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Narrative Portraiture Of American Indian Men Who Persist To Completion Of Doctoral Degrees

Shawn F. Holz

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NARRATIVE PORTRAITURE OF AMERICAN INDIAN MEN WHO PERSIST TO COMPLETION OF DOCTORAL DEGREES

By

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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May
2019
This dissertation submitted by Shawn F. Holz in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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4/29/19
Date
PERMISSION

Title       Narrative Portraiture of American Indian Men Who Persist to Completion of Doctoral Degrees

Department  Education Leadership – Higher Education

Degree      Doctor of Philosophy

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Shawn F. Holz
May 2019
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the lived experiences of American Indian men who have completed their doctoral degrees through the positive exploration of portraiture methodology. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with subject-actors being asked to share stories from their earliest childhood memories and educational experiences through high school and through to completion of their doctoral degrees. Using narrative analysis and transculturation theory as the framework, subject-actors stories are examined to identify emergent themes of common experiences and characteristics. These create a composite portrait of a male American Indian student who persists to completion of their doctoral degree.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In western and modern society post-secondary education is considered by many to be the pathway to a better life via a better career and a larger income. Income is frequently equated to personal and professional success. To this end children and young adults are often encouraged to pursue professional careers that pay well like those of scientists, medical doctors, lawyers, and engineers. Almost all of these professions require some form of graduate education beyond the bachelor’s degree. The pinnacle of these careers requires the pinnacle of graduate education, the doctoral degree.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics (2017) the average unemployment rate by educational attainment in 2016 was 4%. Individuals with less than a high school diploma had an unemployment rate of 7.4% compared to those with a doctoral degree who had an unemployment rate of 1.6%. Additionally, weekly income for an individual with a doctoral degree was more than three times higher than that of someone with less than a high school diploma, $1,664.00 to $504.00. These numbers indicate that there is a measurable increase in fiscal value to the increase in amount of educational attainment an individual achieves.

While post-graduate education leading to a doctoral degree is not the educational path for everyone, those who do pursue and obtain the doctoral degree do so in significantly varying numbers based on race and ethnicity. Concluding the 2014-15 academic year, 178,547 doctoral degrees were conferred to U.S. citizens and nonresident
aliens (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Only 884, or .6% of these were
cferred to American Indian/Alaska Native citizens. By comparison, 69.3% were
cferred to White citizens, 12.2% to Asian/Pacific Islander citizens, 8.4% to Black
citizens, 7.2% to Hispanic citizens, and 2.3% to citizens claiming two or more races.
American Indian/Alaska Native citizens comprise only 1.3% of the total U.S. population
(U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). When we compare the percentage of doctoral degrees
conferred by race to the percentage of population by race, only Hispanic citizens, 17.8%
of the population, earn fewer doctoral degrees as a percentage of their whole population.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2016), when we look
at the number of doctoral degrees conferred by gender and race at the conclusion of the
2014-15 year, women are now receiving more degrees then their male counterparts in all
race categories. Black women received almost double those Black men received, 8,811
to 4,467. All other race categories the number of degrees conferred to men and women
were closer in numbers. During the early to mid 2000s, data collected by the National
Center for Educational Statistics (2016) show that women in all race categories began
earning more doctoral degrees then men. In 2014-15, American Indian/Alaska Native
women earned 474 doctoral degrees while American Indian/Alaska Native men earned
410 doctoral degrees. American Indian/Alaska Native men are earning fewer doctoral
degrees than any demographic for which data is currently being collected and reported on
by federal government educational agencies (National Center for Educational Statistics,
2016).
General Problem

American Indians are not completing doctoral degrees at the same rate as other documented minorities. This is supported by data collected by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2016), which exhibit that from a peak in 2008-09 of 460 American Indian/Alaska Native men and a peak in 2009-10 of 522 American Indian/Alaska Native women, completion of doctoral degrees has been in decline for both genders. This is in stark contrast to all other race categories in which the educational attainment of doctoral degrees continues to grow for both genders (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016).

Research about the retention and persistence of American Indian students is limited. What has been conducted has primarily focused on undergraduate students. There is a small subset of research focused on the retention, persistence, and motivation of American Indian students pursuing Master’s degrees and specifically American Indian women pursuing and completing their doctoral degrees (Bamdas, 2009; Hanna, 2005; HeavyRunner, 2009; Kleinfeld & Andrews, 2006; Lajimodiere, 2011; White Shield, 2009). While some of this research has been published in peer-reviewed journals, much of it still resides in dissertations. I have been unable to identify any studies specifically focusing on American Indian men pursuing their doctoral degrees. Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgensen (2012) identified broad themes that play a mostly negative role in the retention and persistence of American Indian students, such as institutional barriers, finances, mixed messages, academic unpreparedness, social connections, family influence, racism and discrimination, and reservation life. Yet we still know very little about the American Indian men who do pursue and complete doctoral degrees:
We have much to learn about the way American Indian students encounter and ultimately evaluate academia. Given the highly personal and fluid nature of these experiences, long-term, qualitative research designs would be especially helpful in the exploration of this phenomenon. Ultimately, greater understanding of how American Indian students personally experience and assess college would be tremendously helpful in identifying the factors in and interpreting the patterns of both attrition and persistence among Native students. (Huffman and Ferguson, 2007, p. 68-69)

The results of this study should provide greater insight into the educational experiences of American Indian men and how academia is perceived within American Indian communities.

**Study Focus**

This study focused on telling the story of American Indian men who have completed their doctoral degrees. I investigated their personal and educational experiences that supported their educational journey, created barriers to completing their educational goals, and motivated them to persist to completion. The first part of the study asked participants about their earliest childhood memories and educational experiences through high school. The second part of the study asked participants about their post secondary education experiences. This study was completed utilizing transculturation theory through the portraiture methodology (Huffman, 2001; Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Using narrative analysis I explored their stories and identified their common experiences. These common experiences created a composite portrait of a male American Indian student who persists to completion of their doctoral degree. Shedding
light on the common experiences provides educators and tribal communities with reinforcing research to support what is already known and new insights to guide future research and assist in making informed decisions that benefit American Indian educational success.

**Study Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to learn about the lived experiences of American Indian men, who completed doctoral degrees, through their story-telling, meaning-making, and subjectivities - which is the focus allowed by the narrative portraiture methodology. This methodology allows for de-centering the individuals from the margins of dominant social forces to the center of their experience and agency, which further orients research towards anti-deficit perspectives and opportunities of examining previously unknown forces behind an individual success. I examined their stories and identified their common experiences and characteristics. I was specifically interested in their reflections on the behaviors and actions they had engaged in or had been faced with while pursuing their degree. I listened to their stories where they reflected about the role of the family, community, and institutional supports that were provided or sought, and their motivations for pursuing a postsecondary education and a doctoral degree. Their common experiences and characteristics create a composite portrait of a male American Indian student who persists to completion of their doctoral degree.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question for this study is: What are the lived experiences of American Indian men who have persisted to the completion of doctoral degrees? In order to answer this question it is necessary to explore three secondary questions often
examined in research pertaining to educational persistence. First, what barriers did these American Indian men overcome to complete their degree? Second, what were the supports that assisted these American Indian men to overcome barriers to completing their degree? Third, what motivated these American Indian men to persist to completion of their degree? These questions were framed and researched utilizing the portraiture methodology and transculturation theory.

**Study Importance**

Findings from this study identify factors and experiences that enabled some American Indian men to complete the pinnacle of higher education achievement, the doctorate degree. Understanding how they overcame the challenges they faced, what supported their pursuit of their educations, and what motivated them to persist to completion, may provide valuable insight into how tribal colleges, tribal communities, and both public and private institutions might better support and encourage American Indian men to persist and complete doctoral degrees. This study may affect how public, private, and tribal institutions develop policy and programming to support all American Indian students. This research may also provide insight to federal, tribal, and state government officials, helping to guide their decision-making processes related to American Indian education policy today. The identified common experiences and characteristics found in this study will help guide future research and assist in making informed decisions benefiting American Indian students’ educational success.

**Inquiry Framework**

It is important that as a non-native researcher I remained self-aware as to not impose white majority norms into this study. In an attempt to overcome this research
challenge I selected the research method of portraiture and the research theory of transculturation theory. Portraiture and transculturation theory have been developed for research with indigenous and other racial/ethnic minority populations. Portraiture and transculturation theory both seek to document success rather than failure. This search for success aligns with the subject’s successful completion of doctoral degrees. The process of portraiture, subject-actors sharing and telling stories about their experiences, aligns with the oral traditions found in American Indian culture. Vividly and accurately sharing history and personal experiences via the oral tradition of storytelling is a process many American Indians have experienced and learned since their earliest childhood memories. This oral tradition practice continues today and is both a logical and practical research method to utilize with transculturation theory, a theory specific to studying American Indian educational experiences. Transculturation theory then, “attempts to understand how Native students, specifically culturally traditional individuals, persist and succeed in school rather than why they fail” (Huffman, 2010, p. 163).

In other words, merging these methodological and theoretical orientations into an inquiry frame served a two-fold outcome:

(1) epistemological appreciation of a subjectivity of individual realities is fundamental (knowledge is constructed from bottom-up where individuals shape their realities and truths, rather than top-down where macro social forces determine an individual destiny and their truth that often leads to deficit perspectives); thus,

(2) a recognition of an individual self and their cultural identities becomes the center of their experiences of social world (i.e., education paths filled with
barriers, constraints, and opportunities) and the center of their constructed subjective truths – the transcultural theory offers this conceptual lens on a cultural identity/self/agency as a foundation of how social world is experienced and lived.

Pursuing this two-fold outcome in the context of this study where the participants already completed their doctoral studies (i.e., the opportunity to document success), I hoped for learning more on whether and how someone’s cultural self became that foundation and driving force of their success. Degree completion is commonly viewed as the mark of academic success. The completion of a doctoral degree is commonly considered the pinnacle of academic success. Completion is an outcome of one’s persistence. However, persistence to degree completion is the culmination of years of hard work and experiences. Persistence is a longitudinal process where individual actions because of other social forces or against other social forces lead to that outcome of completion.

Thus, analyzing the experiences of individuals who have persisted to completion of their doctoral degrees through the lens on their cultural self, framed by transculturation theory, and taking an epistemological stance of subjectivity (i.e., focus on individual agency) through the portraiture methodology shed the light on the process of how an individual acts and makes decisions to persist and what role their cultural self plays in that process. These unique stories and emergent themes should guide future theory and practice. Portraiture ensured that subject-actors were given the opportunity to tell their story, for their voice to be heard. But research is a scholarly work that is not free from a researcher’s scholarly contribution.

To be accountable for representing that voice and my scholarly voice in this work (Azizova & Felder, 2017; Luttrell, 2010), I conducted my data analysis in three stages
where it was important to make my voice to have three distinct roles: the role of a conversationalist, the role of an interpreter, and the role of an analyst (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Table 1

On the Voice: Three Stages of Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Data representation</th>
<th>Stage 2: Data interpretation</th>
<th>Stage 3: Theoretical analysis</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Voice of the Subject-Actor</strong></td>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> The researcher’s voice intermingled with the voice of the participants – orienting to story-telling and setting</td>
<td><strong>Tools:</strong> Summaries of fieldnotes, detailed excerpts of transcripts to represent individual narrative portraits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tools:</strong> Summaries of fieldnotes, detailed excerpts of transcripts to represent individual narrative portraits</td>
<td><strong>Tools:</strong> Comparisons and thematic representation of a collective portrait</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criteria:</strong> reliance on detailed transcripts, acknowledgement of dialogic nature of narrative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 2: Data interpretation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Voice of the Researcher-Artist</strong></td>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> The researcher’s attempt to make sense of the data orienting to converging trends and meaning making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tools:</strong> Comparisons and thematic representation of a collective portrait</td>
<td><strong>Tools:</strong> Analytic reflexivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criteria:</strong> interpretations of similarities and differences across all of the narratives</td>
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The narrative analysis of those stories, from representation to interpretation to theoretical analysis, allowed that space for my own voice as a researcher-artist to explain how I came to represent each voice of the participant and further identify the emergent themes as a collective portrait of an American Indian man’s success, based on the six stories. Finally, the scholarly voice to the audience of other scholars and practitioners is heard
through my analysis and discussions of the themes in relation to the literature, transculturation theory and theoretical propositions on initial alienation, self-discovery, realignment, and participation.

**Portraiture**

Portraiture as a methodology seeks to create a document with the aesthetic of fine literature and the rigor of social science research. However, unlike the tradition of social science research that seeks to identify a problem and document failure, portraiture seeks to identify what is good and to document success. The intention is to expand the accessibility of the research by avoiding complex academic speak. This is accomplished through collaboration between the researcher-artist and the subject-actor resulting in the creation of a literary portrait that conveys both authority and wisdom while expressing rich and complex experiences (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

**Transculturation Theory**

Transculturation theory was initially developed as a theoretical tool to describe the educational experiences of American Indian students. The premise of this theory is that indigenous students do not have to assimilate into the dominant culture in order to be successful. Instead, students pass through four stages transculturation in which they retain a strong cultural identity while they learn to live and function comfortably within the dominant culture (Huffman, 2001).

**Study Boundaries**

This study focuses on the lived experiences of American Indian men who have completed their doctoral degree. Subject-actors were required to have a tribal affiliation. Subject-actors were sought across a large geographical region across multiple states in
relationship to the researcher. These states included Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona.

Definitions

Unlike other studies with a long list of specific definitions that are clearly defined, I am choosing to explain the different ways of knowing which are important for audience engagement in this work. I do not want to present a list of definitions or terms that might suggest or imply any specific perspective. The theoretical way of knowing is the process of applying concepts and definitions from the literature and theory to draw a possible conclusion about those findings. This does not preclude the possibility that the application of another theory may result in similar, varied, or different conclusions than of my own. On the other hand, empirical ways of knowing rely on the actual experiences of the individual as told in their own stories and in their own voice. These actual experiences help to guide the identification of emergent themes. The following definitions are derived from the literature:

- Degree completion – American Indian men consistently complete doctorate degrees at a lower rate than other minority populations (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).
- Historical trauma – Social injustices American Indians have suffered since Colonial America (Goodkind, Gordman, & Parker, 2012).
- American Indian, Native American, Native, Indigenous – Terms used interchangeably, guided by the APA standards for non-biased language, most frequently used to identify indigenous populations in North America (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013).
• Assimilation – Integrating American Indians into the dominant white culture has been the goal of Indian education for more than 400 years (Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

• Acculturation – Assimilation into dominant white culture through the use of western education (Deissler, 1962).

• Transculturation – The process of learning a new culture while not sacrificing any aspects of the subject’s original culture (Huffman, 2010).

• Portraiture – Method of inquiry focused on the documentation of success rather than failure resulting in a document with the aesthetic of fine literature and the rigor of social science research (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

• Persistence – Post secondary academic progress of students from year-to-year with the intention of degree completion (Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgensen, 2012).

• Researcher-artist – The research instrument that creates the portrait through a systematic examination of the subject-actor’s experiences (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

• Subject-actor – The participant who collaborates with the researcher-artist, first by telling their story, then through the process of meaning-making (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

• Doctoral degree – Highest level of academic achievement requiring the completion of eight or more years of post secondary (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016).

• Voice – The research instrument used for sensemaking (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
Summary

This study sought to identify the lived experiences of American Indian men who persisted to the completion of their doctoral degree. Portraiture methodology was selected to utilize in this study because of its focus on success and because of its appreciation of voice is similar to the historical and contemporary oral traditions found in American Indian culture. Portraiture ensures that the voice of the subject-actor has the opportunity to tell their story and for their story to be heard. Chapter 4 offers the space for the voice of representation. The narrative analysis process of portraiture allows a space for my own voice as the researcher-artist to be heard as I interpret the emergent themes. Chapter 5 provides the space for the voice of interpretation. Finally, the analytical voice is heard through the lens of transculturation theory’s examination of the emergent themes as they relate to initial alienation, self-discovery, realignment, and participation. Chapter 6 reveals the voice of the theoretical preoccupation. These three voices are used to organize the structure of this dissertation.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I identify and summarize current research related to the primary research question: What are the lived experiences of American Indian men who have persisted to the completion of doctoral degrees? The substantive literature and findings will be outlined following three themes commonly found in research conducted to study educational persistence: What were the challenges and barriers these individuals had to overcome to complete their educations; what supports aided American Indian men in the completion of their educations; and what were their motivations to persist to completion of their doctoral degrees? The methodologies commonly utilized when conducting educational research of American Indian populations will be identified and their relationship to this study explained. The implications of current research and its influence on this study will be examined. Finally, the contributions current research has made to this study will be explained.

Major Works

Research exploring American Indian educational persistence is limited when compared to research of educational persistence among other minority populations in the United States. Of the available published research specific to American Indian educational persistence studies cover K-12 student populations, multi gender undergraduate studies, and a very limited number of studies focus on American Indian
women in graduate and doctoral programs (Kanu, 2006; Schmidtke, 2009; White Shield, 2009). Of these limited studies, significant portions of the research findings still reside in dissertations and have not yet been published. During the period of time this document has been prepared I have found no studies specific to American Indian male educational persistence at the graduate level. Therefore, my analysis relies on the above-mentioned cousin literature.

**Historical Background**

American Indians’ experiences with education have been of assimilation and repression going back to the Colonial era. Early colleges and universities often included educational programs for American Indians or, like Harvard in 1614, an Indian College, yet by the time of the Civil War only four American Indians had graduated with a college education (Hale, 2002; HeavyRunner, 2009). The College of William and Mary, founded in 1693, began accepting Indian students in 1700 and in 1723 built a house for their Indian students (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). In 1766, Eleazar Wheelock and Samson Occom, prominent colonial missionaries, raised money in England specifically for Indian education. Those funds were used to found Dartmouth College with a charter that outlined the institution’s mission to educate tribal youth in reading, writing, the liberal arts, and science. The goal was to civilize and Christianize the “pagan” children (Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

Westward expansion quickly followed the conclusion of the American Revolution and the War Department of the newly formed U. S. government was tasked with handling tribal relations. In 1824 the Secretary of War established the United States Office of Indian Affairs, which became the Department of Indian Affairs inside the War
Department in 1834. During treaty negotiations, providing for Indian education was often viewed as a fair trade for land by both the U.S. government and tribes (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Following the peak of the American Indian Wars in the 1870’s, the government began establishing Indian schools “to assimilate Native children into the mainstream of American society quickly and as thoroughly as possible” (Huffman, 2010, p. 164). The Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, was used as the model for these schools (Bergstrom, 2012). Career military officer Richard Pratt founded the School in 1879 and he believed it was necessary to “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man” (Pratt, 1892, p. 46). Unfortunately, this phrase influenced both American Indian federal and educational policies through most of the 20th Century (Bergstrom, 2012). This influence is evident in the first volume of the *Journal of American Indian Education*, published in 1962, which included an article by Kenneth Deissler. The results of his thesis “A study of South Dakota Indian Achievement Problems” concluded that American Indian students suffered from a ‘cultural lag’ and that “With further acculturation and good instruction, there is a good reason to assume that the Indian student will eventually attain an educational achievement level comparable to that of the white student” (Deissler, 1962, pp. 19-21). The growth of government boarding schools, both on and off of reservations, continued into the 1930’s, peaking around 1911 with 227 schools (U.S Department of the Interior, 1988). The failure of these schools is attributed to the ethnocentric approach both federal and state governments have taken to providing education for Indian children. Even after more than 400 years of Indian education the goal of total assimilation into the dominant white culture is still used as the measurement of success (Reyhner & Eder, 2004).
It was not until the mid 20th Century that the unique educational needs of American Indian students and tribal communities began to be considered. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 recognized tribal sovereignty for limited self-government and acknowledged the need for educational self-determination by providing academic scholarships (Bergstrom 2012). In 1975 the Indian Self Determination and Education Act recognized the need for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to contract with tribal governments directly to provide educational services rather than through non-native providers (Bergstrom 2012). Since 1975, this Act enabled the establishment of Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in tribal communities across the United States (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). In 1988 an amendment was passed “acknowledging that Native American children had special and unique educational needs, which included programs to foster the linguistic and cultural aspirations of Indian tribes and communities” (Bergstrom 2012, p. 74).

While progress toward providing educational opportunities and resources for American Indian education, policies of assimilation and acculturation though the use of western style education have created a stigma about participation in postsecondary education. This stigma is a significantly difficult barrier for American Indian students to overcome because they are not just dealing with their own perceptions of postsecondary education, but also the perceptions of family, friends, and tribal community members. Some of these individuals do not believe in postsecondary education and shun or are suspicious of anyone who has earned a degree.
Challenges and Barriers

American Indian students face many challenges similar to those of other minority populations, but there are unique differences. These unique differences have deep cultural roots and some are linked to the historical trauma and social injustices American Indians have suffered since Colonial America and which continue today (Goodkind, Gordman, & Parker, 2012). Examples of these challenges include American Indian poverty and unemployment rates that are nearly double the national average (U.S Department of Commerce, 2015; U.S. Department of Labor, 2017). Suicide rates among American Indians are 2.5 times higher than the national average (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2013). American Indian men and women experience some form of violence at a rate of 4 out of 5 and the risk of sexual violence against American Indian women with attempted or forced penetration is more than double that of Non-Hispanic White women (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). Additionally, high rates of alcoholism and drug abuse among American Indian students, and their need for support and treatment, creates another challenge to retention and student success (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002).

Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgenson (2012) identified ten themes related to barriers and challenges to American Indian educational persistence: institutional barriers, finances, mixed messages, academic unpreparedness, social connections, family influences, racism and discrimination, reservation life as a barrier to predominantly White culture, antecedents for college completion and retention, antecedents for college dropout and academic probation.
Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers include “a lack of information among faculty and advisers, a lack of resources on campus, and underdeveloped minority peer mentoring” (Flynn, Duncan, & Jorgensen, 2012, p. 442). Kanu (2006) found that “the discontinuity between the home culture of these students and the school environment” is a significant contributor to low retention rates of these students (p. 118). Guillory (2008) discovered that American Indian students “experience feelings of academic inadequacy, isolation, alienation, and marginalization” (p. 12). Bergstrom (2012) noted, “Historically, Native American students arrive at college campuses where their family and tribal experiences differ greatly from that of their Anglo American peers” (p. 1). Research conducted by Chávez, Ke, & Herrera (2012) identified that lack of faculty support, specialized learning resources, tutoring services, and other campus support services specific to unique cultural groups, had a deep impact on retention rates (p. 794-795).

Finances

The lack of finances frequently creates barriers for American Indian students. For example, HeavyRunner (2009) found that a cultural challenge and the responsibility of loaning money to family in need would deplete student finances (p. 89), and then a student “may drop out because a car breaks down and there is no money for repairs” (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002, p. 2). Financial pressure is a consistent theme because American Indian students are not able to attend college without some form of federal financial assistance or tribal support impacting a student’s decision to attend college or stay in college (Bergstrom, 2012; Flynn, Duncan, & Jorgensen, 2012; Guillory, & Wolverton, 2008; HeavyRunner, & DeCelles, 2002). Simply, American Indian students
are frequently unaware and uninformed of alternative financial resources and the true costs of attending college (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

**Mixed Messages**

American Indian students receive a number of mixed messages including “incongruence between expectations and reality, false advertisement, and empty promises” (Flynn, Duncan, & Jorgensen, 2012, p. 443). Examples of these include institutional websites promising unique educational experiences that their programs cannot deliver or that a particular institution is a leader in American Indian Studies when they don’t teach American Indian History (Flynn, Duncan, & Jorgensen, 2012, p. 443). Studies also point to mixed messages coming from family and friends in whom some students receive support to attend college and other students are ridiculed for attending college or pressured not to succeed (HeavyRunner, 2009; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Juntunen et al., 2001; Kicking Woman, 2011; Zyromski, Bryant, & Gerler, 2011).

**Academic Unpreparedness**

Academic unpreparedness is another theme prevalent among American Indian students. Reservations schools have a long history of being poorly funded and in turn lack the resources needed to provide students with the quality education required to prepare them for college (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, p. 73). Deficiencies in writing and math are a common challenge facing many American Indian students and in HeavyRunner’s (2009) study one student shared that math was “her only challenge to completing her degree” (p. 90). Participants in Bergstrom’s study (2012) identified a “lack of adequate academic skills and coping mechanisms” as barriers to their success (p. 84). Even over a period of two or three years into their college experiences “Native
American student were still having difficulties adjusting to the curricular rigors” and some “students felt so ill-prepared academically that they often refrained from asking questions in fear of looking "stupid" or "dumb" in front of their White classmates” (Guillory, & Wolverton, 2008, pp. 79-80).

**Social Connections**

Students’ abilities to remain socially connected to their home communities and to maintain their cultural ceremonies and practices are also significant to American Indian student’s abilities and desire to persist to degree completion (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). Social connectedness is also needed as Kicking Woman (2011) seems to confirm this with her research, finding that American Indian students are more likely to persist to graduation if postsecondary institutions provide an “inclusive environment so the student feels a sense of belonging” which demonstrates the “institution is committed to their completing college” (p. 197). Additionally, institutions need to have “available relevant cultural activities” and “create an environment where family based relationships can be recreated” (Kicking Woman, 2011, p. 179). White Shield (2009) found that participants in her study relied on heavily “on a sense of community as a cultural strength in the self-discovery process. Receiving support from other Native people, the spirits, ancestors, and other Native students provided additional validation and security for the participants to move forward in their higher education experience” (p. 60). The findings in these studies are supported by Tinto’s (1993) theory which explains that the more students are involved in academic and social life on campus the more likely they are to be committed to the institution, their own educational goals, and persist to degree completion.
Family Influences

Family support is frequently cited as having a positive influence on the educational persistence of American Indian students (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Kicking Woman, 2011). Yet families can also create barriers for students because they do not understand the challenges and required commitment students must have to be successful in college (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003). This is particularly noticeable with first generation American Indian college students (HeavyRunner, 2009; Hornett, 1989). Guillory and Wolverton (2008) found that “families acted as both a persistence factor and a barrier” (p. 77).

On student explained that "When I got into a PhD program, I called my parents to tell them how happy I was, and my father ... they've always supported me in my bachelor's degree, but the first thing he told me: when am I gonna stop playing school?" (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, p. 76-77)

Racism and Discrimination

Ethnic minorities frequently contend with racism and discrimination when attending higher educational institutions with white majority populations (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill & Dufrene, 2012). American Indian students described experiences that were not overtly racist but rather subtle or passively racist either by having their race and culture completely ignored in classroom discussions or by “being singled out as representative of their race or culture” (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003, p. 556). Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003) found some students report that these classroom discussions would at times become actively racist when discussing historical and cultural issues leaving students feeling “marginalized and offended” (p. 557).
Reservation Life as a Barrier to Predominantly White Culture

Attending college to receive a degree is challenging enough for many American Indian students and the experience of growing up in a rural environment on a reservation adds additional unique barriers. Leaving the reservation is often difficult for American Indian students because it is “a place of spiritual and cultural significance” and family, friends, and themselves can view it “as selling out to a different culture and way of life” (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003, p. 560). Additionally, student’s fear that leaving the reservation community to attend college will mean no longer being a member of the reservation community (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003). Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgenson (2012) found that students struggle with “different educational standards, dissimilar values” and with “assimilating into the dominant culture” (p. 444).

Antecedents for College Completion and Retention

Antecedents include student’s reasons for attending college and family expectations. On many reservations American Indians live in extended families and student feel responsible for providing a better life not just for themselves but also for their entire families (Guillory, & Wolverton, 2008). Some students have strong desires to return to their reservations to give back and improve communities that have provided for them feeling “they owed it to the tribe to succeed.” (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, p. 75). Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgenson (2012) also found that for some students, such as those who are first generation students or those who are single parents, they are driven to succeed as a means of setting examples for their families and communities. Research conducted by White Shield (2009) also found that family loyalty provided American
Indian women with a powerful sense of purpose and “commitment to achieve a higher education degree” for the benefit of their family (p. 58).

**Antecedents for College Dropout and Academic Probation**

Antecedents for college dropout and academic probation bring us almost full circle and back to potential institutional barriers. Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgenson (2012) found that students often felt there was a “lack of institutional investment, lack of student mentorship” and they had “feelings of inferiority” with a “lack of independence” (p.444). Experiences of feeling academically inadequate, isolated and alienated also impact American Indian student’s lack of persistence leading to dropout or academic probation (Bergstrom, 2012; Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgenson, 2012; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

**Portraiture**

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot describes portraiture as a method of inquiry and documentation that seeks to blend “systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science” to create a document with the aesthetic of fine literature and the rigor of social science research. Unlike traditional social science research in which the researcher seeks to identify a problem and document failure, portraiture seeks to identify what is good and to document success. Lightfoot (1997) explains her reasoning behind this search for goodness, “I was concerned, for example, about the general tendency of social scientists to focus their investigations on pathology and disease rather than on health and resilience” (p. 9). Lightfoot believes the blending of art, scientific rigor, and a search for goodness expands the accessibility of research conducted by portraitists via the avoidance of academic speak “that is often opaque and
esoteric” seldom producing a “dialogue with people in the ‘real world’” (p. 10). The final portrait should “inform and inspire readers” (p. 10).

The process of portraiture requires a collaborative dialogue between the researcher-artist, and the subject-actor to create a portrait, which should “convey the authority, wisdom, and perspective of the subjects” (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 5). Lightfoot explains, “The portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspective of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (p. 3). These same elements of authority and wisdom, expressing rich, complex experiences, can also be found in the oral traditions of American Indians.

The collaboration between researcher-artist and subject-actor is an important methodological practice aligning with my own artistic training. Within this work the reader will hear the active presence of both the researcher-artist and subject-actor. This is done through the use of voice as the research lens. My own voice as the researcher-artist is present along with that of the subject-actor. The reader is the third silent voice, developing their own interpretation of the story based on what they hear and their own life experiences.

This postmodern-like freedom of the audience to develop their own interpretation of the research has found its critics. In particular, English (2000) does not believe it is possible for a portraitist-artist to be objective. Artists have the ability to make creative choices while creating the final portrait. It is this choice that English (2000) believes the researcher-artist uses to impose a singular meaning “that is neither neutral, natural, nor egalitarian” (p. 25). Bloom and Erlandson (2003) believe that English has “misread or
misunderstood” the intent and process of Lightfoot’s portraiture methodology (p. 876).

Bloom and Erlandson point out that while English interprets Lightfoot’s portraiture as creating a work that is encompassing, unequivocal, and beyond reproach, “Few portrait artists would maintain that their work is encompassing, unequivocal, or beyond reproach. Most strive for the expression of truth, insight, or beauty in a unique and powerful way that they want to share with others” (p. 876).

Bloom and Erlandson (2003) are also critical of English’s (2000) belief that the researcher-artist is in complete control of the final message conveyed by the research:

There is indeed much power in the hands of the portraitist but no more so than is the case in any work of art. The viewer (or reader) has ultimate control. He or she can simply walk away from it. The question is: Can the person who reads the portrait use it to make meaning for his or her own purposes? Does the portrait provide insights that imply a different understanding or response to a person or organization that is a more direct part of the reader’s daily life? (p. 876)

Well practiced and trained artists are aware of the power their work can have and realize that now two individuals will view and interpret a particular work of art exactly the same.

Formally trained as both a modern and postmodern artist myself, I am keenly aware that any work of art is open to interpretation by the viewer and critics. Research work created using portraiture is intended to “inform and inspire readers” (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 10). This is what any good artist hopes to accomplish with their work. Like good art, portraiture is also “not intended to be generalized or replicated. Its purpose is to communicate a meaning that can have an effect on the understandings, attitudes, and actions of its viewers” (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003, p. 877).
Transcultural Theory

Transcultural theory is the process of learning a new culture while not sacrificing any aspects of the subject’s original culture. Terry Huffman (2010) adopted this terminology to describe his theory “unique to the American Indian educational experience” (p. 163). Transcultural best explained “the way in which Native students encounter, engage, and ultimately persist in mainstream education” (Huffman, 2010, p. 163). A key element of transculturation theory is it “rejects the notion that American Indian students must undergo some form of assimilation in order to succeed academically” (Huffman, 2010, p. 171). This is in stark contrast to more than a century of American Indian educational policy based on assimilation and the idea that we must “kill the Indian in him, and save the man” (Pratt, 1892, p. 46).

Huffman (2001) identified four stages of the American Indian transculturation educational experience: initial alienation, self-discovery, realignment, and participation. Huffman (2001) explains that most transcultured students are estranged students and “cultural ‘outsiders’ to the campus environment” and are thus initially alienated (p. 27):

The first stage was an extremely painful period in the experiences of most culturally traditional students. Students reported perplexing feeling of loneliness, isolation, and even depression. It is easy to understand why so many estranged students left college soon after their encounter with initial alienation. (p. 18)

These students struggled with what they perceived as assimilation and a loss of their individual identities within a system that they believed did not value them (Huffman, 2001).
The individual endurance of students who remain on campus longer leads students to the second stage of self-discovery. Huffman (2001) found that culturally traditional American Indian students who were able to reach this stage did so because they “began to realize that they had not been snared in a web of assimilation, that they could compete academically, and that they could interact with American Indians and non-Indians alike, all without loss to their cultural self-identity” (p. 20). These students were successful not because they assimilated, but because they remained culturally American Indian. Huffman (2001) found that once transcultured students discovered their success was due to their strong cultural identity, they began to learn how to adapt and work within both cultures depending on the situation. They became able to evaluate their “values, attitudes, and goals” enabling themselves to align with academia’s norms and behaviors and “cross cultural boundaries” when needed. (p. 22). Transcultured students begin to actively participate in the academic experience realizing their American Indian identity was a source of strength and confidence (Huffman, 2010).

Summary

American Indian educational persistence is affected by three core themes: challenges and barriers, supports, and motivation. Challenges and barriers have deep roots extending from early colonial American Indian education policy to contemporary reservation life today. Here subthemes include: institutional barriers, finances, mixed messages, academic unpreparedness, social connections, family influences, racism and discrimination, reservation life as a barrier to predominantly White culture, antecedents for college completion and retention, and antecedents for college dropout/academic probation. Supports for American Indian students include pre-college preparation, family
support, supportive and involved faculty, institutional commitment, and engagement with home communities. Research also indicates that access to and support of cultural specific activities and resources, promotes a strong cultural identity among American Indian students, which is an indicator of academic success and persistence. The motivation to persist to completion also appears to be connected to maintaining a strong cultural identity and connection to tribal communities and family.

Published research in the area of American Indian educational persistence is still limited with a significant amount of unpublished research still residing in dissertations. This study does continue research regarding American Indian educational persistence by building on the known challenges and barriers identified in the literature. Those identified challenges and barriers have been used to formulate questions that were used in the semi-structure subject-actor interviews as described in the methodology.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I explain in more detail how portraiture and transculturation theory worked together to form the inquiry framework for this study exploring the lived experiences of American Indian men who complete their doctoral degree. I detail the design of this study, define the subject-actors, explain interview site and process, and outline data collection steps. Also, I address the dependability, credibility, and steps of the data analysis along with the ethics of researching human subjects. Finally, I acknowledge the limitations of this study.

Purpose of the Study

During my time teaching at a tribal college, I became aware of an educational trend among American Indian men. I frequently participated in discussions with administrators and faculty regarding the lack of American Indian men pursuing higher education and doctoral degrees. Administrators and tribal community leaders have expressed a need for American Indian professionals including doctors, lawyers, educators, and engineers, but there are few to be found in the workforce.

The purpose of this study was to learn about the lived experiences of American Indian men who complete doctoral degrees. Focusing on those who attained their doctoral degrees, I identified individual characteristics and experiences of the American Indian participants. I was specifically interested in their reflections on the behaviors and
actions they had engaged in or had been faced with while pursuing their degree. Moreover, I wanted to learn about the family, community, and institutional supports that were provided or sought, and their motivations for pursing a postsecondary education and persisting to completion of a doctoral degree.

**Research Question**

The primary research question for this study was: What are the lived experiences of American Indian men who have persisted to the completion of doctoral degrees? In order to answer this question it was necessary to explore three secondary questions often examined in research pertaining to educational persistence. First, what barriers did these American Indian men overcome to complete their degree? Second, what were the supports that assisted these American Indian men overcome barriers to completing their degree? Third, what motivated these American Indian men to persist to completion of their degree?

To address these questions, I further developed interview questions around the ten core themes related to barriers and challenges to American Indian educational persistence as identified by Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgenson (2012): institutional barriers, finances, mixed messages, academic unpreparedness, social connections, family influences, racism and discrimination, reservation life as a barrier to predominantly White culture, antecedents for college completion and retention, and antecedents for college dropout and academic probation. As a result, my interview questions (see Interview Protocol in Appendix B) were designed to probe earliest memories and experiences of attending school, things that were most beneficial during elementary and high school years, things that were most difficult during elementary and high school years, decisions to attend
college, and other experiences outside of school that might have affected decisions to attend college. Guided by my theoretical orientation, I also included questions to solicit thoughts and reflections on involvement in the culture and traditions of a tribe before and during attending college, and thoughts and feelings about college prior to actually attending it. Finally, my other interview questions pertained directly to the actual experiences (i.e., challenges and opportunities, actions and perceptions) and thoughts during college years and years of persistence through all levels of education.

Research Approach

When selecting a research approach for this study, it was important that a culturally appropriate approach was taken. It is often cited that a ‘great deal’ of research conducted about American Indian education has applied methods and theories that are not culturally sensitive and which are based on the premise that cultural assimilation will bring both educational success and social rewards for American Indian students (Buckmiller, 2009; Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Huffman, 2010; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1991). Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) suggest that it is important for researchers to resist imposing culturally insensitive methods that do not safeguard the lives of those they study. This is critical because there remains historical trauma associated with American Indian education due to federal policies that used education as a tool for assimilation and cultural suppression dating back to Colonial America (Huffman, 2001; Huffman, 2010). The majority of literature reviewed for this study is based on qualitative studies that examined problems related to American Indian educational persistence and sought possible solutions, much like how traditional social science research tends to focus “on pathology and disease rather than on health and
resilience” (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 8). However, Lightfoot and Davis (1997) are concerned that this focus on failure “magnifies what is wrong and neglects evidence of promise and potential” leading “to a kind of cynicism and inaction” (p. 9). Selecting a narrative research method for this study, one that more closely aligns with tribal traditions and culture, allowed the participants to share their stories of success rather than starting out with a focus on trying to find a cure for a specific pathology.

**Methods**

The research methodology and theory selected to create the inquiry framework for this study have been made to avoid the pitfalls of applying culturally insensitive methods that focus on the negative. The methodology of portraiture and transculturation theory both have a focus on the positive by seeking to identify what works and why.

Developed by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, portraiture is a method of inquiry and documentation that seeks to blend art and science to create a document with the aesthetic expression of fine literature blended with the scientific rigor of social science research (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The result of this methodology is a comprehensive portrait “designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspective of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997 p. 3). Creating a document which fulfills these desired outcomes required portraiture, like other qualitative methods, to use interviews, focus groups, field notes, and document analysis. However, portraiture differs in the requirement of a collaborative dialogue between the researcher-artist, and the subject-actor, creating a portrait that should “convey the authority, wisdom, and perspective of the subjects” (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 4).
Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain how portraiture as methodology was applied to studies they conducted. Lightfoot used portraiture for her book *The good high school: Portraits of character and culture* (1983) in which she examined six secondary schools and Davis utilized portraiture in her book *Safe havens: Portraits of educational effectiveness in community art centers that focus on education in economically disadvantaged communities* (1993) where she and a group of researchers examined six community art centers. In her study *I’ve known rivers: Lives of loss and liberation* (1994), Lawrence-Lightfoot interviewed six individual subjects exploring their life stories through a process she calls “human archeology” (1997, p.15):

A name I coined for this genre of portraiture as a way of trying to convey the depth and penetration of the inquiry, the richness of the layers of human experience, the search for ancestral and generational artifacts, and the painstaking, careful labor that the metaphorical dig requires. As I listen to the life stories of these individuals and participate in the “co-construction” of narrative, I employ the themes, goals, and techniques of portraiture. It is an eclectic, interdisciplinary approach, shaped by the lenses of history, anthropology, psychology, and sociology. I blend curiosity and detective work of a biographer, the literary aesthetic of a novelist, and the systematic scrutiny of a researcher.

This idea of human archeology was ideal for this study as the interview protocol was designed to seek a deeper insight into subject-actors memories and experiences as far in their personal histories as it was possible - into their earliest childhood memories, that were some 30, 40, and 50+ years in the past.
In a similar interest in the past as a precursor of the present, Waterhouse (2007) chose to utilize portraiture when conducting leadership research because she wanted to ‘listen to stories of leadership as it is experienced and understood by individuals…’ and because she was “interested in authentic stories that illuminate the lived experiences of leadership.” She explained that her research was designed to evolve into “a rich, multi-layered portrait of leadership…” which demonstrated “…how a postmodern, constructivist approach to qualitative research would emphasize the importance of narrative for meaning-making both for the researcher and the researched” (Waterhouse, 2007, p. 272). This postmodern constructivist approach to meaning-making aligned with my own personal creative research and training as an artist. Like Waterhouse (2007), I recognized that each individual experienced “the world uniquely” (p.273). I frequently referred to this idea during the critique process as no two individuals had the exact same experience nor would they view an individual work of art in exactly the same way. Waterhouse (2007) continued to explain that:

Stories are how we make sense of the world and our experiences. Part of what it means to be human is to be connected to a social and cultural reality. Language and stories are how we connect to that social and cultural reality. In these ways we develop a sense of self. How we explain ourselves, define our behaviors and recount our experiences help to give us form—to others and to ourselves (p. 273). This process of story-telling through language and the use of portraiture as a methodology also aligned with American Indian traditions of using oral histories to connect to their own history, culture, and experiences. In this way, the methodology of portraiture connected my own natural and trained creative processes of story-telling and
meaning-making with those meaning-making oral history traditions of American Indians societies.

Transculturation theory is the lens through which this study was analyzed. Huffman (2010) explained that transculturation theory “attempts to understand how Native students, specifically culturally traditional individuals, persist and succeed in school rather than why they fail” (p. 163). A key element of transculturation theory is it “rejects the notion that American Indian students must undergo some form of assimilation in order to succeed academically” (Huffman, 2010, p. 171). Moreover, the theory highlights the essence of individual agency and role of a cultural identity/self in the experiences of a social world. This focus on documenting success rather than failure and the recognition of an individual social identity/subjectivity was shared with portraiture. Given that the completion of a doctoral degree is considered the pinnacle of academic success, I utilized portraiture and transculturation theory to work in tandem to explore the success of these American Indian men who had completed their doctorate degrees. Additionally, the choice to use both portraiture and transculturation theory to create the framework for this study was made because both had been developed and used with indigenous and other racial/ethnic minority populations.

Study Design

The sharing and continued development of American Indian culture and history is strongly based on the oral tradition of storytelling. In keeping with this tradition the design of this study utilized the qualitative research methodology of portraiture. This methodology requires the artist-researcher to collaborate with the subject-participant while conducting interviews and gathering field notes.
Artist-Researcher

It is important for the artist-researcher to document in their field notes the details of the environment in which they interview their subjects. Placing the subject-actor and artist-researcher in context is an essential element of portraiture. Lightfoot (1997) explained that “a visual scan of the physical setting, then, also helps the reader anticipate themes – both historical and philosophical – that characterize the place” (p. 55). This approach reinforced the purpose of portraiture to make research more accessible to a wider audience. The artist-researcher then:

Captures the details of the physical setting, hoping to create a picture into which the reader will feel drawn – a palpable picture that allows the reader to see, feel, smell, and touch the scene. In addition, the portraitist places herself in the picture – not in the center dominating that action and overwhelming the scene, but on the edge witnessing what is happening and revealing her angle of vision (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 59).

In this study, I asked the subject-actors to select locations where they felt comfortable and which might hold special meaning for them or have purpose in their lives. These locations were mostly located in or near their offices. Every effort was made to be detailed while still protecting subject-actors confidentiality. Subject-actors were asked to review the final text to ensure that the details, that might impact their privacy and confidentiality, would not included in the final document.

Subject-Actors

This study focused on the lived experiences of American Indian men who completed their doctoral degrees. Subject-actors doctoral degree was conferred by the
time of agreeing to participate in the study. Subject-actors had a documented tribal affiliation. Subject-actors spent time growing up on a reservation and attended some or all of their K-12 school years at a reservation school or a school closely associated with a reservation community. Subject-actors were representative from more than one geographic region, reservation, and tribal affiliation.

Subject-actors were sought via a snowball technique reaching out to professional and personal contacts I had developed within the higher education community, tribal college community, and other relationships. Upon IRB approval, the individuals were identified. I then contacted each individual via email, then I sent them a formal request for their voluntary participation and study consent agreement outlining the scope of the study, and participant expectations. Additionally, subject-actors were asked to identify an appropriate alias of their choosing to protect their own personal identity in the final document. With subject-actors approval, I chose one for those who did not select an alias of their own.

Aligning with the portraiture studies conducted by Lightfoot & Davis (1997), depth of data was privileged over the breadth. In other words, participant selection was not about the notion of how many participants were needed, but rather about what stories they were willing to share. Therefore, the number of potential subject-actors was narrowed to at least six. Six subject-actors were identified for inclusion in this study. Another rationale for a smaller number of subject-actors was that it allowed for the greater amounts of time the artist-researcher could spend with the subject-actors as a necessary element of the portraiture methodology requiring a deep and penetrating inquiry (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Anecdotal experience from working with regional
higher education professionals informed me that finding potential subject-actors should not be difficult. Indeed, it was not.

Data Collection

Portraiture methodology required a collaborative dialogue between the researcher-artist and the subject-actor to create a portrait, which should “convey the authority, wisdom, and perspective of the subjects” (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 4). This process embraced both the artist-researcher and the subject-participant as having an active presence in the work though the use of voice as the research lens. There are three voices within this research method, those of the subject, the researcher, and the silent voice of the scholarly audience as they develop their own interpretation of the story being told (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Telling this story required the recording of guided interviews with each subject-participant and a collection of limited field notes tracking various details about the location, time, atmosphere, clothing and any other details that further assisted in the creation of each subject-actor’s portrait. Below is an excerpt from one of the field notes, as an example of the purpose the field notes served:

Kota: Met for dinner before our first interview. Same big smile I remembered. Was wearing boots, jeans, and fitted shirt. You could easily tell he was still very fit. During dinner he spoke a lot about his family, kids, marriage, divorce, and work. Impression: Very hard working driven person and family oriented especially towards his children. While he is easy going he is not laid back or lazy, he is very driven and wants to prove that things can be done, that he can do them. First interview was conducted in his hotel room. Second interview was conducted in a quiet area of the hotel lobby.
Utilization of and participation in portraiture required a significant commitment of time by the artist-researcher and the subject-actors as both parties collaborated to create a portrait. Lightfoot and Davis (1997) points out that artist-researchers develop relationships with the subject-actors by entering their lives and starting engaging conversations with them about topics and issues they feel as important. Doing this required that, as the artist-researcher, I not only focused my attention on conducting and recording two guided interviews, similar to research conducted by Buckmiller (2009), but also documented the development of relationships between myself and subject-actors before, during, and post-interviews via field notes and recordings. These interactions with subject-actors included but were not limited to phone conversations, email communications, meetings for coffee or lunch, and casual conversations before, between, or after interview sessions.

I designed interview questions to probe and encourage discussion related to the educational persistence of American Indian men who persisted to completion of their doctoral degree. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format (Appendix B). I employed reflective listening with minimal encouragement to maximize participant responses and increase the depth of interview content. The actual wording and order of the questions were adapted to be appropriate to the context and the flow of the interviews. Interview questions were developed following the ten themes Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgenson (2012) identified related to barriers and challenges to American Indian educational persistence: institutional barriers; finances; mixed messages; academic unpreparedness; social connections; family influences; racism and discrimination;
reservation life as a barrier to predominantly White culture; antecedents for college completion and retention; antecedents for college dropout and academic probation.

Twelve separate interviews were conducted, two with each subject-actor. The first interview focused on the subject-actors PreK-12 experiences. The second interview focused on the subject-actors post-secondary and graduate experiences. All guided interviews were conducted face-to-face and no third follow-up interviews were conducted. The length of these guided interviews varied from 45-75 minutes.

I complete the transcriptions of the subject-actor’s interviews within a few weeks of each set of interviews. This process of immersing into the raw data enabled me to develop a more thorough understanding of each subject-actor’s story, which was beneficial when I began writing each individual portrait. Once the transcriptions were completed, they were shared with each subject-actor for their review and validation. The transcriptions were 173 pages in length. Individual transcripts ranged from as few as 19 pages to as many as 38 pages. Once the subject-actor approved their transcripts, I used them in the first stage of data analysis to create a unique narrative portrait of each subject-actor’s educational experiences. These portraits were again shared with each subject-actor for additional review, edit, and validation. The creation of these six portraits resulted in 111 pages of data that is both rich and deep with content and meaning. Once all six portraits were approved, I began the second stage of data analysis following Lightfoot’s method.

Data Analysis

Each stage differed in balancing the voice of the subject-actor and my voice as a researcher and scholar (Table 1).

Table 1

*On the Voice: Three Stages of Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Data representation</th>
<th>Purpose: The researcher’s voice intermingled with the voice of the participants – orienting to story-telling and setting</th>
<th>Tools: Summaries of field notes, detailed excerpts of transcripts to represent individual narrative portraits</th>
<th>Criteria: reliance on detailed transcripts, acknowledgement of dialogic nature of narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice of the Subject-Actor</td>
<td>Purpose: The researcher’s attempt to make sense of the data orienting to converging trends and meaning making</td>
<td>Tools: Comparisons and thematic representation of a collective portrait</td>
<td>Criteria: interpretations of similarities and differences across all of the narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice of the Researcher-Artist</td>
<td>Purpose: The researcher’s theoretical and intellectual assumptions – orienting to new meanings vis-à-vis the theory and literature</td>
<td>Tools: Analytic reflexivity</td>
<td>Criteria: focus on the theory and literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Utilizing the reviewed, edited, and approved transcripts as well as my field notes, I began the first stage that was about engaging with the data to represent story-telling and narrative portraiture. The process of creating or illuminating each individual portrait required that I carefully listened to/for the voice of each participant and the stories they choose to share. My own voice, although intentionally limited to remain objective was used as a research tool in this process – that tool was about engagement in a dialogue.
with the subject-actor. In that process, my voice was limited to a voice of representation to preserve the authentic voice of the participant. While reviewing and interpreting the transcripts of each subject-actor, I carefully identified repeating patterns and themes in their personal stories, but preserved the historical chronology as a structure of each story: from early childhood experiences to the years of their doctoral pursuit. Once the repeating patterns and themes in each of the story were identified, I began crafting the individual narrative portrait, preserving their own voice as evident in their direct quotes from the interviews. Once each portrait was completed, I again shared these with participants, continuing our collaborative process and dialogue, and received their final verification and approval. Chapter 4 offers these stories and the voice of representation.

The second stage of data analysis required the analysis of emergent themes across participant’s stories to identify patterns, which then assisted in the final composite portrait of an American Indian male who completed their doctorate degree. I carefully listened to how participants expressed their experiences and how cultural practices might have provided an important foundation for those experiences. Then, similar to the development of each individual portrait, I also listened to and identified repetitive experiences or views of each individual participant to find converging trends and meanings across all of these stories. I used these views and experiences to create unique story threads identifying emergent themes. This stage of analysis assumed my voice as the voice of an interpreter. Chapter 5 offers detailed presentation of the converging themes – a collective portrait - and the voice of my interpretation.

Finally, I utilized the voice of a theoretical preoccupation, as my contribution to scholarship and scholarly audience, and re-read these conversing themes through
transculturation theory that positions an individual agency and cultural identity of self through the stages of experiences of a dominant social world. These stages are initial alienation, self-discovery, realignment, and participation. This final re-reading of the narratives and themes provided additional insight into the theory’s propositions and the meanings of strength or challenges of one’s cultural affiliation and identity as these individuals strive to navigate dominant social processes. Chapter 6 provides detailed discussions of the narratives and themes vis-à-vis transculturation theory through the voice of theoretical preoccupation.

**Dependability and Credibility**

Multiple techniques were utilized to develop the dependability and credibility of this study. First, I began an audit trail by writing an initial reflexivity statement identifying my own experiences, which might have potentially influenced the study (Appendix A). Next, I used limited field notes to maintain the audit trail documenting various details about the location, time, atmosphere, clothing and any other details that will assist in the creation of each subject-actor’s portrait. Finally, all interviews were recorded and transcribed by me no more than a couple weeks following each interview.

After the initial transcriptions were complete, I again listened to the recorded interviews while reading the transcription to ensure accuracy. Completed transcriptions were shared with subject-actors for their review, comment, and validation. Once approved, I used the transcripts to complete their narrative portraits. Writing in my own unique style I remained self aware and paid close attention to differences between the subject-actors voice and my own voice to guard against inserting any bias or prejudice based on my own unique life experiences. Subject-actors were again requested to review
and validate their finished individual portraits before the next narrative analysis of the conversing themes was completed. Subject-actors retained the right to edit or delete any part of the transcripts and portraits up to final publication. Only one participant requested a portion of their story not be used because it touched on an experience he was not yet ready to share publicly. That portion of the transcript was removed and never used for the creating of an individual narrative.

**Ethics**

Subject-actors were informed of their voluntary participation in this study and their ability to withdraw at any time. Subject-actors were also informed of their right to edit or delete any part of the transcripts and portraits up to final publication of the research. Subject-actors were informed of the scope of the study they are agreeing to participate in and participant expectations will be outlined. Subject-actors were informed of the confidentiality of this study and will be asked to sign a study consent agreement (Appendix D). Additionally, before any interviews were conducted, each participant was asked to provide an alias of their choice to be identified by in the final research document further ensuring their confidentiality. If the subjects did not provide an alias, I recommended one based on some detail from their interview or my field notes (i.e. Eddie was wearing a black Eddie Bauer polo), which assisted me in keeping subject-actors identities and stories separated.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to this study and first and foremost was that of being a White male researcher conducting research with American Indian subject-actors. It is important that as a non-native researcher I remained self-aware as to not impose white
majority norms into this study. This required that additional attention be made to this facet of the study through careful research design, analysis, and reflexivity. Working in tribal communities for nine years now as both a college instructor and administrator has tempered this limitation by providing me with a deeper nuanced insight into cultural and tribal community norms compared to other non-native researchers who may have coming in from the outside. Yet, the history of White men establishing American Indian education policy to assimilate American Indians into Western American society is still a sensitive issue for many American Indians and a significant historical trauma still felt today. While I have been working within tribal communities and while I did grow up poor and in a rural community, I have not lived the same set of life experiences and I do not have the same view of the world. With both researcher and subject coming from different backgrounds, making clear communication of experiences might have been difficult (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). This history, these experiences, and these differences do frequently cause suspicion of intent between the subjects and researcher. One step that was taken to address this was for myself as the artist-researcher to be clear and open about every aspect of this study and that the intent is directed at supporting and improving American Indian postsecondary educational participation, persistence, and completion. I addressed these concerns in the formal request for voluntary participation and study consent agreement (Appendix D), which outlined the scope of the study, and participant expectations. Additionally, because portraiture is a collaborative process and requires relationship development, I felt it was important for me to share with subject-actors a short biography about myself (Appendix C).
While I believed identifying subject-actors for this study would not be a limitation, access to subject-actors proved to be a limitation because of the relatively small number of American Indian men who complete this level of education and whom are widely dispersed geographically (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). This did require a wide search methodology over a multi-state region. It did require a significant travel time commitment to conduct the needed face-to-face interviews.

**Summary**

This qualitative study, lived experiences of American Indian men who persist to completion of doctoral degrees, was conducted utilizing the methodology of portraiture combined with transculturation theory to create its theoretical framework. There six subject-actors in this study. Subject-actors were American Indian man with a specified tribal affiliation who has completed their doctoral degree. Subject-actors were interviewed at locations they felt comfortable which held meaning or had purpose in their lives such as their offices. The researcher conducted and transcribed all interviews and shared the transcriptions with the subject-actors for review and approval. The researcher also maintained a research journal of field note documenting small details like dates, times, locations, and clothing for use in creating each portrait. Subject-actors reviewed transcripts to guard the dependability and credibility of this study. Subject-actors were informed of the voluntary nature of this study, their ability to withdraw from the study at any time, the scope of this study, the confidentiality of the study, and they were requested to identify their own alias by which they are identified in this study. One limitation of this study was that of a White male researcher conducting research among an American Indian population for whom western education policy written by White men has
traditionally been utilized as a tool for cultural assimilation. Another limitation of this study was the relatively small and geographically dispersed population of American Indian men who have completed this level of education.

Transcriptions and field notes were analyzed through the use of voice: the subject-actor’s voice detailing their experiences through story telling, the researcher-artist’s voice narratively analyzing each story for emergent themes common to subject-actors experiences, and the scholar’s voice connecting the emergent themes to theory. This three step process also served as the structure for organizing the final three chapters of this study.
CHAPTER 4

VOICE OF THE ACTORS

This chapter contains the stories of six subject-actors I interviewed for this study. The interview questions were divided into two sets; first, their earliest memories through their K-12 experiences, and second, their college experiences. Subject-actors ranged in age from their early 40s to their middle 50s. The subject-actors professions included a practicing lawyer, a K-12 administrator, a higher education administrator, a non-profit administrator and researcher, an associate professor, and an assistant professor. Subject-actors represented different tribes and reservations from the desert southwest, to the Rocky Mountains, the central plains, the northern plains, and the upper Midwest. These stories have been reviewed and approved by each subject-actor who validated them for accuracy and truthfulness.

Kota: The Athlete

Kota is an enrolled member of an upper Midwest tribe and grew up both on and off the reservation. When he was younger, Kota and his brother spent a lot of time on the reservation living with his grandparents while his parents were overseas. His stepfather was in the military and eventually stationed in Europe. Kota considers himself to be a bit multicultural because as a military kid he has lived and attended school in many different places including El Paso, Texas, Martinez, California, Grand Forks, North Dakota, and three years in Europe, both in Mannheim and Schwenfurt, Germany. Yet he and his brother would return to spend every summer back on the reservation with his
grandparents because he liked it so much. He received some of his elementary school education at a reservation school and the remainder of his education where ever his stepfather was stationed. His parents eventually obtained a home in a small rural farming community a couple of hours from the reservation where Kota and his brother lived with their mom. Kota attended high school there and eventually completed his Bachelor’s degree at the local college. He continued on to get his Master’s and eventually his Ph.D. at two other regional institutions. Today, Kota has now returned to the reservation where he has now worked for 10 years, first at the local community college, and now for the school district promoting health and wellness. He is divorced and shares custody of his six children, three boys and three girls.

Kota is the only subject-actor I have previously gotten to know. We met professionally about seven years ago and spent some time together socially. It had been about four years since we last saw each other. He was in town for an educational conference when we meet for our interviews. Kota was exactly as I remembered him, not quite average height but very athletic wearing boots and jeans. He was showing the same large smile I always remembered about him and with the same outgoing personality. I can’t say I’ve ever seen him sad or overly serious. He’s just someone you want to be around.

The Importance of Family

After reconnecting over some dinner we sat down and began with Kota’s earliest memories of school. He explains that his mom and aunt had both obtained education degrees and returned to the reservation to be substitute teachers. This allowed them to
secure Bureau of Indian Affairs housing for teachers. His mom and aunt, along with his brother, and two cousins shared a house, as they were both single moms at the time:

I remember one time I went in, I can’t remember the class, maybe it was language class or whatever, my mom is an English teacher, she was my substitute. I gave her such a hard time. I remember trying to get away with everything, being a jerk, and so she called the principle in and I got disciplined by the principle. Then when I got home she called my grandfather and I got disciplined by him.

Misbehaving, while his mother was working as a substitute teacher in his class, is Kota’s earliest educational memory. He quickly learned to take school more seriously and not mess around. School became a function of life, something he was required to do, not something he enjoyed. “A lot of times, for me it was monotony, it was over and over, not enough facilitation. I felt like a robot.”

His overseas experiences, and experiences in other parts of the United States, were different from those he had back on the reservation. In those places you would go to school, do your work, then bus home. However, his experience with school on the reservation was a little scarier:

I remember going to middle school, on the reservation. I remember I felt like if you were not in with the right crowd there was a stigma you had to overcome, or if you were not associated with some type of club, you were more apt to be bullied or be put to a place where you would have to fight to maintain your dignity.

Off the reservation he felt more accepted. In some settings with larger Hispanic populations, because of their darker skin and black hair, they would be mistaken for
Mexican. Laughing a bit and finishing with that big smile he states, “We fit in better, so that was pretty funny, as we didn’t speak a lick of Spanish.”

Kota explains the important influence his family has had on his education and his outgoing personality. They are also outgoing and extroverted, never seeming to have any problem making friends. Yet, while he and they are both outspoken and self-confident, Kota explains he was still taught to be respectful and humble. However, he does worry that the self-confidence is sometimes viewed as arrogance, and Kota finds himself debating if he should be more self-confidant or more humble:

The influence my grandfather had on me as far as, a guy who in his 70s would out work anybody that I knew, and he was still humble. He was a musician, he was a carpenter, he was a great dad, a great grandpa, he had livestock he raised, taught us, taught me and my brother and my cousins how to work horses, there were so many things he was good at, but he would still wake up at 5 o’clock in the morning and go pick cans. I learned a lot from that guy.

The lesson of being respectful and humble while being self-confidant is something Kota carries with him today.

Kota’s grandparents had 8th grade educations they obtained from boarding schools back in the 1930s and 1940s. He remembers his grandmother schooling him when he was growing up. “I was awestruck by the way she could write and put stuff from her mouth to paper. If we had a question about algebra, she was answering questions for us, her education never stopped.” When computers and the Internet were first becoming available to the public, his grandmother was still learning and searching the Internet before she passed on. While Kota didn’t take to learning and education right away, the
examples of his family members instilled within him the value of education. “I have a very educated family…I have three siblings, aunties and uncles who are education and medical doctors. One of my uncles was the president of the college for many years, and so, yeah education was always a big aspect of my family growing up.”

One of the most difficult things Kota remembers having to overcome from his elementary and middle school years was a lack of academic preparation. He doesn’t believe he was forced to apply himself enough and by the time he reached high school he already felt he was missing some essential tools, specifically in reading and writing. This became more critically evident during his first year of college:

I got to college and my English instructors first critique of my writing and comprehension from the literature was terrible. I came back and point-blank asked them “Is this right? Am I this bad?” And they said “you need a lot of improvement, you’re pretty much operating at a remedial level.” I sat there and I remember calling my mom, she was living in Europe at the time, and I said “mom, where did I miss the boat? Where did I miss sentence structure, reading and comprehension, critical thinking skills?” She said “Why? What are you talking about?” I said, “I’m getting critiqued by my English instructors here and they said I’m pretty much remedial in this category.”

He and his mom came up with a plan to fix his writing mechanics, critical thinking skills, and reading comprehension on his own because he was so embarrassed. He recognized this was an area of weakness and through a lot of hard work he retrained himself. Now, writing, critical thinking, and reading comprehension are three of his strengths.
Kota also recalls the difficulty of being confronted with racism when he attended the reservation school. He was frequently called the “white guy” because he had been living around the country or overseas. When he would attend public schools he would sometimes be called “prairie nigger” or he was assumed to be Mexican. “I had both. So I was, it’s nothing big to me.” Kota adjusted well and has used that experience to help students he works with understand and deal with racism when faced with it. He tells students, “You’ll know when they call you something, it’s pretty blatant.” His own uncles would call him “white boy” because he lived off the reservations, and his public school peers would harass him about getting “everything for free” or “do you even live in houses?” “I don’t ever really get too concerned with it because those that don’t know are the uneducated ones and you have to educate them up a little bit.”

**The Serendipitous Path to College**

Kota had not given college much thought when he was just a kid. It was not until his peers in high school began talking about being accepted to college that he started thinking this was something he should maybe consider. While he did have well-educated family members and relatives he just was not convinced he was good enough to further his education. “I didn’t think I was smart enough to do that, I just thought maybe the social economics of society was geared towards my white counterparts getting into school versus the Native American kid.” He was having so much fun playing high school sports he just never really gave too much thought to what he was going to do after high school. He joined the National Guard on a whim between his Junior and Senior year of high school and attended boot camp that summer, simply because a friend of his talked him into it. He spent nine years in the Army National Guard.
Kota remembers that the number of his high school peers being accepted to college was an eye opening experience for him. He can identify one specific experience that motivated him to attend college. It was a conversation with one of his football coaches the Fall Semester of his senior year in high school:

I never thought my head coach gave me chances to do really well at football, and caring or not he was caring for me at the time. He came up to me and said, “there’s some schools looking at you, you know to further play football, and I’m recommending to you a junior tribal college in the Midwest.” I didn’t know anything, I thought the local colleges or university or something, but a junior tribal college? It offended me. It actually offended me. I went home and I said, “Mom” I said, “it’s unfair that he just thinks that just because I’m Indian I belong at an Indian school to further my education.” It was at that point that I said “I’m going to prove these guys wrong. They think I’m only good enough to go to Indian College, and play football at Indian college, when I’m a lot better than that.”

The motivation to prove to his ex coach that he could succeed at any college without his support or permission pushed Kota to have a successful senior year as an athlete. With that, more schools began to call him and he was able to “show that high school coach to screw off.”

After graduating from high school Kota did try college for a while. He wanted to continue playing football, but he soon discovered the large university wasn’t for him. Considering other alternatives Kota moved to Montana for a while:
I started logging and breaking horses for a dude ranch, and thought this is more my line of work. I didn’t feel like I was white-collar enough to be getting a four-year education so I felt this was going to be my trade in life, to do the hard labor. Fortunately for me, I received a call, maybe about six months later, saying that I needed to reconsider applying myself to a football program and track and field, so I moved back home. The original reason that I went to college was because a high school coach only thought I was good enough to attend a junior college on a reservation, an Indian school, and I thought I wasn’t going to be separated by my race in that way. It was kind of a way to get back at him saying, “I could go play wherever I want by applying myself.”

It was a ‘legendary’ coach from the local college who had originally recruited him from high school, but because he didn’t want to be that ‘hometown boy’ who graduated from the local high school and played for the local college, he had initially started his freshman year at that large university where things didn’t go so well at first.

Athletics ultimately played a strong role in keeping Kota engaged in college. He was a two-sport athlete, playing football in the fall and running track in the spring. He was always busy and had little time to miss family, who were living in Europe at the time. This did afford him opportunities to travel to Europe during the holidays, which was another positive experience he had during college. However, because his family was not around Kota was on his own when it came to needing help with anything from filing his own FAFSA to applying for work-study. His connections with the Army National Guard helped. Another benefit or support was his ability to return to the reservation each summer to live with his grandparents and work:
I felt comfortable back home on the reservation because I always had work there. I always had loving caring grandparents that took care of me and allowed me to train. I had to train year around, so I would come home from work, eat, and train. Then do it all over again everyday for the whole summer.

His hometown college also took good care of him and was “kind of the home away from home.” He recalls that his advisor was really engaged and cared about his success, “from morning calls sometimes to tell me to, get up and go to class, you’ve missed a few times, to, just reminding you of little things.” He never felt like a number.

Like many college students, finances were tight for Kota. He owed the school money and had to do work-study, take out loans, and during his senior year he even had to work another job on the side. Yet, being the hometown kid, he could always find a meal at a friends place if he needed to. Other resources were also readily available and coaches would be sure tutors were there to help student athletes.

Another thing that was difficult for Kota, he did not have any family around to lean on when he needed to. Again, athletics and his bonds with his teammates provided the support he needed. To this day three or four of those teammates are still a part of his life:

I don’t think I would’ve stayed, stuck around college, if I wasn’t involved in sports to be honest. I didn’t really necessarily feel I had a calling like I was saying. I don’t think I would’ve had an interest in college if it weren’t for sports just because I wasn’t really interested in college to begin with. The only thing that really interested me in college is paying back to the coach that I thought that I could only be a Native American athlete in a Tribal college. That’s the only thing
that had really got to me in high school was the fact that I wanted to show him that I could go play anywhere I wanted to or run anywhere I wanted to and when I had the ability to showcase that, that’s the only reason I went to college. Then when I found out I was really good at what I was doing that was even more plentiful for me to staying in college. Then, when I got the scholarships after I proved myself, that was even better when you’re team captain and all-conference, many records holder, you have a lot to gloat about. The college experience was that, from going from not even being recruited because your coaches didn’t think you were good enough except for a Native American school, then all of a sudden you’re the hometown hero at college, and you’re the hometown boy making all the waves, and you get an NFL tryout. Yeah, it’s substantial. I would’ve never went to school if I didn’t have those opportunities to play sports and have the teammates around me because I thought that was quintessential to me staying in college. If I didn’t have that, if I didn’t have the camaraderie, those people that were helping me understand the complexity of college, understand study habits, understand leadership ability, there was probably no reason for me to go to school.”

Kota did stay in school during his second attempt at higher education eventually completing his Bachelor’s degree.

**An Unfettered Determination to Lead by Example**

Kota recognized that the basis for today’s society required individuals to be highly educated. He had done well in undergraduate school and he knew he wanted to do more. He also wanted to be a role model for his children and be able to provide for them. While
he never thought of himself as intellectual, he took the lessons of hard work he learned from his grandfather and applied that to his education:

I think that’s the stick-to-it-ness they call it. I think that’s what I have more so than most people that I know. I learned that from my grandfather, like I said earlier, he’s going to outwork anybody, and I carry that with me to this day. I’m going to outwork you. I might not have the best answers for you, but I will find them and make sure that I go above and beyond to make sure that the things I do are going to be cemented somewhere.

He also recognized there are “so few Native American males that had doctorate degrees, and I wanted to be that anomaly. I wanted to be that small percentage of people that did.”

He explains that there are not many male role models for young boys to look up to on the reservation who have advanced degrees or terminal degrees, “so I wanted that not only for my own kids, but for all the kids that I mentor. Yeah, more so than anything that is what I did it for.”

Earlier, Kota had talked about being self-confident yet humble and how sometimes that was viewed as being arrogant. He also attributed some of those same traits as being almost narcissistic or requiring some level of narcissism:

You almost have to exclude yourself from anything and everything to make sure you’re plummeting towards a goal. You don’t know or you don’t care who’s in your way. You’re getting it done. I’ve actually became that person, that no matter what’s happening I’m going to get it done regardless if I have the resources or means to get it done.
He realizes that may not be the best trait to have but it does mean he is reliable and focused towards a goal. He believes this is why he was able to persist. He set goals and didn’t let anything get in his way.

I asked Kota if there was anything he would change about his educational experiences? He stated, “I would never change one bit of it!” He enjoyed his college years, even the struggles. He had opportunities to go to larger universities to play sports but he loved the small college atmosphere. He was also very loyal to his teammates and glad he did not leave for the larger schools. His college experience was very different than his elementary and high school experiences due to the greater diversity found in higher education. It was fun because he did not experience racism there. His first roommate was from Japan, a highly educated individual who studied hard and spent a lot of time in the library. “Here I am, this jock, learning from this guy how to study.”

During college Kota would return home during the summers to work. He did his best to be culturally responsible and attend to the things that needed to be attended. His aunt was tribal chairman at the time and so through her he had a good grasp of what was going on traditionally within the tribe. Yet Kota states, “I didn’t feel like I was really one of them.” Having been raised on and off the reservation over the years, he didn’t feel like he was in a position to be a strong advocate for them at the time. When he was younger his parents had followed the Powwow circuit and he was a fancy dancer. Later in life he took a different look at culture and the importance of language and heritage preservation. While these are good things Kota states:

I was more understanding, being a realist and adapting and moving forward, my way of preserving the culture was to stay healthy, stay fit, be a leader, and
promote the culture that way. Not to ever disregard our elders, and everything that they’ve done to pave the way for us, but going a different direction knowing that I didn’t really have any motivation to learn the language. I didn’t have the motivation to keep practicing dancing or whatever, but I did have the motivation to understand the deeper meaning of what the culture is too me and to my family and to preserve it in the means that I’m proud of my heritage, I’m proud of my history, and I’m proud of my traditions.

Kota’s pride of heritage, history, and traditions were also a motivating factor in his educational persistence, as was setting an example for his own children and the children he works with on the reservation. Initially college was about proving people wrong and demonstrating that he had the knowledge and ability to complete a doctorate degree. He’s glad he did it but knowing know the impact it had on his marriage, which ended in a divorce and shared custody of his children, he not sure he would do it again.

**The Intersection of Cultural and Gender Identities**

Kota does believe that young men on the reservation have an uphill battle when it comes to education. The perception of men attending college is not well perceived while women are shown a clear path to pursue their educations. He contemplates that this may be a carryover from the Native American hunter gather culture. “The males were the hunters, they go off and hunt, they go off and they work. The gatherers, they stay home and educate kids blah, blah, blah. That concept is still being played out on reservations today.” In recent years more men have become educators and pursued advanced degrees, in Kota’s opinion, American Indian men do not receive the same guidance and support as American Indian women do both financially and culturally. In his own family, his uncles
went off to work construction, carpentry, and other trades, while his aunts went off to college. When the first semester of college was difficult Kota thought, “Well, I guess I’ll just follow in the footsteps of my uncles and go off to do a trade, do construction, and maybe later on down the road I will venture into education.” Kota mentioned earlier that he did try breaking horses and logging for a while before he was provided with an opportunity to attend college because of his athletic abilities, but not all men have that good fortune:

When I was younger, it was almost an anomaly to hear that your cousin or uncle that was a male went off to college. You hear them going off to work but you would not hear of them going off to college, and vice versa if the female went right off to work, that was not something that was happening. I have a little cousin, she’s a year younger than me, as soon as she was done with high school, boom right off to college. Her older brother, a year older, he was off to the Navy. It’s different. It’s a different expectation.

To this day it is his opinion that the hunter-gatherer paradigm still plays a role in the educational experiences of American Indian men and women. “I can’t really pinpoint it, I just think it it’s the basis of the culture.”

**Driving Forces**

Kota’s educational experiences and persistence to completion of his doctoral degree were driven in part by his own personal pride and self-esteem. Having been told by a coach that he wasn’t good enough, he set out to prove that coach wrong. He did have early educational experiences and role models that supported his later educational goals such as his mother and aunt both receiving their degrees and working as teachers.
His grandparents provided him a home on the reservation during the summers where he could train as an athlete and stay connected to his community. His first attempt at attending a large institution failed. After working for a while he realized he needed to go back to college and returned to his much smaller home town college where he received a lot of support. “I didn’t feel like a number.” His involvement in athletics kept him in school. His desire to complete his advanced degrees was driven by a need to support his family, and by wanting to serve as a role model for his own kids and other kids in the community where he now lives and works.

**Eastman: The Learner**

Eastman is an education professional working for an organization supporting the educational aspirations of tribal peoples. He is an enrolled member of a Central Great Plains tribe. His mother was an enrolled tribal member and his father is white. Eastman grew up on the reservation until he was 13. His father took up teaching at the reservation high school, but eventually he tired of teaching. He found another job in a small town on the opposite side of the state where their family moved. Eastman’s parents also did not believe the school system on the reservation would provide an adequate education for their children. Eventually they moved again to where Eastman lives to this day.

When I first met Eastman my initial impression of him was that of someone who was easy going, unassuming, and humble. With an average height and build, he dressed casually, but professionally, similar to how you might expect a university faculty member to dress. Eastman greeted me with a smile and handshake. He was passing through on business so we used this as the perfect opportunity to meet and conduct our interviews.
He had just gotten off the plane so I offered to buy him some lunch at our local history museum where we later conducted the first of our two interviews.

**Inspirational Childhood Explorations**

I found Eastman to be soft spoken and thoughtful in his conversation. It was almost shaman like in how he approached each topic sometimes pausing to think carefully before speaking. I began by asking him about his earliest educational memories. He starts by stating that he believes his experience living on the reservation has played a significant role in how he views things today:

I think there’s a lot of pride at a young age knowing that you’re part of that community. I read a lot of books growing up, and a lot of the pride grew from the former leaders of the tribe depicted in the history books. So there was always an affinity and appreciation for those leaders and the things that they did, that they went through, that they sacrificed.

He recognized his connection to history early on as a youth. His grandfather, born in the early 1900s was tribal president for several years, and his great-grandfather was born in the late 1800s – one of the first generations on the reservation. Seeing older photos of his relatives reinforced that connection to history he saw in the books and made him realize that, “You’re not doing things for yourself. Your successes are really only successes if they help others.”

Another key aspect of growing up in the community he did which impacts how he views the world and his community was the push for local control, which grew out of the larger national push for Indian self-determination. Many of the reservation schools began incorporating language and cultural components in the classroom. Around third grade
Eastman began to see these in the classroom. By fifth grade he was taught Lakota language and crafts by his aunt and uncle. This reinforced his tribal identity and continues to be a source of inspiration in his current work.

Eastman remembers going to kindergarten, playing at school, and riding bike with his buddies. Many of these buddies were mostly relatives. He had some friends whom he was not related to but growing up on the reservation he had a lot of cousins. He also remembers learning to read and write starting with Sally, Dick, and Jane. Making art was also a big part of his life and another one of his earliest memories. He would go to the library with a group of boys, they would pick books they wanted to draw from, and he would pick dinosaur books. He remembers his grandmother would send him books to read like Aesop’s Fables, and Grimm’s Fairy Tales.

The school was the center of the community back then, even when school was not in session. He remembers hanging out there with his cousins, riding horses, and participating in other programs. The school also coordinated summer field trips to the area attractions or camped by the nearby reservoirs. When there wasn’t something at the school they played football or watched his brothers play little league baseball.

Prior to and during his first years in school the American Indian Movement became a huge influence on the reservation. Eastman was in kindergarten in 1975, a few years after Wounded Knee and prior to the infamous FBI shooting. AIM was very active at the time and there was a growing division between pro-AIM and those who opposed AIM “I think the community was starting to become stretched apart. A lot of people have a very positive view of AIM but there’s a lot of people that have a real negative view of AIM as well and what it did to the rez.” There was a rebirth of traditional religious
practices, Lakota practices, and the push to relearn and teach the language, and the powwow, there was also an influx of negative things as well. His mom’s generation was bilingual, and much of the cultural practices are family-based and taught at home. His generation was now being introduced to language and culture in school. He does not believe this transition has been successful at producing even one fluent speaker.

While growing up and going to school on the reservation, one of the most beneficial things Eastman remembers was having the ability to explore, both in the classroom and outside. In school he was allowed to go to the library, look up things he was interested in, and draw or paint. He could explore fascinating things in nature found in the books. He and his friends paid homage to the images by drawing them. To this day Eastman still creates art. Outdoors, he and his cousins would explore a good mile radius around their homes:

We swam, fished, played on the nearby cliffs, hiked in the Badlands, and we’d go look at fossils in the badlands and dig some up. I remember I was digging up a fossilized sea turtle, it was just amazing stuff, if you had any kind of imagination.

We made our own bow and arrows and shoot each other up with them.

He recalls it being a good time to grow up in the country and that his experiences were probably not all that different from many rural kids growing up at the time. It wasn't until they moved off the reservation that Eastman discovered the public library. He spent much of his time there during the summers, in part because the library was air-conditioned and cool during hot summer days, but also because he loved to learn and read about basketball and stories like J.R.R. Tolkien’s, *The Hobbit.*
Lessons of Poverty and Identity

Outside of school Eastman struggled with his identity “I think I felt it most acutely on the rez being a part wasi’chu…dealing with that garbage was a tough thing.” Although, his family always managed to have food on the table, many other families did not. He never thought his family was poor, for they always had a roof over their heads and food on the table. He also seemed naïve about how poor things were in the area he grew up. As he thinks about it now he can see that many people struggled:

I recall some relatives coming over for like a week straight, and I just thought it was to play and I found out later that they didn’t have any food so they would come over and eat. So you hear those stories later on and you go, wow, people really did have a tough time.

Eastman witnessed poverty impact other kids and fraction families. Alcoholism and drugs often left kids to raise themselves. Yet he states that he was lucky:

We had a dad that lived up to his responsibility in many ways. He expected much from us. He also disciplined us when it was necessary, especially anytime he found out about us doing bad things to ourselves -we got our butts whooped. I got the message. I was smart enough not to do it again. He also taught us about the value of work and responsibility …. We had to haul wood, we had to pick trash around our house and in the ditches, we had a lot of chores that our dad made us do and we hated it, but after time went on and we became used to the idea of work and later getting a job.

If he wanted anything, such as going to a basketball camp, he had to get a job and work for it himself.
Eastman talked about the challenges of being part white, wasi’chu, and part native. He was more aware of racism on the reservation when it was directed at him for being a mixed-blood or when he was traveling, as part of a group on a bus and people would be shouting at them to, “go back to the rez you fucking Indians!” Off the reservation, as he got older he did not notice it so much, but his brothers did experience it more frequently:

So I never really took it seriously …. I had an uncle who was a priest and who lived in Japan, my brother and I stayed with my brother there one summer during high school we stayed out there for six weeks. My uncle asked us, what bothers you guys the most? My brother goes I hate it when people call me a fucking Indian. My uncle looked at him, we were around the dinner table, and he goes, ‘Hey, fucking Indian, pass me the salt.’ My brother was like, what’s up, and my uncles says, don’t let anybody ever control you with their language. That is just a reflection of you if you’re going to allow them to control you with those kinds of things. That lesson stuck with me the rest of my life. I never let anyone control me with words concerning my identity.

He never took the name-calling, the racism, as what he stated was a “call to arms” but his older brothers would:

I remember my brother came back one evening and I looked at his hand. His hand was all swollen, and I said what happened to you? He said, well I got into a fight. I swung at this guy and I missed him and I hit a tree. So, I think some were more sensitive to it. I know my brothers were.
Later, when they moved away from the reservation, they were frequently mistaken for Mexican and so very little would be directed at them for being American Indian.

**Self-Imposed Expectation to Learn**

Eastman was not a first generation college student. His father had earned his undergraduate degree. His mother had earned her GED. One of his aunts never finished high school. His older half brothers and sisters took advantage of vocational training opportunities and college before he did. Yet, the decision to attend college was not a formal discussion Eastman remembers having with anyone. “There wasn’t really one shining moment, I think it was just the expectation that I placed upon myself.” His high school buddies whom he ran cross country and played basketball with talked about applying to different schools so it was just something he did as well. “There wasn’t like an epiphany…it was something that I just did on my own.” Like needing to get a job to pay for basketball camp he just figured, “that if I were going to do it, I’d have to figure out how to do it.” Even though his dad had earned his bachelor’s degree Eastman felt like he had to do this on his own, not really getting any guidance from his father. He figured it was either go to college, join the military or get a job. He opted for college.

Eastman was motivated more by the desire to learn and improve his opportunities than by economics. After starting in engineering, then getting booted from the program for spending too much time distracted by other things, he realized, “I’ve got to get my act together.” He switched his focus to mathematics and earned his bachelors of arts in Mathematics. Afterwards, not forgetting his connection to the community he received a secondary mathematics teacher’s certificate. This was an area he felt he could give back to the Indian community. “The idea of serving and being able to serve” is his driving
motivation putting himself “in a position to do some good.” Being a high school math teacher teaching in an Indian community allowed him to fulfill this vocation.

Eastman had not thought too much about what the college experience would be like. Initially he imagined it would be similar to what he had seen in films with difficult classes but in subjects he would enjoy. Yet he did fear that he was not smart enough for college, not sure if he was adequately academically prepared for the rigors of college academics. He also wasn’t sure what to expect socially.

Eastman had applied to and been accepted to a number of undergraduate institutions including one on the west coast. Eventually he had narrowed it down to two schools, one for engineering and one for commercial art, both in state. The engineering school was close by and his mother suggested starting there because he could live at home and ease into it. During his first semester of college, he either commuted with a friend or rode the bus. This provided him with a period of time to ease into the college experience. It was not until his second semester that he began living on campus:

The real college experience began when I started my second semester. I lived in the dorms. That’s when I got a roommate that I had never met before. His name was John Smith of all names, and, you know, it was really hard to connect. That’s when I began to realize I wouldn’t be going home every evening and have that connection with family and whatnot. It was an uncomfortable space for a while and I never really connected with him.

Not connecting with his roommate provided Eastman the opportunity to build stronger connections with his classmates. He became more involved with native organizations on
campus. He also spent a lot of time at the recreation center and participated in intramural basketball.

Another, somewhat unsettling, experience Eastman remembers occurred early in his college career:

I remember one instance, I was walking between classes, one moment the size and the space just overwhelmed me and I became, it was one moment in my life where I just got anxious. It was like, oh my gosh, people were going this way and going that way and I felt overwhelmed by the whole experience.

He worked through this experience of being overwhelmed and found support wherever he was able to. The Native American scholarship program he was part of would have the students’ meet once a month for additional training and to listen to guest speakers. The minority engineering program provided tutors and the school provided ethnic specific councilors. “So we had a native counselor available to us with an open door policy. We could walk in and discuss anything.”

Networking Relationships Define Purpose

Another connection he made was participating in the Indian Club and getting to know other Native American students:

Now the interesting thing about that club was that it wasn’t just the traditional – aged college students who were there. There were people there who had gone to the institution prior and still lived in the community, who were maybe taking courses or were just part of the native community and would come in and interact with us undergrads. So we had a range of ages represented as well as a range of
cultures. I met people, a woman in particular who was from my home community.

I remember going to church and seeing her family there when I was younger. This provided Eastman with a certain level of familiarity and comfort, as he knew her name immediately. She ended up being another type of support for him and other Native American students.

During his undergraduate studies, Eastman’s involvement with the minority-engineering program and native organizations on campus provided him with the opportunity to meet new people and discuss important issues,

I met Kiowa, Choctaws, Navajos, other Lakota, and Jemez Pueblo Indians. I don’t think I would have been able to succeed had it not been for these types of organizations on campus. We were able to talk about our backgrounds and found real similarities and differences. These helped shape my view of the larger body of American Indians and the social issues that might have been impacting our communities and us at the time.

These conversations and experiences networking built a good foundation for his choice of career.

Eastman’s college experiences, and especially the networking experiences during graduate school, helped him overcome his introversion. College also helped define what the purpose of his education would become:

I think about the Indian Club and the minority-engineering program and those kinds of groups that I was in, the intent, end goal of all this stuff, was not to make a lot of money. Money very rarely came up in the group that I was in, it was about, well how am I going to help the Indian community if I’m going to be a

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lawyer? I can study Indian law or maybe even natural resources or we could talk about sovereignty or self-determination. Education was an easy in to that because I would be working in a native community space that was needed, math education. I could supply the kid something not only in terms of content but in terms of perspective.

These conversations about how their educations could be used to better tribal communities became the driving force behind many of those students’ careers. Eastman majored in mathematics after leaving the engineering program, which then led to a secondary mathematics teaching certification which in turn allowed him the opportunity to work on an Indian reservation and to teach native high school students. Several other students, with whom he is still a friend, became lawyers. In a sort of “self-fulfilling prophecy that we placed upon ourselves, we would be in a position to help.”

Another benefit Eastman experienced was that he did start out in the minority-engineering program. He recalls that going to school for engineering was hard work and “it’s just go, go, go from week one and you are assigned work from day one for every class whether it’s physics, chemistry, calculus, or whatever. If you are not on top of your game you’re not going to last long.” The academic support and tutoring provided by the minority engineering program proved to him that he could succeed in college and the difficulty of the program instilled in him a strong academic work ethic he was able to carry forward into math education. The group study tutoring efforts also allowed him to grow closer to classmates and come to understand the role of conversation in understanding coursework.
Eastman did not struggle early with paying for school. Funding for American Indian students was good at that time. He applied for and received many scholarships, and he made use of Pell Grants. As the years in college progressed things got a bit tighter financially speaking. He eventually took out student loans, having extended his college experience by a couple of years due to changing majors, meeting his wife, and starting a family.

**Non-Conformist Thought**

One reoccurring issue Eastman struggled with as an undergraduate student, which became very evident during graduate school, and is still an issue today, conformity, he explains:

I remember growing up watching MTV in high school, it was all about the videos, you might relate to that, then, all of a sudden, I think in the early 90s, you begin to see a shift in MTV from videos to programs. It dawned on me that shift in programming was not really about entertainment but about promoting a certain set of values and required a set way of thinking. These guys are trying to make me think a certain way and I don’t like that, and that’s how I begin to see the university especially in courses that were not the hard sciences…I thought they really wanted to pigeonhole me and make me have a certain viewpoint so that if I said I was Native American they could feel like I was in league with them and I always resented that. It became even more pronounced when I got in graduate school, I’m talking about the PhD experience. I began to see that this was way more pronounced than I would have liked, the idea of multiculturalism. It wasn’t about bringing in and honoring everybody’s perspective, it was about honoring a
certain perspective and I felt that this was a real power issue for faculty and staff and students. I always felt as a native person that I didn’t fit the view of multiculturalism that they wanted me to have. First of all they didn’t understand the language I was bringing to [the multiculturalism discussion] when I started talking about sovereignty and self-determination and all these kinds of issues that are within the native community. I always felt they would applaud but not really understand or were not able to engage in any of the conversations that I wanted to bring to the table in the subject areas. One specific conversation really pulled it out for me and highlighted it and I just said I was done with that. We were in a multicultural education course and they began talking about shaping the minds of teachers to have not just content knowledge but a certain political stance, and to sift out those students that did not fit that stance, or the alternative was to bring those students along, identify them, and then shape their minds so they come out thinking a certain way. I’m just going, is this a reeducation camp? Is this something we really want to do? This is what the gulags were all about eventually, for people who didn’t go along with the program. We want to throw them out the door and not deal with them anymore, or put them on a cart and ship them off somewhere? When I heard those kinds of things I was just like, wow! This is not about education, this is about control.

In his current work with education Eastman still confronts this issue explaining, “Education is a much contested area, and it really is about control, it’s about thought control, it’s about votes, it’s about getting people to think a certain way.” He believes
students need to be presented with both sided of an issue then engaged to formulate their own thoughts and not coached “to think like me.”

Complications of Tribal Life and Traditions

Another area of difficulty Eastman contended with was many various family issues. He had one brother who was incarcerated a couple times, one in the county jail and another time at the state penitentiary while he was an undergraduate student. Eastman would visit him every couple of weeks when he was in the county jail. “I had saved money for college. He broke into my mom and dad’s house and stole my money, so how do you deal with that kind of stuff when you’re a student and you’re just trying to survive?” Another brother later went to jail for a DUI and Eastman would go visit him also. When they were not incarcerated he recalls:

They would call me, my brothers, and they weren’t good when they were drinking beer, and they would be fighting each other. So I would get called 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and have to play the counselor and make sure that they were not trying to kill each other.

These situations created an additional mental burden for Eastman while he was trying to navigate his college experience.

One more issue Eastman believes had a negative or numbing effect on him was experiencing tragedy and a number of deaths while growing up on the reservation:

There are a lot of tragedies that we had to deal with when we were growing up, and I don’t know if this is true of everybody who grew up in rural communities, but life happens, and death happens, and so you begin to kind of become numb to tragedy. A lot of people I knew, died from exposure, car accidents, and cirrhosis.
So there’s all of these kinds of things that you witness and that you see, and you become numb to it. A cousin got in the car accident and rolled a car and died, you know that should be shocking, but it’s just the way it is.

Being away at college and away from what Eastman calls an “everyday thing” made it difficult for him to cope with loss when it occurred:

So you are pulled away from the community when you move away from the rez. Then these things happen and you’re not able to go back and go through the ceremony of grief with family and community members. The mourning feels out of context and becomes very isolated. So you have to find a way to adjust, to stay connected not just to the grief but also for family and community events you no longer can attend because you are not there. It is an adjustment.

He found ways to internally deal with these experiences when they happened, however he states, and “I don’t know that there is any kind of support mechanism for you to have to deal with some of those kinds of things.”

Culturally Eastman would often rely on prayer during difficult times. Yet he maintains a broad and somewhat untraditional perspective about what cultural involvement actually is when discussing American Indian culture:

When we think about culture we oftentimes think of activities, we don’t think about the day-to-day so much. So we mention powwows, we mention ceremonies, and those kinds of things always come up when we talk about Indian cultures. I want to expand that notion and talk about Indian culture in your day-to-day life and how you live and the connections that you have with individuals, because when you talk about Indian cultures it’s always about this connection and
relationship maintenance. You don’t necessarily need a native language to do that, you don’t need, necessarily need, a ceremony to do that, even though that’s what ceremonies are all about in relationship with each other in relationship to creation and God. I am not going to discount language in this because it is a powerful purveyor of culture obviously, so I want to acknowledge that. Powwows are the same way, you go, you appreciate music, you appreciate the dance, but it’s also about the relationships that develop there and the people that you see and maybe you haven’t seen in a while, and being able to reconnect with them. I have friends who are in drum groups. They have spoken to me about the inner camaraderie that is developed singing and practicing together. Invariably Stories are shared – some about the songs, some about how people have lived, life experiences, etc. So again, cultural activities like the powwow and ceremonies serve a very important function in the development of tribal cultural capital within the individual, but they do not represent the only avenues for the dissemination of cultural knowledge and ways of being.

He had access to powwows, sweats, and the Sundance when he was growing up, if he felt he needed to or wanted to participate. He attended powwows as a child, not so much the cultural spiritual practices. As an adult he has attended his wife’s ceremonies more as an observer when she would participate in her cultural ceremonies. Yet spiritually he was raised Catholic. “I could go to mass every weekend, I could pray anytime I wanted to pray, and so relied on those kinds of things [while in graduate school]. That’s how I was brought up and that’s how I practiced my spirituality.”
Self-Improvement as Motivation

Eastman’s decision to attend graduate school began when he was teaching on a reservation in the Southwest. He explains:

First of all, the pay is low as a teacher even though when I first came out I think it was $26,000 and I was thinking, yeah that’s a lot of money, I’m going to be happy, but then I realized it wasn’t a lot of money when I started actually having to live and support a growing family. So part of it was to find a way to make a living more affordable, but also I think the other part of it was to really strengthen my craft as a teacher…I wanted to be a better teacher. I discovered you never stop learning and what you learn is always going to inform how you teach. So graduate school in a school of education seemed an obvious choice to hone my craft.

For him, graduate school was a means of analyzing the work he had been doing as a teacher, learn some new teaching techniques and learning theory, then return to the classroom and apply what he had learned. He was accepted at the same school he did his undergraduate work.

Deciding to pursue the doctorate degree was a different process as he was still not certain of his own intellectual ability, “even though I had obtained a degree in math, even though I received my teacher certificate, even though I was accepted into a master’s program and was on the verge of completing it,” he did not start to consider the doctorate until he neared the end of his master’s program. He asked a math education faculty about the Ph.D., if it was worthwhile and did he have the ability for that level of rigor? The professor affirmed that it was something he should consider. “In my master’s program I
begin to realize that I’m just as smart as these guys, my opinion is just as valid, and I’m doing good work. So it was at that point I said I’m going to apply for the Ph.D. program and go for it.”

Once Eastman started the Ph.D. program his motivation for completion was evident daily and there was never any doubt about not finishing. “I was working full-time, and I had four kids when I started the program and five when I finished. So there was my motivation, my completion would help me raise my kids, to be able to provide for them.” While he struggled internally with various issues from loss to course content, he maintained the attitude of, “let’s get used to this workload and just plow through it.”

I asked Eastman if there were anything he would do differently or change about his educational experiences. After quiet pause with some consideration, Eastman explained that as an undergraduate student, “I might have changed my attitude, my head wasn’t in the game, paying too much attention to all the trappings and distractions found on most college campuses. I also might have given myself more credit for what I knew.” After another pause he continued, “Looking back, I wouldn’t change the graduate school experience. I enjoyed the interactions with faculty and staff, the heightened level of discussion and the mature approach to learning. I was challenged, forced to read things I normally wouldn’t.”

A Lonely Pathway

With our interview coming to a close I asked Eastman if he had any further thoughts on the subject of American Indian men pursuing their doctorate degrees. Stating that he was not certain if all individuals going through a Ph.D. program feel this way, for him, as an American Indian man, he felt it was a lonely existence. There are few
American Indians who had completed the Ph.D. in his area of study to begin with, Mathematics Education. “I was in a program where I did not see a native Ph.D. person for a long time. Perhaps a national conference and then, maybe if I was lucky, I would see just one.”

Eastman’s persistence was influenced by his passion for learning and the pride he has for his heritage and what his ancestors were able to accomplish before him. He was not a first generation college student. His father was college educated and a teacher. He learned about his language and traditions from his aunt and uncle when he was very young. Growing up on the reservation and having the freedom to explore the outdoors and spend time reading and drawing are among his fondest early educational memories. He recalls that his grandmother would send him books and he would spend time in the library whenever it was possible. He remembers being exposed to racism and prejudice when he was younger. However, because he was half white, his skin tone was not as dark as his brothers and he did not experience much racism in college. After messing around too much as a sophomore and getting kicked out of his program, he became a math educator and took up teaching for a while. His pathway to becoming a PhD was not intentional. He wanted to improve his teaching so he went back to graduate school. Once there he was encouraged to pursue his Ph.D. By this time he had a family and he was motivated to complete his education as a better means of supporting them. Another motivating factor was a strong desire to give back to the Indian community as a whole and work to improve Indian life. The Ph.D. has now allowed him a career that enables him to do exactly that while also supporting his family.
Sam: The Leader

Sam is a tenure track assistant professor of education at a Southwestern university where he has been teaching for 5 years. He has worked in both higher education and K-12 for more than 20 years. He is an enrolled member of a small Southwestern tribe and though single he has a large extended family of many relatives, nieces, and nephews.

I was first introduced to Sam through a mutual colleague. I believe it’s important to meet with each subject-actor face-to-face so I drove over 1,100 miles one way for the opportunity to meet with him, and later another subject-actor. We agreed to first meet for lunch at a popular university student hangout spot. Sam easily blended in with the university students. He actually made reference to this later in one of our conversations, being mistaken for a student rather than being recognized as a faculty member. Similar to my size and build but with a short haircut, he was dressed very casual and wearing a bright pink t-shirt. He was very easy to spot from a distance. We greeted each other, had some lunch, and walked across campus to his office.

Starting the interviews Sam immediately opened with a formal introduction in his native language and translates if for me in English. The introduction shares who he his, who his parents are, who his ancestors are, and where his people are from. Sam takes great pride in his own history and both exhibits and maintains a close connection to his ancestral language, traditions, tribe, and family. Surrounded by books and papers, there are photos of his family and relatives on one of his shelves, including an image of his 91-year-old great-grandmother whom he later speaks about.
Inadequate Government School

We begin the conversation with Sam’s earliest educational memories. He explains that he attended a Bureau of Indian Education boarding school as a day student. Over the course of his time there the school expanded from being just an elementary school only to being a full K-12 institution. When he first started school in the early 70s he only spoke his native language and he remembers struggling with the Kindergarten experience as they were only allowed to speak English in the classroom:

I remember I had an African-American teacher, he was really mean to us, and when we spoke our language she’d have us put our hands on top of the piano and she’d slap it with a ruler, a steel ruler, so that told us every time we spoke our language we would get the slapping’s. Some students were thrown into like a closet and then they were not allowed to come out until they agreed not to speak our language again. I think that a lot of our parents were brainwashed because it was that ‘English Only’ movement kind of where parents were told, make sure that your children only speak English from now on. The long-term effects were half of us lost the language, so I’m one of those who lost the language…and now I’m relearning the language.

His later elementary years were better. He remembers having some great teachers in 4th and 5th grade, who were white, really cared about their students. There were no Native American teachers, but many of the teacher aides were Native America. He also remembers having many bad school administrators, but there was one he recalls as being very good, a Native American gentleman from a Great Plains tribe. “He was a real good
Principal, really saw the light in us and saw what we were doing was educating ourselves in a positive way.”

Sam’s middle school years were tough, not dissimilar to many students in that age group; he experienced a lot of bullying. To make matters worse the facilities were run down old dormitory buildings and houses, which they used as classrooms after they closed down the boarding school and became a day school only. The facilities were in such bad condition the school was not even accredited. However, the school kept expanding and adding grades every year. There was some talk about busing students to the big city for school because they were not being educated right and pushed through the system, but that changed when some of their tribal students were shot at while attending that big city school. The elders decided it was safer to just keep expanding the school they had all the way through the 12th grade. By the time he reached 10th and 11th grade there were only 50 students in the whole high school, which is when they finally built a new school. “We never had a gym; we never had a library; the modern amenities, so it was real exciting. Those were probably the best years of my schooling, the 11th and 12th grade when we had a brand-new school.” After Sam graduated they began integrating bilingual and bicultural classes into the curriculum. So while those students behind him began to again learn the language and culture in school, he never had that opportunity.

The Many Blessings of a Medicine Man

Though he lost much of his native language skills and some of his cultural knowledge while in the K-12 system, when he was younger Sam did learn his language and culture while at home. One of Sam’s great grandfathers was a well-respected
medicine man. His mother wanted to become a medicine woman and would take Sam with her when she went to study with his grandfather. He recalls:

I used to be like a patient, a mock patient. I used to sit there, you know, they used to do prayers and stuff like that on me. I remember being blessed and before my mom died I kept asking her why did you drag me over to the medicine man. The medicine man, she said, knew I would go far in education and in life so that’s why. He knew that I needed the prayers, the protection, the blessings, so I’ve been blessed all these years without even knowing it.

In his life and career Sam has found that many things he has pursued have simply fell into place for him or have had positive outcomes, even when he was being punished in school he viewed the experience as learning a lesson.

Sam was spiritually educated at a young age and participated in many healing ceremonies of the years. He has received eagle feathers for each educational milestone he has obtained from his high school diploma to his doctoral degree. These experiences from his earliest memories through the completion of his doctoral degree have enabled him to return to serve his people:

I currently am a Peace Chief in my 12-member council. Part of my duties is to give back to my people. My elders asked me, why are you working at a university, you are not serving us? I tell them, in my way I am and from there I teach dual enrollment and I teach a leadership class at the high school...I helped raise scholarship money for our students.”

The blessings bestowed on him as a child and over the years have enabled him to give back to his community, “that’s what keeps me going. Especially being here at a university
on tenure-track. Sometimes I feel like giving up but then I know my parents and relatives are looking down on me to make sure that I’m doing okay.”

He recalls the many visits his mother made to his great grandfather and medicine man:

I was really involved in a lot of ceremonies and helping out. It was expected. I was very fortunate because I got to participate and get blessed in those ceremonies. A lot of them are no longer done anymore. There are no medicine men that can perform those ceremonies. I feel bad for the kids because they will never experience what I have experienced…I was able to see sand paintings and blessings that were done, but are no longer done anymore. In my own community we don’t have any full-fledged medicine people anymore. We have to travel maybe 3 to 4 hours away, to get a medicine person.

Sam sees the youth of his tribe no longer spiritually balanced and contributes this to losing their culture, language, and medicine.

**Difficulties of Reservation Life**

Sam expresses that losing his cultural identity and language has been the most difficult result of his early educational experiences and he recalls not having the best teachers:

I really pushed away my traditional language and culture at many points during my elementary years, and I got really good at English…I did have problems a lot with mathematics I remember. We had really bad teachers, math and science teachers, because they were just there to teach from the book. We were not
allowed to participate in experiments. A lot of hands-on learning wasn’t really there. It was just learning from a book.

Sam spent much of his junior and senior years in high school in a room teaching himself from a book. He knew that in order to get into a college he needed Algebra, but his school only taught consumer math, so he taught himself. “The teacher would check my work once a week to see what I got wrong and he would tell me what I got wrong or right but he wouldn’t really help.” There were no gifted and talented programs or college prep courses for students on the reservation at that time so Sam was mostly on his own.

He explains that reservation life itself also added to his educational difficulties as a youth:

I think just being on the reservation, just seeing people die from alcoholism and substance abuse. I think about half of my classmates are gone. They never reached 40. Cirrhosis, cancer, people are not taking care of themselves, so I think that’s one of the hardships of growing up back home.

The school and Sam’s class were small at that time. He had maybe less than 20 classmates who graduated with him.

**Poor Odds of Success**

Sam describes one specific memory that affected his decision to attend college. “My grandmother always told me, always remember who you are, where you are from, and where you are going in life if you have strong young wings, and I’m sure you’re eager to fly higher.” However, Sam’s first high school counselor was not helpful at preparing him for college. During his senior year his school hired a new counselor who was really good and did what she could to prepare him and his classmates for life after
high school. However, that preparation did not really direct them to college but rather to get jobs and start families. Sam remembers applying to colleges and universities even though he had a very low ACT score. One of the schools was a small Christian college. They had their own assessment exams and did not relay on the ACT scores. Sam’s love of writing and English helped him score well enough that they accepted him to attend school there. Sam knew this was going to be a challenge:

In my community we had 100% college dropout rate. Everyone that went to college all dropped out within the first semester, but for me I think that my writing kept me going. I didn’t know much about credit hours and all that, but the brothers of this college, those Christian brothers, they made sure that I learned and that I went to class.

There was additional support and encouragement from the Dean of Students and his Resident Advisor who both exerted extra effort to look after the small group of American Indian students at the institution, about 15 students out of a student body of 800. Without their assistance and support Sam would have dropped out of college.

After a little more than a month at school Sam recalls informing the Dean of Students that he was going to drop out and go home because had run out of money. This is when he first learned about FAFSA. Additionally, the Dean of Students had him use his excellent writing skills to complete multiple essays for various scholarship applications. This effort was successful, “they gave me three scholarships, and so I walked out with like $10,000 worth of scholarships.”
Sam understood that college was going to be very difficult. “Everyone that I knew that went to college dropped out within the first semester.” Yet he had one uncle who had attended MIT and earned his doctorate years before Sam was born:

I knew I would follow in his footsteps in some way or manner. I think it took a lot of encouragement and pushing from people to get me to go, especially being male, for males you’re just expected to go to work, you’re not really expected to go to college.

Sam explains that men were expected to start families and work with their hands at menial jobs. “Guys shouldn’t be on the computer or, you know, doing things like girls do. So that’s why very few males pursue it, it wasn’t considered manly to go to college.” In his tribe only Sam and his uncle have doctorate degrees, and only four or five other men have college degrees.

While attending college was both exciting and scary for Sam, he knew the odds of succeeding at college were stacked against him having come from a Bureau of Indian Affairs school. He knew he was academically unprepared and would need to catch up to his fellow students. Fortunately, the first college he attended utilized a placement test of their design and did not use the ACT. He was placed into English 101 and College Algebra. Sam sees this as another blessing he received, unlike many tribal students who end up having to take remedial course work that does not count towards a degree and often results in students becoming discouraged and then drop out of school. “I think that is one way that they weed out a lot of our promising students.”
Personal and Institutional Challenges

After his freshman year, he could no longer afford to continue attending the Christian college so he transferred to the local community college then to the university. Here he began to run into trouble. “I fell into the wrong crowd, drinking, partying, drugs, you name it I did it. My GPA was only 1.0.” Sam struggled with many of the same issues and addictions often associated with reservation life:

I think alcohol was a factor. That became my main push just to party, and I guess that’s what made me happy, but then it brought a lot of problems of its own. It led to suicide attempts and depression. Throughout my college years I was seeing a mental health professional. I really lost balance.

Sam believes it was during this time that he “fell into the city life.” He wasn’t living at home and lost his connection to his tribe and spiritual center.

Sam eventually sought help from Indian Student Services when he was about to be kicked out of school. They instructed him on how to get his grades up and which courses he should take and “which professors are more culturally sensitive. From there I took all the classes that were prescribed and I ended up staying at the university.” Sam had difficulty adjusting to the large university environment and class sizes of up to 600 students. He also struggled with professors who were either not good at teaching or were unwilling to accept or understand his cultural believes. He recalls one class:

I remember, I was taking an American literature class and we had two papers to do and I remember I had an A going but for the final. The instructor told us to write about death and in all of the stories that we’ve read death was the theme. In our way we don’t talk about death, that’s a taboo in our culture. I told my
professor I couldn’t do this assignment. He said no you’ve got to be like everybody else, you’d better do this assignment or you’re going to get an F on your final paper. So I tried writing the paper but it just wouldn’t come together. I knew I was breaking cultural taboos so I didn’t turn it in and he gave me an F. So he averaged out my grade and I got a C-and it didn’t count toward my graduation because I was an English and journalism major.

Sam explained that this was not a unique experience in this one class, with this one professor, but that he had difficulties with other professors also not understanding his cultural beliefs. Another difficulty for Sam was racism. He recalls enduring bullying and physical violence because of his American Indian heritage with little to no consequences for those involved. One administrator actually blamed him for the incidents saying, “You probably deserved this.” Thinking back to what happened Sam states, “You know I had to pull myself together because you’re kind of like on your own, but I learned to live through those types of things happening to me.”

Participation in the Native American student group and learning the financial aid system were most beneficial to Sam:

I was the president of the Native American organization here on campus. I think that really gave me that support system and we supported one another. We were kind of like a close-knit family. We had sponsored events, we raised money, and even to this day we are still friends, and it’s been like 20 years.

He would also involve himself in other campus activities, attending various wellness workshops, and financial aid workshops. Sam also developed, and relies on to this day, a
support system of close connections with his elders back home. “When I do have
problems they help me, you know, get on the right track again.”

**An Unlikely and Difficult Path**

Sam’s decision to attend graduate school and pursue his doctorate was not an easy
one or even planned. He had barely completed his undergraduate degree because of the
various addiction and mental health issues happening in his life. Eventually he ended up
working as a part-time high school tutor. He found that he really enjoyed teaching and
his students encouraged him to become a teacher. “There were no jobs on the
reservation, so the kids helped me to decide what to be. They said you’d be a good
teacher.”

The institution where he had completed his undergraduate studies, initially denied
him graduate admittance. He finally found a school, farther away from home, which
accepted him into their graduate program. However, he quickly discovered that he would
have to contend with prejudice again:

I was the only Native American graduate student that I knew of, and it was one of
the worst educational experiences that I had. When I started going to class I wrote
a really good papers because I was a Journalism and English major. These ladies
[teachers] would say, I overheard their conversations when they saw I was getting
high grades, they only passed him because he’s Indian, or he’s Indian and the
school needed to fill a quota and that’s why they just keep passing him. That’s
why he gets good grades because the professors kind of feel pity for him. It just
created a fire in me to keep going and continue on with those good grades. They
treated me very badly when I was attending graduate school for the first time.
This prejudice was not limited to the faculty. During group classroom work other, mostly white, students did not want to partner with him. His dorm resident advisor and the advisor’s roommates were KKK members with both the Confederate flag and German swastika flag hanging in their dorm room. The result of these experiences was that Sam developed more anger and he knew that he needed to leave that school after only attending for one semester. He again applied to the same institution where he had received his undergraduate degree and this time he was accepted into their program where he eventually finished his Masters in Education.

Sam never initially thought about going to graduate school until his tutoring students encouraged him to become a teacher. He never believed he was smart enough for graduate school yet alone working towards a doctorate degree. Yet, while finishing his master’s degree his faculty kept encouraging him to apply to the doctoral program. Finally, Sam says, “I decided to take a gamble…I just decided to do it and I got accepted and then from there I started taking classes.” He remembers feeling young and knowing in the back of his mind what he wanted to do, but he just never believed he would get as far as he did. He attributes his persistence to his strong writing skills and knowing that if he completed his doctorate:

I could do a lot more for my people. My mom used to call me Professor a long time ago so I said maybe that’s what she saw in me, as well as my great grandfather who was the medicine man. They both thought I would be a professor, so I just went with it from there.

Though the degree took substantially longer to complete, he eventually did persist, completing his doctorate degree and graduating with distinction. It was not until he was
on his way home to the reservation that if finally occurred to him what he had accomplished. “When I drove home that night, I hit the exit to my community and I started bawling. I was like, I went in and now I’m a doctor. It finally hit me when I saw home.”

Responsibility and Respect

Sam was motivated by what he saw as “the need to change Indian education in a positive way.” His mission has been to create educational systems that work for native children through a bicultural and holistic approach. Now, as a faculty member, he instructs his students that they are their culture and language, “if you lose those things you’re no longer going to be a people. You are not going to be unique anymore.” This is particularly saddening for Sam because in his own community he believes there are maybe a half dozen students who are fluent speakers in the school system. In an effort to save the language, Sam has been assisting with the development of a kindergarten and first grade immersion program to be taught entirely in his native language.

Today, Sam practices his traditional way of life as much as possible, getting up early in the mornings, attending blessings, and performing prayers. He is committed to preserving his people’s language and history through teaching and he looks to his elders for guidance:

Elders, I think, are our most important resource that we have. They are the living encyclopedias. That’s what I call them, because they have so much knowledge to give. I invite them to come to my classroom and they teach there. I even invite them to come to the university. They were not allowed to be here back in their day but now it’s really great.
Even his 91-year-old great-grandmother visited the university where he now works and conducted a blessing of the school. She only speaks their native language.

Patience and Humility Influence the Development of Knowledge

Nearing the end of our interviews, I asked Sam if he would change anything about his educational experiences? After a short pause he begins with a long list, as if this is something he has spent time contemplating:

Don’t drink, don’t pollute your body, prepare more, don’t make snap judgments or decisions, practice writing, practice accepting, learn how to be balanced more using your strengths, listening more, especially to the knowledge keepers because sometimes they would get mad at me. One of my knowledge keepers, she’s about 95, when I was in college I was typing when she came over to the house and I said, I’ll be with you in a minute, hold on, I told her and I kept typing away. She got really mad at me. She said, when I come over and visit you, you put that away, that’s bad for you, she said of the computer. She goes you’re not listening to me. You want knowledge like that and it doesn’t work that way. You have to work for it.

Sam recalls that his dad had told him basically the same thing, “find out where it’s at, check out the book, start reading it, and have the patience and time to deeply construct the knowledge.” Today, Sam sees it in the younger generations he works with at the schools. When there are questions to be answered, instead of working to learn the answer and searching library card catalogues or even taking the time to ask elders questions, students simply look up the answer on Google.
I asked Sam about his thoughts regarding American Indian men obtaining doctoral degrees. He begins by first explaining that while having the doctorate has been a wonderful experience and afforded him opportunities he would not have otherwise had, “it gets old after a while.” Culturally he was raised not to brag about his achievements:

You don’t put it on Facebook and say, look at me! You don’t go and try to show people. I do a lot of projects but I keep them to myself. I don’t tell them that I got published. I don’t tell them I’m going up for tenure soon. I keep everything to myself because jealousy runs rampant in my community and they will do whatever they can to stop you from succeeding.

Sam has even lost contact with relatives, “They don’t even look at me or acknowledge me, but that’s the price you pay for being in higher education.”

Sam believes that people who do not want to work hard drive this jealousy in his community. “My aunt, she just got her master’s degree, but she didn’t tell anybody. I said, why didn’t you tell anybody? She says, you know! I said, oh okay, keep it a secret.”

Sam has asked his institution not to publish information about him on their website, but they do anyway. This has caused problems for him especially when money is involved:

So now people treat me different because of my salary, he’s trying to show off, look at him. So we have to keep it secret a lot of times. You don’t bolster yourself.

My goal is to get tenure, just to get to an associate professor. That’s my main goal. Photos of his relatives and his students remind Sam of why he does the work he does and why he completed his doctorate degree. He has been able to help other native students complete their educations, obtain their principal licensure, and he’s been able to travel
around the world and share his knowledge and experiences making a positive difference in people’s lives.

A Male Initiative

Finally, regarding other American Indian men pursuing their educations and working toward completion of doctoral degrees, Sam explains:

I think that we really need to start to create a male initiative to inspire high school males to pursue college. I think that the expectations start in the schools. I remember very low expectations for male students, even when we were in middle school. They didn’t expect us to go very far. When we got to high school it was like, just try to get a job and support your family. I think we need to catch them at junior high and start building them so that by the time they are in high school they are already on a career path. A lot of times I’m noticing that the males in my community, they want quick money. They don’t want to go through the training programs. They don’t want to go to college. They want that money. They want to buy a vehicle.”

He believes that the teachers and counselors, even when they are excellent, need the support of community members who have gone to college and who can serve as role models. However, he also believes that education by itself will not make a huge difference on the reservation without jobs. “There are just not that many jobs back home for them to take. That’s what they’re telling me.”

Sam’s motivation to persist to completion of his doctorate degree has a lot to do with the deep pride he has for his tribal history and the commitment to his tribal community and traditions. Though he talks about initially losing his traditional language
and some of his traditions while he was attending a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding K-12, he has since striven to reclaim and share that knowledge with others. His love of reading and writing not only helped him though is early educational years but throughout his college years and to this day. While not apparent to him initially, he says that somewhere in the back of his mind he always knew he was going to go to college. He just never thought he was smart enough for graduate school. Like his uncle, he eventually completed his Ph.D. The two of them are now the only members of his tribe to receive doctorate degrees.

While away from home, Sam fell in with the wrong crowd and struggled with addictions not unlike the many addiction problems reservations are faced with. It was the connections he had developed with his elders that helped get him back on the right path. Today, he is a leader among his people and the Peace Chief on his tribe’s 12-member council. He expresses concern that American Indian men are just not encouraged to pursue college educations like American Indian women are. The men are often expected to start families and go to work. Sam is now using his education to give back to the tribe and help improve educational methodologies, and create new educational opportunities for tribal people.

**Eddie: The Educator**

Eddie is an enrolled member of a Southwest tribe and works as an associate professor at a large southwestern university. He began his teaching career at home on the reservation in the late 1990s before enrolling in graduate school to obtain his bachelor’s degree in elementary education. Once completed, he returned to his community to teach in the local K-12 system for a couple of years before deciding to pursue his master’s
degree in bilingual education. He moved away from home to pursue a graduate degree eventually earning a doctorate degree. During this time, he was teaching in urban schools working primarily with Indigenous youth and bilinguals. “When I first got into education it wasn’t something I had initially thought I would want to do, but when I started doing it, it was just something that I really enjoyed.” Yet he still did not believe teaching would be something he would continue to do until he became a university faculty. It was then that he realized being an educator was his vocation.

I met Eddie for the first time at his campus office. He was a little apprehensive and guarded at first. We greeted each other, he was polite and professional, but he also seemed to be sizing me up. His office was arranged in such a way as to keep a small desk between us. He was dressed in black and had his hair pulled back and braided into a long black ponytail. Awkwardly, we immediately started the first interview.

An Early Educational Start for Success

Eddie proceeded with a formal introduction in his native language, which was followed with an English translation. I then asked about his earliest educational memories. Eddie recalls participating in a home-based schooling program with his aunt as the instructor. He attributes his academic and professional success to this early start back when he was pre-kindergarten. “I vaguely remember she would sit there and she would show me shapes and colors. She would tell me how to say them in English because I started speaking our traditional language first.” He believes this experience imprinted on him the idea that learning was important. Later, when he began kindergarten, he remembers his mother taking him out to the main road where a small rural school bus would pick him for the day. Eddie didn’t like having to leave home to go to school. His
teacher was white and he remembers she was nice, but the experience was uncomfortable, it was in a different setting and it was not home.

Eddie’s father worked all the time in the oil fields and doing construction. He was gone a lot and Eddie’s older siblings helped care for him. Their mother eventually ended up sending them to boarding school because it was difficult for her to care for them at home. With their father gone, taking their only vehicle to work, she had no way to transport the kids to the bus or to town.

Eddie began attending boarding school half way through kindergarten. In the dorms they would separate children by age. Though his brothers were still around to console him when they could, he still remembers being very homesick and crying:

So they separated us from the older kids and they took the older kids to the gym. I ran into my room crying and I was looking out my window and they were walking down to the gym and I think I stood there for a long time crying and finally I just went to bed. So that kind of stuff stands out to me, more then what we actually did in the classroom.

While being away from home was difficult for Eddie, classroom learning was easy for him and to this day he still attributes that to the home-based learning his aunt conducted with him. He was doing so well that when he was in 1st or 2nd grade he was one of the students featured in a public interest story in the local newspaper. He remembers being asked what he wanted to be when he grew up. “I was trying to think of something and I remember my dad talking about when he was a police officer, so I thought that would be cool, so I said I wanted to be a state police officer.”
Boarding schools can be traumatic experiences and Eddie had his share of those. One positive experience was that other young kids who also spoke his native language also attended school with him:

So that is what we spoke. I think one of the things that, in hindsight, it was a good thing that we were put into the school where we could do that, which is very different from the old boarding school mentality where people were told not to speak their language.

The only place they were not allowed to speak their language was in the classroom. English was mandatory there and if they tried to use their native language the teachers would correct them. “In the dorms, in the cafeteria, we were allowed to speak our language. So I think that was probably the one thing that I think was good, for a lot of the students that went to school with there.” This shared experience is something Eddie, his brothers, and their classmates still talk about and joke about today.

Eddie and his brothers attended school there for eight years. Family housing was eventually built and his family was able to get one of the homes and move into the community from the country. His dad also returned home from working jobs far from home and obtained a job close to town working for a local agriculture company.

**High Expectations**

High school was a different experience now that he lived at home and no longer in the dorms. He recalls being placed into honors classes:

I don’t know if I was that smart. I think a big part of it was I just knew how to take a test, because I remember a lot of things just came easy. I look at my peers they were probably just as smart as I was they just weren’t really prepared.
Of the maybe ten students he went to school with through 8th grade, he believes only two or three graduated high school with him. Of those students, Eddie was the only one to continue on to college.

Eddie recalls that early on he only had a couple of native teachers up through 2nd grade. Most of his teachers from then on were white:

The white male teachers were usually the mean ones, but the female ones were usually kind and caring. I remember my 4th grade teacher, she was an old lady, I would always finish my work, then I would be done and I will show her my work and I guess she wanted to give me something else to do, so she went into her closet and brought out this big old box of books. That’s when I read the Lord of the Rings trilogy. I read the Chronicles of Narnia trilogy.

Being able to access and read many different books and having parents and teachers with high expectations helped him get through school.

One specific example of being held to high expectations occurred when he was first placed into honors classes. He intentionally failed so he could spend more time with his peers and not be viewed by them as being different:

My dad had a long talk with me and he said those people are just going to hold you back. You need to do this for you. So then I turned it around and in 10th grade I did better and I got put back into regular courses. By the time I reached 12th grade I went back into the honors classes again.

Transitioning from middle school to high school is difficult for many students and the boarding school experience did not help the situation. Eddie sees young students in this
age group struggle like he did and feels they need lots of support, encouragement, and for someone to also have high expectations of them as well.

**Fighting for Survival**

Physical conflicts in school also seemed to be somewhat common both during his elementary boarding school years and his high school years. “I remember a couple of years when I was like 4th or 5th grade we had these gangs within the dorms, and I don’t know why we did that but we just started creating these gangs without no reason.” They would meet in the bathrooms and have fights to see who was the toughest. When new students arrived at school the same thing took place. Eddie equated it to a Lord of the Flies type of experience. “I guess it’s natural because if you put people into an institution, like a boarding school, or prison, or whatever, or even the military, I imagine you kind of have like this pecking order.” Eventually the gangs and these types of fights mostly passed.

During his high school years there was a lot of drinking and fighting in the dorms and some students would be kicked out. Eddie experienced this once and didn’t like it. Additionally he says, “My parents got after me when they found out. I think one of my brothers saw me doing that and they told my parents.” He believes another contributing factor to the fighting was that when he and other students reached high school many of them had not been around students of various races and backgrounds:

When we got to high school I remember there was a lot of fights between the native students and others. There were even native students that grew up in in town, so they were like the city natives, and they always looked down on the rez. So we have that conflict between the rez natives and city natives. I remember one
year like almost a whole semester, there was this huge conflict between, I guess it must’ve started with some guys over a girlfriend, then they were getting into fights, then gangs. I remember there was one year, there was like four of us, and there was like eight of those guys, and I was telling those guys, you know don’t fight them just leave them alone. These people I was with were younger guys, they were like freshman then, I think I was a junior, and I told them just let them walk, but they would try to corner us and we would stand there and just ignore them. I always remember there was like three natives, and they were the worst ones, they were really taunting us and saying racial slurs and I was thinking, aren’t you like native too? Why are you saying that to us?

Eventually this subsided as the principle became involved, “I remember in my senior year it seemed to be pretty smooth, I don’t recall anything in particular that stands out like racial comments or whatever, at the school, it was pretty smooth.”

The racial and social tensions he experienced while attending school is still a problem today. “I mean, you still go to these small towns and you can feel the racial tension, it’s just there.” Eddie believes economics and access to resources plays a large role in these conflicts. In recent years there has been a boom in oil production regionally and he’s witnessed a steep increase in conflict, not only between native and non-native, but also native to native.

Support of Family and Church

During those years Eddie had two support systems, his peers who were going through the same boarding school experiences, and his family back home. When he began to stray with his peers his parents and brothers got after him and corrected him.
His family support system is what helped to eventually take him all the way through his college and university years. “You know, when you get to college it’s a whole new experience, you are on your own and all these things are happening. I always think about how I did some really crazy things and wonder how I got through?” Without the support of his parents, siblings, and relatives, he may not have gotten through.

In high school Eddie also began participating in more ceremonies and started attending the Native American Church rather than going out partying and drinking on the weekends with his school peers:

So I would attend that, it kept me away from them, I mean we were still friends; I still hung out with those guys during the week. I always remember them Monday’s, hung over, talking about the weekend, laugh about it, but I know that’s not what I wanted, and I think that’s what really got me through high school, that’s what got me into college.

To this day Eddie believes strongly that traditional songs and prayers are what helped him get through school and he also believes those same songs and prayers are what’s needed to get today’s youth, like his own young son, through life and through college.

It was the expectations of his parents and siblings that guided his decision to attend college. They never directly instructed him to attend college but he knew they supported his education and wanted to see him do well. His older brothers either went to work right away or joined the service after high school. Everyone did well, but his experiences had been geared towards school and that’s where he did well. The Marines had tried to recruit Eddie but his second oldest brother, who was the first of Eddie’s
brothers to join the service, stepped in and told him, no. He told Eddie that he needed to go to college.

The summer before his senior year of high school Eddie participated in a summer business program on the university campus. He became familiar with the campus and what it was like to live there and attend classes there. He made some friends there and so when the time came to apply for colleges and universities, he applied to the same school where he had attended the summer business program. He got accepted and began working on his business degree. He later realized he didn’t like business and changed majors. He began reading native authors like Sherman Alexi, A.J. Lewis, Vine Deloria Junior, and Russell Means. These new interests eventually lead him to another large Southwestern university.

While attending the Native American Church where his uncle was a traditional leader, Eddie remembers the congregation would pray for people’s wellbeing, their good health, and they would pray for people’s educations. That prayer for people’s educations left an impression on him. He would also hear members of the congregation talking about wanting to go to college and come back and help their people and their communities. When Eddie first started going to college he would also say that he was there to get an education so he could return home and help his people. “I think I said that for a while, maybe a year or two. But then when I really thought about it, it became cliché. Is that really what I’m doing?” Through the Native American Church he learned to value relationships, have respect for others, and reciprocate good will and deeds back to his community. The boarding schools experiences tried to beat these ideals out of American Indians, but Eddie reflects, “Somehow we were able to maintain them.”
feels there is an ongoing attempt to continue beating these ideals out of students when they attend college. “People are told you can do this, you can do that, you can go into this program, but really what they are telling you is it’s for yourself, you, you, you.” When young students fall for this idea about their education being about them rather than giving back to the community he believes this is where the ‘brain drain’ comes from, younger people moving to the big cities rather than returning home.

**Ready but Unprepared**

Like many young college students, Eddie believed being off on his own would be exciting, yet he was still a little anxious. He believed that being a native kid the courses might be difficult and he was not sure he was academically prepared for college. Conversely he also felt challenged and inspired that he had the opportunity to go to college thinking, “You know, I can do this!” He was also inspired by being in a new environment, meeting new and interesting people, and knowing that he was the first in his family to go to college.

Once Eddie received his acceptance letter, both he and his parents were excited. They planned the trip to travel to student orientation so he could get his start that fall. Being the first member of his family to attend college, nobody really knew what to expect. He pictured it similar to boarding school or the summer program he had attended, where everything was provided for you. He showed up with just the clothes on his back. His mother had been asking, “Do you need any linens, sheets, pillowcases, all that stuff?” Eddie had told her no. Once he was through orientation and registration and he checked into the dorm and received his room key, only to discover there was nothing in the room:
You know my family wasn’t, we had financial struggles, so my dad wasn’t expecting that. We had to go to Wal-Mart I think and we had to buy some of that stuff. So in the end, by the end of that day I was tired, I was frustrated, and then my dad says okay, I guess we’re going to leave now. He goes, I don’t have a lot of money but here, and gave me like $40 and that’s all I had. I said that’s fine; I think my financial aid is supposed to come in. So that weekend went by, the following week went by, about two weeks in, because I don’t know if you know about travel scholarships, but sometimes they take a long time. So by the time I was getting close to getting my Pell Grant and all that stuff, because that would have only covered tuition room and board, I needed extra money. I was pretty much out. So I told my parents, and my dad said I can’t help you. Well, I said, maybe this isn’t the right time.

He withdrew from college and took a job working at a local convenience store as a clerk. Working mostly the night shifts and someday shifts, he saved as much money as he could. He went back to school in the spring and was able to complete the whole semester.

This was a good lesson for Eddie, because he believes that if he had tried to stick it out longer he would have only become more disenchanted with the experience. Returning home to work set the idea into his mind that he did not want to spend his life working the night-shift for $9.00 an hour. “That really got me thinking I had to go back to college.”

**Developing Relationships for Success**

The friends Eddie had initially made during that summer program between his junior and senior year of high school, and with whom he had reconnected with when he
started college again in the fall after high school graduation, were excited to see him return in the spring. Those friends created a support system for him during his first two years of college as they spent a lot of time together, and became involved in various extracurricular activities together. Neither completed college at the same time as Eddie. Both dropped out for different reasons. One later returned to finish and the other eventually went off to another institution. Like Eddie, they both went off to work for a while and realized those jobs were not what they wanted to spend their lives doing either.

Over time Eddie developed other relationships, which kept him engaged in school. One such individual was a graduate student. He was a tall, blond, and “ladies man” from Fargo whom they nicknamed “The Viking:”

He was like the coolest person, the mellowest white dude I ever met. Just really mellow, smoked a lot of weed, he would play guitar, we would just sit in his room, plays blues. You know when I think about it now I don’t think the issues of race never came up, we were so open about it. He would ask me where I was from, he would be interested in knowing, and ask me to talk about it. So that was one cool guy I met and he would always tell my friend and me that, yeah you guys are just undergrads, you guys are fresh meat, because we were like freshmen that first year. He was also like, you guys have to get done, and you have to do this for your people.

Then it was another older graduate student, a white gentleman from Pittsburgh, who got him into reading beatnik literature and listening to Bob Dylan. Eddie also became friends with two really preppy guys from the state of Washington. He would take trips with them in their Audi and they would go to parties together. During one party some people were
making some rude comments about Indians and these prep guys stood up for Eddie. He explains that these experiences “are what got me realizing that people aren’t all that bad as you get to meet more people.”

**Challenges of College Life**

While Eddie was building relationships and friendships with a number of white kids he was also getting caught up in the college life and all the parties. He met a lot of native students from other tribal groups and joined the Native American organization on campus, participating in the drum groups, singing, and attending powwows:

When I tell people that, it’s not like I was just partying 24-7, like I said it was a weekend sort of thing. Some weekends were boring, but some weekends were not, because I think, and the other part of that is because I think I knew where to draw the line, but sometimes it became a challenge. For me I think that was the most difficult thing because when I think back to it I used to write poetry and I looked at some of the stuff I wrote recently. I said wow did I write this?

Rereading what he wrote years ago brought back memories of what he was struggling with at the time. He would make new native friends, but after a semester they would drop out and return home while he continued on.

Finances were also difficult. His dad was supporting Eddie the best that he could, but as Eddie began his fourth year his dad began to ask when he was going to finish? Eddie had not told his father that he had switched from the business program to undeclared. He eventually admitted to his parents that he was going to major in something else because business was not what he wanted to do. This was not an easy task, “I knew that would be frowned upon by my family and the other part of me was
telling me it’s not who I am. So that’s why I really had to change things around.” He went on to find a different program in southwest studies. Most of his friends at school were now Native Americans from around the country. Like Eddie, most of them had goals of helping their communities and many of them went on to become very successful.

Unexpected Opportunity to New Motivation

After completing his bachelor degree Eddie began looking for a graduate program in cultural anthropology. He thought this would be a good fit with his Southwest Studies degree. However, he didn’t really plan ahead and once he got home his dad told him about a teaching job in the local school. Eddie applied and began his teaching career. He also learned that there was going to be a cohort of native students like himself meeting locally on the weekends to work on their master degree. Everything fell into place and he was able to work as a teacher and study as a graduate student all from his home community:

I didn’t go into teaching, I said I kind of fell into it. So when my dad told me that it’s not going to be hard, because I had never thought about teaching, had never even considered it. I was like what’s so hard about it? It’s just a simple thing of sitting at the front desk opening up your teacher’s textbook and telling students to read. Why was I thinking that? It was because that was my experience. Our teachers would just tell us to read these and do these problems and then you’re done. So that was exactly what I was thinking, it shouldn’t be so hard, and that was totally not my experience. Most of my students could read but they were like three or four grade levels behind. They were fourth grade students reading at a
second grade level, some probably even at a first grade level, it was that bad. I had no classroom management skills, so I practically learned on the job.

He continued taking graduate courses with his cohort the entire time he was teaching. He would raise issues like classroom management with the cohort. He eventually learned about child psychology, but in many cases he was learning after the fact, after he experienced something and was in need of finding a solution, a real trial by fire experience.

Eddie was working for a White principal who refused to respect tribal traditions or even take time to learn a few basics of the tribal language. This was highlighted during one presentation:

He walks up to the mic and he says, Yatahey! First of all, that’s not how you say it. It’s yá’á’t’ēéh (you have to emphasize the high tone sounds), but that’s how cowboys say it, Yatahey. Then he goes, that’s all the Navajo I know, and he went into his long talk about nothing. I was sitting there thinking are you serious, because I knew he had been there for a long time? I was thinking, you had been in the school for over 20 years as a principal, your family has lived in this community for over three generations, and that’s all our language you know?

Eddie also had other conflicts with this principal. He would often let students off the hook, in the process inadvertently encouraging them to cause more problems in the future. Eddie pushed back and told the principal he was wrong. Parents were later involved and supported Eddie’s perspective and actions.
Eddie knew then that if he did not obtain the same level of education as the principal he would never be able to have any impact what happens at that school, or with the curriculum and policies:

I thought unless I can sit at the table with the white man I can’t have any impact on my community. So that was really the driving force for me to continue. Even when I came here I kept thinking, why am I going through this, why am I racking up on the student loan bills? That was the reason why I almost didn’t finish, was money. It was either rack up some loans or just quit. I figured well, I’ve got a long life ahead of me you know. What’s more important? Getting those letters behind my name, not for myself but for my community and other young people to say I can do it, or worry about financial things.

Like many, Eddie now has a large number of student loans that affect him financially, but he does have that education to rival his former principal.

**A Transformative Process**

He recalls that his uncle, who was the spiritual leader of their community, told him of a visit he had made to a Canadian community and an elder with home he had spoken to. The elder was worried about all the traditional knowledge that was being lost. She stressed that the young people need to become well educated, not just in the western way, but also in their traditional way. He then tells Eddie:

Of a lot of tribes, ours is one of the strongest, but even then we’re losing it fast. I think that’s something that you are really going think about. You can either stay here and try to learn that, but it would be hard to make money and make a living,
or you can get an education and then advocate for that, get the young people to understand the importance of that, their language and culture.

This is a very clear memory for Eddie as his uncle was speaking to him in their traditional language. This motivated Eddie to complete his own education so he could go on to help other people complete their educations.

Persistence to completion of his doctoral degree has been part of what Eddie believes was a transformative process, the “notion of putting theory to practice, actually living it, actually doing it.” He also believes there has been a spiritual aspect to his persistence as he had gone through the process of discovering his personal identity and true vocation. Early in his life it was family and members of the Native American Church that helped guide him on this path of discovery. Later, his wife has taken on that role of providing loving support and guidance. Eddie also references John Dewey talking about education as a vocation:

It’s not just a job, it’s not just a career, and it’s a lifetime worth of work, so then when you think about it, what does that really mean? I think for me I begin to realize that every community, every indigenous community, has healers, has educators, has people who are knowledgeable about plant life and animal life, has hunters, and has warriors. So I think, in that sense, once I begin to understand that for myself, it is education, to be a teacher, to pass on the knowledge.

It was his uncle who asked him if he knows what his calling was, what was his vocation? Eddie finally realized that as an educator he could inspire other educators and young people to learn their language, learn their culture, and discover their own identities.
During his undergraduate and graduate years his mother was also a good resource for him. When things were difficult she would ask him if he was taking care of himself? He always said he was. Then she would ask if there was something he was not taking care of? Finally, on a return trip from visiting his parents he realized she was not asking him about if he was physically taking care of himself, eating well and getting enough rest, she was referring to his emotional wellbeing. She was concerned that he was treating people well and was he socially engaged with others, signing and praying, participating in drum groups. This was his mother’s way of supporting and encouraging him to persist, some simple words of inspiration and advice.

When Eddie finished his degree his mother again provided him with some additional wisdom and inspiration:

All those people that used to come to our prayer service meeting, all those people that prayed for you, what they said for you, what feelings I shared with you, it’s right there, it finally came to be. That’s what happened. It wasn’t just you, it was all those people that helped you.

There is a temptation to believe we alone accomplished such achievements, but his mother was reminding him not to forget that he would not have succeeded without the love, support, and prayers of all these other people.

**Finding His Red Road**

Eddie has recently gone through the tenure process but reflects back and realized it did not really matter if he did or did not receive tenure. For him, it’s not about “me, me, me” which he so often sees in academia. He believes that his ancestors have guided him to where they wanted him to be, “It wasn’t just personal perseverance, it wasn’t just
personal motivation, it was all these things pushing you and pushing you. Sometimes you take a left turn sometimes you take a right turn but something keeps you going.”

Eddie completed his education and doctorate degree before getting married and starting a family. Looking back this was not a traditional pathway for men or women to follow:

Back home, that’s not the norm. A lot of people they get married young, some cases teenagers, and then some cases early 20s, and then they to college. Which is funny because what I hear the elders, the parents, and the grandparents telling us is to get an education first and then start a family.

When he and his wife were first moving into a house together and were talking about getting married, one of his nephews offered to help them move. While hauling everything to their new home his nephew commented how cool it was that Eddie had obtained his degree first, and then he had decided to get married, “you are the only one who did that.” Eddie had not considered this before and upon further reflection began to understand it was also another connected part of the entire process he has passed through to get to where he is today. His early participation in church meetings and traditional ceremonies helped preparing him for taking on increasing responsibilities. Completing his education and doctorate degree have better prepared him for raising his own family while being a role model for others in his community.

When I asked Eddie if there was anything he would do differently about his educational experiences he first responded with what assistance he believes would have benefited him while still in high school. He feels that he needed better advisement to get him thinking farther ahead and to plan for where he wanted to be ten years after
graduation. He is seeing that schools are doing a better job of this now, but feels more could be done to create a better ‘pipe line’ or pathways from high school to college. He thinks this type of pathway could have helped provide him with additional experiences off the reservation. “Back when I was growing up my world was the reservation, the boarding schools, that was my world.”

During his college years Eddie states, “I should’ve listened more to my parents, like really listening to what they’re saying, instead of just listening to what I wanted to hear.” He also wishes that he had been more financially literate. He believes this might have helped him find additional resources and scholarship opportunities rather than simply being there and getting by from year to year on student loans. “I think I could’ve been more prepared in that way.”

Since completing his doctoral degree Eddie feels his life has become more challenging. His wife had two children from a previous marriage, so he instantly gained a family. They went on to have two more children. Later, they moved his mother in to live with them so they could care for her before she passed away. Most recently, going through the tenure process of was long, difficult, and stressful. Finally, teaching new and unique subjects has created additional challenges:

I have to be not just one step ahead, but also stand behind my students. What does that mean? It’s like if I’m teaching social justice how do I practice it? If I’m teaching cultural responsive pedagogy how do I do it? If I’m talking about indigenous education, what is it?”

Teaching has become more than just sharing knowledge with his students, it is also about living the lessons that he is teaching and being a role model. To this end, Eddie has
become involved with language and community revitalization back home on his reservation, but like many communities with limited resources, it often comes down to a lack of funds.

Today he tries to pass on and teach the beliefs he learned from his parents to his own four children. The beliefs of valuing relationships, having respect for others, and reciprocating good will and deeds back to the community:

Some people say the Red Road, but ours is a path that just naturally seems to work with all other indigenous ways. So like a lot of our young people now are into the powwow, which I guess is the Red Road, which I guess comes from the north. The circle, dance, song, and so forth, but also the Native American Church is the same way. A lot of those ceremonies, they have altars, and they have that road. But then I guess when you look at Christianity it’s the same thing, they talk about the road of life. So it’s that way thinking I think that was being formed in our lives and I think that all goes back to my parents.

His parent’s involvement in the Native American Church and what he learned from the church and his parents has played a significant role in his life, but Eddie states that the traditional ceremonies were always there, “my paternal grandfather was a traditional healer, and so we have always had that in our life.”

Eddie’s drive to persist to completion of his doctoral degree developed over time. He views his educational path as a transformative experience. Early in his child hood he was taught an appreciation for learning and reading through a home based schooling program his aunt taught him. Eddie’s first language was his traditional native language and not English. When he began Kindergarten he and his brothers ended up moving to a
Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school because his family lived too far out in the country. He recalls the eight years of school there as being very traumatic, but he does remember the other children also spoke his traditional language so when they were not in class they could continue to use the language they grew up with.

School was easy for Eddie. He loved reading and writing. In college he was not financially prepared for school and had to drop out his first semester to return home and work, but he returned the following semester. He finished his degree and fell into a teaching opportunity back home. He was able to begin to give back to his community. However, he had conflicts with his principal and quickly realized that if he was ever going to make a real difference he needed to be at the same educational level as his white principal or he would never be able to affect change.

**James: The Protector**

James, a practicing lawyer, is an enrolled member of a Rocky Mountain tribe. His mother is a full blood member of her tribe and English was her second language. His father was affiliated with another tribe and spoke several different tribal languages as well as English. Both his mother and father had families from prior marriages with five children each. James was child number 11 and the youngest.

They lived on the edge of the reservation and he attended school at a border community with a mix of native and nonnative students. His mom decided this was beneficial for them to maintain connections to all their relations while also learning English at school. When at home, their native language as well as English was spoken.

His father was a Korean War vet and his step grandfather, who also helped raise him, was a World War II vet. He had two uncles who were Marines, Vietnam vets, and an
aunt who was in the navy. Over the years, several related families lived in the little singlewide trailer James called home. James remembers that for a couple years he stayed in a tent or on the floor in the trailer.

Through stories he learned that his clan was known for traveling and following the game. They thought of themselves like a beaver dam, together they were strong; separate they could be broken easily. His family frequently traveled to visit local relatives providing James an opportunity to hear many stories from other relatives. He developed a deep connection to them and to the land through hunting, fishing, and simply being on the sacred lands. Many things were scarce when he was growing up, but game meat and potatoes were always on the table. His family had very little, “We were rich in culture but we didn’t have much money.”

I was introduced to James through a mutual acquaintance. He was someone I had not expected to meet, yet alone include as part of this study. The high profile work he has done in recent years has made him a bit of a celebrity, however, that is not a position he is comfortable being in. Once he was given the opportunity to achieve even higher recognition, however, he declined the offer so he could return home to his roots. We met to conduct our interviews at a local coffee shop and convention center in the city where he and his family now live, not too far from his hometown and tribal community. We greeted each other, grabbed some coffee, and found a quiet corner to begin.

James presented himself very professionally and arrived dressed business casual in a nice pair of jeans, dress shoes, dress shirt, and sport coat vs. the full suit and tie he would wear in court. Average height with a bit of an athletic build, you could tell he was taking good care of himself now, which, as he tells me later, was not always the case. He
was also a bit guarded at first, concerned about anonymity because of his celebrity. I reviewed the protocols with him again and stressed that he and I would work together to ensure he is comfortable with what information is shared. Satisfied, we began with me asking about his earliest educational memories.

**An Easy School Life and a Hard Home Life**

His earliest memories of school was that he didn’t want to go to school, he wanted to stay home, play cards with his step-grandfather and listen to the many stories he told. His Mom didn’t realize kindergarten was mandatory so he was only going part-time. He was allowed to continue on to the next grade but school just wasn’t as interesting as what he was learning at home:

I remember just thinking there was so much more of a flow at home then at school. It seems like everything was in a box. Everything had to be this way. You had to follow this, you had to do it, this is how it’s taught, and this is the sequence. I just remember that feeling really foreign at first, then I decided I needed to teach myself what they are saying and so I started to learn and very quickly excelled.

He appreciated teachers who recognized his abilities and were kind to him, but there were also those teachers “who were not very nice for no reason at all, and it just seemed like it was always one way or the other.” He remembers his second grade teacher just did not understand how he was able to complete all his math assignments before all the other students. She would always scrutinize them immediately in front of class but they were never wrong. What she didn’t realize was he had been counting cards and keeping score with his step-grandfather for years and by the time he reached second grade he had
already developed strong math skills. James continued to excel in many subject areas and they began putting him into gifted and talented classes. “School always came fairly easy and I worked hard but it was never really difficult. It was just when I had a teacher with a difficult personality who just couldn’t relate to me, just knew that I was tribal and different.”

James found that with the support of teachers who would challenge him, school was an opportunity for him to just focus on one thing and push himself farther. This was in stark contrast to his experiences at home where, where he felt there were many different things that needed to be done for the family. “I guess by the time I hit high school, there was kind of some challenging periods in there you know with a lot of stuff at home, but it seems like I could go to school and I was kind of left alone.”

James explains that there was a lot trauma his family went through. There was a lot of drinking, some fighting, and PTSD from both military service and intergenerational trauma. He remembers an uncle who just went missing for weeks. Then there was the death of his father, which no one talked about or explained to him:

According to people near the incident, my mom and dad were in a conflict and an accident occurred - so he passed when I was three years old. My mom continued to raise all of us in a disciplined kind of way, and so we were always just told we’ve got to do our part, so I never missed a day of school first through eighth grade, not one day. I went every single day.

His daily experiences were going to school and acting one way, then returning home where he would have to act another way, “It was like night and day.”
James continues to explain that there was then the death of his step-grandfather whom he was very close to, and the death of his sister starting his sophomore year. There was always a constant sense of loss. James recounts physical violence as well:

People would claim that they’re getting you ready for life, and just punch you in the gut, wrestle with you, knock you down, tell you to get ready and toughen up. I remember my brothers used to keep preparing me for the outside life because everyone dislikes Indians, everyone’s against us, so you got to be ready to fight…My nose was broken three times. A lot of fighting, unnecessary too, but they claimed they were getting us ready for the world.

James was also the designated driver for his close relatives. He would have to track them down to get them home and ready for the workweek. He avoided becoming involved with the wrong crowds while visiting his relatives who lived on the bad side of town. “I always kind of knew deep down right and wrong so I made sure not to go too far on the wrong side.” He states how it was really just about surviving at times, “to just make it past the weekend, make it to the next week of school.”

James “felt some racism in school” but he was determined to do well and end up getting straight A’s. He did have difficulties with some teachers:

I remember one time we were learning about state history and there was like one page of an Indian in a book and the Indian was attacking a stagecoach and I raised my hand and said that’s not even what it was like, we were here first, people were attacking us, and we were defending our homeland. I got sent to detention, but I knew then that I had to stand up for everything that I knew was right.
James learned to take responsibility for himself, and when needed, for other family members, his cousins, his sisters, and for people who are not able to assert their own will:

So I always tried to protect those that were less fortunate and tried to provide for them and then eventually, I would help out the adults and then before you know it I was the one writing everyone’s correspondence and helping them with whatever they had, whatever they needed. The older women in the family talked to my eldest brother and said, we need to keep him busy, so I was a mechanic for my brother on weekends and summers for 6 or 7 years, and I received an old car for my several years of mechanical service. That was a lesson too, in learning to set boundaries and working hard for what you had.

James was always working to take care his family and whatever needed to be done.

Another incident he remembers having a deep impact on him occurred when he was in 7th grade. One day he was called over the intercom to come to the conference room. Once there he found his teachers were waiting to talk with him about having him removed from home. James was an excellent student but they were concerned about his performance, especially being tired all the time and having differing emotions:

It was a terrible moment to think that’s what everyone thought. My mom reacted angrily and she went to the school and she confronted them and she said, no you’re not going to do this. You leave him alone! I don’t ever want to hear of this happening again. What else do you want from this child?

The issue never came up again and James remained at home.

James played a lot of basketball in and out of school. “It’s just part of the culture. Everybody played basketball. Everybody watched basketball. I remember even in the
wintertime I’d wear snow gloves and be shooting outside when you can’t dribble a ball, and we just had plywood and a metal rim.” James also played baseball and some football. He believes staying active, playing, working, and going to school, helped get out some energy and used up his spare time, keeping him out of trouble and prepared him for his career.

**A First Generation Path to College**

Nobody in James immediate family had ever attended college. There was no one to guide him through the process. He felt that he was on his own. “I didn’t have anyone who kind of took me under their wing and explained anything to me really…I just knew that I wanted to try college and finish with something.” He involved himself in all the advanced placement courses he could. The counselor tried to push him to pursue vocational training “because that’s what folks like me were good at, a mechanic, and I told him no I want to go to college.” James did not go back for advice from the counselor but went to the regional BIA office for assistance and they helped to get him started with college applications and classes that he needed to complete. “I just took it over from there.”

James was also motivated by a little bit of jealousy. Since he began working at the age of 12 he always envied other people who were able to just have fun because they had financial resources while he had to work hard all the time. “I just thought I’d better go to college unless I want life to be like this, work a whole bunch just to make ends meet.”

James talked to his mother about college, but his family was poor and he knew this was going to be a challenge. He also knew that he was just as smart as the other kids
talking about going off to college. He was in the honors classes and he had mostly A’s even though he worked all the time, “I thought I was a good candidate for college.” He started going to the library and reading about colleges and then asked the BIA education person for help. This was after his sister had passed and his life at home started to calm down. He had three good years in high school with a lot of good experiences, good teachers, and his mother’s strong support. It was also during this time he learned more about the history of his reservation, his people, their legends, their history, and their quiet strength. James believes it’s that quiet strength “that I was like I’m going to college no matter what. It was just a question of when and where.”

James knew he needed to find a scholarship or some other financial means to pay for college. He thought about joining the military service, like so many of his relatives, and using the G.I. Bill to help pay for college, “everyone went to the military, I’ll go to military like everybody else.” Then, one week before he joined the Navy, the BIA education person he had been working with called and told him that he qualified for a scholarship to go to college.

After applying to several schools and doing a lot of research, James finally had a call from a recruiter at a southwestern university known for their robust support of native students:

We’d love for you to join us, and we have a lot of natives here. I thought that sounds awesome! I mean I’d love to live in another desirable location and as long as you’ve got a bunch of natives, that’s all I’ve ever been around, so I need that connection, so that’s what I decided to do, go there.
He remembers loading up his small pickup truck, then driving down to the desert southwest with no air-conditioning and arriving to a temp of 107°. Without really knowing what he was doing he went to orientation, opened a bank account with his scholarship, began asking a lot of questions, and went to the Native American center to begin making connections.

After several weeks, James remembers becoming homesick. He called and talked to his mom about coming home. She said to James:

You’ve worked too hard. Just stay there for a while. Just try to work it out. I said there’s no one here from our homeland. She said, I know, but there’s Indians everywhere. You’ll meet some friends. It’ll be good to meet somebody new.

You’ve been in this world where everyone knew everyone, sometimes it’s fun to try something different. So, I stayed and then did very well, all A’s and B’s in engineering.

He stayed in school, never dropping out, earning all A’s and B’s in the engineering program.

It was still financially difficult. During his freshman year he did have to ask his mom if she could send him some money like he saw other parents do for their college kids. She responded, “I don’t have any money. I’m barely making the bills. I will send you a care box.” About a week later, half way through the semester, this care box arrived full of ramen noodles and tuna fish:

That was my care package and I see all these other kids getting endless things and having unlimited bank accounts and I just knew where my place was, which was to grind it out and eat what you’ve got to eat to survive, just make it through.
James viewed this as a great lesson about wealth, happiness, and what a person actually needs in life. He saw fellow students who had access to lots of money but just didn’t seem to care. During his second year he found a job to help pay for school. He was determined to obtain his undergraduate degree.

**Importance of Community**

James had no real expectation of what college would be like because he had not talked to many people who had been through the experience. Yet, while he had no idea what it was going to be like, but he knew it was something he had to do. “I didn’t really know too many people who went to college and finished. I just thought I needed to do it to open up opportunities in life.” He describes being overwhelmed and humbled by the scale of the university campus, having never before set foot on any college or university campus. “I couldn’t believe these mini communities existed for higher education. I remember just walking around staring up at the buildings because I came from a trailer on the edge of the reservation, there were no multi story buildings or anything.” Another challenge for James was the sense of feeling lost and the anonymity he experienced for the first time in his life. “That was a bit alienating and it was really important that I connect with the Native American community.” While he was the only member of his tribe there, eventually the majority began teasing him in a good natured way, “which felt good because that’s the way we all get to know one another.” They would tease him about being a lost Indian and he would tease them about the stories he had heard about them. It was this connection he developed with the other Native students, which James attributes to helping keep him in school. Of the many undergraduate and graduate Native
American students attending the same university, there were only two other natives that were trying to graduate with the specific type of engineering majors that he was studying.

James believes his social involvement with the Native American community on campus played an important role in keeping him at school. Meeting his wife and her parents, both in the medical profession, beginning his sophomore year of college, was probably the single most important event in his life, keeping him in school. Their very stable and independent family provided him with emotional and financial support when needed. “I mean she was probably the key to keeping me in school and finishing my studies in engineering.”

Another experience he benefited from was looking for summer jobs to “validate why I was studying engineering.” He returned home every summer to work for different federal agencies:

I had always just assumed I would work on an Indian reservation as an engineer.

All I ever wanted to do was help build water and sewer systems, roads, just all the infrastructure that’s lacking which other places have. That was my vision. That was my goal.

These other practical experiences helped James understand the many possibilities of how his education could be used to benefit tribal people.

Engineering is a tough discipline and at a large institution like the one James attended, first year general engineering classes would have many students. He learned quickly you were anonymous, a number, and that you had to make connections and learn to work with other students from around the country and world in order to survive. He recalls they would tell classes to look to their left, and then look to their right, and state
that only one out of three students who start the engineering program graduate from the program. While there were a lot of American Indian students in other programs such as education and native studies, in the 5 years he was in the engineering program there were only three American Indian engineering students.

**Overcoming Ignorance and Discrimination**

James also faced discrimination by some faculty. One incident he recalls the professor had given a particularly difficult assignment. James and two other students stopped by the professor’s office during his posted office hours. They had not scheduled appointments. One by one the professor met with the first two Anglo students and provided them with assistance. Then, when James entered the office, he abruptly asked James if he had an appointment. Like the other students, James did not have an office appointment but it was during the professors open office hours and there were still more than 20 minutes left. That did not matter; the professor insisted he go schedule an appointment. James did as was requested and waited 10 minutes before he was allowed to go back to meet with the professor. James found him packing up and leaving his office. The professor asked James to walk with him. When they reach a place where the professor was certain nobody would hear what he had to say he stated:

> You and your kind are not welcome here. Why don’t you go back to wherever you are from or go do something easy because if you don’t get it you don’t deserve to be here? This is for people who are smart!

James remembers just standing there as he walked off:

> I was devastated. I thought why did he say that, why me? It was very troubling, so I went and talked to some friends and their first reaction was that’s racist, that’s
ridiculous, you should report him. I said I know, but I’ve got him for five more classes in this major, he is one of the seven professors that teaches all of these classes so if I report him who knows, I’m here living on loans, I’m hanging by a thread. I said I’m going to wait until near the end. So in every class I had with him I never went to office hours or his office ever again, and every single class I had with him, I always got one or two grades lower than my group, even though we handed in the same assignments. So I always got one grade lower and that is what stopped me from graduating with honors in engineering was this professor. My last semester I went to the ombudsman and I reported him, I said this guy is racist. I told them everything and they said well, I don’t know if we are going to be able to do anything, we will log this into the system and we will see what happens. He remained there for many years and then several years later I checked on it and they said oh yeah, right after you graduated some women reported him for sexual harassment and he was asked to leave.

James did not realize at the time but now in retrospect he understands that all of his experiences as a kid provided him with the fortitude and inner strength to get through difficult situations like this when others would have simply given up and quit:

So I finished. I didn’t like most of aspects of engineering, but I did it anyway. I thought of all my relatives before and of them telling me how people just showed up here and started taking stuff, we had to stand our ground, and that’s the only reason we’ve got what’s left. I remembered those stories, so I was like I’m standing my ground, I’m not leaving, you’re not forcing me out, if you want to grade me less then grade me less, and I finished. I graduated.
This was a very difficult period for James, but by the time he finished the engineering program he already knew he was going to law school.

Since James was the first member of his family to go to college and complete a degree, he had never even heard of a graduate degree before attending college. It was just not something he ever thought about. Then his spouse was preparing to go to law school after she completed her undergraduate degree. He took a look at the types of LSAT questions she was practicing and really enjoyed the logic games, “I enjoyed those kind of logical intellectual exercises and I said I’m kind of interested in this.” With his wife’s support he looked into it more seriously and then tested the idea with his mother:

She was absolutely exasperated and just, oh my god, she said. You kids nowadays, you are never satisfied are you? If you can get a great job, like nobody I know ever finished in engineering, and you can go work out wherever, a government job, and get paid good money, and you want to go back to school? What’s wrong with your kids? I said, but mom you know there are a whole lot of opportunities that open up and I have studied this and I know, and she said, I don’t understand.

Later on she said I was correct for the way I decided to do things, years later. He attended the American Indian Prelaw Summer Institute in Albuquerque to learn about and get ready to attend a law school. He applied to 15 law schools and got into 14 of them, all around the nation. This time he picked a midwestern university with a large Native American organization and student body.
**Motivation and Support**

Upon reflection, James believes it was hard work, showing up, and never giving up, even when he did not want to finish, that are the threads that run throughout his life. These are the things he believes have driven him to persist in all of his endeavors:

I just remembered everyone around me growing up. I remember so many stories like they almost made it, or they almost stuck through this one thing, or they got out of the military and they were ready to complete something significant and something happened, or this bad luck story, or this relative got really sick, or there was always something that happened. I just thought that barring any massive tragedy there is really no reason I can’t just keep going for me and for them. It’s not just me; it’s all of them. It’s kind of like the unlived life, I felt that energy, I’m going to make it, and I’m going to do it, for everyone - not just myself. I can feel that, I think that was true, and I still feel it to this day. When there’s one person who sticks out and earns an accomplishment it’s actually not them it’s everyone around them, it’s all that energy that gets funneled behind through prayer and ceremony and support. In this case there was no financial support but there were a lot of sincere wishes and that means a lot. That can carry a person through tough times and I always believe that. When I was finishing law school we have this cultural peace in our native tradition where we pray for people, like for military service, or if they accomplish something, or if they are doing good and they are on a good path, or if they are a good person. Everyone comes together and we decorate the horse and the person and then you parade through all the camps. Then everybody sees that you are a person in that family that the clan wants to
represent everybody. So I paraded through and my aunt and uncle had made a headdress and buckskins and beaded outfit, traditional warrior stuff. I was given that and I was given all these things for bringing the family up, that is the way they viewed it. So I paraded, that’s part of it, you never feel like you are alone. You always have relatives, always. Now I know, even through ceremonial life, if it’s not just people, it’s gifts from animals, gifts from the elements. There are spirits in everything that are helpful and you just have to be grounded and be available.

During difficult times in school, both as an undergraduate and graduate student, James remembers retreating back to solitude and prayer, welcoming the energy of all his well-wishers from afar, then coming back full of energy, doing what needed to be done, and getting his education back on track. His own grandmother was a healer and carried a medicine bundle. Prayer and cleansing ceremonies were a part of everyday life, “there was always somebody doing cleansing ceremonies, in fact I do them everyday now…it’s just woven into everything every day. It doesn’t stand out, it’s just in the fabric of the community, in the culture.”

The universities James had chosen to attend were far from home and he was not able to afford to return for ceremonies. However, he had carefully selected those universities because they had large Native American student bodies and organizations. James had realized that he was reliant upon tribal communities and even if the tribal names and traditions were not always the same, there were parallels and he always felt like he was among relatives.
They would take me in and we would go and pray together or go hang out or go visit their relatives and homelands. I was part of drum groups, or we would just sit around and talk about family and relatives. So I always had community, and then I would go to their ceremonies. They would invite me and I would attend. I was not familiar with them because they were not the ones that I did but I respected them and I felt the energy from them and I respected their process. They would pray at certain places and I would go with them, they would have eagle feathers and other feathers and prayers and offerings, and sage, and sweet grass, and cedar, and tobacco. Everyone has their own way, but it was parallel, so I just participated with all of them.

Having a community who shared the same values and beliefs were critical for James to feel connected and get through the difficult times. They would share stories and he would realize there was always someone who had it worse and if they could show up and do what needs to be done, than he had better show up and finish this class, finish this degree.

**Unbound Opportunities**

Since completing his law degree, James has had experiences and a career that are remarkable for anyone, yet alone someone in their early 40s. His education has afforded him the opportunities to practice tax law in a big city; however that experience left him very empty. The drive for wealth, status, and the corner office in a high rise with his own secretary, just didn’t motivate him. He returned to his roots and then began teaching. He became a professor teaching Federal Indian law. He ran a center placing law students within tribal communities needing legal services. He went on to establish an Indian Law
Center in the Midwest. He returned home again to become a tribal attorney and began working with all the regional tribes. He served as an Appellate Judge for a few tribes. He then became involved in national politics and, for a time, worked in the highest levels of the federal government and testifying before congress:

I was involved in legislation on the behalf of tribes for tribes, projects for tribes, help them, advocate for them, testified for them. When he was asked to stay and sacrifice for tribes for more years, he said absolutely not. It’s time for me to go home. I’m done. I’ve done my calling and it’s time to go home and back into ceremony and to cleanse and so I came home. I could’ve been in charge for a long time. New power is a thing to be very careful with, to always be humble about it, because it can be all-encompassing and it was.

All of this eventually led to James becoming very ill:

I went deep into ceremonies even further, and I quit, I almost quit being a lawyer. I worked a little bit, and then for just a year and a half I went into all ceremonies all of the time. I came out of it healthy and that’s where I’m at now. I’m just helping a little bit here and there and just serving as a mentor.

This recovery for James has been a process of coming full circle and now he can begin again with a new focus.

Many Challenges Remain

I asked James if there was anything he would have done differently with his educational experiences and if he had any final thoughts about American Indian men completing their doctorate degrees. He started by stating that there are two areas of support he would have liked to experience while he was in school. First, Native
American students need more financial resources so they do not have to rely on student loans to pay for their educations. James explains that student loans leave these students “cash-strapped when picking what to do, because sometimes it’s hard to return home when there is something that doesn’t pay enough.” He always wanted to return home but there were just no jobs within the tribal community that would pay well enough for him and his wife to get out of debt. Tribal communities that he is familiar with do not have the financial resources or jobs for those who obtain their higher education, and so many natives seek jobs away from home and do what they can to support their families and tribes from afar.

Second, James believes more mentors are needed for those seeking educations, individuals from the same disciplines:

Even just for males, older males, somebody who has been through it, be available, and not wanting anything from it other than guiding, which I’ve tried to do…I think that those two things are really critical ingredients for people to make it because there’s always tough times in that process and there are so few, older native men who have been to and finished graduate school…I give guidance to whoever wants it, whatever age, whatever gender, it doesn’t matter. I know it’s a difficult journey and just having a few words of support you’re in there sometimes makes a big difference.

The response to that kind of support is sometimes a “mixed bag” he says, as there are those that respect and value it, but then there are those that simply “take, take, take, and think they get to take whatever they want.”
Finally, James expresses his continued concerns about intergenerational trauma like that he experienced, and historical trauma,

I would like to see more healing around historical trauma. I think that would release people to do what they would like to do instead of feeling stuck, or in darkness, feeling like they have to keep going in a certain thing even if it means all sacrifice all the time. I think intergenerational trauma healing could open up a lot of opportunities for a lot of people...You know, there are a lot them that have kind of a warrior mentality still, like joining the military services is the highest expression of the old ways of being and culture. So a lot of people go towards that, and I respect the service, and the protection of everyone’s homelands. Nothing but respect for them, but sometimes there is a cost, like PTSD for example, and other things from those experiences. From my experience, some natives do experience some violence. So, a balance would be great in that it can’t be just all masculine all the time, fight, fight, fight, and then you end up in trouble. It’s okay to cry. It’s okay to feel. It’s okay to open up. It’s okay to be both. I think when that can be brought back and allow them to be whatever essence they are and not have to be any thing else, just be who you are, and foster that, water that seed, again and again and let it grow however it needs to grow. Soft, when you soften you open, when you are clenching and contracting you can’t grow. If you are busy fighting and trying to hold your ground, it’s difficult, it’s really difficult so I think the first level is healing of the ancestors and then bringing it down to the person, to the healing of the person, and the family allowing them, let
them be who they are. Then I think you will see flourishing, I think it would open up a lot.

When these key elements of Native American men’s experiences are addressed James believes they will no longer be held back and will then be free to pursue their educations and take on new leadership roles among their nations and clans.

James knew early on that he was just as smart as other kids. He learned to count before he even went to school by play cards with his step-grandfather. Though he experienced many struggles with his home life, school was a completely different experience for him. He enjoyed school and like reading and learning about the history of his people. He was a straight A student.

James developed a strong moral compass early in his life. He always knew right from wrong. He used this is while looking after his adult family members and protecting friends and others who were less fortunate. It was that desire to protect and care for his people that lead him to pursue civil engineering. He wanted to return to his tribe and help improve the lives of his tribal members and family by building infrastructure. While in college he would return home every summer to work various jobs that would reinforce what he was learning in school.

Though James also found prejudice at school and among some of his faculty he graduated and discovered that he loved law. He had chosen a school that was known for providing native students with a lot of support, and he completed his Jurist Doctorate. His education has allowed him to serve tribal peoples both at home, across the country, and around the world, in ways he had never imagined. However, upon having an opportunity to climb the professional ladder further, he realized he had finally strayed to
far from home. He returned to his roots, to pray, and to ceremonial cleansings. This now daily practice keeps him healthy. One thing he does see a need for is more mentors for tribal people and especially for American Indian men.

**Richard: The Entrepreneur**

Richard is an enrolled member of an upper Great Plain’s tribe. He grew up on two different reservations spending the first eight years of his life in one community before his family returned to his father’s home reservation. He grew up on that reservation and lived there much of his life until he joined the service. Following the service, he returned home to work for about ten years before going to college. He started at the local tribal college completing his first associate’s degree and a second at a state community college before transferring to a large regional public institution where he completed his Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate degrees. He returned home again to work at the same tribal college where he first started his college career. He went on to serve as tribal Chairman for a short time and now serves as President of a tribal college. His parents stressed the value of education and all nine of their children completed high school with eight of nine going to college. Richard is the second oldest in the family. He is currently married with two adult children from previous relationships.

I knew of Richard professionally but had never met him prior to when I reached out to him as a possible subject-actor. He accepted and invited me to schedule a couple of interviews at his office. When we first meet he welcomed me and took up a position behind his desk. Richard is a taller and larger man with broad shoulders. He was dressed in a dark business suit and exhibited a comfortable command of his surroundings and his leadership position. We didn’t waste any time and started right into the interviews.
Lessons of Hard Work and Entrepreneurship

Richard’s earliest memories of attending school are of playing with his friends and saying the Pledge of Allegiance. He remembers enjoying school. There was a mix of native and non-native students at that time. He recalls one of the first times he got into trouble at school:

I had a pocketknife onetime and one of the kids was teasing me and so I pulled my knife on them as a little five-year-old. Maybe I watched… and I had him jacked up against the wall with my knife and then the teacher came and took my knife away. So I remember that!

Richard recalls being mischievous in school. He recalls sneaking away from the group on small local field trips and ending up back at home. “I guess I was kind of a little hell raiser.” He of course got in trouble with his parents.

Richard’s parents advocated for he and his siblings to at least finish high school. They realized that while an 8th grade education might have been sufficient years ago, now a person needed to obtain at least a high school diploma and preferably some college education. His mother attended college, but did not complete as she stopped out to take care of her aging mother. His father had attended a tribal college and then a public college for a little while, long enough to gain some skills. He never graduated with a degree but those skills he gained were enough for him to obtain some good jobs with the tribe, which is not easy to do considering the impoverished economy on reservations. He remembers that his father always worked. “I think that was a good example to us in regard to work ethic. We all worked.” Richard is at the back end of the Baby Boom
Generation, now in his mid-50s, he is concerned that the current generation of students does not seem as interested in working as his generation was at their age.

I remember reading a lot of comics. I remember getting pop bottles and selling them so I can get more comics. I remember selling Grit newspapers, they would send you these Grit papers and then you sold them and then you sent the money back and you got to keep some of the money as your commission.

Developing his strong work ethic early in life, and being the second oldest sibling, he was able to help contribute to the family:

Although we may have been poor to others’ standards, we never knew we were poor. I guess I kind of learned that if I wanted anything I was going to have to work for it and that nobody was going to give me anything. So that’s what I did.

Even though his dad had good jobs with the tribe, the community was still a poverty stricken community and every little extra bit of income was appreciated.

When Richard was old enough he worked in the summer program at school. “I made $70.00 a week, $35.00 went to the house and I got to keep $35.00 and that’s just the way it was.” Later, his best friend and his friend’s father cleaned the school in the evenings. Richard would hang around with them and help out so his friend would be freed up to “go mess around.” The principal saw this and offered Richard the job officially:

So now I had a job during the school year. So then now I’m working, we both are, and compared to our peers there wasn’t a whole a lot of jobs in a tribal community, there still is not. If you wanted a job you had to go to the next town
and work at McDonald’s or someplace. So then we get in there and we just pick up trash and clean up and mop and we get a little check every week.

Richard continued finding little jobs, through different programs and Upward Bound, which helped him to buy school cloths and other nice items. His parents were grateful because they did not have to buy anything for him.

Upward Bound also taught him study skills and provided him with the opportunity to spend extra time with the smart kids:

So during the school time I was with the smart guys and then after school I was with the hell raisers. So I don’t know if we were really hell raisers but we liked to smoke cigarettes and try to find a beer every once a while, you know stuff like that.

These programs and opportunities reinforced the value of education for Richard. “I think that was kind of helpful to formulate my thoughts for pursuing education past high school.” He set two life goals for himself back then, “I wanted a four year degree and I wanted to be a champion traditional dancer.”

Richard found that he did not struggle with his classwork in school like other students. “I was able to do the work easily. I didn’t have any problem with school.” He would finish his schoolwork before everyone else then go to the library. He began helping put books back on the shelves and the librarian tracked his hours doing that so he began earning a little extra money during the school day as well. He also shared half of these earnings with his family:

I don’t really remember my folks asking me for money but they just kind of expected it so we did it. I don’t see that now with this generation either. If they
can they just take it. I don’t know if that’s our fault for not, what we were taught
is that if you were staying at somebody’s house then you should be helping out
there. If you don’t have any money then clean up their house for them, mow their
lawn, do their yard-work, do something to earn your keep, and that, that’s how I
grew up.

Again, Richard laments a little bit that he doesn’t see the same work ethic in today’s
younger generations. From his perspective, they want someone to clean up after them
and they believe “the world owes them something. I don’t remember being that way or
any of my siblings being that way. We were, I think we were all good workers.”

Motivations Overcome Challenges

There were non-academic challenges Richard faced early in his life, specifically
dealing with alcohol and drugs:

I got in trouble with booze right away. I got thrown in jail when I was 13 the first
time. Then my dad was mad at me so he wouldn’t come get me out and my uncle
did come and got me out of jail. Then I got an actual physical control when I was
18, and that was from drinking too. So I guess if there were any challenges it
would be that, but at the time I did not see that as a challenge. At the time I was
just having a good time. So I didn’t think I had any problems with that, then I
went into the service and I had a military ID and you can drink. So I pretty much
drank for three years in the service. Not all the time because there’s so much
training going on, but if I say that was one challenge that carried over into
adulthood it was that. I started using drugs and was probably about 13. For me
drugs at the time was just marijuana which seems to be nothing nowadays, with
meth and heroin available in our tribal communities. Talking with some of my old buddies that still get high they said it’s now easier to get meth then it is marijuana. When Richard returned from the service his drinking became worse. He started to drink hard and it began costing him jobs. He says he was always able to find jobs on the reservation, even when people say there are no jobs, but his heavy drinking caused him to continuously lose those jobs. His heavy drinking also affected his early college experience by causing him to miss so many classes he was administratively dropped from school. Ultimately, when he finally became sober and addressed his alcoholism, he was able to refocus on the early goals he had set for himself back in high school, to get a bachelor degree and to become a champion dancer. He went on to win one championship as a dancer and not long after that he completed his first college degree, “It took me four years to get a two year degree because I was still raising hell.”

Richard knew he was going to continue his college education and complete his goal of receiving a four-year degree. He never really thought college was optional. He had looked at his extended family, his aunts and uncles, and they either worked hard labor jobs or were educated and worked desk jobs. “I saw that those who had a four-year degree had better jobs and lived better than we did. They were doing pretty good.” Having a tribal college in his community also made a critical difference in his ability to pursue his education, “I think what happens with tribal folks is that once they have that foundation built at the tribal College then they are able to [successfully] transition, or transfer to another institution.” Without the tribal college right there he says, “I don’t know if I would’ve pursued higher education.”
His older sister served as a role model for him. She graduated high school when she was 16 and went off to college right away. His mother also served as a role model for him. While he was in the service and when most of his siblings had moved out of the home, she went back to school to and got her GED, then she went on to college to become a nurse. However, she dropped out of school and never finished her degree because she needed to care for his grandmother so they did not have to put her in a nursing home.

Having participated in early college experience programs like Upward Bound, Richard imagined off to college would be similar, going to a classroom and to different classes. “I had some exposure to the campus that other students might not have had and I think that it gave me a comfort level that I think others coming straight from high school graduation might’ve been intimidated by.” His Upward Bound experience took him to the same large institution where he would later finish his bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees. He was already familiar with the campus and how to get around before he even enrolled in classes for the first time. However, there was one significant difference. When Richard had first participated in the Upward Bound program the majority of those students were native kids from reservation schools. Now as an undergraduate student he had not expected to be the only American Indian student in most of his classes. He went from being part of the majority in his reservation school to being part of the minority on the college campus. There were other subtler and nuanced cultural differences he had to navigate as well:

How we joke around at home is not the same way we joke around off reservation, a lot of times the Indian humor, native humor, is not understood by the non-native
community. So I think you end up just having to adapt to that new environment and realize they might not get the joke that you’re sharing. One thing I did come to an understanding of for myself was that whatever I was thinking was valid, but I don’t think I realized that at the undergraduate level. I realized that at the graduate level where you are sitting around the table and discussing things. You’re talking about theory. You’re talking about methodology. You’re sharing whatever thoughts you have with regards to the book that you read or that theory that you are discussing and how it applies to your background.

He did note that even though he was often the only American Indian in the classroom, many of the students all came from rural communities. Many of their experiences were not all that dissimilar to his experiences. The one significant difference however, was the “poverty and racism and prejudice, which they didn’t have because of the color of their skin.” When he was younger he remembers walking into stores to go shopping and the store employees would follow him around and stare at him constantly as if they were waiting for him to steal something or do something wrong.

Richard states that you cannot let the perspectives of racism and prejudice, “affect you as an individual or stop you from achieving the education that you need to have in order to succeed.” These are things that have “been there all the time. There’s nothing to do about it. You can’t change peoples values, their ideals with regards to the world, and their perspective that they think you are lower as an individual.” Richard explains that as native people, “everybody is equal and so it doesn’t matter the position that you hold, if you’re the chairman, or if you’re somebody that’s unemployed at the tribe, that person is still equal to you.”
However, racism and discrimination did become a significant challenge while he was attending the university. It was during this time that the American Indian nicknames issue began to “heat up” and interfered with his schooling. He was often the only native student in the classroom and he would often find cornered during class discussions because everyone would look at him. He had long black hair in a ponytail at the time and because he was the only native student in the class, he was often isolated out at the token Native American student. This would often lead to arguments and occasionally, fights. He recalls one day in class he was asked his opinion about the school name and he shared with the class:

Well you know what, I said, I just had some friends that went to the football game over here and there was some drunk white guys there and my friends were there with their family and the kids, and these guys were getting up in there saying fuck the native women, fuck all the native women, fuck all those native women and saying that at the game. And all of these little kids heard what they were saying and they said aren’t we native? Mom, aren’t we native? Why are they saying that about our people? My mom, or me, or my grandmother, or my relatives, we call ourselves by our people’s names, but they call us by a derogatory nickname, they are talking about us when they say that. I said, as I was talking about this in the classroom, I started becoming angry and I started, I said, so I’m hearing this is happening at our football games here on the university campus. Now, I don’t go to the football games, but now I don’t want to go to them, I said, because of this. I said, but if any of you bastards want to go outside and if any of you want to say
fuck the Natives I’ll take you on right now, I’ll take all you fuckers on. Let’s go outside you fucking bastards.

Initially, he wasn’t even concerned with the American Indian nickname issue, but the frustration because of the issue affecting his education, his classroom experience, that lead him to become more active in protests and marches.

The Job of Learning Opens Opportunities

Like his K-12 experience, Richard found that completing the coursework for his classes was not difficult. He approached school like it was a job. He worked as hard as he could between 8:00 and 5:00 and then would take the evenings off if he were not taking an extra heavy course load. When papers were due he would take extra time in the evenings and on weekends to stay on top of his classes. His point of view is that if you do this effectively, “you become prepared to enter the workforce because that’s what you are going to be called upon to do every day, at any place you work.”

Richard benefited from being included in a specialized scholar program designed to support first-generation low-income students who are underrepresented in doctoral programs. Through this program he was provided with an advisor and mentor who helped guide him through institutional processes. Eventually, his mentor included Richard in a grant funded research project and hired him half time, with benefits. This provided much needed financial support for Richard and his wife. She was able to join him at school and complete her bachelor’s degree while he worked on his master’s degree and conducted research about the healthcare needs of the Native American elderly population. Work on this study lead him to a full-time research position while he was worked to complete his doctoral degree.
Another beneficial experience was his involvement with the Native American association on campus. It provided him with an additional support network of individuals who could provide him with information about university resources. The association would also sponsor and organize an on campus powwow each year. This social piece was important to Richard, “You can’t just go out there and hang out by yourself. You’ve got to have somebody to socialize with outside of class.” They would get together to dance, drum, sing, and cook meals together. He also continued attending powwows on the weekends. He remembers:

I would drive back all the way on Sunday night to get to class on Monday. Then I would be falling asleep in class, so I quit going to powwows and just made the ones that were convenient for me. The ones that I had to drive a long ways I kind of backed off of it.

Along with the powwows he continued with traditional practices and ceremonies as needed with family and with the American Indian student group on campus.

Richard’s decision to pursue his PhD just sort of happened. He had no plans or further aspirations beyond completing his bachelor’s degree:

There were no plans to be a PhD, there were no plans to be a chairman, there was no plans to be a president of the college, it was just kind of taking advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves to me at the time.

The scholar program he was participating in required students to make a commitment to pursue their doctorate degree:

So they will help you get your undergraduate with the premise that you are going to go after your doctorate, but really I was just looking for resources to complete
my undergraduate. I had no intentions of being a PhD. I had no intentions of going on past the bachelors program. Then the mentor, whom I had at the time, wrote me into a research grant, which allowed me to have some financial resources in order to stay there and continue my degree. I think it was just an opportunity that came up as a result of being a good worker, a good employee, and a good student.

He doesn’t recall thinking that far ahead when he was in school. Often he was just focused on trying to get through the day, through the week, and through the semester. He states, “We are only trying to pay the rent for that month. We are only trying to make the car payment for that month.”

While working on his doctorate, Richard was presented with a job opportunity. He discussed it with his mentor who recommended he stay and complete his PhD before going someplace else. They were also in the middle of the research grant and his mentor really did not want to lose him:

So were there other things that were influencing him besides me not getting my PhD? I don’t know, but I know for one thing that I am glad I listened to him.

Because I trusted him and I believed his advice to me was in my best interest. This advisor and mentor had been with Richard since he first started at the university and became a part of the specialized scholar program, undergraduate through the doctoral program. Eventually Richard even took over for his mentor as the Primary Investigator (P.I.) for the research grant. Other well-paying job opportunities also came up around the time he was becoming All But Dissertation (A.B.D.), but he continued with the research grant and finished his dissertation before moving on to the next position.
Richard describes his persistence as “plugging away.” He was busy all the time with the research grant, conducting trainings around the country, going to school in the evenings, and working on his dissertation. The idea of persistence wasn’t a part of his daily routine or thought process. It didn’t really dawn on him that he had persisted until he was defending his dissertation:

It’s kind of no different than how I run now I think. I have a calendar and I try to make all those meetings I have for today and have some kind of remedy or action come from that. Either we close something out or set the next step in regards to how we are going to make things better or remedy the situation. We just keep moving forward.

Just like working a job, Richard kept moving forward with his own research and eventually completed his dissertation.

**Education and Life as a Transformative Journey**

Reflecting on the role his culture and traditions had in his educational experiences, Richard describes how he perceives culture and traditions in a broad context. He recalls that when he was in his early teens, there was a resurgence of American Indian culture, specifically singing and dancing at powwows. Members of his community also began to bring back sweat lodges and other ceremonies. With a broader perspective he continues to describe how they were raised in the culture and traditions:

We were raised to respect our elders, we were raise to open doors and hold the doors for women or your elders, elder men, and if you saw somebody needing help to carry something, like an elderly lady, then he went and helped them. Nobody needed to tell you to do that you just did it, but there had to be some
training growing up in order to get you there so that your mind does that, so I think probably my dad was an example, my folks were in example. My dad is an example for being a man and for working all the time instilling that work ethic in us was so important. Then my mom in the house and when people would come to visit they would always give them something, offer them some water, offer them something to eat, and so there always seemed like something cooking and when somebody came over they would feed them.

Not restricting his view of culture to singing, dancing, and traditional practices he also thinks of military service as reflecting the strong warrior society found within American Indian traditions. Five of his six maternal uncles served in the military. His paternal grandfather served in World War II. His oldest paternal aunt and one of her sons entered the service. Richard and two of his siblings also continued the family warrior society tradition by serving in the military.

Another cultural difference that has affected him and he believes affects native students is the difference in how non-natives and natives define family and who are relatives:

If you’re my brother or my sister then your kids are considered my kids. Your kids consider me another father. So family is important and the extended family is recognized within the culture that we have. That’s just a part of everyday life for us. We grew up with the perspective of the importance of family.

Richard and his wife have had many new experiences for which they were the first members of their extended family to go through. Caring for their extended family, they
share their gained knowledge with other family members who are going through similar experiences.

I asked Richard if there was anything he would do differently with his educational experiences. He describes being happy with how his education turned out. He completed his PhD and about the same time his wife completed her Masters. They each had a debt of about $28,000. He felt that was good in comparison to some of his friends who had accumulated more than $100,000 in student loan debts:

Of course they drove a better car than I did and they dressed better than I did, but that was them, I didn’t really care about that. But they are paying those loans back now and mine are paid off. It took us seven years to pay off and my and my wife’s loans. So our loans are paid off so now we are just working and putting money towards our retirement and paying the mortgage on our house.

Their educations have enabled them to obtain better jobs and have an increased income. He believes this is one of the themes in his life and ultimately why he went to school in the first place.

When Richard completed his doctorate degree and changed jobs switching from being a research analyst to being an assistant professor. This netted him a $10,000 pay raise at the time. Up to that point his professional and academic career had mostly been at the same institution. His actual goal was always to return home. This drive to return home is not unique to Richard. He tells a story of a non-native female student he met while he was guest lecturing:

I ran into a student from one of the communities just north of here, a small community, and she was a physical therapy student. I asked the class, it was a
mixed class, what are your intentions after you complete your degree, and this girl got up and said, my intentions are to go home. But, I asked, you are going to have a physical therapy degree and you’re going to be able to earn lots of money because they are highly paid and they work hard at that skill set so why would you go home? She said, because there’s no physical therapist at home right now and I feel I can go back and help our community. So there it was! I don’t know if it surprised me, but it did make me realize that to go home and to try and help out was not just a cultural perspective, not just a tribal perspective, but it was more of a rural perspective. That if we can get our education and go home to help our rural community, small close knit communities where you know everybody, where everybody knows you and sometimes knows your business, they certainly know your history, then I think we are just fulfilling our heart, because we are related to that community either through blood or marriage.

Richard sees this same desire in many of the American Indian students that pass through his institution today, they want to go home and help. Helping can be much more than going home like the research he was conducting about the community health needs of tribal elders. His research was helping tribal communities across country from Alaska to his own reservation on the northern plains.

Richard did eventually return home for a while to take a leadership position at the local community college. During this time he and his wife sold their first home and built a new home on the reservation. He served as tribal Chairman for a short period during where he enforced the fiscal policies, and for the first time in the history of his tribe, they had a clean audit. Now he is serving as the president of a tribal college and advocating
for both American Indian men and women to pursue their college educations and obtain their masters and doctoral degrees. When he identifies good students he often asks if they have ever thought about getting their bachelor’s degree, or master’s degree or even a PhD:

I think they may not be aware of the opportunities that are available to them so I think we’ve got to do a better job informing young people. That means we have to be knowledgeable ourselves as to what is available and then be sure to share information about that opportunity with the people who could benefit.

Another area that would have benefited Richard, and which he believes would benefit future students, would be to have mentors who have been through the same experiences students have. He sees many students who come from the same background he did, straight off the reservation. These student need mentors who also grew up on the reservation, went down the same path they are navigating now, and went on to complete their degrees and have successful careers.

Richard reflects back on how there has been little encouragement within tribal communities for individuals to pursue their college educations. He relates this to how education has historically been presented to American Indians over the past century. The dominant society reining them in:

Saying that we’re savages and that our religious practices are savage. They put us in boarding schools and took our languages away, forcing our people to learn a new language then washing their mouths out with soap when they spoke their own language, and whipping them when they prayed in their own language.
The forced introduction of western education into tribal communities has left deep intergenerational traumas on tribal peoples.

Richard summarizes a story shared with his faculty during a professional development day about the experience a young boy who was sent to boarding school:

This young man was talking with his language and they were telling him to quit, but he wouldn’t. They told him to pray in English and he wouldn’t, he prayed in his own language. They couldn’t make him stop so they whipped him. They made him eat soap. They brought him to the priest, who came and got him in the middle the night and raped him. The next morning, when all them were having breakfast, the priest took him in front of the other kids naked and with blood coming down his legs and made fun of him in front of everybody. They started laughing at him to try and break him from his culture and way of life.

These types of stories are heard and retold throughout Indian country and it is important to remember that these assimilation practices, which for many American Indians now psychologically connect to western educational practices, did not just impact the individual students but also the whole culture and entire communities.

Today he finds that community members are both supportive and dismissive of the benefits of higher education:

What I am saying is that when you go to school you have a broader knowledge and understanding of the world. So due to your interactions in classrooms or with other students then what happens is you are able to hear other perspectives, and when you are from a small community, if you don’t leave that community to go to
school or go into the army or something, then the only perspective you have is the perspective that you have gained with in that small community. He explains that if someone really wants to expand their worldview they need to leave the reservation for a while and experience the larger world outside of their small communities. The same thing is true for all small rural communities.

Richard made friends with individuals from around the world while he was attending the university. Through that experience he found that there were many similarities between his own culture and experiences and those of other countries:

I had a Norwegian friend and we had some similar cultural perspectives, and we also had differences. Then I had a German friend and my German friend shared this with me, we had similarities and differences between our cultures but we were still friends because we had commonalities between our cultures and commonalities mostly between our personalities that helped us mesh together and be friends in the first place.

His hope for members of his reservation is for them to become more open to experiences off the reservation and be willing to go to school or join the military or just experience some other aspect of the world besides only what they know at home. It’s something they have to be willing to do and maybe they need to be exposed to it earlier in their initial educational experiences.

Richard’s persistence was a transformative process. He recognizes that he really never had a plan; he just took advantage of opportunities as they presented themselves to him. He enjoyed school from an early age and always found learning to be easy. He spent a lot of time in the library reading and re-shelving books to earn some extra money.
for the family. Richard was very entrepreneurial and always was able to find jobs and ways of earning an income. Even though jobs can be difficult to find on the reservation, he was always able to find work. However, after returning from serving in the military his alcoholism caused him to begin losing jobs. He was also trying to start college, but was administratively withdrawn. He eventually recovered, got himself back on track, and finished his two-year degree. He had set a goal of completing a four-year degree because he saw that his relatives who were educated had good jobs and lived well compared to other members of his family. Throughout his educational career many of his decisions were made based on financial opportunities including staying in school to finish his Ph.D. or take a different job. He has always been driven by hard work and a desire to contribute back to his community. Over the years since completing his doctorate degree he has given back by teaching, serving as tribal chairman, and now serving as a tribal college president.

Summary

This chapter presents the lived experiences of six American Indian men who persisted to completion of their doctoral degrees. Each participant represented tribes from different parts of the Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, and desert Southwest. While the stories they shared are powerful and unique to each participant, themes begin to emerge including self-doubt, the support of individuals, a perceived value of education, and a desire to give back to their communities.
CHAPTER 5
VOICE OF THE RESEARCHER-ARTISTS

Not surprising, all participants I interviewed described various common barriers, which they had to overcome similar to those identified in the literature. Participants described struggling to find adequate funding for their education. They also described experiencing various forms of discrimination and racism. However, this study was designed to use guiding questions based on common barriers already identified in the literature. The intent was to encourage participants to share their educational stories while I carefully listened for emergent themes not commonly identified in the literature.

Through this process I identified four converging themes across the participants stories. Intellectual self-doubt: participants frequently felt some variation of self-doubt regarding their academic abilities. Developing supportive relationships: participants each described supportive individuals, including family members and professors, who valued education and encouraged each participant’s educational journey. Perceived value of education: participants each shared a perceived value to education as a means of supporting themselves and providing a better life for their families. Improving American Indian Communities: all participants shared a strong desire to improve and give back to their tribal communities, and all American Indian communities, while serving as role models and mentors for other American Indian men and women. The early signs of these themes began during the first interviews, but the themes continued to grow with more meanings through the transcription and individual story collaboration.
Intellectual Self-doubt

The first emergent theme of intellectual self-doubt appeared early during my first interview with Kota. All six participants expressed various experiences with self-doubt regarding their academic abilities. The stories they shared with me were not about an actual lack of academic ability or lack of academic preparedness, which is an identified common barrier to educational persistence. Eddie, for an example, stated, “I don’t know if I was that smart. I think a big part of it was I just knew how to take a test, because I remember a lot of things just came easy.” Only Kota expressed having an early struggle with his writing skills when he transitioned from high school to the university. He worked hard and quickly improved his writing skills. The remaining five participants all expressed enjoying school and doing well in school. However, beginning with Kota’s stories, I began to hear another theme emerge similar to academic preparedness, yet different enough to be a separately defined, intellectual self-doubt.

Kota’s own intellectual self-doubt, not believing he was college material, developed after he dropped out of his first college experience. He states, “I didn’t feel like I was white-collar enough to be getting a four-year education so I felt this was going to be my trade in life, to do the hard labor.” If it had not been for a supportive coach who encouraged him to try again, I was left with the impression that this most likely would have been the end of his educational career. The remaining participants all knew they were going to college, but none of them expressed setting out from the beginning with the belief that they would pursue graduate degrees or their doctorate degrees. Eastman, Sam, Eddie, and Richard expressed questioning if they had the intellectual abilities required for the academic rigor needed to complete graduate degrees, yet alone doctorate degrees.
Deciding to pursue the doctorate degree was a different process for Eastman, he was still not certain of his own intellectual ability, “even though I had obtained a degree in math, even though I received my teacher certificate, even though I was accepted into a master’s program and was on the verge of completing it,” he did not start to consider the doctorate until he neared the end of his master’s program.

Sam and Eddie both also described doing well academically in high school and talked about how they loved to learn, yet both believed they were not academically or intellectually prepared for college. This was because they had both attended reservation boarding schools and as Sam explained, he believed he was set up for failure from the beginning because “In my community we had 100% college dropout rate. Everyone that went to college all dropped out within the first semester, but for me I think that my writing kept me going.” He never believed he was smart enough for graduate school yet alone working towards a doctorate degree. Yet, while finishing his master’s degree his faculty kept encouraging him to apply to the doctoral program. Finally, James, being a first generation student, was initially not even aware there was such as thing as a graduate degree before attending college. It was just not something he ever thought about. Then, as his spouse was preparing to go to law school after she completed her undergraduate degree, he took a look at the types of LSAT questions she was practicing and really enjoyed the logic games. “I enjoyed those kind of logical intellectual exercises and I said I’m kind of interested in this.” With his wife’s support he looked into law school more seriously.

It was encouragement from their faculty that finally enabled them to believe they were capable of the intellectual rigor required for advanced degrees. Each participant
overcame the negative consequences of intellectual self-doubt, in part because of the
dynamic experiences and positive influences they had, which are illustrated in the next
three emergent themes.

**Developing Supportive Relationships**

Participant’s abilities to overcome their own intellectual self-doubt were strongly
influenced by the supportive relationships each participant developed. Again, I began to
notice this thread early in my interviews. Kota overcame his initial intellectual self-doubt
because a supportive head coach encouraged him to try going back to college once more.
That coach and athletic program provided Kota with the opportunities and support needed
to finally complete his undergraduate degree. “I don’t think I would’ve had an interest in
college if it weren’t for sports just because I wasn’t really interested in college to begin
with.” Kota also had a supportive family back home. He had a mother who was an
educator herself who encouraged his educational pursuits. His grandfather, though not
college educated, taught Kota the value of hard work, which he describes as the ‘stick-to-

it-ness’ that got him through college.

Eastman’s family valued education. His father was college educated and a
teacher on the reservation. Eastman’s grandmother would send him classic books to read
like *Aesop’s Fables* and *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*. When he first went to college his mother
encouraged him to pick a school near by so he could still live at home and ease into the
college life. His participation in the Minority Engineering Program, the Indian Club, and
activities like intermural basket ball, helped him develop friendships that kept him in
school.
I don’t think I would have been able to succeed had it not been for these types of organizations on campus. We were able to talk about our backgrounds and found real similarities and differences. These helped shape my view of the larger body of American Indians and the social issues that might have been impacting our communities and us at the time.

Later, it would be the relationships he developed with his math faculty, who affirmed he should pursue his doctorate degree. These relationships helped him to understand that he was just as smart as any other students in his program and he too could complete his doctorate degree.

Sam also had a very supportive family. One of Sam’s grandfathers was a medicine man and had provided him with many blessings to support his education and wellbeing. Sam also had an uncle with a doctorate from MIT, the only other member of his tribal community to compete a doctorate. Sam somehow knew he would follow in his uncle’s footsteps. Sam stated that the relationships and connections to community he formed through his participation in the Native American student group on campus, which he eventually served as president, also helped to keep him engaged and in school. It was also the support and encouragement of his faculty, which convinced him to pursue and complete his doctoral education.

When interviewing Eddie, this theme of supportive relationships continued. First, back in high school, his father stressed the need for Eddie to not intentionally fail classes so he could spend more time with his friends. “My dad had a long talk with me and he said those people are just going to hold you back. You need to do this for you.” His parents and his brothers would make sure he didn’t stray to far and
stayed focused on his education. Between his Junior and Senior year in high school Eddie had an opportunity to attend an on campus college experience. He stated that the friendships he made during this time helped him get through the first couple years of college. Then there was the support and encouragement of his uncle who was the spiritual leader of the local Native American Church. He instructed Eddie that he was not just attending college for himself, but also for all tribal people, those who came before him, and those who have prayed for his success.

James had the unwavering support and encouragement of his mother. When he first went to college he explained that it was not long before he began to become homesick and considered quitting, but it was his mother who talked him into staying in school. James did carefully select what universities to attend. He was certain he would need to be involved in the student Native American organizations to help maintain his connection to a community with shared values. This helped James overcome the sense of feeling lost and the anonymity he experienced for the first time in his life. “That was a bit alienating and it was really important that I connect with the Native American community.” It was this connection he developed with the other Native students, which James attributes to helping keep him in school. Later, after meeting his wife, she and her parents provided additional supportive relationships, which he believes, was key to keeping him in school. Ultimately, it was his wife’s own interest in law school that got him to consider pursuing his doctorate in law after completing his engineering degree.

Richard also described developing relationships that supported his educational persistence. His family valued education and his sister had gone to college ahead of him. While in high school he participated in a summer college experience, which provided him
with a working knowledge of the campus, he would later attend. He immediately became involved with the Native American Association on campus, “You can’t just go out there and hang out by yourself. You’ve got to have somebody to socialize with outside of class.” They would get together to dance, drum, sing, and cook meals together. Like other participants, Richard also described having the positive support and encouragement of a faculty who served as both a mentor and an advisor, providing him with work as a researcher and guiding him to not quit or give up on his doctoral studies when lucrative job opportunities came along before he was finished with his degree. “I had no intentions of being a PhD. I had no intentions of going on past the bachelors program.” Finally, similar to James, Richard’s wife also shared similar educational goals and a belief in the valued of those educational goals.

Common across all these stories was that while each of these supportive relationships had different forms and origins, family and non-family connections, and degree of agency from the participants themselves (i.e., whether the participants pursued such relationships or these relationships happened in their lives), they all centered on the premise of encouragement, inspiration, involvement, and belief in one’s ability.

**Perceived Value of Education**

While the development of supportive relationships helped to keep the participants in school and help them to persist to completion of their doctoral educations, it was the third theme that I began to see which seemed to have served as a driver to complete their educations. In other words, in addition to the external forces that pushed and pulled the participants in various directions, there was a profound internal psychological dynamic that each of the participants emphasized. Each participant, at some point along his
educational path, came to place a perceived value on education. Kota, after dropping out of college the first time and going to work on a ranch logging and breaking horses, thought that hard labor might be what he would do for the rest of his life. It was a type of lifestyle an American Indian man would be expected to pursue. However, he soon realized he missed school and playing sports. After finishing his undergraduate degree Kota began to realize that if he wanted to provide a better life for his children he would need to consider pursuing his graduate education and completing his doctorate. He also recognized that there are “so few Native American males that had doctorate degrees, and I wanted to be that anomaly. I wanted to be that small percentage of people that did.”

Eastman initially pursued his education as that of a career path and a means of a better income. This drive for an initial career and income was similar for Sam, and Eddie. Eddie had actually dropped out of school his first semester because he was not financially prepared for attending school. He took up a job as a store clerk working the night shift. It was during this time he hardened his belief that completing his college education would be better than continuing the work he was doing for the rest of his life.

James was perhaps the only participant who may have had a more altruistic drive from the beginning. While he did seek a career to earn a living, his initial goal from the beginning was to get an education that would allow him to return home and improve life on the reservation. He believed that a degree in civil engineering would enable him to return to build the infrastructure projects his reservation needed. The counselor tried to push him to pursue vocational training “because that’s what folks like me were good at, a mechanic, and I told him no I want to go to college.” To a lesser extent James was also aware that a college education would provide him with better financial resources.
Working hard all the time from the age of 12 James remembers, “I just thought I’d better go to college unless I want life to be like this, work a whole bunch just to make ends meet.”

Richard started out as an entrepreneur early in life. Richard knew he was going to continue his college education and complete his goal of receiving a four-year degree. He never really thought college was optional. He had looked at his extended family, his aunts and uncles, and they either worked hard labor jobs or were educated and worked desk jobs. “I saw that those who had a four-year degree had better jobs and lived better than we did. They were doing pretty good.” He saw that they had better jobs, earned more money, lived in nicer homes, and drove nicer cars. Education was a means to an end of being able to provide a better life for himself and his wife. That financial driver helped to get him all the way through his doctoral program. However, while the financial benefits of a career may have started Richard’s and the other participant’s persistent drive to complete their educations, it ultimately lead to the final emergent theme, improving American Indian communities.

Whether encouraged by their supporting relationships or learned from life experiences, and whether or not it was financial or intellectual, each participant eventually developed and maintained an uncompromised perception about the value of higher education in their lives and for the well-being of their communities.

**Improving American Indian Communities**

Emphasis, related to the call for improving American Indian communities, was consistent and explicit across all six participants stories. I also believe it to be the most direct and easily identifiable of these four emergent themes. While Kota had an initial
rough start to his educational path, it didn’t take him long to determine that the value of his education was more than just being able to provide a better life for himself and his children. He realized that being one of the few American Indian men in his community to complete a doctorate degree he could serve as an educational leader, as a mentor, and as a role model for other American Indian youth. He explains that there are not many male role models for young boys to look up to on the reservation who have advanced degrees or terminal degrees, “so I wanted that not only for my own kids, but for all the kids that I mentor. Yeah, more so than anything that is what I did it for.”

Eastman shared how members of the Indian Club would gather and discuss how their educations could benefit the larger Indian community. He stated these meeting were never about how much money they could earn, but if you were a lawyer or teacher or engineer, how could you use your education to benefit Indian Country? Assessing his own abilities, Eastman initially decided that math education was something he could give back to tribal communities. “The idea of serving and being able to serve” was a driving motivation to put him “in a position to do some good.” Being a high school math teacher teaching in an Indian community allowed him to fulfill this vocation. “Education was an easy in to that because I would be working in a native community space that was needed, math education. I could supply the kid something not only in terms of content but in terms of perspective.” A little farther down his educational career path he realized he could make a larger positive impact by completing his doctorate degree and working on a national level for tribal higher education.

Sam found his motivation, to complete his doctoral education, was so that he could “change Indian education in a positive way.” Eddie was driven by a similar
motivation to complete his doctorate so that he could have an impact of the educational curriculum and policies in Indian Country and on his home reservation. Eddie thought, “Unless I can sit at the table with the white man [who has a Ph.D.] I can’t have any impact on my community.” Richard, similar to Sam and Eddie, has also been driven to serve his tribal communities and Indian Country through educational leadership at a tribal college level.

Finally, once James found his passion for law, he described what could again best describe as a near altruistic drive to serve and protect Indian Country and indigenous people. He’s done so not just at the local and state level, but also at the national and international level. He has been so dedicated to giving back to tribal communities and improving life for tribal and indigenous peoples that his own health has been negatively impacted. Today, he is in a much healthier place physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Among all participants the desire to give back to and improve their tribal communities is a strong feature of their individual agency of resilience, determination, and academic pursuits.

Summary

The emergent themes found in this study demonstrate that an American Indian male, who persists to completion of their doctorate degree, has experienced and overcome self-doubt about their own academic abilities. To do that, they have an individual or group of individuals who provide support, guidance, and encouragement. These sources of support come from various places, such as family, role models, schools, and others, in addition to this important role of the social and cultural support. However, having someone rooting for their success and supporting with a word of encouragement
was not the only influential factor in the stories of success. An American Indian male has developed and maintained an uncompromised perception about the value of higher education in their lives and the well-being of their communities. Connected to that, a desire to give back to and improve their tribal communities is a strong feature of their individual agency of resilience, determination, and academic pursuits. These four emergent themes are found in the stories shared by all six participants. The stories these participants shared in this study are both rich and deep with content and meaning. While no two sets of experiences are identical and the participants were significantly separated geographically, there are still similarities that help us to better understand the lived experience of American Indian men who has persisted to completion of their doctorate degree.
CHAPTER 6

VOICE OF THEORETICAL PREOCCUPATION

This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of American Indian men who have completed their doctoral degrees. American Indians are not completing doctoral degrees at the same rate as other documented minorities. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2016) documents that from a peak in 2008-09 of 460 American Indian/Alaska Native men and a peak in 2009-10 of 522 American Indian/Alaska Native women, completion of doctoral degrees has been in decline for both genders. In this study I investigated American Indian men’s personal and educational experiences that supported their educational journey, created barriers to completing their educational goals, and motivated them to persist to completion. I then examined their stories to identify common experiences and characteristics. I was specifically interested in their reflections on the behaviors and actions they engaged in or were faced with while pursuing their educations and their motivations for pursuing postsecondary education and a doctoral degree. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the emergent themes through the theory and literature and offer implications for research, theory, and practice. This chapter also provides some reflections and implications for non-Native researchers who pursue research with and about American Indian populations.

What Do These Findings Mean from the Theoretical Perspective?

Echoing existing evidence in the literature, all participants described various common barriers that they had to overcome. Participants frequently struggled to find
adequate funding and they frequently experienced various forms of discrimination and racism. While re-visiting each of the stories about barriers, forms of discrimination, and ways of coping, I found four themes across the participants’ stories, which had converging trends and meanings. The first was self-doubt where participants frequently felt some variation of self-doubt regarding their academic abilities. The second theme was supportive relationships where participants each described supportive individuals, including family members and professors, who valued education and encouraged each participant’s educational journey. The next theme that emerged was that of perceived value where participants each shared a perceived value to education as a means of supporting themselves and providing a better life for their families. The final theme was community improvement where all participants shared a strong desire to improve and give back to their tribal communities, and all American Indian communities, while serving as role models and mentors for other American Indian men and women.

Here, I returned to transculturation theory as the framework to analyze the participant’s stories and the converging themes. Huffman (2010) explains transculturation as “the way in which Native students encounter, engage, and ultimately persist in mainstream education” (p. 163). A key element of transculturation theory is it “rejects the notion that American Indian students must undergo some form of assimilation in order to succeed academically” (Huffman, 2010, p. 171). Huffman (2001) also identified four stages of the American Indian transculturation educational experience: initial alienation, self-discovery, realignment, and participation.
**Initial Alienation**

Huffman (2001) explains that most transcultured students are estranged students and “cultural ‘outsiders’ to the campus environment” and are thus initially alienated (p. 27). “The first stage was an extremely painful period in the experiences of most culturally traditional students. Students reported perplexing feeling of loneliness, isolation, and even depression” (Huffman, 2001, p. 18). Each subject-actor experienced variations of initial alienation during their post secondary educational experience. These variations included isolation and alienation, lack of academic preparation, and discrimination and racism. These experiences appear to confirm that initial alienation does affect individual educational persistence.

Guillory (2008) discovered that American Indian students “experience feelings of academic inadequacy, isolation, alienation, and marginalization” (p. 12). Eastman, James, and Richard shared experiences that seem to verify these findings. Eastman described being overwhelmed and anxious about the size of the campus as well as being isolated and the only Native Ph.D. student in Math Education. James described being homesick and also overwhelmed by the size of the campus. Richard felt isolated when he discovered that he was often the only American Indian student in his classes.

While academic unpreparedness has also been found to be an educational barrier for American Indian students at the post secondary level, it did not appear to be the actual problem for these participants (Flynn, Duncan & Jogensen, 2012; Guillory, 2008). Rather, the emergent theme here was that of self-doubt. Kota, Eastman, Sam, Eddie, and Richard all shared experiences when they had doubt about their abilities. Once in college or at the university, the participants did well for the most part. Kota described believing
that after leaving college the first semester he was not college material or ‘white collar’ enough and would work physical labor the rest of his life. Eastman described being unsure if he was capable of the academic rigor of a Ph.D. program. Sam was uncertain of his academic skills because he had attended a Bureau of Indian Affairs school in a community where he knew there was a 100% dropout rate for those who attempted college. Eddie described being anxious about going to college because he also believed that being a native kid he was not academically prepared for college. Richard also expressed that he had initially been uncertain of his ability to endure the academic rigor of a Ph.D. program. Ultimately, participants overcame their self-doubt.

Racism and discrimination have also been identified as having a role in isolating and alienating American Indian students creating another educational barrier to post secondary education (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill & Dufrene, 2012; Flynn, Duncan & Jogensen, 2012). Kota, Sam, James, and Richard shared experiences of racism and discrimination while in college or entering college. A coach told Kota that he belonged at a tribal college because he was Native American. Sam experienced violent racism during his first year of college. James had an experience with a faculty who did not believe “your kind” belonged in that school. While Richard found himself involved in the American Indian mascot controversies and was often cornered in classes where he was the only American Indian and placed in the position of having to defend and fight against the odds for his point of view. American Indian students often describe experiences that, while not overtly racist, were rather subtle or passively racist such as when their race and culture were either completely ignored in classroom discussions or they were “singled out as representative of their race or culture” (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003, p. 556).
Self-Discovery

The individual endurance of students who remain on campus longer leads students to the second stage of self-discovery. Huffman (2001) found that culturally traditional American Indian students who were able to reach this stage did so because they “began to realize that they had not been snared in a web of assimilation, that they could compete academically, and that they could interact with American Indians and non-Indians alike, all without loss to their cultural self-identity” (p. 20). These students were successful not because they assimilated, but because they remained culturally American Indian. All six subject-actors experienced some form of self-discovery during their educational experiences.

The process of self-discovery for these participants was varied for the participant-actors. The underlying development in the stage of self-discovery appeared to be attributed to the supportive individuals and supportive relationships. All participants shared experiences of having at least one person, mostly from their family, or sometimes multiple individuals or faculty, who helped them past their initial self-doubt and alienation. Support is frequently cited as having a positive influence on the educational persistence of American Indian students (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Kicking Woman, 2011). Kota was approached by a coach who knew of his athletic abilities and invited him to come back to college and give it a try again. With that coach’s support and the support of the athletic program Kota began to discover that he enjoyed school and learning. Eastman had the support of his family who encouraged him to go to college. While in school it was his participation in the Minority Engineering Program, the Indian Club, and intermural basketball that helped him persist. Later, it was
his math faculty who affirmed that he should pursue his doctorate degree. This support helped him discover that he was just as smart as any other students in his program and he, too, could complete his doctoral degree. Sam, after some initial difficulties, finally established a network of elders back home whom he would return to for advice and guidance, but it was the support and encouragement of his master’s program faculty who helped him discover completing a doctoral degree was possible. Eddie stated that he never believed he was smart enough for graduate school. Yet, while finishing his master’s degree, it was again the support and encouragement of his faculty recommending that he needed to apply to the doctoral program which helped him to discover that he what he now views as his true calling, teaching. James, being a first generation student, stated that he was initially not even aware there was such as thing as a graduate degree before attending college. It was when his spouse began preparing to go to law school that he took a look at the types of LSAT questions she was practicing and discovered that he really enjoyed the logic games. Finally, Richard had the support of his wife who shared similar academic goals, but yet he had never considered completing his doctoral degree. Ultimately, it was again a graduate faculty member and mentor who provided him with financial support in the form of research work and who strongly encouraged Richard to complete his Ph.D. It was then that Richard finally discovered this was something he wanted to complete which lead him to his current career. Each of these discoveries triggered the participant-actors to realign themselves to functioning successfully in the academic environment while still retaining their strong cultural identities.
Realignement

Huffman (2001) found that once transcultured students discovered their success was due to their strong cultural identity, they began to learn how to adapt and work within both cultures depending on the situation. They became able to evaluate their “values, attitudes, and goals” enabling themselves to align with academia’s norms and behaviors and “cross cultural boundaries” when needed (p. 22). This realignment was more difficult to identify in the participants stories. It was not clear that their strong cultural identity alone was the cause for their success, but it did appear to play a role in their success.

Realignement by means of individual’s strong cultural identities took a variety of forms. While Kota, Eastman, Sam, Eddie, James, and Richard all expressed having great pride in their heritage, history, and traditions, they each honored those in their own unique ways. Kota explains that for him, staying healthy and fit while being a leader is how he promotes his culture. Eastman also has a strong sense of pride in his heritage and believes his experience living on the reservation has played a significant role in how he views things. Sam practices his traditional way of life as much as possible, getting up early in the mornings, attending blessings, and performing prayers, as well as his commitment to preserving his peoples language and history through teaching. Eddie’s family was deeply involved in the Native American Church. Today he tries to pass on those beliefs to his four children, not just the beliefs of the Native American Church but also the traditional ceremonies of their tribe. James recalls that during difficult times in school, both as an undergraduate and graduate student, he would go back to solitude and prayer, welcoming the energy of all his well-wishers from afar, then coming back full of
energy, doing what needed to be done, and getting his education back on track. Today he continues this practice of prayer and cleansing. When Richard was in his early teens, there was a resurgence of American Indian culture, specifically singing and dancing at powwows and a return to sweat lodges and other ceremonies. He continued these practices into his college years.

During this realignment period, one emergent theme began to present itself; participants developed a perceived value of higher education and obtaining advanced degrees. However, this perceived value of higher education did not appear in the literature reviewed for this study. Kota realized that he would be able to better care for his family and persisting to completion if his doctorate degree would set a positive example for his children and for the children he works with on the reservation. Eastman quickly realized teaching K-12 Math was not profitable and did not provide an enough income to support his family. Sam also discovered that being a K-12 tutor did not provide much of a living. Eddie and Richard each saw that those who had educations had better jobs, nicer homes, and were better able to support their families. James knew that a college education would allow him to obtain a career.

**Participation**

Transcultured students begin to actively participate in the academic experience realizing their American Indian identity was a source of strength and confidence (Huffman, 2010). The subject-actors in this study each describe their decision to participate as having taken place in various ways and at various times. This also does not clearly align with transculturation theory. Some participants recalled their decision to
participate occurred more than once. Other participants made the decision to participate while they were still in high school.

The active participation of participants in their academic experience does have a strong connection to their American Indian identity in the form of the final emergent theme, a strong desire to give back to their communities. Guillory and Wolverton (2008) found that some students have strong desires to return to their reservations to give back and improve communities that have provided for them feeling “they owed it to the tribe to succeed” (p. 75). Kota was driven to complete his doctorate degree so he could return to his reservation and work to improve the lives and health is his community. When Eastman’s connection to his ancestry and community is reinforces the idea that, “You’re not doing things for yourself. Your successes are really only successes if they help others.” He also felt completing his education would provide him with the opportunity to give back to the Indian community. “The idea of serving and being able to serve” has been his driving motivation to put himself “in a position to do some good.” Sam has been driven to complete his doctorate degree so he could work to “change Indian education in a positive way”. Eddie realized that if he did not obtain the same level of education as the principal he had a conflict with he would never be able to have any impact what happens at that school, or with the curriculum and policies at any tribal schools. James ultimately made his decision to fully participate while he was still in high school. He wanted to complete his civil engineering degree so he could return to his reservation and build the infrastructure they desperately needed, however there were no jobs for civil engineers on the reservation that would pay well enough that he would be able to repay his student loans. The completion of his law degree has allowed him to
return to his reservation and serve his community, Indian Country, and indigenous peoples around the world. Finally, Richard returned to his reservation to teach at the local tribal college, and then serve as Tribal Chairman, and now he serves as a tribal college president.

**Limitations of the Study**

The first limitation I identified at the start of the study was that of myself being a White male conducting research about American Indians. This is due to the long history of White men establishing American Indian education policy to assimilate American Indians into Western American society. This is still a sensitive issue for many American Indians to this day. While I was interviewing participants, I noted this limitation with only one individual who initially greeted me with skepticism. After we had spent some time together, he began to trust and respond with less guarded answers. All other participants were welcoming and eager to share their stories with me. When working with this group of participants, well-educated American Indian men who have completed their doctorate degrees, I’m left with the impression that my white ethnicity was not as much of a concern as I first anticipated it to be.

The second limitation I identified was the physical distance between the participants and myself. While this was overcome for the initial interviews and I’ve been able to share transcripts and writings with each participant via email, I still believe this to be limiting factor in this study. I believe it would have been beneficial to have the opportunity to spend more time getting to learn about each participant and time to develop a deeper understanding of their passions and motivations. This added time may
have benefited the study in areas where results were less clearly defined such as under realignment and participation.

One final limitation I did not address earlier was that of not knowing exactly what to ask participants in order to encourage them to tell the stories needed for this study. This was due to the limited research available with this particular group of participants, American Indian men who complete their doctorate degrees. Questions were based on prior mixed gender and mixed minority studies. However, because no study of this nature had been conducted in the past, it was difficult to know exactly what to ask. Here again, having the ability to spend more time with participants would have been beneficial.

**Implications and Recommendations for Theory and Research**

I found the method of portraiture to be ideal for this study despite the limitation described above, such as the distance from participants. Once participants began telling their own personal stories, their link to the historical traditions of oral histories quickly became evident. With only slight prompting, participants shared stories rich with content and detail that extended beyond the scope of this study. The act of story telling was natural for each participant, enjoyable to listen, and mostly easy to follow. With added time to develop more meaningful relationships with participants, as described by Lightfoot and Davis (1997), stronger collaborative process would be possible.

Transculturation theory mostly fits this study as the framework for analysis, however, while initial alienation and self-discovery were clearly present in participant stories, realignment and participation were less clearly identified. It is possible additional time collaborating with participants was needed to better identify these themes, or
perhaps a different set of probing questions was needed. It is also possible a different 
theory may be needed since participants seemed to have already aligned themselves to 
academic norms and decided to fully participate in their educations early in their 
academic careers, as early as during their K-12 years. Considering this perceived 
determination to participate and align with academic norms, how would the results of this 
study compare to the results of a similar study utilizing self-authorship theory?

In Chapter 3 I explained that I have been fortunate to work directly with tribal 
communities for nearly a decade. This does not include the more than six years I spent 
working with regional Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) to preserve and 
present cultural histories and artifacts as part of my duties while working for a nationally 
accredited state history museum. These experiences have provided me with a deeper 
nuanced insight into cultural and tribal community norms when compared to other non-
native researchers who may be coming in from the outside. However, my own academic 
studies have informed me that as a non-Native researcher conducting a study about 
Native American male educational experiences, I needed to be sensitive and respectful. 
When I first selected this topic, I had an opportunity to visit with a guest speaker who is a 
well recognized academic scholar and Native American elder. I explained the study and 
asked if it was a concern for her that I would be a non-Native white researcher 
conducting this type of study. Her response was simple, “That’s your problem. We need 
the research.”

Kent Nerburn, author of *Neither Wolf Nor Dog: On forgotten roads with an Indian 
elder* (1994), is a non-Native researcher who has also lived and worked with Native 
American people for many years. Through his experiences, work, and authorship, he has
developed some insightful and valuable thoughts regarding this topic of non-Native white researchers working with indigenous populations. There are many good intentioned white people who,

…try to ‘become’ Indians or, at least, try to become one with Indian experience. They take on the trappings, they romanticize, they try to right the historical wrong through a great outpouring of empathy, or try to enhance their own identity by appropriating Indian values or belief. In the process, they distort the reality of the people whom they care so deeply, and turn them into a reflection of their own needs (Nerburn, 1994/2002, p. XII).

The non-Native white researcher working with indigenous populations needs to be honest and self aware, caring, trusting, and respectful of differences. The non-Native white researcher should not try to become indigenous. They should avoid overgeneralizing individual experiences and unique indigenous world views by reducing them into something that fits neatly into the dominant cultures’ own understanding and worldview. Implementation of these actions will assist to avoid reducing subject-actors “to collective objects of sympathy or pity or veneration” (Nerburn, 1994/2002, p. XII). I agree with Nerburn’s insights and recommendations. Additionally, my experience informed me that the careful and deliberate selection of the methodology and theory is also a critical step for the non-Native white researcher working with indigenous populations. In this study portraiture’s methodology linked seamlessly to the historical traditions of sharing knowledge via oral histories.

This study also suggests a number of other opportunities for additional research to be conducted. First, in Kota’s story he shared that a strong motivational drive for him to
attend college was to prove a racist coach wrong. There might be value in revisiting the data using Critical Race Theory to examine how discrimination and racism affects overcoming educational barriers and persisting to completion of doctoral degrees. Next, participants shared stories of persistence that described determination and hard work as means for their persistence. Revisiting the collected data using Grit as the theoretical lens analyzing for self-determination as it relates to participants persistence to completion of their doctoral degrees.

All participants had family, grandparents, parents, and siblings, who valued education even if they themselves did not participate in higher education. Is this common among other American Indian men who complete their doctorate degrees?

Most participants explained that they had early access to books, enjoyed reading, and did fairly well in their K-12 schools. Some even found learning to be easy. Is access to early learning experiences and books common for other American Indian men who complete their doctorate degrees?

Participants either served in the military, considered serving in the military, or had family who served in the military. This service was a common among all participants and was described as an expectation for American Indian men, military service or work. Two of the six participants used their military service to help fund their educations and others considered military service to fund their educations. What role does military service play in the lives of American Indian men who complete their doctorate degrees?

Participants described a culture and education system that maintained and furthered different expectations of American Indian men vs. those expectations for American Indian women. Men are expected to graduate high school, start families, and
join the military, or start working to provide for their families. Women are encouraged to graduate high school and go on to college. Select participants associated these differing expectations to historical traditions and culture, the hunter-gatherer society. Is there evidence that a historical cultural connection related to a hunter-gatherer society commonly influences different educational and career expectations for American Indian men vs. American Indian women? These questions may shape and guide future directions of this research.

**Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

Participants in this study addressed various concerns and volunteered some recommendations regarding American Indian men pursuing higher education. Commonly, participants expressed concerns about the uphill battle young men on the reservation have when it comes to education. It was stated several times that there are different expectations for American Indian men and American Indian women. These different expectations lead family, friends, and teachers to treat young men and women differently. Participants explained that while women are often shown a clear path to pursue their educations, men are guided directly to work or military service. Kota contemplates that this may be a carry over from the Native American hunter gather culture. “The males were the hunters, they go off and hunt, they go off and they work. The gatherers, they stay home and educate kids blah, blah, blah. That concept is still being played out on reservations today.” Other participants share similar stories of young American Indian men not being guided toward or encouraged to pursue higher education like American Indian women are. Sam explains:
I think that we really need to start to create a male initiative to inspire high school males to pursue college. I think that the expectations start in the schools. I remember very low expectations for male students, even when we were in middle school. They didn’t expect us to go very far. When we got to high school it was like, just try to get a job and support your family. I think we need to catch them at junior high and start building them so that by the time they are in high school they are already on a career path. A lot of times I’m noticing that the males in my community, they want quick money. They don’t want to go through the training programs. They don’t want to go to college. They want that money. They want to buy a vehicle.

He believes teachers and counselors, with the support of community members who have gone to college, can do a better job of serving as role models and provide that clear path for young American Indian men as well. This need for mentorship and guidance is also supported by the stories of other participants in this study.

Richard explains that many young American Indian men have never even thought about getting their associates or bachelor’s degree, yet alone a master’s degree or even a PhD:

I think they may not be aware of the opportunities that are available to them so I think we’ve got to do a better job informing young people. That means we have to be knowledgeable ourselves as to what is available and then be sure to share information about that opportunity with the people who could benefit.

He also believes these young men would benefit from mentors who have been through the same experiences they have, who have come from the same reservation communities,
and who have went down the same path they are navigating to complete their college
degrees and have successful careers.

One of the motivating drivers for all participants was the need and desire to give
back to their communities and all tribal communities. Some participants expressed
strong desires to return home but found that they were unable to do so. James explains
that while he always to return home there were no jobs for him or his wife within their
tribal community that paid well enough for them to get out from under their student loan
debt. Sam described a similar problem with his tribal community, “There were no jobs
on the reservation, and so the kids helped me to decide what to be. They said you’d be a
good teacher.” Of the six participants, only one works on their reservation in their
hometown. The other participants do what they can from a distance. Participants
expressed that for individuals who want to return to their reservation, this inability to
obtain employment back home after they complete their college degree is a deterrent to
even try.

Ensuring access to early educational experiences, books, and early college
experiences also appears to be a strong recommendation for practice. Participants in this
study shared various early educational experience including activities like Upward
Bound, an early college experience program for 7th and 8th grade students, or a summer
camp on held at a regional higher education institution. These experiences encouraged
those participants to apply to those institutions after they graduated from high school
because, as they explained, they were already familiar with the campuses.

Providing access to better funding sources is another area of practice that
participants suggest would be a benefit for all American Indian students. Participants
shared stories of running out of funding even for basics like food and having to drop out of schools. Participants would have to work various jobs and take out student loans to pay for their educations. Only one participant was able to complete their doctorate without student loans, simply because they were well employed while they worked on their degree.

Finally, participant stories suggest that in order for there to be more American Indian men who complete their doctorate degrees, there needs to be a shift in how tribal communities perceive American Indian men who pursue their educations. Participants in this study had families who highly valued education, but that is frequently not the case within tribal communities. Sam explains that men were expected to work with their hands at menial jobs. “Guys shouldn’t be on the computer or, you know, doing things like girls do. So that’s why very few males pursue it, it wasn’t considered manly to go to college.”

**Conclusions**

The stories of their educational experiences shared by these six participants are both rich and deep with content and meaning. While no two sets of experiences shared are identical and the participants were significantly separated geographically, there are still similarities that help us to better understand the lived experience of an American Indian male that has persisted to completion of their doctorate degree. The emergent themes found in this study demonstrate: that an American Indian male who persists to completion of their doctorate degree has experienced and overcome self-doubt about their own academic abilities; that they have an individual or group of individuals who provide positive support, guidance, and encouragement; that they have developed and perceived
value of higher education; and that they have a strong desire to give back to their tribal communities.

Other general similarities include this individual would most likely come from a family who values education, even if those family members did not attend college or receive a degree themselves. They would have access to early learning experiences and books, often having a passion for reading and in some cases finding learning in school to be easy. They would develop a strong work ethic with the help of parents, grandparents, and siblings who served as role models. They would have family members who served in the military and they themselves either served or considered serving as a means of paying for their educations. Finally, this individual would have, as one participant stated, a “stick-to-it-ness” which drove them to completion of their educations, and as stated by another participant “there was never a question about not finishing.” Now, empowered by their doctoral educations, each participant is fulfilling their new leadership roles as mentors and role models for their children and the children of others, by writing policy and law protecting Indigenous rights, by educating others and preserving traditional languages and practices, and by ensuring the health and welfare of their tribal communities.

Summary

This chapter presents the discussion, interpretation of the findings, recommendations, and conclusions of this study. While findings regarding barriers and challenges corresponded closely with the document evidence in the literature, this study discovered four additional themes contributing to a collective portrait of eight American Indian males who completed their doctorate degree. After reading these themes through

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the literature and the theory, each of these themes found additional meanings in connection with the existing literature and the propositions of transculturation theory. First, participants experienced self-doubt about their academic abilities at some point during their academic careers, which was an additional layer in alienation. Second, participants had supportive individuals who helped guide and encourage them to complete the educations, which prompted the individuals re-connect with their selves in the context of educational possibilities and lead to their self-discovery. Third, participants developed a perceived value to higher education and obtaining advanced degrees, which re-aligned their cultural identities with the purposes and reasons of educational pursuits. Finally, all participants expressed a strong desire to serve and give back to their tribal communities, which, arguably, was a solid foundation for their persistence.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Reflexivity Statement

The following reflexivity statement functions as an important part of my research methods dependability and credibility. It will address my own experiences, perceptions, and thoughts that may influence the study. First, I will reflect upon my own personal experiences and perceptions of American Indian communities. Next, I will reflect upon my own deep-seated passion for education, lifelong learning, and educational access. Finally, I will reflect upon my professional experiences with American Indian communities while working in state government and while teaching at a tribal college and which have guided me towards conducting this study.

My early experiences with American Indian communities were very limited up through my early college years. My very first memory of American Indian society and culture occurred in my youth while growing up on a ranch in south central North Dakota on the east side of the Missouri River. During those years, in the late summer before harvest when everything is dry and brown, a large powwow was held annually on the reservation directly across the Missouri River from our ranch. In the evenings, when the air was calm and the sun was setting, I would sit on our back porch and listen to the sound of the drums several miles away while watching the large bonfires flicker in the diming light. These experiences were easily reinforced as romanticized stereotypes by the television shows my father watched in the 1970s including Bonanza, Gun Smoke,
Little House on the Prairie, The Rifleman, Rawhide, Branded, and The Big Valley. Yet for myself, while the memories are both nostalgic and almost surreal, the stereotypes never set in as part of my perception of American Indian society, culture, and people. I contribute this to the influence of my mother who was both college educated and traveled.

There are a number of influences that caused me to develop a deep-seated passion for education and life long learning. First, I cannot overlook the fact that I am not a first generation college student. My mother was college educated and she traveled before starting a family. She spent three years in the Peace Corps establishing an English language school in Brazil, a school I’ve gone on to support to this very day. From a very early age, through literature and her stories and artifacts from her travels, she introduced me to the possibilities of an outside world away from the homogeneous communities where I was growing up. Additionally, she instilled in me the value of learning even when it’s difficult to do so. I struggled through my K-12 experience during a time before ADHD and dyslexia were tested for and diagnosed early in children’s learning experience. Upon graduation from high school, when friends, relatives, and my own father, expected me to take up a traditional and respectable trade that any rural kid would be proud to have, she encouraged me to try attending the same local university where she started her postsecondary education.

During my time as an undergraduate and graduate student I spent more time learning about diverse cultures including American Indians. I met and befriended a number of American Indian colleagues for whom I remain friends with to this day. Through their artwork I began to gain insight into their own worldviews and experiences
as they navigated between reservation life and a contemporary art world heavily influenced by a mostly white European and American perspective.

Following graduate school I began a museum career where I eventually found myself working for the State Historical Society of North Dakota. This was a transformative experience for me as I was now a figure who shared the responsibility of carefully and accurately preserving and displaying the history for all of North Dakota. I worked with Tribal Historic Preservation offices from across the state to assist them with the preservation and display of their own artifacts and the telling of their stories from their own view. Within our agency I worked to ensure exhibits respectfully and accurately told the history of all tribal peoples in North Dakota. It is during this time when I also became familiar with tribal oral traditions and winter counts as means of preserving American Indian knowledge, history, and culture. These experiences have deeply influenced my own values as a researcher, historian, and artist.

Finally, the experience of teaching at a tribal college for eight years has had a profound influence on my view of education for American Indian students. Being a non-native educator and researcher, this time provided me with an up close and intimate understanding of the challenges and barriers American Indian students must overcome to be academically successful and persist to graduation. While tribal colleges may have a more culturally specific environment for American Indian students to more comfortably engage in higher education, I have found that many of the challenges and barriers to persistence are the same as those for American Indian students attending white majority serving institutions. I also witnessed first hand the dramatic transformation that can take place when students who were perceived to fail because of their ethnic heritage, the
community they call home, and economic hardships, continued to persist to degree completion and completion of a graduate education.

It is important to understand that these influences do motivate and guild my thoughts regarding the value and need for more research about American Indian educational experiences. My earliest memories and the influence of my mother combined with my college and professional experiences provide me with a firm foundation that help keep me realistically grounded as a white researcher conducting research about American Indian educational experiences.
APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

First Interview: PreK-12

Subject name/alias:

Date:

Time:

Location:

Questions:

The following questions are designed to probe and encourage discussion related to the educational persistence of American Indian men who persist to completion of their doctoral degree. The interviews will be conducted using a semi-structured format. Reflective listening with minimal encouragement will be used to maximize participant responses and increase the depth of interview content. The actual wording and order of the questions will be adapted to be appropriate to context and the flow of the interview. The three core research questions are first, what barriers did these American Indian men overcome to complete their degree? Second, what were the supports that assisted these American Indian men overcome barriers to completing their degree? Third, what motivated these American Indian men to persist to completion of their degree? These questions will be framed using the 10 core themes related to barriers and challenges to American Indian educational persistence as identified by Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgenson (2012): institutional barriers; finances; mixed messages; academic unpreparedness; social connections; family influences; racism and discrimination; reservation life as a barrier to
predominantly White culture; antecedents for college completion and retention; antecedents for college dropout and academic probation.

1. Please describe your earliest memories and experiences of attending school. (Probing: family; friends; individuals; likes; dislikes)

2. Please discuss what things were most beneficial to you during your elementary and high school years. (Probing: family; friends; individuals; social involvement; activities; academic resources)

3. Please discuss what things were most difficult for you during your elementary and high school years. (Probing: family; friends; individuals; racism and discrimination; social involvement; activities; academic resources)

4. Please talk about your decision to attend college. (Probing: family; friends; individuals; alternatives; finances; motivation)

5. Please talk about your experiences outside of school that affected your decision to attend college? (Probing: (Probing: family; friends; individuals; role models; social involvement; activities; financial resources)

6. Please talk about your involvement in the culture and traditions of your tribe before attending college? (Probing: (Probing: family; friends; individuals; ceremonies)
Second Interview: Postsecondary and Graduate

Subject name/alias:

Date:

Time:

Location:

Questions:

The following questions are designed to probe and encourage discussion related to the educational persistence of American Indian men who persist to completion of their doctoral degree. The interviews will be conducted using a semi-structured format. Reflective listening with minimal encouragement will be used to maximize participant responses and increase the depth of interview content. The actual wording and order of the questions will be adapted to be appropriate to context and the flow of the interview. The three core research questions are first, what barriers did these American Indian men overcome to complete their degree? Second, what were the supports that assisted these American Indian men overcome barriers to completing their degree? Third, what motivated these American Indian men to persist to completion of their degree? These questions will be framed using the 10 core themes related to barriers and challenges to American Indian educational persistence as identified by Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgenson (2012): institutional barriers; finances; mixed messages; academic unpreparedness; social connections; family influences; racism and discrimination; reservation life as a barrier to predominantly White culture; antecedents for college completion and retention; antecedents for college dropout and academic probation.
1. Please describe your thoughts and feelings about what you believed it would be like to attend college before attending. (Probing: hopes; fears; motives)

2. Please describe your thoughts and feelings about what it was actually like for you to attend college/university. (Probing: family; friends; academic resources; financial resources; social involvement; activities; racism and discrimination)

3. Please discuss what things were most beneficial to you during your college/university years. (Probing: family; friends; individuals; social involvement; activities; academic resources)

4. Please discuss what things were most difficult for you during your college/university years. (Probing: family; friends; individuals; racism and discrimination; social involvement; activities; academic resources)

5. Please talk about your decision to attend graduate school and pursue your doctoral degree. (Probing: family; friends; individuals; motivation)

6. Please talk about your experiences that affected your decision to persist to completion of your doctoral degree? (Probing: family; friends; individuals; mentors; academic resources; social involvement; activities; financial resources; motivation)

7. Please talk about your involvement in the culture and traditions of your tribe while attending college/university (Probing: family; friends; individuals; ceremonies)

8. Please discuss what you would do differently with your educational experiences. (Probing: family; friends; individuals; mentors; academic resources; social involvement; activities; financial resources)
9. Please talk about your life experiences after completing your doctoral degree.

(Probing: family; friends; career; tribe; reservation)
APPENDIX C

Artist-Researcher Biography

Shawn F. Holz

609 12th St NW

Mandan, ND 58554

Email: shawnfholz@gmail.com

Phone: 701-400-3588

Currently, Shawn Holz is serving as Dean of Academics, Sitting Bull College, Fort Yates, ND.

Most recently he served as the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs for Dawson Community College in Glendive, Montana, and as the Director of Academic Affairs for the Laramie County Community College, Albany County Campus, in Laramie, WY.

He served United Tribes Technical College as Instructor/Art and Art Marketing, Bismarck State College as Adjunct Art Instructor/Gallery Director, the State Historical Society of North Dakota as Curator of Exhibits, and the University of Northern Iowa as Director, UNI Gallery of Art. He began his professional career immediately following graduate school when he was invited back to Texas Tech University to serve as Interim Director, Forum on the Visual Arts (FOVA) Galleries, Department of Art.
Shawn was awarded the Masters of Fine Arts degree from Texas Tech University where he studied photography, painting, and 20th century art theory and criticism. He earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of North Dakota where he studied art and photography. He continues to pursue his creative work and volunteers his time to support local arts organizations.

Shawn’s other interests include supporting 4-H programs, humane societies, and animal shelters. He enjoys hiking, hunting, fishing, and 4X4 trail adventures. He and his wife Wendi are passionate about dogs and have a special affection for the Bichon Frise breed, training them to work as therapy dogs and to participate in K-9 agility.

Shawn grew up on a cattle ranch in central and western North Dakota. His family and relatives are still farming and ranching in the same western North Dakota communities and on many of the same homesteads their ancestors settled over 100 years ago.
APPENDIX D

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE: Lived Experiences of American Indian Men Who Persist to Completion of Doctoral Degrees
PROJECT DIRECTOR: Shawn F. Holz
PHONE #: 701-400-3588
DEPARTMENT: Education Leadership

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

A person who is to participate in the 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?

You are invited to be in a research study about the lived experiences of American Indian men who complete doctoral degrees because you have been identified as an American Indian man who lived on a reservation, attended school on a reservation, and completed their doctoral education.

The purpose of this research study is to identify the common experiences and characteristics of a male American Indian student who has persisted to completion of their doctoral degrees.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Approximately 6-10 people will take part in this research study.
HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in the study will last through December 2018. You will be asked to meet face to face with the principal investigator a minimum of two times. Each visit/interview will take about 45 – 75 minutes. The methodology being used encourages additional time spent developing a trusting working relationship between the investigator and the subject that will require additional investigator and subject collaboration beyond the initial two interviews.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

You will be asked to participate in two semi-structured interviews at a location of your choosing. Interview questions will be open ended to allow for you to tell your story. These interviews are scheduled to last between 45-75 minutes and will be digitally recorded. Interviews will be transcribed by the principal investigator and shared with you for your review and approval. You retain the right to edit the transcripts up to the publication of the research. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, you may also have less formal communication with the principal investigator. This communication may include emails, text messages, phone conversations, etc. A memo will be created for each point of contact and be used as source material for the narrative analysis. All data will be reported as an individual narrative of each participant under a pseudo name (that they choose) and in an aggregate format, such as patterns of experience emerging as themes from all participants’ stories. You will review and approve your individual portraits before the final narrative analysis.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You may not benefit personally from being in this study. However, we hope that other people might benefit from this study because of the composite portrait of a male American Indian student who has persisted to completion of their doctoral degree. This portrait may identify additional needed research and may inform educational policies at public and tribal institutions.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You will not have any costs for being in this research study. The principal investigator will travel to you to conduct the interviews.

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. Government agencies and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board may review your study record.

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 you providing an alias of your choice to be identified by in the final research document.

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 principal investigator immediately following the interviews will transcribe audio recordings and provide a copy of the transcriptions for your review and approval. You retain the right to edit the transcripts up to the publication of the research. Audio recordings will be deleted at the conclusion of the study, December 2018. Transcripts and consent forms will be stored in a locked safe for three years after completion of the study and then destroyed. Research documents will be maintained in separate locked files and on an external hard drive not connected to a network. The principal investigator, his advisor and doctoral committee, and people who audit IRB files may have access to all documents and files related to this study.

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 inform the project director/principal investigator immediately. No explanation is required. Your records and data will be removed for the study and securely destroyed.
CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?

The researcher conducting this study is Shawn F. Holz. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Shawn F. Holz at 701-400-3588 or at shawnfholz@gmail.com. You may also contact his doctoral advisor Zarrina Azizova, Ph.D. at 701.777.3737 or at zarrina.azizova@und.edu.

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 or UND.irb@research.UND.edu.

• 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 audio recorded during this study.

Please initial: _____ Yes _____ No

I give consent for my quotes to be used in the research; however I will not 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
REFERENCES


Saunders, C. T., (2011). *Native American tribal colleges and universities: Issues and problems impacting students in the achievement of educational goals* (Doctoral dissertation). The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I (920010802).

Schmidtke, C., (2009). "That's what really helped me was their teaching": Instructor impact on the retention of American Indian students at a two-year technical college. *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education, 46*(1), 48-80.


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doi:10.1037/a0031546


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White, P. M., III, (2007). *Assessing the factors that affect the persistence and graduation rates of Native American students in postsecondary education* (Doctoral
