to know for class; on her way home, she reviewed what she learned.

Emily Willow explained how automobile difficulties created additional stress in her life. She did not have access to funds to get her automobile repaired or to buy a

different car. She revealed that she worked as a research assistant to a professor. Because his research dealt with the Pacific Ocean's tides, she needed reliable transportation to his research site at the Pacific Ocean shore. When her vehicle broke down, she had to rely on the mass transit systems (subway and busses) to get her to school and work. The mass transit system did not provide passage to the ocean. This transportation glitch caused her to revise her calendar to allow for the extra time she needed to arrive on time at school and work.

Emily reflected on her situation:

> I did actually secure a research position with one of my professors, and he was extremely, you know, understanding and willing to work with me you know for the most part. There came at times where his schedule just conflicted with my schedule especially when I didn't have that vehicle, and some of the work he was doing required us to be somewhere before dawn. His work actually was based on the [ocean] tides, so there are certain times when the tide was out.

Emily said that she had to contact her professor to let him know that she couldn't come to work because of car problems. This issue required that she constantly adjust her calendar, impacting her time management approach.

While Emily's experience was negative, Chelsea's experience was both negative and positive. Chelsea shared:

> I guess that was always a negative, driving. Because, especially in winter months, that was always an added stress. Leaving work and having to go down for the whole weekend. The positive on driving was it was always my time to think. So

going down, preparing myself for class and I always drove pretty much by myself.

Chelsea continues:

> …So it was always my time to reflect on class and stressing. And I remember the drives coming back where I would always be like, oohhh, I did it! It was always such….we always had really good discussions so that my mind would be going all the way home. So the rides never seemed too long. So there was a positive out of that too.

Time management was key to the successful completion of the participants' graduation goals. Although the participants encountered challenges to their time management plans, they found that having the discipline to adhere to their plans greatly enhanced their success. The self-esteem that they experienced by graduating with their degrees could be directly related to their time management strategies. In addition to time management, the participants rated advisor selection as the next important element to achieve their graduation goals.

Advisor Selection Process

The second category of Advisor and Committee Selection in Theme One: Education and Graduate School Experiences focuses on the selection of advisors. The participants felt that the advisor selection process was critical to the success of the graduate students' achieving their graduation goals. The process for advisor selection is similar for a Master's and Ph.D. degree with minor variations.

Selecting a good advisor. The participants in this study felt that having a compatible advisor contributed to their successful completion of their degree programs. Barnes, Williams, and Archer (2010) find that positive attributes for graduate student advisors were accessibility, helpfulness, social guidance, and caring while the negative attributes were inaccessibility, unhelpfulness, and disinterest. The participants experienced both the positive and negative attributes in their advisors.

Steven Cedar initially felt his advisor selection process was a positive one; however, he needed to replace her towards the end of his dissertation process because she resigned from the department. Steven reflected that an advisor needs:

> To be somebody that's going to fight for you. Somebody that's going to be there for you. I was…I think I was blessed in two ways. I had that, and then I had somebody that was probably spending an average of 10-20 hours a week just overlooking my stuff.

Steven also believed that an advisor needs to be chosen carefully:

> I would say search for your advisor and choose wisely. That would be my biggest piece of advice. Because if you don't' have a strong advisor, somebody that's willing to get in depth with you and know everything about what you're doing and knows the system back and forth, then you might have some trouble.

Steven also had advice for new graduate students; they should be "looking for someone that's strong willed. Somebody that knows your background and knows your heritage and knows where you're coming from and that has experienced some of the things that you've experienced. I think it's an interview process, really."

Conversely, Chelsea Maple's experience with advisor selection was not a positive one. Chelsea reflected on what not to do when selecting an advisor:

> I didn't know any of the professors. And once we started that first semester, they're like, now you have to pick your committee. I'm like, when I don't even know any professors or who. And they're like, oh and this is your temporary advisor. So I just got who I got, and it wasn't very good.

Different universities have a variety of methods in assigning advisors for new graduate students. Usually, the program assigns a temporary advisor; ultimately, the student chooses a permanent one. In Steven Cedar's situation, his advisor was Native American, one who was compatible with him and who was familiar with his Native background. Unfortunately, his advisor resigned from his department before he could graduate. Consequently, Steven needed another advisor. He chose a person with whom he had taken several classes and was comfortable with her advising style.

On the other hand, Chelsea Maple was appointed a temporary advisor. Initially, the relationship was working well until Chelsea's advisor requested that she change her dissertation topic to her advisor's research area. Chelsea refused, and her advisor retaliated, causing enormous stress for Chelsea. Ultimately, a person in Chelsea's cohort recommended a professor whom she knew superficially. He became her new advisor, and her experience went from very negative to very positive.

Challenges to selecting a good advisor. Finding a compatible advisor can be complex. First, the participant needs to get to know the different faculty members who are able to be advisors. Second, learning about graduate faculty takes some research; for

example, the participant had to find his or her particular department's website that posts the biographies for the faculty. The faculty usually list their areas of research, but those biographies usually do not post personal information. Third, as Steven Cedar commented, finding an advisor is like a job interview where Steven met with the faculty person to get to know him or her.

Chelsea Maple, a participant in this study, discussed her negative experiences with her advisor. She recalls that the process did not allow her to get to know who was available to be an advisor. She recalled that she was given a temporary advisor, but she didn't have any input into the process. Chelsea relates, "See they had assigned me to an advisor; we didn't get to choose [pause] and so I ended up getting [pause] well the first teacher I knew. So I ended up having her as my advisor. Chelsea's experience was a frustrating challenge for her, but she was determined to get her degree.

The main challenge was finding a faculty member who was compatible with the participant. In Chelsea's situation, when she did not want to change the focus of her research, she had to contend with perceived retaliation. Chelsea stated:

> She wanted my research to go in another direction. So she wanted my research to go in one direction and I didn't want it to go in that direction. So I just kind of took what she gave me and just got through that class and hopefully I wouldn't ever have to see her again. So that wasn't very pleasant at all. And she did…she treated me really differently after that.

In addition to selecting an advisor, two of the participants needed to select a dissertation committee as well.

Dissertation Committee Selection

For doctoral students, the process of choosing a committee can be difficult, especially if the students do not know the graduate professors when they are required to form their committees; relying on their advisors is crucial to forming a cohesive committee.

Challenges to selecting a good committee. A variety of elements can influence the choice of a committee and committee members. Once a selection problem is resolved, a positive experience can emerge. Chelsea Maple discussed the committee selection process she experienced after her difficult experience with her first advisor:

> Luckily, I ended up getting a really good advisor, and he knew a good group of people for my committee; so I just redid my committee and went through the proper protocol of what I needed to do to get the right people on my committee. And after that, I had the best committee. It was a great experience. I just loved it, where I know other people had a not-so-good experience.

Steven Cedar's had a good committee chair with whom he was compatible, but she resigned from the department. He replaced his committee chair, and because he was having difficulty with two of his committee members, he and his committee chair felt they needed to be replaced. After their replacement he felt his process went much more smoothly and created a more positive experience. Steven reflected on his committee selection experiences:

> And that's [replacing committee members] very difficult to do because most of your committee they know what you're doing from the beginning. Then when

> you have to bring in two new people, it's more difficult. But if the people that you're bringing in understand more, then it was a good decision.

When a graduate student chooses a compatible advisor, the dissertation process becomes a positive experience. In addition to choosing a dissertation committee, the participants also needed to examine the academic support process of the university.

Academic Support

Colleges and universities have different methods of serving students to ensure their academic success. These means of helping students to achieve their graduation goals can include writing centers, student success centers, financial aid offices, and advising services among others (University of North Dakota, 2017). All of the participants indicated that they did not have problems academically; however, one participant indicated that she could have used help with her academic writing.

Faculty. An important element in helping students succeed is the faculty. The participants' encounters with faculty were varied. Both Chelsea Maple and Steven Cedar commented on what the faculty members stated in class regarding university policy and missing classes. Steven Cedar commented:

> One of the things that our advisors told us at the beginning of the cohort was 'life happens, and we'll let you.' That proved to be absolutely false, by the way. Because they didn't allow life to happen. Because if you missed one class, they [faculty] would tell you to drop it [the class].

Chelsea also commented:

> You know, their lack of understanding and when we started they said, you know, life still goes on, and we understand there's family and emergencies come up. But then when it actually did happen, they [faculty] weren't so understanding like they said.

In Steven Cedar's situation, he received a call from his family that his auntie/godmother had passed on. MRU's Educational Leadership department policy stated that he would have to drop the class if he missed his weekend classes. He did go to class on Sunday; however, he reflected on that day in class:

> I got through the Saturday course. Woke up on Sunday, and she was gone. I was asked to be the keeper of the flame, so I had to come home and stay with the fire for four days and four nights. Yeah, that was kind of like a reality check for me. So I remember getting the [pause] I was at class when she was sick one day. And they called me [pause]. It was on a Sunday afternoon, and they said, your aunt passed away. I just told my teacher…can I go? And she was like, yeah, why what's going on? I said, my aunt just died. They all kind of knew what was going on, so I actually got that…that was one [class] I got excused.

Because of the academic support that he received from his professor, Steven appreciated her compassion.

Organizations. Colleges and university have student organizations that students can join. These organizations can provide students with opportunities, such as mentoring. Emily Willow reflected on the support she received from different scientific student

organizations. She was the only participant who mentioned student organizations, and she remembered the support she received from them as an undergraduate student:

> A lot of groups especially like AISES is one. SACNAS is called the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science, and they have a mentoring program. That's the SEEDS program, which is Strategies for Ecology Education and Diversity and Sustainability. That group has a mentoring program as well. I don't think I would have been as encouraged to go to graduate school had I not been part of those programs. So what I did was I tapped into my AISES network because they had a regional rep. [at PRU]. So that sort of was the chapter that adopted me when I was there, at [PRU]. That gave me my connection and that familiarity with being able to tap into my culture a little bit and also still get the support that I needed. Here at the [American Indian Center at MRU] we have this space. If you like, you can walk in here and be able to freely express yourself. You feel like your point of view will be reciprocated because there will be at least one other Native that relates to you whereas when you're you know with others, you have to explain and then you have to explain the history and then you have to kind of explain to educate people.

Emily felt that her mentors in the AISES organization, associated with MRU, helped her decide to even go to graduate school. She participated in these organizations as an undergraduate student. When she became a graduate student, she was able to contact these organizations for assistance. Because PRU AISES did not have a local chapter, [PRU]'s AISES chapter adopted her; she participated online when possible.

Academics

Academics relate to the experience of learning in higher education. The participants mentioned the academic environment on their university campuses, and they spoke about the classroom environment and their cohort experiences. The participants shared their frustrations as well as their positive experiences.

Academic environment. The participants viewed the academic environment in terms of classroom and their cohort experiences. They reflected on their experiences within the academic environment, for example, their cohorts and classroom environments. The participants felt that the academic environment in their classes was positive and negative. The classroom environment was positive when the professor and the students were open-minded and respectful; the negative environment was generated when distrust was present.

Joshua Aspen described his experience in his Educational Leadership program in graduate school as positive and reflected on his classroom experiences when he began his classes. He shared:

> It took me one [the first Sociology Program attempt] to get to the program I was fitted for, but I felt the most comfortable and did have that spark and that passion that was mentioned to me before. So I felt like I was in the right place and on the right track again after you know being feeling like crawling under a rock.

Regarding the cohorts, Emily Willow related her experiences with her cohort at PRU when they were working on a project:

> To complete the group projects, [since] we all didn't live close to each other, we had to come up with you know email communications and we didn't really use social media so much as we do conference calling and deciding like you know to meet outside of class.

Because their group was scattered over a large regional area, they needed to discover ways to complete their projects without having to travel long distances to meet.

In addition, Chelsea Maple's experience with her cohort were positive. She shared:

> The positives [are] that I have lifelong friends from my cohort. So that was a really good experience. You know, I knew they always had my best interest and they always wanted me to do well. So it was….they never wanted to see me do poorly, I always had their support. It was just to trust in those relationships at the beginning. Going into not knowing anybody and going out of my comfort zone. And leaving the reservation for the first time to go into a program where I didn't know anybody. That was a big first step. But once I got there and moved past my insecurities and vulnerabilities and opened myself up to them, I found lifelong friends with those individuals.

While academics are an important element in higher education, the academic environment provides the background, either positive or negative. Joshua and Chelsea eventually had positive experiences within their academic environments. Joshua (in a classroom environment) and Chelsea (in her cohort) believed that those experiences helped them to attain their graduation goals. Academic environment can influence a

student's experience positively or negatively. In addition to the academic environment, one of the participants discussed the issue of finding the right program.

Finding the right program fit. The participants shared their experiences about finding the right graduate program, and three of the participants were confident they chose the correct program for themselves. One participant, Joshua Aspen, took longer to find his program fit. His first encounter with graduate school was a very negative one. Joshua Aspen discussed his experiences in his first choice in graduate school. He thought that he wanted to go into the Sociology Master's program but found that he did not have the passion for this discipline. He stated:

> I got accepted, provisionally accepted, and so I went through a year of that program. A couple of the classes were rather difficult because we mainly talked about theory, and we weren't talking about everyday things that I need to deal with on a day-to-day basis. At the end of the second semester the spring semester, things kind of came to a head and kind of burst it because one of my--I had a misunderstanding with an instructor, and so I ended up getting a bad grade in his class. It was miscommunicated --a misunderstanding is what it really was.

Joshua stated that he almost gave up on getting his Master's degree because of his experiences with that first attempt in graduate school:

> So at the end of that first year of hearing my teachers, my instructors, say that, and I'll never forget it because what she said was, 'I talked to a lot of your instructors, and they all said they all made it aware to me that you know your [pause] 'it seems like you're just not cut out for grad school at this time,' or you

know, and so it really kind of crushed me. So I have, I could have let that little tiny thing be this great big huge killer or big wall in front of me, but I didn't. I addressed it as a little tiny thing, and I pushed it aside and kept going.

While Joshua's first attempt at graduate school was negative, he still wanted to get his Master's degree. Joshua shared that a friend suggested that he talk with the department chair in the Educational Leadership program. After talking to family and friends, he did contact the department chair:

> So I went and talked with the department chair -- the Educational Leadership department chair, and she basically asked me, 'well what you want to do?' and so I told her what I wanted to do. I wanted to direct my own center, a native center on campus. And so she talked to me about the program, the Ed Leadership program and what I could take to do that, and that is exactly what I did. That's when I really knew that Ed. Leadership was the fit for me--the perfect fit because we talk about current issues, we talk about historic things that happened in education and in higher education.

After traumatic experiences in the Sociology program, he did find his passion in Educational Leadership where he felt he was accepted.

In Chelsea Maple's experiences, she knew from the beginning what program she wanted to study. Chelsea shared:

> I started looking for different programs and seen the program. I thought, well, I could do this because my ex-husband always had my kids every other weekend so the classes were every other weekend. So I thought, well, that will give me

something to do and to get out of town. So I just started taking classes and I ended up finishing a few years after that.

Academics can have profound influences on American Indian graduate students as the participants discovered. After struggling with finding the right program, Joshua succeeded in finding the right program for himself. The participants believed that these effects, if negative, can sway a student to leave college or, if positive, can result in earning his or her academic degree. With the participants in this study, they found their passion, and they graduated with their degrees.

Theme Two: Culture and Tribal Values

The second theme, *Culture and Tribal Values,* revolves around the participants' American Indian cultures and tribal values. This theme includes family/extended family, beliefs and traditions, environmental factors, and education. This theme involves discussion of the values of immediate and extended families, and the participants agreed that families played an important role in the participants' success in achieving their goals. Some of the environmental factors, such as poverty and politics, created hardships for the participants; however, their resiliency and determination helped them to overcome those disadvantages. The fact that education is highly valued in the participants' tribal communities reinforced their determination to succeed.

Family and Extended Family

The first category in Theme Two, *Family and Extended Family,* centers on families that also include their extended families. The participants' American Indian cultures and traditions emphasize family and extended family as the most important

aspect. From the time children are born, they learn these values. The participants shared their experiences with their families and extended families.

A cultural priority. Family, and in particular children, are considered a top priority in American Indian families. The participants in this study all agreed that their children and extended families came first when making their educational decisions. Emily Willow explained that she earned her Master's degree at PRU and planned on returning to North Dakota to work on her Ph.D. She explained the importance of family and extended family and shared her thoughts about her daughter:

> It was just me and my daughter out in California. I had an older sister who is there, and we stayed with her for a while, but then we got our own place. She [Emily's daughter] was only what eight years old, so she wasn't much upset. She was a little sad that she would leave her friends, but she made a lot of friends in California too and was enjoying the experience.

Emily continued to share about the importance of her daughter:

> It's very important that I am active in her life, not just be an adult who, you know, gets up and drops my kid off who didn't really participate in her life fully, and I was an only parent. And again because of my life choices and it had nothing to do with her, but more just as the way I was raised is that children come first, and that's where you dedicate your life.

Emily also discussed her desire to return to North Dakota, stating "I felt the desire to return home so I ended up actually longing for what is my home, the actual lands and

where my people are from." Emily explained that, when she returned home, she was prepared to pursue her Ph.D. degree at MRU:

> The family comes first, and children are the most important; I know that because of my own choices. I had a child at a very young age, and so that carried its own costs with it as you decide whether you want to go to college or you want to do these other things. Well, it does come with the consequences. The reason I came back to North Dakota was I wanted to pursue a PhD. And I ended up within less than a year of coming back; I ended up with all of her [her sister's] kids. So that kind of really changed my plans, and I haven't gone back to school yet. I kind of keep putting it off.

Emily explained about the background of what kept her from pursuing her Ph.D.:

> It's just that was my personal journey, was my personal choice to make something of my priority rather than you know doing this other thing. That's kind of where I'm at now too is the ability to care for my sister's children because I didn't think anybody else would.

She reflected on why she took over the care of her sister's children:

> That is the case. It's an actual cultural conflict because in our culture those kids are my kids and so on. My sister was no longer able to care for them. It is my responsibility to step up and take care of them. People go 'my God you're such a saint,' and I honestly don't feel like that. That's my duty. I mean you guys might not think of it that way, and you might see as this person who is going above and beyond, but that's really living back in the day and is something that is carried on.

> You do take on those children especially if your sister can't take care of them herself because I understand, but my sister-- it isn't because of [her] poor choices -- but at the same time this situation came about, and I needed to be there for her. She has seven [children] total, and I have one, and so I have eight.

Emily gave up her educational goal temporarily because her cultural belief that made her prioritize her extended family (her sister and the children) before her education. By following her belief about the priority of her extended family, she was upholding her cultural beliefs.

Along with Emily, Steven Cedar agreed with the importance of family, explaining:

> I don't think people understand the reality of extended families, either. When you're raised by your aunts because you're an extended family, and the sisters are all like grouped together. You all live together. You all travel together. They don't really understand how close you become. And native tradition too, that's how it was. You were raised by your family and your extended family. So it was more difficult [pause] it was almost like, oh, [people will say] that's not your normal, family so we're not going to give that much thought consideration to your extended leave because of that. To me, that was kind of like a slap in the face when somebody does that.

Steven also reflected on his gratitude to his wife:

> You know, I have to thank my wife, my kids for putting up with me three years. Because I didn't see them. I would come home from a long day at the office.

> Like I said, during this time, winter, fall--I get a little small break. And then spring's kind of easy for me. But the fall and the winter, I'm averaging 10 hour days.

Steven felt that his immediate and extended family were instrumental in his achieving his graduation goals. Yet, he always tried to put his children at the forefront of his thoughts by providing them with a role model and encouraging them ultimately to pursue degrees in higher education. Steven stated:

> In 2010 I was in the middle of my thoughts on education and all my kids with my four kids growing up and while they were still young while they are growing up, I want to inspire them lean on education to get themselves so that they can get better jobs and work on leadership and so on and so forth. I decided at that point that I needed to show the way for them. What I have done with that [my degree] so far is inspire my children.

He hoped that his success would be an example for his children to follow.

The participants established their cultural belief that family and extended family took precedence in their educational decisions. The participants believed that non-Native people found it difficult to comprehend the extended family relationship among Native people.

Tribal Values, Beliefs and Traditions

In addition to family and extended family, the next most important aspect in Theme Two of *Culture and Tribal Values* were cultural beliefs and traditions. The

participants reflected on how their spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions influenced them when making their educational decisions.

Joshua Aspen explained how cultural beliefs and traditions interface with education by stating, “I try my best to be to be true to who I am and to my spirituality and my culture and my customs, but at the same time, I know I am a student as well.” Joshua continued sharing his viewpoint on education and ceremonies:

> Yes, there may not be sweat [lodge] or ceremony or anything, but it's just reevaluating and sometimes it feels tough that you have to look at yourself and that you feel like I'm putting my all that stuff, my culture, my language, ceremonies, my spirituality-- putting stuff aside to be white. And that's not it at all. You are reprioritizing what you have to do, and for some people that they can't do that. They can never because they feel that way, they can never do that. They can't put the studies ahead of ceremony.

He continued to share his beliefs, stating, “It was spiritual obligations that I have that are totally different, and it means different things in academia. So but to me personally, culturally and spiritually, had very high value and sometimes a higher value than getting a degree.” Joshua continued discussing educational policy and his cultural values regarding death:

> Again it brings us back to the issue in the subject of death and how people are scared to die whereas some of us are not scared to die because we know that we know when we die go back to the earth, but my spirit never dies. So because just like when we came to this world, we were welcomed. So death is welcomed

> because we will be welcomed when we go over across to the other side. We know that we know will be welcomed. But not everybody has understanding that ideal, and that's okay because not everybody is supposed to have that.

Joshua further explained:

> A lot of different cultures have ways that they deal with that, and for our culture our teachings show us that you need to take time to mourn for that person. And they [persons mourning] don't attend any powwows, any public gatherings because we are mourning for that person. Even if we did attend these events, we wouldn't be ourselves because we would just be thinking about our relative. And that's understandable. But how these ways came to be were the spirits that directed and guided our ancestors on how to mourn --that you put food out, that you put tobacco out, that you pray, that you cry, that you take time to just meditate and sit in nature, you know, to relax, just to mourn in that capacity.

Joshua reflected that the educational policies did not allow students time to adequately grieve the loss of their loved one, which often resulted in the students being unable to concentrate on their academic studies. In addition, Joshua commented on the attitude of faculty, saying "a lot of instructors just don't understand that. In one year we went to nine funerals in one year." Joshua felt that the grief students experienced was compounded nine times, which possibly resulted in this lack of concentration. Death impacts education in several ways: First, when a student experiences the grief related to the death of someone who is close, it affects their concentration. For example, when a student tries to study for a test or to write a paper, the grief sometimes will distract them.

Second, this grief can often result in depression, which further compounds the effect on their academic studies.

Chelsea Maple reflected on her cultural values when she had to push out her graduation date because her grandma was dying. Chelsea was required to drop the class and retake it the next time it was offered two semesters later:

> And then everything that I've been working so hard for and this is going on. And I had a strict timeline. Like I was going to be done, in 3 ½ years--I'm done. So I'm like, this is going to throw me back. So I'm like, well, my family always came first, so I ended up going to be with my grandma.

Chelsea graduated with her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership; however, it took her two semesters longer than she had planned.

Politics. Tribal politics had some influence on the participants' educational decisions. Regarding the political environment on her reservation, Chelsea Maple gave an example of what she would like to change in the school system on her reservation. She asserted:

> It was always difficult because it was always…back home it's so political. The school [grade and high school] systems are run by our school board members, [some] who don't have our students' best interests at heart. So you know, I always knew I wanted to go into this profession to change that.

Chelsea continued with her recollection, stating, "So people don't quite understand that unless you actually are in that environment. It's like a third world country. Everything is governed by inside. So they can basically do whatever they want." She also explained:

> And they [the Council] just don't quite get it. But when you're...80% of your employment is coming from the school systems. Those boards are probably bigger, just as big as our tribal elections. Everybody wants those positions, so they can hire people to get in there. The janitor's getting paid $30 an hour and doesn't need a degree. Like I said, those boards and the council control and dictate everything. They want those positions. So they necessarily don't hire the right people for those positions. It should be student-geared and not be just hiring to…whoever because they're a relative. So I always knew that I wanted this degree, so I could change that, but the reality sunk in is being [pause] first of all I'm a woman.

When Chelsea first decided that she wanted to earn her degree in educational leadership, she used the reservation school system's environment as a motivation to obtain her degree. As a result, she applied and was hired in a leadership position in the North Dakota's public school system. She believed that additional leadership experience in the North Dakota public school system would inform her efforts to effect changes in her home tribal school system. She trusted that the changes she affected in that system would eventually benefit the Native school students.

Community response. On the other hand, Steven Cedar remembered how the community members provided negative feedback when he wanted to start a youth program; however, other community leaders were positive. One of the reasons that Steven wanted to earn his Ph.D. in Educational Leadership was so he could give back to his community through helping the community's youth. What Steven did not anticipate

was the jealousy he encountered from some of the tribal members by getting his degree in higher education. Steven reflects:

> So when I came back, I didn't realize how much people were jealous of people that make progress, and they want to do well for themselves. They always think that there's a kick back. They think that there's somebody that's going to [pause] 'oh, he just wants all the accolades' and all that stuff.

Steven continued with his reflection:

> So that led into me giving back as far as [the center for American Indian youth] [Name deleted to protect anonymity], the 3.2 million-dollar center that we put up. That was another outgrowth of that, which I wanted to give back to the community. I remember I got asked just a year ago…some person. We did a grand opening and stuff, and somebody wrote a segment in the [local] paper--an anonymous segment about I'd like to know what those guys got for supposedly giving back. Then our chairman wrote the next article and said the person that was solely responsible for this received zero dollars for anything that he ever did.

Steven paused to think about what he wanted to say next. He expressed his thoughts:

> The truth of the tribal communities [by some members] is your success as almost like 'oh well you think you're better than everybody.' You don't see anything like that. You don't give up any of that type of flare or by anything, but people just automatically think that because they fear success. They fear education in a sense, but I'm not better than you. I'm not better than anybody else, you know.

Steven was using the knowledge he had gained from his classes for the benefit of his tribal community.

Conversely, Emily Willow experienced inclusion in her community. When she returned to North Dakota after graduating with her Master's degree, she felt accepted. She remembered:

> I had a bit of a different perspective because I had moved to a predominantly native community, and so for the first time, I was completely surrounded by more natives than non-natives. I felt really good. I felt like I was actually able to connect with my identity much more. Now is the first time I was really surrounded by natives, and literally like you know I didn't feel like a minority; actually, I felt like a minority only because my worldview is different.

Emily felt that she belonged in her community, and she wanted to continue her education by working on her Ph.D. However, when her sister was unable to take care of her seven children, Emily stepped in and began caring for her sister's children, thus delaying her own educational plans.

While Emily's experience was positive, Steven was disheartened by the tribal community's response in the form of a negative newspaper article about his giving back to his community's youth. He felt, however, uplifted emotionally when one of the tribal leaders responded to that article by publicly supporting Steven's contributions. In spite of the negative opinions of a few people, Steven felt that the benefits to the tribal community's youth was worth the effort he put into the youth center project. He believed that earning his degree benefitted his tribal community, which upheld his tribal values of

giving back to the community, even though he had to endure the negativity of some of his community's tribal members.

Culture and Education

Theme Two, *Culture and Tribal Values*, contains the aspect of culture and education in addition to family, extended family, cultural beliefs, and traditions. The participants believed that education is valued in Native cultures. However, they felt that education within Native cultures (tribal values) and education outside of Native cultures (higher education) became a balancing act.

Value of education. The participants believed that education is valuable in tribal communities and the members of their communities also believed in pursuing degrees in higher education. Joshua Aspen explicated the value of education:

> You have to learn the language. You have to learn a song or something or an oral story, a creation story, or a gender role, or something, societies. You know why we grow our hair [long]. There has to be something cultural that is equivalent just like we have immersion camps and some summer camps that teach you the survival skills of life, for instance, how you start a fire if you don't have a lighter. It [Native culture] is dubbed as primitive, but it's now dubbed as going real or something like that. I think time structure--needing more structure. In the flipside of that is that school isn't for everybody, but you can't let that simple statement decide if you will try to go to school or not. You have to try it.

Joshua clarified the value of education from his cultural point of view:

> Some of them [community members] have a great education but can share something that somebody who does have an eighth grade education could never understand. So you have to be a student always, even if you get your masters, even if you get your bachelors, even if you get your doctorate. That does not mean that you know everything there is to know about that particular subject because you are still a student of the universe. So we are always learning, and then there comes a time when we are still learning, but then we become a teacher as well.

Joshua felt that education is important, no matter where a person acquires it. A person who has a graduate degree has a different type of knowledge than a person who has life experiences. The lessons learned from life experiences are just as valuable as the knowledge gained in a classroom. Joshua further expanded on his clarification, stating, "I think the more we get students to go to these camps to learn science and STEM and everything like that. I think it's important, but I also think like I said we need to have something cultural)." He further stated, "We need to encourage them so that in turn they will encourage the next generation, the younger generation coming up." Joshua reflected on his responsibility for the younger generation:

> As a generation we have to learn how to encourage and empower our students to inspire them like all these things never mentioned and what the students want to do. I tried to remember what they want to do because you never know ten years down the road, you never know. Some of them could be astrophysicists or

scientists that was mentioned and some of them can make a career change and do something else.

Joshua felt very strongly that youth needed to know that the opportunities are available to them but also that the community supports their educational efforts.

Theme Three: Decisions

The third theme, *Decisions,* describes educational decisions made by the participants. These decisions were made in response to events that happened while coping with the situations that occurred while earning their degrees. The participants expressed their feelings about those impediments.

Problems and Decisions

Joshua Aspen's main hurdle was choosing the Sociology master's degree program. He did neither feel that he belonged, nor did he feel welcome. He related his feelings about even continuing on to get his master's degree. Joshua remembered his instructors' attitude:

> …getting told basically that from the majority of my instructors I had in that department that I wasn't ready for grad school, or grad school wasn't for me. Somebody is basically telling you that you're not good enough for grad school.

Joshua worked through the first year of his master's program; when he encountered difficulties with his instructors, he described as a miscommunication. When his advisor counseled him that he was not ready for graduate school, he felt disheartened and considered abandoning his plans to earn a master's degree. However, a friend suggested that he discuss his plans with the chairperson in the Educational Leadership program. He

did meet with the chairperson who talked with him, delving more deeply into his motivation to earn his degree. As a result of that discussion, Joshua enrolled in that master's degree program.

Emily Willow's main decision was whether or not to resign from a research assistant position she held at PRU. She accepted a research position with a professor who was studying ocean tides. Emily described her situation, explaining why she had to resign:

> And so I had to unfortunately ask for an exception late. I can't make it this time, and he would say okay, but I could always hear the disappointment in his voice like I hired you to do that, you know; that's what he was thinking, and that's what I would be too, but it was like it was one I would have to find childcare, which is something --you can't really find somebody to take kid at 5 o'clock in the morning, and then two it would require that I have a dependable vehicle to get me down there at that time in the morning, and it was embarrassing to tell him that I can't do it because like this car thing is going on in my life right now.

Emily had to make a decision as to whether to continue in her position, which would a) enhance her resume, or b) to resign from the position due to child care and transportation difficulties.

Steven Cedar had a completely different dilemma to resolve. The university (MRU) lost his paperwork towards the end of his program. In addition to losing his paperwork, Steven described the disappointment with his advisor, who resigned from his department, as well as experiencing conflict among his committee members. His new

committee chair became his ardent supporter who helped him through the process of setting up his new program. She advised him to set aside his frustration with the administrative staff and handle the problem by being respectful. Respect is one of Steven's tribal values. She helped him identify two committee members who needed to be replaced. Steven recalled his frustration of his losing his advisor, stating:

> The hurdle with the MRU really left a bad taste in my mouth with that part in the Educational Leadership program. My advisor, she resigned shortly after I graduated too because of the system. She felt she could no longer work in it as well.

Steven continued reminiscing about his advisor, fixing his program of study and replacing his committee members, "the program of study that they [pause] that I had approved and then didn't get approved or was lost, and I had to redo it and then MRU add[ed] a bunch of classes. That ended up being a problem in itself." Steven recalled that it came "almost to a head on collision, when I found out that I couldn't finish as fast as I'd like to because of the system. The system was holding me up."

Additionally, Steven Cedar discovered that his program of study was still not fixed, "And then that's also when that program of study was dropped back in my lap, and we had to fix it because it wasn't fixed." He also recalled that, "when it [the paperwork] came back, they had included more credits than was put up for, and I didn't get as much for in return that I got for my Master's degree program." In addition to his paperwork, Steven also felt frustrated, reflecting:

> I felt that I was getting treated unfairly by a few of my committee members. So I replaced two of them and that was a lot of work. I ended up with two Deans serving on my committee plus the additional five members of the people I had. And that's very difficult to do because most of your committee, they know what you're doing from the beginning. Then when you have to bring in two new people, it's more difficult. But if the people that you're bringing in understand more, then it was a good decision.

In addition to Joshua, Steve, and Emily's obstacles, Chelsea Maple's complications revolved around time management. She set up a detailed, comprehensive plan for each semester, which she felt was realistic for her. The problems arose when her family wanted her to come to baby showers, weddings, birthday parties, and funerals. When she was notified that her grandmother was dying, Chelsea was torn between being with her grandmother, thereby upholding her cultural value of the family coming first and before her academic responsibilities. In the situation with her grandmother, she chose to uphold her cultural responsibility of putting her family first, thereby delaying her graduation date. Regarding the other family events, she was able to adhere to her plan but with difficulty because she wanted to be with her family. In these instances, she put her family first but with some feelings of guilt for not adhering to her academic plan.

In her Ph.D. program, Chelsea belonged to a cohort that met every other weekend. Her ex-husband would take care of their three children on the weekends because she had to travel four hours each way to her classes. She reflected on her situation:

> That was always my holiday weekends, too, where I wasn't working, and the kids were [their dad's] home or they were at [their extended—aunts or uncles] families' [homes]. Then they would be next door at their dad's so that was just my time to sit and work. So I would work literally from the time they left. I would sit down in the morning. Work all day. Work all night. Grab something to eat. I mean, it was just constant. And that worked best for me. And that's one thing that I learned from my group, too. Everybody's not like that. My best work is when I sit there for ten hours and not move, just focus on what I need to get done.

She is thankful that her ex-husband and her extended family were able to take care of her children. However, she indicated that she had to prioritize her homework. As a result, she said she didn't have much of a social life, and she felt guilty about missing those family events. Even though she was adamant in adhering to her time management strategy, she reflected that it was difficult because of the guilt she was feeling.

The participants had difficult situations to overcome, any one of which could have derailed their educational goals. Their perseverance and motivation kept them focused, which allowed them to succeed academically. The participants felt the conflict between adhering to their academic responsibilities and/or honoring their cultural values. The participants' willingness to accept advice from their families, extended families, tribal leaders, and advisors assisted them in making suitable academic choices.

Theme Four: Social Support

The fourth theme, *Social Support,* is an important element in persisting to graduation. This theme, *Social Support,* includes the categories of family/extended family, cohorts, and American Indian Centers. The aspect of inclusion is important for American Indian students to feel that they belong to a group, and the social element is important for students to persevere in achieving their educational goals. The participants felt that being accepted and respected were critical for their success. The participants felt that family and extended families, their cohorts, and American Indian Centers were the next most helpful in creating the feeling of belongingness—a home away from home. They shared their thoughts on social support.

Family/Extended Family

Steven Cedar explained that his extended family included his immediate family of his wife and children, his parents and grandparents, as well as his aunts and uncles. Steven honored his extended family by asking for their advice, and he respected the advice that they gave to him. Steven shared:

> I would come home and I would tell my wife, what in the heck am I doing? What am I doing? She would be like, well, you can do it! You've only got two more semesters. I would get that so I knew I couldn't quit at that time or take reduced limits. I just thought, I'm going to do this. I don't care. I'm going to get it done.

Steven's wife reinforced his motivation to complete his education.

Emily Willow felt that her family and friends were her biggest supporters while she was attending PRU. Emily shared:

> It was close to Christmas. I knew we were going to be home, and I think I just got so caught up in my emotions. And I ended up talking with one of my friends who wasn't going to school, and she was one of my coworkers; I was telling her how I felt and then she was, but you only really have like a year and a half left to go, and if you want to go home you can do that but do you really just want to give up this whole opportunity?

Emily valued the advice from her friend. She finished her degree program, and then she returned home to North Dakota.

The participants felt that their extended families and friends were instrumental in helping them to cope with situations as they arose. The families and friends helped them to make the right decisions. The participants with the help and advice from their family and friends were able to adhere to their tribal values and beliefs by completing their programs and making their families and friends proud of them.

Cohorts

Cohorts are formed when a group of students begin their program at the same time. They usually move through their classes as a group unless one or more of the students need to take a different class that is offered at a later or earlier time than the required classes. Within the cohort, the students form friendships that last beyond graduation. Three of the four participants were members of cohorts: Emily Willow at PRU, Steven Cedar at MRU, and Chelsea Maple at MRU.

Steven Cedar described his cohort as part of his extended family, and he valued advice from its members. He reflected:

> My extended family, the colleagues that I gained in the cohort. They were very supportive. They would give me information, anything that I needed. They were always there to lend an ear or give me some advice. So yeah, my family and extended family have been superb. I go back to even my parents, my aunts and uncles.

Steven also remembered how two of his colleagues in his cohort helped him:

> I had two really close colleagues of mine that are in my same cohort that kept me abreast of all of these happenings with the curriculum. And I mentioned them in my dissertation, by the way, because I couldn't have gotten through it without those two guys. Those two guys, they were always worrying about their course and their curriculum, but they'd always tell me, hey, this is coming up. Maybe jump into that then you don't have to worry about all this craziness that you've been going through. Because they all felt kind of sorry for me too because of my schedule and then having to work. Because one of them didn't work at all. He was a farmer.

Steven appreciated the information he received from two members of his cohorts because they helped remind him of deadlines and what events would be happening.

Chelsea Maple remembered how she felt about belonging to her cohort, sharing:

> The positives [are] that I have lifelong friends from my cohort. So that was a really good experience. You know, I knew they always had my best interest, and they always wanted me to do well. So it was…they never wanted to see me do poorly. So they always [pause] I always had their support. It was just to trust in

> those relationships at the beginning. Going into not knowing anybody and going out of my comfort zone. And leaving the reservation for the first time to go into a program where I didn't know anybody. That was a big first step. But once I got there and moved past my insecurities and vulnerabilities and opened myself up to them, I found lifelong friends with those individuals.

Chelsea continued:

> So when I look back on it, I could just smile. Like I just ran into one [cohort member] last night. We were in Bismarck and one of my classmates…he and his daughter were at …they were going to a father/daughter dance. Just knowing that I can go to another city and always run into somebody or know that somebody is there…that I can call a friend. That's always nice.

American Indian Centers

The American Indian Centers on university campuses have a mission to help the American Indian students, both undergraduate and graduate, to navigate the university system and to find the resources the students need to succeed in achieving their graduation goals. These centers are invaluable to the students for the services and help that they provide, for example, finding housing, providing academic tutoring, helping students struggling with homesickness, and locating community services, such as domestic violence counseling and medical assistance.

Emily Willow reflected on her feeling of being included in a group. At the American Indian Center art MRU, she remembered what it was like to feel included and not to have to explain everything:

> Here at [American Indian Center-MRU] we have this space. If you like, you can walk in here and be able to freely express yourself, and you feel like your point of view will be reciprocated because there will be at least one other native that relates to you. Whereas when you're you know with others [non-Natives], you kind of you have to explain and then you have to explain the history and then you have to kind of explain, to educate people. You know what Native Americans are like, and that can be kind of frustrating enough in itself, just trying to connect with people that on the surface level share the same struggles that you do you know with racism and poverty and things like that. But at the same time they are completely experienced in their own way, not the same that you are.

Emily felt it was a safe place for her to go for acceptance.

Joshua Aspen remembered his experiences with the American Indian Center at MRU. As a graduate student, he remembered how the Center was some place where he felt he belonged:

> I remember the picnics, and I remember Soup Fridays, but other than that, I remember tutors of course. Then again I came with a family, so I was a nontraditional student. Otherwise during the day, I was pretty much at the center every day. I would go to class. I would come back to the center and hang out and relax and converse. It seemed to be a home away from home.

Joshua felt the acceptance he received at the American Indian Center on his campus help him to remain focused. At this Center, he felt that he was able to connect with his

spirituality, since he could be smudged (sage is burned and then wafted over him to purify himself from negative energy).

Belongingness is an element that helped the participants feel accepted in their educational environment. Brayboy et al. (2012), quoting Gay (2004, p. 267), stated, "doctoral students of color 'spend their time physically isolated, and feeling excluded from the mainstream dynamics of graduate studies'" (p. 78). In other words, American Indian graduate students need to feel that they belong to the academic community. To achieve that end, the participants felt that their families, extended families, and friends provided social support and were instrumental in aiding them to achieve their educational goals. For those participants who belonged to a cohort, they attributed those relationships to feeling accepted in their classrooms and in their group work. Finally, the American Indian Centers to which they had access gave them a feeling of a "home away from home," a place where they belonged and where they could experience acceptance on campus. The American Indian Centers also gave them a place where they could connect with their cultural spirituality.

Theme Five: Perseverance

The fifth theme centers on *Perseverance*. This theme includes the categories of determination and motivation. The participants identified determination and motivation as key to persevere in reaching their goals—graduating with their degrees. All participants felt that academic and personal balance in their lives contributed to their successes; achieving this balance while coping with the stresses of graduate school is significant for attaining success. The three participants who were in cohorts found that

being part of a cohort enhanced their academic experience and shared that after graduation, they have had life-long friends as a result.

Determination

All of the participants felt that determination was essential to graduate school success, and they expressed how it helped them to achieve their goals. Joshua Aspen recalled how his initial negative experience with graduate school eventually increased his determination to reach his goal of graduating with his Master's degree. It was "taking a risk and transitioning to another program" that ultimately determined his future in graduate school. Joshua further reminisced as to how his being accepted into the Educational Leadership program increased his determination to succeed and to prove to himself that he was, indeed, destined to earn his graduate degree:

> Not only did I get my task and my objective done, but it made me feel better about myself, about my identity as a graduate student because again coming from the program before me basically told me that I wasn't good enough to be in grad school to almost getting a 4.0 within a different program.

Steven Cedar shared his thoughts about his determination, reflecting, "But I have one thing that a lot of people don't have is drive, determination, and that forwardness to always keep moving forward regardless of what happens." He remembered how he felt when he graduated, stating, "the most memorable was the fact that we started with 23 or 24 in our cohort with six remaining. I was the first to get this degree in this program." Steven felt that his determination was instrumental in his graduating with his doctoral degree.

Summary. The participants in this study felt that determination was key to their completing their degree programs. The participants' determination was reinforced by their families and extended families' support, and they felt their cohort was included in their extended families. This inclusion helped the participants achieve that sense of belonging. The tribal value of extended family helped the participants to remain connected to their cultural beliefs.

A plethora of research has been conducted on students' determination to succeed, which can be paired with motivation. In a study conducted by Galotti, Wiener, and Tandler (2014), they found "evidence for moderate levels of content consistency and varying levels of structural consistency across multiple important real-life decisions" (p. 28). In other words, students "repeatedly consider some of the same issues when making important decisions (probably because that information is valued by the decision-maker)" (p. 28). The results of this study can be applied to the current study of American Indian professionals, since they use their tribal values consistently when they make their educational decisions.

Motivation

The second category in Theme Five, *Perseverance*, is motivation. The motivation, as described by the participants, is what accounted for their ultimate success to graduate. Giving back to their tribal communities is how the participants described one of their motivations to achieve their goals of graduating with their degrees. Each participant ascribed their motivation to different reasons and shared what motivated them to persevere.

Joshua Aspen discussed his motivation to initially apply to graduate school. He reminisced:

> One of my instructors asked me if I knew what the term ethnomusicology was, and I said no [laughs]. I did hear of ethnography and ethnographers before but as far as ethnomusicology, I have never heard of that before. And so this particular instructor was an Indian Studies instructor that I had throughout my undergrad, and so he's the one that really kind of, you know, pushed me to get my-- he wanted me to get my doctorate--my PhD in ethnomusicology. That was the initially what propelled me to go into grad school. It was hey maybe I can do something where a) I can learn the language-- learn more of the language and b) I can learn more of the songs, and c) I can do something do my part to help preserve both all three a, b, and c for the generations that are still coming.

Emily Willow discussed her motivation to get her Master's degree in Environmental Management. After she moved back to the Pacific coast, Emily felt she needed to get her Masters' degree because she did not always want to be someone's assistant. She expressed her concerns about her future:

> I got my undergrad in fish and wildlife biology, and while I was doing my undergraduate degree, it became pretty apparent unless I wanted to spend most my time out in the field and basically being somebody else's research assistant, I would need to get a degree beyond.

Along with Joshua and Emily, Steven Cedar attributed his motivation as wanting to be a role model for his children as well as looking forward to having future opportunities. He shared his motivations as follows:

> It's always been something more for me and my kids. I just wanted to fulfill my educational capacities and make sure that I didn't leave any stone unturned. And I also thought about in the future, when I go off. Maybe I'm not going to be here another five years, and I want have a lots of opportunities. I want to have fun. I'm still young.

Steven continued with his reminiscing:

> I want to be able to see a lot of things. I want my kids to be able to see a lot of things. And I feel that with an advanced degree you're never really going to have a door slammed in your face. And you're not going to have a glass ceiling.

Chelsea Maple also shared her motivation for pursuing her graduate degree at MRU. By succeeding in achieving her degree, she would prove her naysayers wrong. She remembered:

> I guess my biggest desire to finish was I was proving those individuals wrong that always said that I couldn't. So I always knew at a young age that [pause] people I was always destined, in their opinion, to not be much. And I wouldn't finish high school, and I was never looked at as being somebody who was going to be somebody. So I guess that was always my biggest fuel in my fire was to prove those individuals wrong and keep on moving forward.

Chelsea continued with her story, saying "I'm not dumb like everybody [in grade school and high school] said I was. I could do this. And from there I just kept on taking classes" (Interview 1, p. 3). She remembered when she began student teaching:

> I had one teacher say, 'Chelsea, is that you?' It's just like, she couldn't believe where I had come from and there where I am now. So yeah, it was kind of like, in your face…I wasn't a 'nobody' like you guys all predicted I was going to be. So I always knew this is what I was going to do, and I think it was always my [pause] I was always very resilient. I always knew. And especially the teachers because I started working with a lot of the teachers that were my teachers, that never took the time. So I always knew that I wanted to change that. So that was kind of something going back and work with them.

Chelsea Maple's motivation was fueled by her childhood experiences of being described as less than intelligent; however, by proving those persons wrong about her, she felt she was vindicating herself. She also felt that giving back to her community was another factor in her motivation to graduate; returning to her community to improve the educational system there, she was upholding her tribal belief that she was helping her tribal community to survive.

Summary. Perseverance is a quality that allows a person to achieve a goal despite obstacles that were encountered. All participants in this study achieved their educational goals despite some difficult obstacles that they experienced. Their tenacity in overcoming those difficulties permitted them to graduate with their degrees. The participants thought that determination and motivation connected with perseverance in

achieving their graduation goals. They also upheld their tribal value of giving back to their communities so that the tribe survived.

Much research has been conducted regarding motivation in higher education. In particular, Guay, Ratelle, Larose, Vallerand, and Vitaro (2013) conducted a study exploring close relationships as autonomy-supportive and their relationship to motivation. The results of their study reveal, "Specifically, students who perceived all sources as moderately-supportive (Moderate group) showed better achievement, were more autonomously regulated (intrinsic and identified regulations), and perceived themselves as more competent" (p. 380). This study's theoretical framework is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), "which endorses an organismic perspective on individual functioning whereby individuals—in the present case students—are viewed as inherently self-motivated to master their environment" (p. 375). In the current study with American Indian professionals, the moderately-supportive source of relationships can be extrapolated to be their families and extended families.

Assessing the data, the following assertions emerged:

Assertion No. 1

Family, ethnic traditions, and cultural beliefs positively influenced the educational decisions made by American Indian professionals who were successful in earning their chosen degrees despite barriers encountered.

Assertion No. 2

Prospect Theory may help researchers to understand American Indian graduate students' processes in making their educational decisions while in graduate school not only

by taking into account the positive and negative outcomes but also taking into account the tribal values.

Summary of Chapter IV

Through the data gathered from this study, the principal investigator identified the five themes set out in this chapter. The data shared by the four participants helped to ascertain main themes and helped the principal investigator recognize the value of these themes. The first theme of Education and Graduate School Experience highlighted the importance of time management as well as selecting a compatible advisor and committee members.

In addition to the first theme, the second theme focused on the essential role that tribal values played in the participants' successes. The participants emphasized that family and extended family played an important role in American Indian graduate students' success. The third theme examined the obstacles faced by the participants. The four participants identified the different obstacles that might have stopped them from achieving their goals. These participants achieved their success in spite of these obstacles because they received good advice from their advisors, family, extended family, and the staff at the American Indian Center.

Moreover, the fourth theme of social support and the fifth theme of perseverance dovetail. Social support and perseverance were crucial to the participants' educational successes. The participants believed that a balance between education and life circumstances provided a good foundation for achieving their goals. This study highlights the positive influence that family, extended family, ethnic traditions, and

cultural beliefs have when American Indian graduate students succeeded despite the barriers they encountered.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research study was to conduct exploratory research to investigate the decision-making process of American Indian professionals who persisted to graduation from their graduate program. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

How did American Indian professionals make their decisions to persist to graduation with their master's and doctoral degrees?

The three sub-questions, relating to the main research question, are as follows:

1) How did American Indian professionals navigate the graduate education system, including their degree programs, to succeed in achieving their educational goals?
2) How did American Indian graduate students make their educational decisions and what influenced those decisions?
3) In what ways did culture influence the students' educational decisions and successes?

The theoretical framework utilized for this study was Prospect Theory, defined by Payne (1985), which includes two phases of risky choices process (See Table 7, p. 44).

Five themes were identified through data analysis: Theme One--Education and Graduate School Experiences, Theme Two-Culture and Tribal Values, Theme Three-

Decisions, Theme Four-Social Support, and Theme Five-Perseverance. Each of the themes contained important categories, supported by the data (See Table 9, p. 58).

In this chapter, this researcher examines the two assertions, resulting from data analysis and considering the decisions made through the lens of Prospect Theory. This chapter also contains recommendations for institutions of higher education and suggestions for future research.

Assertion One

The first assertion is as follows: F*amily, ethnic traditions, and cultural beliefs positively influenced the educational decisions made by American Indian graduate students who were successful in earning their chosen degrees, despite barriers encountered.* The participants shared information about their graduate school experiences and described how those encounters related to their tribal values. In Table 11: Assertion One: Participants' Graduate School Experiences and Related Themes demonstrates the relationship between the assertion and themes.

Table 11. Assertion One: Participants' Graduate School Experiences and Related Themes.

Participants' Experiences	**Related Themes**
Education	#1 Graduate School Experiences
Culture	#2 Tribal Values

Education

The value of education was highly stressed by the participants, their families, and mentors throughout their educational experiences. This concept was consistent with literature in which Brayboy et al. (2012) assert:

> Formal education is taken up by indigenous peoples to sustain, promote, and enhance their nations' economic, cultural, and social well-being…Indigenous peoples utilized higher education toward the end of strengthening, sustaining, and promoting their communities. (pp. 22-23)

The first category of education in the graduate students' experiences theme contained four education sub-categories--time management, selection of advisor and dissertation committee members, academic support, and academics. These categories played major role for the participants in achieving success and graduating with their degrees.

The sub-categories in the education grouping were associated with time management as the most valued element in successfully completing their educational goals. Jussila (2016) defined time management as "a skill to help an individual manage his time to accomplish his tasks, reach his goals, and still make time for himself" (para. 10). She indicated that the seven skills included in time management are managing goals, managing tasks, prioritizing, using a calendar, managing procrastination, and utilizing a reminder system for due dates and follow-up. Jusilla (2016) and Perlmutter (2012) suggest creating a master chart that is accurate and sensible as well as plan for unexpected events. While Steven Cedar did create a master plan as Perlmutter suggests, Chelsea Maple went further by recognizing that she also needed to adhere to her plan. While they discussed strategies and managing various tasks, these participants extended that conversation to a cost/benefit analysis of the value of giving up spending time with their families and friends at social events during their graduate school years for the long-term goal of achieving the degree.

The alignment of Prospect Theory with students' experiences indicates the utility of the theory when applied to graduate students' lives. This alignment is illustrated by parsing out the positive and negative outcomes when considering what decision to make. However, the association as to the outcomes stops short of reflecting the ways that adult students' lives are complicated and require multiple levels of planning—short- and long-term, individual and collective. These portraits of complicated lives are captured in the literature on American Indians (Brayboy et al., 2012; Merriam et al., 2007; Shotton et al., 2013) and supported by this study. It also suggests that perhaps much of the literature on time management and organization is silent regarding ethnic cultures.

Discussions about challenges to time management included two items: procrastination and unexpected situations. Procrastination can be an especially difficult challenge for time management scheduling and can be detrimental to the accomplishment of individual academic goals. Perlmutter (2012) asserts:

> Procrastination is not always bad. Sometimes the work you put off doing is better left undone. And sometimes the best ideas just come late. But perennially postponing everything until the last minute, especially for the doctoral student and the probationary faculty member, can be a career killer. (para. 2)

Perlmutter felt that it was important to know when procrastination was acceptable but also when it will be detrimental. For example, Joshua Aspen admitted that he struggled with procrastination in his undergraduate years; however, he had to overcome his propensity for procrastination during his graduate studies.

In addition to procrastination, another challenge to time management is handling unexpected events, such as a family death and car trouble. Perlmutter's (2012) advice to

"expect the unexpected" (para. 17) was advice to be heeded. Although the participants encountered challenges to their time management plans, they found that having the discipline to adhere to their plans greatly enhanced their success. The self-esteem that they experienced by graduating with their degrees could be directly related to their planning strategies. The decisions that the participants made in addressing their challenges can be viewed through the lens of Prospect Theory, which examines the positive and negative outcomes for each decision they considered, thereby helping to identify the best solution for a particular decision. However, when considering religious or spiritual situations, Prospect Theory does not consider ethnic cultural beliefs; it only addresses the positive and negative outcomes. Since tribal values are important when Native students are making their educational decisions, those values need to be taken into account. Prospect Theory does not consider them since the values do not have a negative or positive connotation; therefore, it diminishes the value of this theory. However, values are determined by the people defining them, so those values could be considered positive or negative in context. On the other hand, the inclusion of tribal values would enhance the implementation of this theory. Almost all people have values, so expanding Prospect Theory to include people's values, tribal or otherwise, would greatly benefit decision-making discussions.

Two additional categories identified in the Education Theme were the importance of a good advisor and dissertation committee selection, both of which impact the success of graduate students. Barnes, Williams, and Archer (2010) found that positive attributes for graduate student advisors were accessibility, helpfulness, social guidance, and caring while the negative attributes were inaccessibility, unhelpfulness, and disinterest. In

addition, forming a doctoral committee is similar to finding an advisor as posited by Moran-Craft, Augustine-Shaw, Fairbanks, and Adams-Wright (2016) who report:

> The instructional components of academic advising focus on the didactic or task-focused nature of advisor–advisee interactions (Kahn & Gelso, 1997), such as selecting courses, forming a doctoral committee, and completing comprehensive exams. Both the interpersonal and the instructional components characterize the essential components of advising graduate students. (p. 54)

While the advice from Barnes, Williams, and Archer (2010) along with Hegarty (2010) suggests suitable guidance, the participants felt that they needed to discover the information about future advisors but were unsure of where to find it. The decisions the participants were making required information about professors. As in making any decision, reliable information is necessary, and information is the backbone for making any good decision. If the needed information is challenging to find, the decision becomes just that more difficult when trying to identify the positive and negative outcomes.

Other sub-categories in the Education Theme are academic support and academics. Colleges and universities have different methods of serving students to ensure their academic success. These means of helping students to achieve their graduation goals can include writing centers, student success centers, financial aid offices, and advising services among others. The participants knew they needed to ask for help, but they also needed to know that those services were available. Shotton, Lowe, and Waterman (2013) assert, "Professional development [for graduate students] is needed in many areas—for example researching, writing to the audience, time management, technical aspects of particular academic fields…" (p. 131).

The subcategories of academic support include faculty and organizations. Faculty are an important element in helping students succeed. Brayboy et al. (2012) further state that "feelings of isolation and academic and cultural alienation, racism and discrimination, lack of Indigenous role models, lack of academic guidance, and financial stressors" (p. 78). Because there are few Native faculty members, Native students need to seek mentors outside of their departments. Brayboy et al. (2012) report, "Usually, access to Indigenous faculty was noted as an important source of support, and in many cases, students described having to go outside of their department to find mentors who in some cases were other faculty of color" (p. 87). For this study's participants, they found the support they needed through the American Indian Center.

Colleges and universities have student organizations that were important forms of academic support. Chixapkaid (2012) shares about his involvement with UCLA and the American Indian Studies Center (AISC) organization:

> My first faculty job was at UCLA with a joint appointment in the Higher Education Program and American Indian Studies Center (AISC). The AISC has a well-established reputation for scholarship, teaching, and service. Highly productive and nationally recognized Native faculty still face institutional struggles, and Native professional and graduate students experience the same demands. The AISC met Native students' needs by providing resources, opportunities, mentoring, and a safe haven. (p. 129)

One student shared a similar valuable experience, while the other three participants did not mention student organization involvement.

While Emily Willow discussed how student organizations were helpful to her as an undergraduate student, she also found student organizations helpful to her as a graduate student. A plethora of research has been conducted regarding undergraduate students and student organizations (Kuh, 2008; Kuh, 2009); however, studies regarding graduate students and student organizations were not found. Studies researching engagement of graduate students and student organizations need to be conducted. Emily's experience in trying to locate an organization to help her as a graduate student was dependent upon her membership in several organizations as an undergraduate student. Therefore, while student organizations can be very important forms of academic support, not every student, particularly graduate students, will choose or be able to access those services. Therefore, while there might be an assumption about the utility of these organizations available, other supports must be available for this level of student.

Culture

The second main category of culture is related to Theme Two-Culture and Tribal Beliefs and revolves around American Indian cultures and tribal values, which are entwined with the American Indian participants' lives. This category reflects the complicated intersections between family, values environment, and education. Bryde (1971) explains that in many tribal belief systems the Creator/God is a first priority and family and extended family should be the next top priority, which was reflected in the important role that families play in achieving the participants' goals. In addition, the seven grandfathers' teachings (Red Lake Nation College, 2017) were also important in promoting persistence. Environmental factors, such as poverty and politics, created hardships for the participants; however, their resiliency and determination helped them to

overcome those disadvantages. The fact that education is highly valued in the participants' tribal communities reinforced their determination to succeed.

Family and, in particular, children are considered a top priority, next to the Creator/God in American Indian families. Bryde (1971) clarifies that children are the future of the tribal communities. The participants in this study all agreed that their children and extended families came first when making their educational decisions. Their immediate and extended families were instrumental in achieving their graduation goals. They always tried to put their children at the forefront of their thoughts by providing them with a role model and encouraging them ultimately to pursue degrees in higher education. In addition to family and extended family, Bryde (1971) explained that the traditions and ceremonies are the structures for passing on the cultural beliefs and values on to the next generation.

One core tribal value is giving back to their tribal communities, in other words, sharing what they have learned to better their communities. Brayboy et al. (2012) reflects:

> Simply stated, reciprocity is guided by the mantra, 'We give so that others can take, for our survival. We take so that we can give to others. Those who receive must give what they have to others.' Only through reciprocity can community survival be possible. This simple fact points to one of the reasons for the centrality of the community instead of the individual. Individuals play a role in the survival of communities; they can never come before it. (p. 17)

The community's survival must be a priority as well (Alvord & van Pelt, 1999; Brayboy et al., 2014; Gray & Rose, 2011; Patel, 2014; Shotton et al., 2013; Tippeconnic &

Tippeconnic, 2012). Joshua, Emily, Steven, and Chelsea all believed that their educations in their disciplines are used to enhance their community's well-being. The participants indicated that their motivation to succeed was to give back to their tribal communities. Specifically, Shotton et al. assert that the National Service Learning Clearinghouse (NSLC) "offers a number of publications to help institutions of higher education create opportunities for Native students to give back to their communities" (p. 131). However, the participants also reflected on how their spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions influenced them when making their educational decisions and how cultural beliefs and traditions interfaced with education. This connection between their beliefs and educations emerges with the motivation to give back to their communities. Higher education is one of the vehicles that promotes this interface.

Assertion One Summary

This assertion discussed the elements of the participants' experiences related to education and culture as it intersected in their graduate school experiences. The themes of the participants' graduate school experiences are linked to their tribal values, which gave them the support that they needed to succeed, namely, the beliefs rooted in their tribal values and the courage to continue in spite of the roadblocks they encountered

Assertion Two

The second assertion focuses on the decision-making process, namely, Prospect Theory, which was used to understand the decisions made by the participants while in graduate school. This assertion is as follows: *Prospect Theory may help researchers to understand American Indian graduate students' processes in making their educational decisions while in graduate school not only by taking into account the positive and*

negative outcomes but also taking into account the tribal values. The participants' decisions resolved the roadblocks they faced as American Indian graduate students.

Table 12 Assertion Two: Participants' Decisions: Prospect Theory Phases and Related Themes.

Decisions and Prospect Theory Phases	**Related Themes**
Problems Outcomes	#2 Tribal Values #3 Decisions #4 Social Support #5 Perseverance

This researcher used Prospect Theory's (Payne, 1985) two phases to analyze the participants' decisions. Phase I includes the following processes:

1) Editing involves (a) coding where the perception of each gamble outcome is viewed as a gain or loss;
2) Cancellation where certain components of each gamble can be discarded;
3) Combination where the information display and framing effects are stressed and which outcomes can be combined; and
4) Detection of dominance or which outcomes looks best.

Prospect Theory's phases are useful when identifying outcomes. Viewing the outcomes as a gain or a loss will help to determine which ones can be discarded and which ones can combined to have a stronger effect. Lastly, in this phase the student who needs to make a decision can determine which of the outcomes look best.

For example, this researcher examined when Joshua Aspen was deciding whether or not to find another Master's program or to abandon his educational goals. This researcher thought about the gain and loss that would be involved. In finding a different

Master's program, Joshua would eventually gain his Master's degree and recover his self-esteem. Additionally, Joshua would uphold his tribal belief by having courage and doing the difficult thing; therefore, if he abandoned his educational goals, he would suffer further loss of his self-esteem because he would be abandoning his tribal belief of courage by doing the easy thing of walking away. He would also be abandoning his educational goals. Joshua identified the problem and looked at the positive and negative aspects of it (Phase I). He then decided that he could not walk away from his goal of earning a Master's degree not only because his desire to earn his degree but also because he was intrinsically committed to upholding his tribal values (Phase II).

Another example is Steven Cedar's problems with MRU when his program paperwork was lost. Steven was very frustrated with MRU because he felt it set him back in his goal to graduate within three years, plus he was required to rework his program of study. Furthermore, MRU added some additional classes to his revised program of study and gave him less transfer credits than they initially gave to him, which further frustrated him. According to Prospect Theory, Steven's gain and loss potential outcomes did not include walking away from earning his doctorate. His advisor counseled him to control his frustration and treat the staff with respect instead of with anger. The gain option of redoing his program of study would be to his benefit if he wanted to achieve his goal of graduation. No outcome options could have been combined (part of Phase I), so Steven's best option was to follow his advisor's advice. Steven shared his logic:

> My advisor and I, we always were two steps ahead of the game. It was….it was a political game that we were playing….towards the end of my program of study. It

> was who could be a step ahead of everybody else, is what it was. And it was getting through red tape. Visiting with the right people at the right time. Getting backing. Getting people to sign off on this and that. I mean, it was just a little rhetoric and road blocks that people put in front of you so that you know that there are those gates that have to be opened. And somebody's got to open them. I guess what my advisor taught me was be patient, use the system, be patient with the system, and know in your heart that there are good people out there. That's what she kept on telling me. There are good people out there. And I started to believe that and then towards the end, yes, there were good people that ***were*** out there.

Prospect Theory's Phase II was evaluation of the edited prospects, which properties involve value function and decision weights (positive or negative ones). (See Table 7, p. 44). Steven chose the option of graduating with his degree. Instead of venting his anger, he approached the administrative staff, and he treated them with respect, thereby upholding his tribal value of respecting others—one of the seven grandfathers' teachings (Red Lake Nation College, 2017). The advice that Steven received from his advisor helped him to maintain his respect towards others.

In both of these examples, Prospect Theory's phases revealed the gains and losses for Joshua and Steven. This theory aids a person in arriving at positive and negative outcomes; however, it does not include ethnic background or beliefs when Natives are ultimately making their final decisions. Prospect Theory does not take into account the tribal values because they can be valued as neither positive nor negative. If Prospect

Theory can be expanded to include ethnic values, this theory would become more inclusive.

Racism

Obstacles to persistence can come in the form of racism, which behavior can be acted out through micro-aggressions, such as race-based statements, other statements meant to hurt, and invalidation statements (See Table 5 for examples on p. 26). These harmful statements can be made to hurt either intentionally or unintentionally. Education on how to avoid these types of micro-assaults are necessary to prevent more harm. A case in point is the example Steven shared about his committee members. One of his committee members felt that two of his other committee members were making statements that bordered on racist. However, Steven did not feel those comments were racist. While racism was included in this study's literature review, the participants did not mention racism except for Steven when he was discussing changing two of the members of his committee. Steven shared:

> People were….people on my committee were telling me that I needed to pull the racial card because that what they felt it was getting to be. Yeah and so I mean, we never did of course. I know it existed somewhat but I'd never had it happen to me so it was kind of weird to hear somebody tell me, I think it's racial. A committee member of mine or two, it was two of my committee members that said that. I was just like, what? No way!

In this instance, Steven did not feel racism was involved in his committee's attitude. When Steven was having difficulties with two of his committee members, another committee member remarked that racism might be involved. Steven did not think racism

was motivating those committee members' actions; those two members kept holding up his graduation.

My participants were silent on the topic of racism. Clandinin (2016) discusses the subjects of silences and white spaces. She indicates that participants did not only tell their stories with words; they also tell the stories with their silences. That silence can be just as powerful as words. The participants' silence about racism could stem from three purposes. One reason for silence could be an indication they were not comfortable discussing aspects of racism. Given that this researcher is White and part of the majority culture, this reluctance may have been part of a trust issue. Silence may have been used as a way of conveying a lack of trust. A second reason could have been that the participants may have had some ingrained stereotypes about White older people's beliefs about Native Americans. However, Native people are raised to respect their elders, and this researcher is included in the elder category. Because of this tribal value of respect, they may not have wanted to sound rude or disrespectful. On the other hand, however, the silence does not mean that racism was not part of their graduate school experiences. A third purpose could have been that the participants may not have recognized racism as part of their experience.

Summary

The purpose of this research study was to conduct exploratory research to investigate the decision-making process of American Indian professionals who persisted to graduation from their graduate program. Through analysis of the data collected in interviews of the participants, this researcher identified specific categories and themes, which led to the two assertions explicated in this chapter. Tribal values, for example,

priority of family which includes children and extended families, helped the participants make educational decisions that facilitated reaching their graduation goals. The information contained in this study also contributes to the decision-making literature discussion about ethnic cultures, specifically American Indian cultures, where only corporate culture had been the main discussion topic. Specifically, the information from this study can open different threads of discussion in the decision-making venue where ethnic cutural values can be discussed, determining ways to open ideas on how to improve the decision-making theories to include those values.

Limitations of the Study

This study contained three limitations. One limitation is the small number of participants in this study. Because of the small number of American Indians receiving graduate degrees, the available population from the Midwest area from which to choose participants was also small. Second, this study focused on American Indian graduate students who lived on the reservations in the Northern Plains region. If the study had included American Indian graduate students from other regions in the United States or students from an urban population, those students may have offered different perspectives from those living in the Northern Plains area. Urban American Indians may have encountered different experiences; therefore, this study has a limited perspective Third, another limitation is that the researcher was non-Native. The researcher attempted to mitigate this potential limitation by developing a good rapport with the participants.

Recommendations for Higher Education

Graduate Faculty as Advisors

The results of this study bring to light an implication for graduate faculty as advisors. This implication is that advisors who will be advising students who are Native American or non-Native persons who are interested in Native issues should become familiar with those matters. They should also learn about their advisee's cultural beliefs and traditions or the ethnic background of the Natives with whom the non-Native advisee wants to research.

My first recommendation focuses on graduate faculty who advise American Indian graduate students or non-Native graduate students who want to center their research on American Indian issues. The participants in this study indicated they believed that their advisors and/or committee members needed to be more knowledgeable about American Indian cultures. For example, they shared about the deaths of family members. The participants felt that, if the professor would have had more knowledge about the ceremonies and traditions or even a willingness on the professor's part to learn, it would have mitigated some of the participants' frustration, just knowing that the professor cared enough to learn about those traditions. Once the participant explained his circumstances when his family member died, the professor said he could leave class; he was grateful that the professor understood why he had to leave class. An advisor needs to reach out to American Indian elders or tribal leaders who have knowledge about the Native culture of the advisee and the research issue addressed in the theses or dissertation studies.

A second recommendation is reaching out to elders or tribal leaders is important because elders/tribal leaders are very important in American Indian cultures, and their

advice is highly respected. For example, Native elders at the MRU campus, in the researcher's knowledge, included at least eight persons who have earned their doctoral degrees, two persons within tribal communities who have earned their doctorates, and several presidents of tribal colleges with doctorates who have retired. In addition, over the next ten years, several other persons who earned their doctorates will become tribal elders, and still other persons who have earned their Masters' degrees plan to earn their doctorates and will become elders. If the advisee is non-Native, the advisor can contact Native faculty and/or American Indian Center staff to learn about the culture, traditions, and the research issues. The advisor can contact the American Indian Center on campus to seek advice from staff as to which elder or tribal leader would be appropriate to approach. When the advisor meets with a Native elder or faculty or staff person, it is customary to offer him or her a pouch of non-flavored, loose pipe tobacco as a measure of respect for their advice. Before contacting an elder or tribal leader, a faculty advisor could talk with the student, learning about the student's culture. The faculty advisor could also check to see if other faculty or committee members are knowledgeable about American Indian beliefs and traditions.

Professors

Another implication that this study uncovered through the data analysis is that some professors may need to become more culturally sensitive. Three of the participants experienced a lack of sensitivity from certain professors. Those instances may have been a lack of communication in those situations, possibly on both sides of the conflict. Some professors may feel some resistance to acquiring this sensitivity. A future study may be necessary to determine why the professors feel that resistance. Administrators and

educators may need to assess this difficulty through surveys to pinpoint those issues. A cultural sensitivity committee could administer a survey and determine the best time to conduct those surveys.

The third recommendation concerns this cultural sensitivity. The advisor may already be culturally sensitive. However, because American Indian graduate students come from a variety of Native backgrounds, refresher training in cultural sensitivity would be helpful. In particular, *BaFa BaFa* is a cultural sensitivity training activity in which graduate faculty can participate. The objective of this exercise is to gain an understanding of what it is like for Native students who are entering into a non-Native culture, for example a Native student enrolling in a predominantly White-valued university. This activity will help graduate faculty gain an awareness of the challenges and frustrations Native students may experience in that type of university setting. Books are available that address the issues of ethnicity and accountability in higher education.

American Indian Graduate Students

Another implication is that time management skills are lacking in American Indian graduate students. One reason for these skills being missing is that the Native students are raised to view time differently. This Native view of time is more circular; however, the Western viewing of time is linear. Learning these skills are necessary for the graduate students successfully reaching their graduation goals. Training for graduate students to acquire these skills is essential. While the institution or individual departments may feel that this training is not their responsibility, they may offer to provide this training to improve their graduation rates.

A fourth recommendation involves time management training. The study found that time management is a crucial element in American Indian graduate students' success. The program administrators can offer this training in a classroom setting or in an online environment where students learn to use the different elements of time management. Additionally, current students could be trained as peer tutors to work with students who need to improve their time management skills. These skills can empower American Indian graduate students to achieve their educational goals.

American Indian Student Center

Yet another implication discovered through data analysis relates to accessing the knowledge of American Indian cultures through the American Indian Centers on university campuses. These on- and off-campus centers can offer resources to graduate students' advisors.

The fifth recommendation centers on advisors becoming familiar with the American Indian Center on campus or in the local community. This familiarization can help foster a deeper appreciation of the Native cultures and traditions. Advisors can visit with the Center's staff and join in events sponsored to promote a home-like environment for Native students. For example, Soup Fridays offers homemade soup to the campus community where they can enjoy free soup and good conversation.

The American Indian Center is a place where graduate faculty can meet with Native elders and/or tribal leaders, American Indian faculty, and staff to discuss issues in advising Native students, possibly in a Talking Circle environment. The elders who hold doctorates or Master's degrees on the MRU campus can be consulted to access their wisdom. A recommendation is to contact the director and assistant director who are able

to contact these elders to discuss the feasibility of using the American Indian Center for these types of discussions. Possibly, one meeting can be scheduled each semester for anyone interested in attending and learning about American Indian cultures, traditions, ceremonies, and values.

Advisor Selection

One last implication emerged from the data analysis from this study. This implication relates to the selection of graduate student advisors. Administrators should examine the current process for assigning temporary and permanent advisors. This process creates frustration for some of the Native graduate students. When Native students are required to choose an advisor, most would prefer having an advisor who is also Native. Brayboy et al. (2012) assert that Native graduate students want to find Native role models who have succeeded in academia. These role models help to reassure the Native graduate students that they, too, can succeed. With few Native faculty from which the graduate students can choose, the non-Native faculty advisors who are available sometimes are at a loss to help Native students because they may not understand the American Indian students' cultures. When an advisor is appointed without the Native student's input, misunderstandings and miscommunication can occur, which can influence the student's persistence to graduate.

A sixth recommendation concerns the process where graduate students select an advisor. Usually, a temporary advisor is appointed for the graduate student. The student then will need to choose a permanent advisor fairly soon afterwards to accept or replace the temporary advisor. Native students need to have some input into advisor temporary appointments. This time frame makes it difficult for graduate students to become familiar

with graduate faculty. On their departments' websites, most faculty already have posted a short, written biography about their research areas. I recommend that graduate faculty also post a short video about themselves so that students can get a sense of each graduate advisor's personality.

Policy

Finally, policy for missing class in a cohort, weekend-intensive course model needs to be established. Two participants experienced the death of a family member while they were completing their programs of study. These two participants belonged to a cohort where policy stated that they could not miss class because of the tremendous amount of material that was covered during those weekends when they met. The participants felt that the policy was too stringent—not allowing for unexpected deaths. In examining the whole picture, the students and the faculty seemed to be in direct conflict over this policy about this religious and spiritual situation.

Student view. The MRU university policy, allowing just three days for funeral leave, was overridden by institutional policy for students belonging to their particular cohort. Students belonging to this cohort who missed a day of class were required to drop the class because of the large amount of material covered. The participants felt that, even if they attended class, their minds and emotions were not present because of their grief; they did not learn much of the material presented. They understood the reason for the policy but still thought the professor could be more flexible. This example refers just to the MRU policy and should not be generalized to all institutions.

Faculty view. The professors teaching the cohort classes were required to uphold the institution's cohort policy about not missing class. This policy set the

professor up as the *villain* because he or she was required to follow that policy. The professor knew that a large amount of material would be covered in class, and he or she was responsible for presenting that material. The policy at MRU should not be construed to mean it applies to all institutions.

Recommendation. When the institution sets policy, they must decide for whom the policy is being created. This policy gives the students boundaries for behavior and gives the faculty restrictions to be enforced so that they can cover the necessary material for the cohort. These policies are good and are needed; however, an alternative policy needs to be in place for unexpected occasions, such as the death of a family member (specified by university policy) or in the instance of Native students, an extended family member. Additionally, policies need to be culturally sensitive as well as be somewhat flexible so that an adjustment to the policy can be modified in specific instances. For example, the professor could have alternate methods of disseminating the missed material to the student, such as via an audio or video recording, a PowerPoint containing the lectures, or a peer in the cohort who would be willing to meet with the absent student.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following recommendations for future research will add to the existing literature. These research areas will examine issues that affect academically and socially the decisions of American Indian graduate students. Educators can develop an awareness of these issues and recognize the information's value.

Recommendation #1

American Indian graduate students must cope with academic, social, and financial pressures while attending graduate school. Many times, American Indian

students enter graduate school with a spouse and/or children; the spouse may have a different racial background. The participants in this study discussed how families and extended families influenced their lives. Educators would benefit from a qualitative study that delves more deeply into these influences. How do American Indian graduate students cope with the pressures of being in a relationship, which includes children, while in graduate school?

Recommendation #2

Certain tribal colleges and Native nations have a high percentage of students who pursue degrees in higher education; however, other tribal colleges and Native nations have a much lower percentage of students applying to colleges and universities. The participants in this study discussed the influence the tribal leaders and communities in American Indian graduate students' lives and shared how tribal leaders may use encouragement and empowerment to inspire students to gain a degree in higher education. How does the education system of tribal colleges and Native nations differ from each other in encouraging and empowering students to attain degrees in higher education?

Recommendation #3

American Indian students from urban areas as well as students from tribal nations pursue degrees in higher education. The tribal values of students from a reservation may differ sharply from those of students from an urban area. How do urban American Indians' values compare with members of tribal nations' values from a reservation setting when pursuing graduate degrees?

Recommendation #4

Graduate School Preparation Programs (GSPPs) have been instituted to prepare underrepresented minority students to succeed in graduate school. These formal programs have been created to assist URM students to obtain research experience as well as gain proficiency in future course work. Jones' study (2014) focused on hybrid GSPPs with National Science Foundation (NSF) associations. Jones analyzed documents and reports to gain information about each program, conducted interviews with the leaders of the program, support staff, faculty, and senior institutional leaders, and designed protocols. While Jones's study focused on the administrators, researchers need to conduct qualitative studies with a focus on Native American graduate students in the area of graduate school preparation because it is important that researchers also identify and understand the perspectives of the URM students and, specifically, American Indian students.

Recommendation #5

This study focused on American Indian Natives who lived or were raised on a reservation in the United States but excluded Alaska Natives. An additional study could focus on Alaska Natives to study the decision-making process of Alaska Natives to explore how those processes are similar or different. This recommended study could be qualitative to gain thick, rich descriptions, or it could be quantitative to explore the different factors involved in the decision-making process.

Recommendation #6

As the last recommendation, when researching student organizations for American Indian graduate students, no research studies were found. Since one of the

participants in this study relied on her undergraduate membership for support from an undergraduate student organization during her graduate school experience, research needs to be conducted to explore American Indian graduate students' access to student organizations. A plethora of research studies have been conducted on undergraduate student organizations but not regarding organizations for graduate students.

Conclusion

Colleges and universities can provide the skills needed to persist to graduation. In addition, educators can gain deeper insights into American Indian cultures and values through interacting with an American Indian Center on campus or within the community, for example by attending the yearly powwows. Furthermore, the American Indian graduate student can make decisions that are more enlightened by understanding the conscious and unconscious processes that inform their decisions. Retention and matriculation of American Indian graduate students are important to increasing the number of graduating Native students. The increase in graduation numbers can also achieve an increase in Native student enrollment because graduating American Indian students can advise other Native students, influencing them to enroll at a particular university. This increase provides evidence that Native graduate students attain the coveted graduate degrees and increased enrollment of American Indian graduate students. This increase will also cause additional diversity to campuses and provide leadership and other beneficial outcomes to their Native communities.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE: *[American Indian/Alaska Native Professionals: Decision-making and Persistence]*

PROJECT DIRECTOR: *[Colleen M. Burke]*

PHONE # *[701-317-1023]*

DEPARTMENT: *[Department of Teaching and Learning]*

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

A person who is to participate in this research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this research study is to conduct exploratory research to investigate the decision-making process of American Indian/Alaska Native professionals who persisted to graduation from their graduate program. To achieve this purpose, this research study will accomplish the following objectives: a) explore the participants' experiences as they progressed through their graduate studies; b) investigate the relationships between the participants' educational decisions, cultural and ethnic influences, and persistence; and c) contribute to the literature on American Indian decision-making in an area that remains relatively unexplored.

You are invited to participate in a research study about the decision-making process of American Indian/Alaska Native graduate students who persisted to graduation because you have earned your advanced degree within the last five years and have been working in your field of study for a minimum of one year.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Approximately four to six people will take part in this study at the University of North Dakota. You will choose the location where you wish to be interviewed so that you will feel secure and where your privacy will be safeguarded.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in the study will last for three interviews; each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Each visit will be as follows: The first interview will last approximately 45-90 minutes and will be used to get to know the participant, and the second interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will examine the obstacles encountered in graduate school. The third and final interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will explore the participant's decision-making process.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

When you agree to participate in this study, you will be contacted by the principal investigator to set up the interview dates and times. You will then choose a place where you will feel safe so that the interviews can be conducted. With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded electronically.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There are "no foreseeable risks" to participating in this study, however, You may experience frustration when discussing your experiences. Some questions may be of a sensitive nature, and you may become upset as a result. However, such risks are not viewed as being in excess of "minimal risk"

If, however, you become upset by questions, you may stop at any time or choose not to answer a question. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings about this study, you are encouraged to contact a counselling office of your choice.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You will not benefit personally from being in this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study because it will inform educators, administrators, staff, and future students about American Indian students' persistence decisions. Contributing new knowledge about the decision-making process will inform future research relative to how culture influences American Indian graduate students' educational decisions. Possible benefits of this research include new knowledge, which will, in turn, help American Indian graduate students understand their decision-making process and, through this understanding, make decisions that promote persistence to graduation.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY
N/A

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?
You ***will not*** have any costs for being in this research study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You ***will not*** be paid for being in this research study.

WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by Government agencies, the UND Research Development and Compliance office, and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of keeping research data and consent forms in a separate locked locations for a minimum of three years following competion of study. The storage location for the research data will be a computer external drive that is kept locked in the principal investigator's home office or in the Committee Chair's office. The consent forms will be kept in the Office of Research in the College of Education. The principal investigator and the Committee Chair will be the only persons with access to t he consent forms. The primary investigator will have access to anonymized subject data. The audio files will be deletedafter three years. The written documents will be shredded. If we write a report or article about this study, we will describe the study results in a summarized manner so that you cannot be identified.

The interviews will be digitally audio recorded with your permission, and you will have the right to review the recordings. These audio files may be used for educational purposes. The audio files will be deleted after three years.

IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

If you decide to leave the study early, we ask that you call the principal investigator to set up an appointment for a close-out visit. There are no consequences to your withdrawal.

You will be informed by the research investigator of this study of any significant new findings that develop during the study, which may influence your willingness to continue to participate in the study.

Any circumstances, such a deteriorating health or other conditions that may cause early withdrawal from the study without participant's approval and that might make continued participation harmful is understandable. If possible, a phone call in which you leave a message that you are withdrawing will be appreciated by the principal investigator.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?

The researcher conducting this study is Colleen M. Burke. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact ***Colleen M. Burke*** at ***701-317-1023*** during the day. ***Dr. Carolyn Ozaki is the advisor, and her telephone number is 701-777-4256.***

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at **(701) 777-4279**.

- You may also call this number about any problems, complaints, or concerns you have about this research study.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is independent of the research team.
- General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking "Information for Research Participants" on the web site: http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.cfm

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.

Please initial: ____ Yes ____ No

I give consent for my quotes to be used in the research; however I <u>will not</u> be identified.

Please initial: ____ Yes ____ No

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subjects Name: _____

_____ _____

Signature of Subject Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject's legally authorized representative.

_____ _____

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent Date

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

Project: Persistence and Decision-Making: A Qualitative Study Using a Narrative Focus

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Interviewee's Tribal Affiliation: _____

Interviewee's Graduate Degree: _____

Interviewee's Position: _____

Interviewee's Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Other _____

Project Description: The purpose of this study is to explore the decision-making process used during your time spent in graduate school while earning your graduate degree. The individuals participating in this study will be interviewed, and the interview transcripts will consist of the data collected. The interviews will be transcribed, and the transcripts will be analyzed through identification of codes and themes. The primary investigator will comply with the requirements of the University of North Dakota's Institutional Review Board to protect the participants' confidentiality and privacy. The initial interview will last from 45 – 90 minutes, the second interview will span 60 minutes, and the third interview will last up to 60 minutes.

Have the interviewee read and sign the consent form.
Turn the recorder on and test to make sure it is working.

Interview #1

This interview will allow the principal investigator to get to know the participant.

1. What inspired you to decide to apply to graduate school?
2. Please tell me the story of your graduate school experiences and events that were most important or most memorable to you. What are some examples of those experiences? Begin wherever you want. I won't interrupt. I will just take some notes so we can talk after you have finished.
3. What were the greatest or hardest obstacles that you encountered? Can you give me some examples?
4. Tell me about your family and extended family's reaction to your decision to go to graduate school.
5. How did you family affect/influence your educational journey/decisions to/in grad school? Give me some examples that show how these persons influenced your decisions.
6. Please tell me about your tribal community, relative to your educational goals.
7. What part did your tribal community play in your decision to enroll in graduate school? Give some examples.

Interview #2

This interview will focus on the obstacles the participant faced while earning his/her graduate degree and the decision-making process in resolving those situations.

1. When we last met, you described your experiences and some obstacles that you faced while in graduate school. Today, I would like to focus on discussing the obstacles you encountered.
2. You mentioned several obstacles in our last interview. How would you prioritize those obstacles in terms of importance?
3. Which of those obstacles/situations you encountered seem to be the most important o memorable?
4. The first obstacle or event that you mentioned is …..
   How did you go about resolving this obstacle or situation?
5. What outcome did you expect to happen?
6. In handling that situation, what was the actual outcome of your decision?
7. What advice did your family, extended family, and tribal community give you?
8. In the second obstacle, you mentioned, did you handle making your decision the same way as the first one? If not, did you approach it differently? How did you approach it?
9. How did you go about making this difficult decision?
10. What outcome did you expect?

11. What was the actual result?
12. Is there anything else would you like to add?

Interview #3

This interview will use the information received in Interviews #1 and #2 to explore the decision-making process relating to the events, experiences, or obstacles the participant encountered relating to his/her educational decisions.

1. In our last two interviews, you described your experiences in graduate school, and you told me about your family, extended family, and your tribal community. For this interview, I would like to continue to focus on the process you used to make the decisions, relating to the particular obstacles or situations.
2. In the decisions you made in the situations we have discussed, in either situation, what would you have done differently-either in approaching the problem or making the decision and why?
3. What else would you like to add anything else to this interview?

Thank you so much for cooperating and taking time to participate in these interviews. When I have compiled the results of my study, would you like to receive a copy of the results? Please be reassured that your responses will be kept confidential. If you have any question(s), please contact me so that we can discuss them. Your interview responses will be confidential.

2/2/20

APPENDIX C

Excerpts from Codebook

Theme One: Education and Graduate School Experiences

Code	Category	Theme
misunderstanding with an instructor, miscommunicated	conflict, misunderstandings	Education: Conflict
email communications, conference calling, meet outside of class	communication	Education: Communication
instructor taking time to learn about my culture.	education, culture	Education: Culture
a student of the universe, a time for learning, a time we become teachers	education, culture	Education: Culture
provide them with resources, resources to be proud of who they are, always encourage them	education, culture, mentoring	Education-Culture
encourage them so they will encourage the younger generation	education, culture. mentoring	Education: Culture, Mentoring
they get their degrees, make decision to change, have successes behind them	education, decisions	Education: Decisions
empowerment and inspiration	education, empowerment	Education: Empowerment
follow their dream	education, follow dream	Education-Follow Dream
Institution and as a generation learn how to encourage and empower our students, to inspire them	education, mentoring, self-esteem	Education: Mentoring
poverty, the stereotypes, how we break those things. We get educated.	education--to escape poverty	Education: Poverty
great to see them grow [Native students], realize that 'hey, I can do this you know because that's not always there.	education--personal growth	Education: Self-esteem

Theme Two: Culture and Tribal Values

Code	Category	Theme
completely surrounded by more natives than non-natives, connect with my identity	cultural inclusion	Culture
spiritual obligations, means different things in academia personally, culturally and spiritually, had very high value	cultural obligations	Culture
what better way to preserve our language for these songs in the different tones rhythmic tones,	cultural preservation	Culture
when relatives pass away, it's a really big important event for their lifecycle, most family members are expected to be there. feel a bit guilty about not being able to make it back for those types of events.	cultural traditions	Culture
carry on our culture and live our culture, one through sitting at the drum, going to ceremony and hearing songs and then just having relatives share songs with me	Culture, traditions, ceremonies	Culture
Our elders carry that wisdom, that's what they share with us. they lived a lot, you speak to elders.	Culture, wisdom	Culture
longing for what is my home, the actual lands and where my people are from	homesickness	Culture
scared to die whereas some of us are not scared to die my spirit never dies.	cultural beliefs, death	Culture
school isn't for everybody beside you will try to go to school or not. You have to try it.	culture, education	Culture: Education
Shared knowledge spreads, how those teachings spread.	culture, education	Culture: Education

Theme Three: Decisions

Code	Category	Theme
Reprioritize, don't feel bad about the decisions you make.	deciding priorities	Decisions
I actually wanted to come back to North Dakota doing things on my own and making decisions on my own	decisions	Decisions
I made my decision about what I wanted to do.	decisions	Decisions
made the decision to resign didn't want his work to have to suffer	decisions	Decisions
Don't give up on grad school, I felt really bad because I felt like I was letting people down I felt those expectations of going to grad school and attaining my Master's and my doctorate.	Decisions-academic	Decisions-Academic
so is just like he said sorting out or restructuring my priority system.	setting priorities	Decisions-Priorities
resourceful when it comes to finding ways of getting what I need.	problem solving	Decisions-Problem solving
Having children. listened to our parents and thought about like what those consequences.	decisions, responsibility	Decisions-Responsibility
figure out what things do I like now, and what I would be geared towards, in which things would I be influenced, and by what things do I really want to do	self-assessment	Decisions-Self-esteem

Theme Four: Social Support

just trying to connect with people that on the surface level share the same struggles that you do you know with racism and poverty and things like that.	lack of non-natives understanding Native culture	Social support
the only Native student in my cohort.	marginalized	Social support
I was going there because I needed some moral support, and I wanted to be able to have that tie back to AISES.	moral support	Social support
to be around other natives, not as you'd like to be. created a space where I could at least connect	no connection to other Natives	Social support
she has seven total, and I have one and so now I have eight children.	family	Family
for myself, it was never a question. If it came down to a decision where I was going to end up spending a majority of my time doing someone else's research and helping them out, I would pass on that opportunity to be able to spend time with my child.	family comes first	Family
My family being my wife and my children and then also my parents, my grandparents, my wife's family, and they were all supportive you know of me going through that. Some of them knew what it was as I was going through it. A lot of them didn't know what I was going through.	family support	Family
I did feel that they supported me. They were like well you know now you're in a different program, and you sound like you're excited.	family support	Family
just as the way I was raised is that children come first, and that's where you dedicate your life to.	Family	Family
The family comes first, and children are the most important;	family, decision consequences	Family-Decision Consequences

Theme Five: Perseverance

So I just applied for it and again keeping in mind I still have this dream or this foresight with this ethnomusicology doctorate program after my Master's. So I went into sociology; sociology is a pretty broad field to begin with	motivation	Perseverance
it didn't feel like class, and yet you read about the things. It's almost like pleasure reading whereas rather than feel like I have to read this for class and I have to understand it. It's 'no I want to read this. I want to understand this.' I want to read things on how people are coming after me so	motivation	Perseverance
[change your ingrained habits] they mention lack of sleep	change habits	Perseverance
the only thing that I probably would have changed was..... I would have incorporated a lot of what I did on the tail end of my graduate school and moved it to as an undergrad.	changes	Perseverance
not saying I would put my culture and my spirituality on the back burner but these academia my studies would be right there along with my spiritual obligations-- both on front burners	changes	Perseverance
You kinda have to be a self-starter and if you're not you will be one.	Finding yourself	Perseverance
robbing her [daughter] of a lot of time.	guilt	Perseverance
when I got into the educational leadership program, I had to meet with the chair.	low self-esteem	Perseverance
sparked back up, felt good again being in grad school. It felt like it was a meeting. I could just sit and talk with my friends and family about a lot of different things.	positive attitude	Perseverance
weight I have on my shoulders was letting everybody down	Self-esteem	Perseverance

APPENDIX D

Recruitment Email

Hello,

I am a graduate student and the primary investigator at the University of North Dakota, and I am interested in the decisions that you made as a graduate student and that allowed you to succeed in graduating. I would like to know if you would like to participate in a research study. You are under no obligation to participate, and if you choose to participate you can withdraw at any time. If you choose to participate, I would like to interview you a minimum of three times: (a) the initial interview, lasting from 45 to 90 minutes, (b) the second interview may last up to 60 minutes, and (c) the third interview will last only as long as it takes to clarify any previous information. I have attached a consent form to this email and would be happy to answer any questions you have about participation in the research. You can contact me, the principal investigator Colleen M. Burke, via email at colleen.burke@my.und.edu or via phone at 701-317-1023. Thank you very much for your time.

APPENDIX E

Biographical Chart of Participants

Pseudonym	Degree	Degree Program	University
Joshua Aspen	Master's	Educational Leadership	MRU
Emily Willow	Master's	Environmental Management	PRU
Steven Cedar	Doctor of Philosophy	Educational Leadership	MRU
Chelsea Maple	Doctor of Philosophy	Educational Leadership	MRU

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