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The Lived Experiences of Natives who Have Attended Both TCUs and PWIs

Heather Kind-Keppel
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Ruth Harper, Ph.D., Content Specialist

Ray Francis, Ed.D., Content Reader

The Lived Experiences of Natives who Have Attended Both TCUs and PWIs

Heather Marie Kind-Keppel

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

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Candis Best, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Ray Francis, Ed.D., Content Reader

Ruth Harper, Ph.D., Content Specialist

Concordia University–Portland

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation was to determine how Natives defined their experiences at both TCUs and PWIs. This study is one of the first to gather and analyze the narratives of Natives who have experienced both types of postsecondary education. How Native participants defined their experiences differed from the traditional definitions that have historically been used to dictate and define the frameworks for postsecondary education. The research design for this study is transcendental phenomenology and colonization did provide a necessary framework to compliment Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit). Five participants were interviewed and the following themes emerged from their narratives: TCUs positively impacted participants' confidence; tribal community and Native identity were integral parts of the TCU experience; children and family presence at the TCUs was valued; participants' transitions to the PWIs was impacted positively by their experience at the TCUs; racist interactions occurred at the PWIs; mentors made a positive impact at both TCUs and PWIs; resiliency was a key trait amongst the participants; urban, linear, and reservation Native students at PWIs introduced intra-Indian student conflict; Native based spaces and individuals made an impact on the participants sense of belonging at the PWIs; and perceptions of TCUs are inaccurate. The lived experiences of the participants who attended both types of postsecondary institutions proved to be very distinct. The participants articulated that their success at PWIs was because of the foundation the TCUs gave them to persist their time at PWIs.

Keywords: TCUs, PWIs, Natives, postsecondary education, TribalCrit

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Todd and our children, James, and Isabelle. Without their

unconditional love and support, I would have been unable to complete this journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Native American, or

"Native" students have the lowest education completion rates of any identity-based subgroup. The

lack of completion in education ranges from as early as pre-kindergarten through postsecondary

(American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2016). NCES reported in 2016 that Natives make

up less than one percent (0.08%) of the students enrolled in postsecondary education in the United

States. According to the 2016 U.S. census data, there are approximately 323 million people in the

U.S. Of this population, 76.9% are White, 17.8% are Hispanic, 13.1% are Black, 5.7% are Asian,

and 1.3% are Native (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). According to the NCES, in 2015 there was a

total enrollment of 17 million undergraduates. Of this population, 54.7% were White, 17.6% were

Hispanic, 13.5% were Black, 6.4% were Asian, and .08% were Native (NCES, 2016).

Underrepresentation of Natives in postsecondary education is not a new phenomenon.

Understanding what barriers prevent access, admission, enrollment, continuation, and graduation

of Natives within systems of postsecondary education is essential to assessing the problem and

increasing representation rates. However, research does demonstrate that 43% of Natives who

started postsecondary education did not persist to completion (Lopez, 2016). These Native

persistence percentages are compared to 33% of their White peers who did not persist (Lopez,

2016). Lopez's (2016) research addressed postsecondary persistence of Native students but did not

address the phenomenon of when Native students persist through both types of postsecondary

institutions—TCUs and PWIs. To date, this is one of the first studies to explore the lived

experiences of Natives who have attended both tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) and

predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Interviewing Natives who had both a TCU and PWI

experience provided valuable information as to how each postsecondary institution shaped their

lived experience.

The first three chapters of this dissertation will provide the reader with a better understanding of the differences in experience of Native participants who have attended both TCUs and PWIs. To date, minimal research has been done to understand this phenomenon and this study attempted to add to the literature by gathering and analyzing the narratives of Natives who have experienced both types of postsecondary education. The study will be detailed in the introduction of Chapter 1, a review of literature in Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 will outline methodology. The reader will be provided a lens by the use of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) through which to view the history, context, and current sociopolitical issues that impact the educational experiences of the Native participants. Further, in order to comprehend these experiences, an examination of the historical and theoretical contexts is imperative. The final two chapters were written after the interviews took place in June of 2018. Chapter 4 analyzes the interviews that were conducted with the five participants as well as the results that emerged from the participant's lived experiences attending both types of postsecondary institutions. Chapter 5 summarizes the study, provides recommendation for future research, and the conclusion.

Introduction to the Problem

Stull, Spyridakis, Gasman, Samayoa, and Booker (2015) identified three barriers that Native communities face in regard to educational obtainment: inadequate funding, remote geographic location, and high poverty areas. These three interconnected variables are compounded by lack of employment opportunities and limited access to healthcare/social services that often characterize tribal communities (for the same reasons).

TCUs provide one avenue for postsecondary educational obtainment for Native communities. TCUs provide postsecondary educational obtainment on tribal land that help sustain Native culture, provide services to the community, and opportunities for scholarship and research (HLC, 2013, p. 5). Other pathways for Natives to access an education are obstructed by ongoing,

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long-term barriers (Wright & Tierney, 1991). Social barriers compound both the economic and educational obstacles Native communities are faced with (AIHEC, 2014). Suicide rates are twice as high for Natives as for non-Natives; Natives face a higher incidence of alcohol-related deaths and larger population of single-parent households (AIHEC, 2014).

These real-life, daily circumstances are some of the variables that are influential when predicting whether or not a Native student will pursue postsecondary education and persist to completion. Based on the fall enrollment of postsecondary students in 2015, Native students continue to be drastically underrepresented in postsecondary enrollment numbers and, therefore, the statistics that pertain to persistence and completion remain drastically low as well. In 2016, only 13.6% of Natives 25 and older had obtained a postsecondary degree (American Indian College Fund, 2016, p. 4). In fall of 2015, there were 19,977,270 students enrolled in the United States in postsecondary education (NCES, 2016, table 304.14). Of these students, American Indian/Alaska Natives were 0.8% or 146,171 of the total (NCES, 2016, table 306.60).

With knowledge of these factors, the postsecondary education systems should be focusing on ways in which they can meet Native student needs, understand specific persistence issues, and create pathways to graduation for Natives in the U.S. Understanding the impact of the type of postsecondary institution has had on the Native participants has the potential to inform practice, procedures, and policy that might influence the enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation of Native students in the future.

Theorists are cognizant there is a gap in knowledge and theory relevant to the Native narrative, and a real understanding of how Natives define their own educational experience is void from the literature (Garland, 2013). Education is a term that is defined based on context, culture, geography, legislation, and policy. In a colonized society, education can be used as a tool to

colonize and assimilate. Natives are a population that are being marginalized through both formal and informal systems, including educational systems (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006).

TCUs were created as a result of Native communities defining their own self-determination for postsecondary education. The creation of TCUs provided a physical space for tribal communities to educate and preserve their culture (Stull et al., 2015). "Tribal Colleges are actively involved in a broad range of community efforts—including basic education, counseling services, and economic development initiatives—that are specifically focused on communities that would otherwise be completely isolated from such resources" (AIHEC, B-1, 1999). This holistic, integrative, tribally-focused, and controlled approach to bridging the needs of community through postsecondary education is what differentiates TCUs from PWIs. Given the sociopolitical factors that impact access to education, learning how Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs can inform higher education as it attempts to meet the needs of a vastly underrepresented student population.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework of the Problem

The history of education of Natives in the U.S. is complex. The first residential boarding school for American Indian children was established in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1879 (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012; Wright & Tierney, 1991). Native children were taken from their homes and families; the goal was to use education as a tool to perpetuate colonization—taking from Native children their kinships, languages, spiritual practices, and more. These children were force-fed the English language and Christianity. Many died of what was euphemistically termed "failure to thrive." Native boys were trained to do farm labor and the girls were trained to perform household help. The phrase "kill the Indian and save the man" is associated with this type of education (Adam, 1995, p. 52 as cited in Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013).

Background and History

Prior to colonization of the U.S., Native communities controlled their education and knowledge-based systems. The settlers not only started the colonization of the Americas but used education as a tool to colonize the people who already lived on these lands (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Boarding schools were an attempt to colonize and dismantle Native communities through the taking of children and interruption of the family system. Because of boarding schools, Native ways of learning and knowledge preservation were halted, disrupted, and ultimately destroyed (Child & Klopotek, 2014). This intentional destruction and colonization of the Native ways of education led to the erosion of culture, language, and tradition.

The Western or colonizer constructs did not understand or respect Indigenous forms of education and, as a result, when the encroachment of White settlers began, the need to colonize all aspects of Indigenous ways of being including education was determined by said settlers (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). This lack of understanding started the erasure of the educational systems Natives had been practicing before colonization (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

Natives have been portrayed as less than human for centuries (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Stull et al., 2015). Unfortunately, throughout history, "education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression" (Freire, 1970, p. 78). This mindset of domination transcends education and is detrimental to all aspects of Natives and their communities (Waterman & Lindley, 2013).

Sovereignty. One way in which TCUs are unique is that they are located on tribally-owned, sovereign lands as designated by the U.S. federal government. The land variable is what makes TCUs distinct from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). All of these institutions serve identity-based populations but only

TCUs reside on tribal land. Further, Native peoples are the only identity-based group with which the U.S. government maintains and negotiates treaties. The concept of sovereignty, which applies only to American Indian tribal communities and not other "minority" groups in the U.S., is a distinctive feature that extends to the creation and operation of TCUs.

There are currently 37 TCUs that serve over 75 sites; unlike PWIs, TCUs are not funded by state or local governments (AIHEC, 2015). Because of the lack of local and state support, TCUs cost 52% more than their counterparts (AIHEC, 2015). The majority of TCU students are over the age of 25 (AIHEC, 2015). Since TCUs serve primarily nontraditional students, "about 25% are single parents; 62% are female; and 64% attend college on a full-time basis" (AIHEC, 2015). Understanding sovereignty can help give the reader context and insight to the unique parameters as to how TCUs are funded and operate in contrast to PWIs.

Sovereignty is a topic that seems to create confusion and misunderstanding regarding the political identity, policies, and rights associated with being a federally recognized tribe. Sovereignty is the result of the U.S. government taking, pushing, and relocating Natives from their traditional lands for centuries. It is also a political designation—not an identity or culturally-based demographic—which again makes Natives unique and different from other racial categories (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006).

There is well-documented, long-standing history of federal and state legislation that has stripped Native Americans of not only their land but their rights, identities, and cultures. "Although compensation for federal trust mismanagement and repatriation of ancestral remains represent important victories, land claims and treaty rights are most central to Indigenous peoples' fight for reparations in the United States" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 206).

The Dawes Act of 1887 and the Indian Reorganization of Act of 1934 are two examples of the U.S. government attempting to control and reduce Native populations and land rights (Takaki,

2008). In 1903, it was determined that the Supreme Court could renegotiate treaties without reason or consultation with tribes (Takaki, 2008). These are only three examples of decades of legislation that are evidence of the ongoing, centuries-long struggle Native communities have had to deal with to preserve their identities.

Because TCUs reside on tribal, sovereign lands, the funding structure is different than other institutions of postsecondary institutions.

> The treaty obligations and trust responsibility between the sovereign Indian tribes and nations and the U.S. federal government sets Tribal Colleges apart from mainstream institutions in a specific way: the federal government is committed to providing funding for Indians for a variety of programs, including higher education. This commitment is especially important because Tribal Colleges receive little or no funding from state governments, as states have no obligation to fund them due to their location on federal trust territory. The status of reservations as federal trust territory also prevents the levying of local property taxes to support higher education—an important source of revenue for most mainstream community colleges. (AIHEC, 1999, p. 21)

In the 1960s, Native activists initiated their own civil rights movements that coincided with other similar movements, resulting in increased self-determination led by tribal leaders who included education for Native populations as a priority (AIHEC, 1999; Boyer, 1997). This growing self-determination was the foundation for ongoing persistence in the 21st century to attempt to provide more educational opportunities for Natives. Self-determination started to emerge, whether it was access to better education or Indigenous ways of informing how policy and practice are both implemented and maintained in the U.S.

Conceptual Framework

Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) has yet to be used as a framework to understand the experiences of Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs. Furthermore, the framework has not been applied as a way to define impacts of postsecondary education, both at TCUs and PWIs, on Native students.

TribalCrit was developed by Brayboy (2005) because Critical Race Theory (CRT) did not account for the unique relationship Natives have had with the U.S. government and the historical impact of colonization. The application of CRT is not as helpful for this dissertation because CRT does not address other racial identities beyond the Black–White binary for which it was developed in the 1970s (Brayboy, 2005). Furthermore, CRT emphasizes that "racism is endemic to society" and TribalCrit emphasizes that "colonization is endemic to society" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). TribalCrit does not dismiss racism but rather adds that colonization is endemic and racism is a byproduct of that colonization (Brayboy, 2005). This theory acknowledges the impact of 500 years of colonization on Native populations and has attempted to create a more Indigenous framework that acknowledges these variables when conducting research with Native participants.

Understanding the history of colonization and the impact it has had on Native communities is imperative to setting the context of this study as well. Colonization has been the crux of how Native populations have been educated for centuries. "Amer-European educators, regardless of program level, ask daily that Indigenous peoples acquiesce to fit within Amer-European versions of the world within this Eurocentric model of education or life of poverty and welfare as the uneducated or unemployed or unemployable" (Hart, 2010, p. 4). In the U.S., Natives, as the peoples Indigenous to this continent, are the only population that has been colonized.

Statement of the Problem

The impact of both types of postsecondary education on the perceptions, identities, and completion trajectories on Native students remains understudied. This study attempted to understand how participants who have attended both TCUs and PWIs define their experiences at each type of institution. Based on examining the narrative of participants' lived experiences, a clearer understanding of these experiences for Native students at TCUs and PWIs will emerge.

TCUs offer access to education and student services that are grounded in Indigenous paradigms and worldviews and are committed to ensuring that the curriculum, policies, and services are Native-centric (AIHEC, 1999). This is a unique and different experience for Native students in that TCUs do not attempt to colonize Native peoples into the dominant culture and its ways of thinking; rather, TCUs promote growth and introspection that has reinforced identity-based, culturally-appropriate curricula. Wildcat (2001) made the statement "higher education in America is one of the most conservative Western culture institutions in America" (p. 10). Understanding how Natives navigate both TCUs and PWIs could be beneficial for future generations who intend to obtain a postsecondary education.

Indigenous frameworks or ways of knowing have also been dismantled for centuries. Over the past few decades, Indigenous methodologies are being documented and utilized in research on a more frequent basis (Wildcat & Deloria, 2001). Tribal Critical Race Theory is the result of hybrid theories that have emerged (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to determine how Natives define their experiences at both TCUs and PWIs. A comparison of lived experiences of Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs has been understudied in the United States and this dissertation is an early study in this area. How Natives define their experience may differ from the traditional

definitions that have historically been used to dictate and define the frameworks for postsecondary education. TCUs have a more holistic philosophy when it comes to obtaining an education and unlike students at PWIs, students who attend TCUs are not expected to disconnect from their family and culture (Schmidt & Akande, 2011). In today's world of postsecondary education, TCUs promote environments where Native students can obtain an education and not be forced to further be colonized in the process. In fact, at TCUs, a Native student's cultural identity is central to their curricula and services provided both in and out of the classroom (Stull et al., 2015).

Research Question

There was one primary research question for this study: What are the lived experiences of Natives who have attended both a TCU and a PWI? The research design for this study is transcendental phenomenology, and colonization provides the framework to compliment Tribal Critical Race Theory.

The lived experience of Natives who have attended both types of postsecondary institutions has been understudied. Transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), is utilized in this study to attempt to understand this lived phenomenon, which is not represented in the current literature. For the purpose of this study, five participants were interviewed who have had the common experience of attending both types of institutions. A series of questions structure interviews with participants. Five out of the nine tenets of Brayboy's (2005) Tribal Critical Race Theory are used to help understand the essence of their experiences at both TCUs and PWIs. This theory will be explained further in Chapter 2.

Participants were Natives who have attended both a TCU and a PWI as a part of their postsecondary education. Demographics for each participant were collected including: sex, gender, age, tribal affiliation, years attended TCU, years attended PWI, and degrees obtained. The demographics helped provide context for the study.

Of the interviews conducted, 4 were face to face and one was over the phone. TribalCrit will be the theoretical framework for this study. TribalCrit will lend insight to interpret and better understand the experiences for Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs to obtain their postsecondary education. The interview questions served as a guide for the interview but questions emerged as a result of participants' responses to the questions.

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Rationale

This post-colonial history of, access to, persistence in, and completion of education for Natives has been problematic at best. Native high school completion rates are the lowest amongst all identity subgroups (Camera, 2015). The highest dropout rates and, therefore, the lowest graduation rates remain constant between K–12 (Brayboy et al., 2012). Natives earn 0.6% of all degrees conferred (Guillory, 2009, p. 12).

To date, Natives still remain underrepresented in postsecondary education (Guillory, 2009). The master narrative has perpetuated and worked actively to suppress Native ways of being. Takaki (2008) defined the master narrative as a "narrow definition of who is an American [which] reflects and reinforces a more general thinking that can be found in curriculum, news and entertainment media, business practices, and public policies" (p. 5). The master narrative has been purposefully perpetuated for centuries through the process of colonized, educational systems that have educated Natives with the explicit purpose of maintaining a dominant, White status quo (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Takaki, 2008). The master narrative extended to postsecondary education (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Takaki, 2008).

Relevance

Over the past decade, Native or Indigenous research methods, worldviews, and paradigms have begun to emerge (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). "Indigenous people have come to realize

that beyond control over the topic chosen for the study, the research methodology needs to incorporate their cosmology, worldview, epistemology and ethical beliefs" (Wilson, 2008, p. 15). What Wilson (2008) wrote is imperative when it comes to having a contextual understanding of the current gaps and the limitations of research associated with the Native student experience in postsecondary education institutions—at both TCUs and PWIs.

The persistence and completion data that has been collected since the first TCU was established in 1968 is slightly different because TCUs have grown in what they offer for postsecondary education in the past 50 years. As of 2013, TCUs offered four master's degree programs, 46 bachelor's degree programs, 193 associate's degree programs, and 119 certificate programs in a variety of fields (College Fund, 2013). TCUs also serve an additional 47,000 Natives on an annual basis through community-based education and support programs (AIHEC, 2012).

> Today there are 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities serving more than 20,000 students throughout the United States. More than 75% of the TCUs are in the Higher Learning Commission's region and hold candidate or accredited status with the Commission. Since they were first founded, the number of Tribal Colleges has quadrupled and continues to grow; Indian Student enrollments have risen by more than 370%. (http://ahec.org)

How do the experiences for Native students that attend both TCUs and PWIs differ? Native students have high attrition rates and subsequently do not graduate from postsecondary institutions at the rate of other students (Shotton, Lowe & Waterman, 2013). This data reinforces the importance of understanding the learning experiences of Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs.

Significance of the Study

This is one of the first studies that explored the lived experiences of Native students who have attended both TCUs and PWIs. Ultimately, learning has been defined and perpetuated by predominantly White, male theorists who did not take into consideration Native frameworks as well as other identities that do not fit into the dominant paradigm. Lack of theories relevant to the Native student experience can be considered a limitation to this type of research. The Native student's lived experience does not emerge because the theoretical frameworks that are utilized to produce knowledge and ultimately guide theories do not take these experiences into account. Unfortunately, the gaps in research and literature are maintained and Native frameworks that could influence both the literature and practice for those who work in postsecondary institutions remain practically nonexistent.

<center>Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations</center>

Assumptions

My assumptions were that each participant was truthful in how they recalled their experiences at both TCUs and PWIs. Second, another assumption was that since there is minimal literature that has addressed this phenomenon, there is value in understanding their comparative experience through qualitative methods in order to hear their lived experiences through their stories. Finally, the findings cannot be generalized from five participants.

Delimitations

One of the delimitations of this study is that the Native participants must have attended both TCUs and PWIs for postsecondary education obtainment. The participants for this study were tribally enrolled Natives who have attended both a TCU and PWI. Their attendance at either type of postsecondary institution does not have to be in any particular order. For example, the participant could have attended at PWI, then transferred to a TCU, and then returned to a PWI after

attending the TCU. The important selection criteria is that they attended both types of postsecondary education. The participants had to be Native and have a connection to their tribe.

Limitations

Limitations are conditions of the study that are beyond the researcher's control. Phenomenological research relies on interviews and may incorporate archives or other types of qualitative methods like case studies. The participants were expected to recall their experiences that may span years to decades. Their recollections may have shifted with time and been altered with experience (Wargo, 2015). This is not unique to this study but a limitation that could occur when participants were asked to recall their experiences from the past.

The five participants for this study were not expected to speak on the behalf of all Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs. As in any qualitative study, the purpose is to gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon, in this case, the experiences of Native participants who have attended both a TCU and a PWI. The purpose was not to collect data that can be generalized to the entire Native student or any other population.

Indigenous considerations. There are other unique aspects of research (what could be referred to as limitations, but that implies a deficit) when incorporating Indigenous based frameworks and methodologies. Issues concerning the use of dominant culture, non-Indigenous research methods conducted by non-Native scholars is a limitation because of the historical exploitation of Native communities for research purposes (Brayboy, 2005). Exploitation of Native communities has been ongoing, becoming even more complicated as Native scholars themselves have been forced to assimilate to conduct research by utilizing dominant, Western methodologies (Hart, 2010).

Meyer (2008) urged Indigenous researchers to recognize multiple truths and abandon the Western notion that subjectivity is a less rigorous or empirical way of thinking. Meyer (2008)

further asserted that the resurgence of old, Indigenous based theories will be critical to the reclaiming of Native-inspired scholarship. The emergence of what Meyer referenced supports the notion that Native researchers and scholars reject Eurocentric ideologies that have been forced on them for the past five centuries and develop and utilize research methods that are appropriate to their topics and worldviews.

Definitions of Terms

The definition of terms for this study are complicated. The way the government and other entities define terms and the way Natives define terms can conflict or appear seemingly incongruent. For the purpose of this section, context will be provided but the terms will be defined based on the dominant narrative. Fortunately, or unfortunately, terms can be subjective and there is no universal truth when determining definitions (Kovach, 2009). Finally, the evolving definitions amongst Native communities are another byproduct of ongoing self-determination.

American Indian/Alaskan Native. According to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (O.M.B.), this term refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment (Office of Management and Budget [O.M.B.], n.d.).

For the purpose of this study, both Native and Indigenous are used as the primary way to reference the American Indian/Alaskan Native or Native American population, participants, and communities.

Colonization. This term refers to the history and practice of taking over land, space, and hegemonic narrative of a culture (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Colonialism has also been referred to as "structure dispossession" by Coulthard (2014, p. 7).

Indigenous. Originating or occurring naturally in a particular place (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Immanuel, 2017).

Native American. A member of any of the Indigenous peoples of the Western hemisphere (Immanuel, 2017).

Self-Determination. Wildcat (2001) defied self-determination in the context of postsecondary education as, "essentially a tribal intellectual and moral mandate requiring action, unless we want our current educational system to be like our contemporary political structures and practices, which too often merely reflect dominant society's institutions" (p. 7).

Sovereignty. The brief definition of sovereignty is the supreme legal power or authority. As defined by Brayboy et al. (2012) "in present terms, sovereignty is the engagement of legal and political relationships between tribal nations in the United States and the U.S. government" (p. 18).

Chapter 1 Summary

Native persistence and completion rates in postsecondary education are not positive and yet to date, the phenomenon of attending both types of institutions has yet to be understood. Chapter 1 provided a foundation as to why interviewing participants who have attended both types of postsecondary institutions could have the potential to contribute to the scholarship and dialogue about how Native students persist and complete their postsecondary education. In Chapter 2, a more in-depth understanding of Tribal Critical Race Theory and the impact of colonization will help provide frameworks for the context of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

European educational systems dominate the landscape of American school systems and higher education, and Native students have long struggled with navigating these colonized methodologies. "The history of American Indian higher education is one of compulsory Western methods of learning, recurring attempts to eradicate tribal culture, and high dropout rates by American Indian students at mainstream institutions" (AIHEC, 1999, p. A-2). Predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have traditionally had policies and curriculums that are incongruent with Native worldviews and paradigms (Hart, 2010). This incongruence has proved distressing for Native individuals who have attempted to navigate postsecondary policies and procedures. The incongruence affects Native communities, as postsecondary education has caused a loss of cultures, languages, and spiritual practices (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hart, 2010). In short, Native students are often forced to give up their tribal identities in order to "succeed" in typical higher education settings, echoing today the destructive dynamic of boarding schools.

As a result, Natives have endured trauma at the hand of Western educational institutions for centuries (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). This trauma has been perpetuated by Western educational systems since the first boarding school was established by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and may well play a role in the low degree completion rate of Native college students (Chiago, 2008; Pidgeon, 2008). "The White man has been using education in an unrelenting effort to assimilate Indians," and this history of assimilative education towards Native communities has been problematic at best (Chiago, 2008, p. 117). Some Native students have succeeded in obtaining a postsecondary education, 12% in fact (Lorenzo, 2016), at institutions that are modeled after Western influences, but the very low completion rate is a mark of how uncomfortable the institutional fit is between Native students and traditional colleges and universities. Moreover,

according to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), Natives have the lowest

education attainment in the U.S. (AIHEC, 2016, p. A-2).

Native peoples have come to cope with the struggle through means that are constructive,

positive, and congruent with their identities. One clear example of this is the tribal colleges

movement. According to the federal definition in the Tribally Controlled College or University

Assistance Act of 1978 (TCU Act) (25 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.):

> To qualify for funding under the TCU Act, an institution of higher education must: (1) be
>
> chartered by the governing body of a federally recognized Indian tribe or tribes; (2) have a
>
> governing board composed of a majority of American Indians; (3) demonstrate adherence
>
> to stated goals, a philosophy, or a plan of operation which is directed to meeting the needs
>
> of American Indians; (4) is an operation which is directed to meeting the needs of
>
> American Indians; (5) be accredited or have achieved candidacy status, by a nationally
>
> recognized accreditation agency or association. (HLC, 2013, p. 4)

Tribal College and University (TCUs) missions and visions were founded on providing access to

education for tribal communities.

TCUs have been providing academic, co-curricular, and community education for tribal

communities since 1968 (AIHEC, 2013). Despite inadequate resources because of lack of local and

state funding, TCUs are able to meet the educational and employment needs of Native students and

their tribal communities (Watson, 2015). In fact, TCU-based access to postsecondary education for

Natives could be attributed to the fact that "tribal colleges have unique missions that reach way

beyond most institutions of higher education to tribal communities, regional communities and

families" (Watson, 2015, pp. 6–7).

The impact of TCUs on Native students has been documented. Tribal Colleges and

Universities (TCUs) "have positively affected the participation, retention, and graduation rates of

American Indian students in higher education by providing programs and classes that are more culturally sensitive and relevant to the unique needs of American Indian students" (Boyer, 1997 as cited in Martin, 2005, p. 80). Similarly, the impact of PWIs on Native students has also been documented. However, existing literature does not yet reflect the experiences of Native students who have attended both a TCU and a PWI. This study will gather the research necessary to form an initial exploration of this phenomenon.

TribalCrit was used as the theoretical framework to help understand the narratives of the participants. "TribalCrit emerges from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and is rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically—and geographically-located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427). TribalCrit is an appropriate theory because it is congruent with the mission and vision of TCUs. It is a theoretical framework that was developed to address both the cultural nuances that are unique to Native populations as well as the impact colonization has had on Natives for centuries.

Conceptual Framework

To date, there is minimal understanding of the lived experiences of Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs to obtain their postsecondary education. This phenomenon has been under studied; therefore, postsecondary education has minimal insight or literature upon which to draw when attempting to understand Natives who have experienced both types of postsecondary institution.

However, research does demonstrate that 43% of Natives who started postsecondary education did not persist to completion (Lopez, 2016). These Native persistence percentages are compared to 33% of their White peers who did not persist (Lopez, 2016). Of the Natives who have persisted to graduation, 12% finish their undergraduate degrees versus 37% of their White peers who graduate (Lopez, 2016). Lopez's (2016) research addressed postsecondary persistence of

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Native students but did not address the phenomenon of when Native students persist through both types of postsecondary institutions—TCUs and PWIs.

Traditionally, postsecondary education has been predicated on individuals relocating and assimilating themselves into primarily Western curricula (Grant & Chapman, 2008). This process has been no different for Natives. However,

> Some historians believe that assimilation through education was not an end in itself, but rather a means by which Indians would need and use less land, thereby releasing more land for occupation and settlement by the Europeans and their descendants. (Grant & Chapman, 2008, p. 117)

In contrast to the colonial model, TCUs serve the specific needs of the tribal communities based on curricula grounded in Native based paradigms and worldviews (Hart, 2010).

Recognition of the importance of TCUs and the state of Native education has been gaining recognition. The Bush administration demonstrated the importance of TCUs by issuing Executive Order 13592:

> My Administration is also committed to improving educational opportunities for students attending TCUs. TCUs maintain, preserve, and restore Native languages and cultural traditions; offer a high-quality college education; provide career and technical education, job training, and other career building programs; and often serve as anchors in some of the country's poorest and most remote areas. (Executive Order 13592)

Even as more attention and support has been given to TCUs, little to no research has been done regarding students that encounter both PWIs and TCUs. The purpose of this dissertation is to address this issue.

Tribal Critical Race Theory

Natives and other Indigenous populations "have been studied by Western researchers whose claims, until recently, have been accepted without question and, in many instances, have led to our peoples' continued oppression" (Kaomea, 2015, p. 99). Policies that have perpetuated and maintained the notion of colonization are not helpful for Native students nor any other underrepresented student who has earned or is in the process of obtaining postsecondary education in the U.S. (Johnson, 1995). In response, for this study, TribalCrit is being paired with phenomenology in order to attempt to implement Indigenous research methods and avoid the history of exploitation that Natives have endured when external researchers have conducted previous studies.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provided an initial theoretical framework to highlight these concerns but when accounting for the impact of colonization and the individual needs of Native communities, CRT does not address either colonization or the sociopolitical identities of Natives (Brayboy, 2005). Brayboy (2005) recognized the limitation of the application of CRT with Native participants and developed TribalCrit.

TribalCrit was devised because Brayboy (2005) found that CRT did not take the specific, sociopolitical issues of Indigenous populations into account. CRT emerged because of the U.S. Civil Rights movement that emphasized African American concerns. Critical Race Theory "does not address American Indian liminality as both legal/political and racialized beings or the experience of colonization" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 428–429). The notion and impact of colonization is a distinction between TribalCrit and CRT. The difference is that colonization is unique and part of the lived experiences of Natives from the time of European "discovery" of the Americas and continuing through the present day (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). The emphasis of CRT is that racism is

endemic, and TribalCrit adds an emphasis on colonialism that acknowledges that racism is influential (Brayboy, 2005).

Due to the limitations of the aforementioned approaches, TribalCrit was used as the theoretical framework for this study. TribalCrit was appropriate for many reasons, including how the application of the theory advocates for the integration of Indigenous frameworks to support non-Indigenous curricula and non-Western spaces. These types of spaces are not commonly found at PWIs; moreover, "TribalCrit explicitly rejects the call for assimilation in educational institutions for American Indian students" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 437). TCUs' mission and vision statements support what Brayboy (2005) wrote because they provide educational environments that do not perpetuate centuries of educational models that are committed to the colonization of Native students, but rather are grounded in local, tribal culture, language, and worldview.

Furthermore, for the purpose of this study, TribalCrit as a theoretical framework reinforced that narratives and conversations are legitimate sources of data (Brayboy, 2005). For this study, the collection of data was qualitative and semistructured interviews were used to help the researcher understand the lived experience of Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs. "TribalCrit recognizes that the statistical power of the 'n' is not necessarily the marker of a 'good, rigorous' study," (Brayboy, 2005, pp. 439–440). TribalCrit not only provides a conceptual framework for this study but was congruent with how the data will be collected and analyzed.

Brayboy's Five Tenets

Brayboy (2005) supported TribalCrit through the use of nine tenets that outlined how the theory can be used as a framework. Brayboy described each tenet individually in his 2005 article. For the purpose of this study, five of the nine tenets will be utilized by the researcher. These five tenets were chosen because they fit the parameters of the study and the confines of postsecondary education.

The first tenet that was integrated into the study was how the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens (Brayboy, 2005). This concept was reinforced by Shotton, Tachine, Minthorn, Nelson, and Waterman (2017), who discussed in their article the importance of preserving their Indigenous scholarship through a collective sense of community created by what they have mutually adopted as "Sister Scholarship Practices" (p. 1). The collective practice of supporting and/or creating Indigenous scholarship as a community has been affirming and empowering for these Native scholars who are confronted with Western scholarship methods that do not necessarily acknowledge or respect Indigenous forms of scholarship (Shotton et al., 2017).

The second tenet explains how both government and educational policies ultimately perpetuate colonization amongst Natives (Brayboy, 2005). Simpson (2017) wrote that colonialization disrupted almost all aspects of Native life (p. 45). To non-Natives, colonization may seem like an issue that happened in the past as a part of history but to Native populations, it remains a contemporary issue that continues to disrupt Natives while maintaining structures and policies that are intended to continue on-going practices of colonization (Brayboy, 2005; Simpson, 2017).

The third tenet places an emphasis on how tribal communities have some shared sense of vision but there is variation based on the uniqueness of each tribe based on geography and other factors (Brayboy, 2005). Whereas there are similarities, there are also distinct differences that span the 567 federally recognized tribes in the U.S.

The fourth tenet examines the importance of narratives and how they inform both theory and data. As Brayboy (2005) wrote, the narratives or stories are "a real and legitimate source of data and ways of being" (p. 430). Indigenous scholars continue to emphasize this tenet in recent publications (Minthorn & Chavez, 2015; Shotton et al., 2013; Shotton et al., 2017).

The fifth tenet is that "theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430). The need to create social change consistently has been a driving force by Indigenous scholars and the research topics that reflect the purpose of this tenet. Ideally this study will not only have scholarly contributions but will also have the potential to influence policy and practice in postsecondary education—thus creating social change that this tenet outlines.

Colonization

Colonization is one of the variables that distinguishes Tribal Critical Race Theory from Critical Race Theory and other theories (Brayboy, 2005). Colonization refers to the history and practice of taking over land, space, and hegemonic narrative of a culture (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Simpson, 2017). This destructive force has also been referred to as "structure dispossession" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 7). Moreover, colonization has also imposed structures that allow for environmental control (Larson & Johnson, 2017). For the purpose of this study, education is viewed as a mechanism of environmental control that settlers utilized to colonize Natives for centuries (Larson & Johnson, 2017).

Deloria and Wildcat (2001) made the claim that *God is Red* (Deloria, 1992) was the first book to explore the impact of Western influence on Native systems like education. In fact, in *Power and Place*, Deloria and Wildcat wrote that Natives who had navigated Western systems like postsecondary education are more apt to critically understand the impact colonized, Western systems have had on Natives and their communities (2001). The authors further surmised this insight obtained by Natives who are able to understand their experience in colonized systems are able to bring their knowledge home to help create stronger systems for Natives (Deloria & Wilcat, 2001).

Unfortunately, what Deloria and Wildcat (2001) wrote about Natives navigating colonized systems might not reflect what all Natives who have had postsecondary experiences endured. For Natives, colonization manifested when settlers felt compelled to "civilize" Native populations and force them to "fit" into Western, mainstream society (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Historically, this was evident with the foundation of the residential boarding schools and remains relevant today because a colonized approach to education is still endemic in K–12 and postsecondary educational systems (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). To be successful or meet the Western definition of success, Native students are continually forced to colonize in order to navigate postsecondary institutions that are not run by tribes. To contrast the colonial model, TCUs serve the specific needs of the tribal communities based on curricula grounded in Native-based paradigms and worldviews (Hart, 2010).

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

This lack of understanding of the Native student experience, specifically the Native student experience for Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs, might be because there has been minimal research conducted to understand the needs of Native students who attend both types of postsecondary institutions. Furthermore, Native student persistence and retention has been studied from a deficit lens for decades (Shotton et al., 2013). The deficit lens of the research pertaining to Natives does nothing to promote what is necessary if research cannot get beyond a focus on failure and seek to understand what types of environments promote persistence, completion, and graduation. In other words, Native students are blamed for lack of persistence in traditional higher education, and higher education itself has not examined its role in this negative dynamic.

In 1968, the first tribal college opened its doors in Tsaile, Arizona. Diné College was established to serve the educational needs of the Navajo Nation. In 1978, the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act of 1978 (TCU Act) (25 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.) was passed. In

1994, this 1978 act was supported by the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (HLC.org), giving some of the TCUs land grant status. The demographics of an average student at a TCU is a 27-year-old single mother of three who is a first-generation student (FSG) (Schmidt & Akande, 2011).

First and foremost, it is imperative to understand why the first TCU, Diné College, was created in 1968. "The core mission and identity of TCUs can be described as nation building, the rebuilding of Indigenous nations through the teaching of tribal histories, languages, and cultures" (Crazy Bull, 2009 as cited in Shotton et al., 2013, p. 97). TCUs are unique in that the curriculum is grounded in tribal teachings and Indigenous ways of being in comparison to what PWIs are able to offer Native students (Crazy Bull, 2009). "A tribal college provides a 'whole community' approach to lifelong education based on the principle that a student does not have to abandon culture or family to obtain an education" (Schmidt & Akande, 2011, p. 42). Moreover, the growth and offerings of degree programs and opportunities for Native students at TCUs has grown exponentially since 1968. "TCUs offer four master's programs, 46 bachelor degree programs, 193 associate's degree programs and 119 certificate programs in a variety of fields," (College, 2013 as cited in Stull et al., 2014, p. 4). This growth is indicative of the access to postsecondary education that TCUs are providing to Native students.

Native students are twice as likely to enroll in a TCU versus a PWI for their postsecondary education (American Indian College Fund, 2006, p. 3). The environments TCUs create for Native students are not predicated on Westernized curriculums or abandonment of one's community or culture (Guillory, 2013). The results of Native students attending TCUs have been promising. Three-fourths of TCU graduates obtained employment and other educational opportunities after they graduated (Wright & Head, 1990). "Because of the clear and culturally grounded missions of tribal colleges, their small size, and the commitment of tribal college faculty and staff to their

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students' success, these environments are powerful forces in the personal and academic development of American Indian students" (Guardia & Evans, 2008, p. 258). Not only have TCUs served thousands of Native students but "more than 46,000 community members rely upon TCU services, which include libraries, job training and health programs, and Head Start and youth programs" (Paskus, 2012 as cited in HLC.org). The impact that TCUs are having on tribal communities is significant both for the students and for the tribal community.

The TCU Act of 1976 is what differentiates TCUs from PWIs and other postsecondary institutions. Embedded in the Act is the intent to preserve and maintain educational environments that are committed to Native populations and their specific needs. As we strive to be more socially just in our policies and procedures, let us not forget, "we start from understanding that schooling presents educators with choices, either to ignore and reproduce unequal social relationships or to recognize, interrupt, and transform those relationships" (Skubikowksi, Wright, & Graf, 2009, p. 6). Education does Native students a disservice at all ages if it continues to perpetuate a white, colonized system of education where the premise is one size fits the needs of all students (Reyhner, 2015).

This transformative process that Skubikoski et al. (2009) referred to is what needs to be explored and documented in regard to the experiences of Native participants who attended both TCUs and PWIs. Graham (2002) noted that Indigenous worldviews have been referred to as relational (in Hart, 2010). This is congruent with the mission and vision of TCUs. The convergence of Native research paradigms and Native-based curriculums at TCUs have been transformative for a population that historically has had the lowest graduation rates of any race and has been subjected to more assimilation pressures than other communities that attend postsecondary institutions (AIHEC, 1999).

TCUs have attempted to break the cycle of education as a tool to colonize Natives and to repurpose education as a means of affirming Native identities, preserving Native languages, cultures, and spiritual practices. "Tribal colleges have played a vital role in providing higher education opportunities for American Indians by incorporating tribal-specific culture, history, and language into their academic and student support programs" (Martin, 2005, p. 80). TCUs have not only provided access but access that is congruent with Natives tribal identities.

There is a growing body of emerging literature that highlights how little is understood about Native student experiences in postsecondary education (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). In 2005, Fox, Lowe, and McClellan published *Serving Native American Students*, a monograph that was written as a call to action for postsecondary education to begin paying attention to the needs of Native students. This monograph fulfilled its purpose, and since 2005 many new books and articles by and with Native scholars have begun to accurately explore and elucidate the Native student experience in postsecondary education (Benham & Stein, 2003; Lopez, 2016; Shotton et al., 2013).

In 2009, Warner and Gipp published the book *Tradition and Culture in the Millennium: Tribal Colleges and Universities*. This book explains the intent and impact of TCUs, and also discusses the unique balance of TCU postsecondary policies and the desire to maintain tribal cultures and communities.

Neglect of Native students' needs is reflected not only in the meager amount of scholarship on the subject, but also the lack of appropriate support services in most traditional U.S. colleges and universities. Garland (2010) brought attention to the omission of Native representation in scholarly publications in postsecondary education in his dissertation. Garland termed the omission or the perception that data related to Native students were statistically irrelevant as the "American Indian research asterisk" (2007, p. 612). This omission in research compounded the

marginalization and invisibility of Natives in postsecondary education (Garland, 2007, 2010;

Shotton et al., 2013). In 2013, *Beyond the Asterisk* was published as a response to Garland's

dissertation research. The book highlighted the gaps in postsecondary education literature

pertaining to Natives. It is comprised of a compilation of chapters that provide insight into the

Native postsecondary experience. The editors stated that the purpose of the book was to "explore

ways in which higher education professionals and institutions can better understand and, more

important, better serve Native students" (Shotton et al., 2013, p. 3).

Eighteen authors wrote 10 different chapters that explored the following topics pertinent to

the Native postsecondary education experience: first-year experience for Native American

freshmen; incorporating Native culture into student affairs; extending the rafters (Native students

in university housing); the historically Native American fraternity and sorority movement; the role

of the special advisor to the president on Native American affairs; tribal college collaborations;

academic and student affairs partnerships; how institutions can support Native professional and

graduate students; fancy war dancing on academe's glass ceiling; and best practices for national

organizations to support the Native experience in higher education (Shotton et al., 2013). All of

these topics are imperative to understanding the lived experience of Natives in postsecondary

education but again, none of the chapters addressed the phenomenon studied in this dissertation.

The limited research in the topic area reinforced the need for conducting the study.

Within *Beyond the Asterisk,* Tribal College Collaborations was a chapter written by

Guillory highlighting the collaborative work that happens at TCUs. Guillory (2013) presented the

unique aspects of TCUs and what distinguishes TCUs from nontribal or PWI postsecondary

institutions.

Beyond the Asterisk was so impactful for Native postsecondary education that a second,

follow-up book was released in March of 2018. The title is *Beyond Access* (Waterman, Lowe, &

Shotton, 2018), and includes an additional eight chapters that will address issues of access in postsecondary education in relation to the Native student experience. The book shares the narratives of different Native students who share their experiences in hopes of creating more pathways to access for Native students.

In 2015, *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education* was published (Minthorn & Chavez). The intention of this book was to address Indigenous leadership in postsecondary education from an Indigenous perspective. The publication of all of these books has set the foundation for postsecondary education to start utilizing the emerging body of literature to assist in the creation of policies and practices that better support Native students.

Although these volumes represent important additions to the literature regarding Native college students, none incorporates the experiences of those who have attended both a TCU and a PWI. The study proposed here will clearly contribute to the growing literature of scholarly research that is attempting to help postsecondary education both understand and give insight into the Native student's experience. By documenting and analyzing the lived experience of Natives who have attended both types of postsecondary institutions, the results of the study will address yet another understudied area in the literature pertaining to Native students.

Review of Methodological Issues

As outlined in the literature review, this is a phenomenon that is an early study in this area of the literature and to date the lived experience of Natives who have attended both types of postsecondary institutions is a newer line of inquiry. For the purpose of this study, qualitative inquiry will be used. TCUs remain both underfunded and undervalued (Watson, 2015). This could be true because Native ways of being and Native worldviews are undervalued and the dominant culture does not attempt to understand the Native postsecondary education experience (Brayboy,

2005). In response, according to Brayboy (2005), Native scholars and Native students are trying to incorporate their own worldviews and epistemologies into their research and teaching.

To do so, TribalCrit was created as a response to the gap in the literature that pertains to a myriad of Native issues. Indigenous worldviews and other emergent paradigms are changing the way research is being conducted while promoting Native research done by Native scholars (Shotton et al., 2017). This study utilizes the appropriate method to allow Native participants to enhance this emerging body of work by allowing Native participants to define their experiences at both TCUs and PWIs.

One argument that might underscore the importance of the findings of this study could be that because Natives are less than 1% of the population, the data relevance in regard to whether or not it is proximate could possibly not be fully applicable because the baseline is so small and therefore, understudied. So not only are Natives the least educated ethnic group but they are also possibly not considered relevant (Garland, 2007). In addition, Natives been exploited in the past by non-Native researchers and historically there is very little Native-based research been done by Natives that has been published (Garland, 2007; Garland; 2010). Regardless, after centuries of colonization, their experiences in existing in both types of postsecondary institutions is valuable and imperative to understanding the Native educational experience and responding to Native educational needs. For the purpose of this study, participants were asked to describe and discuss their learning experiences at both TCUs and PWIs.

The researcher conducted a qualitative study that employed a small number of participants and research question designed to outline an investigation of participant's lived experiences. Transcendental phenomenology was the method applied and a semistructured interview format will be utilized when interviewing participants. The question that guided this qualitative study was: What are the lived experiences of Native who have attended both a TCU and a PWI? In order to

understand the essence of this study, five of the nine tenets from Brayboy's (2005) Tribal Critical Race Theory were applied. These five tenets provide a framework that helped understand how participants defined their experiences at both TCUs and PWIs. The five tenets that will guide this study were:

1. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.

2. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.

3. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.

4. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.

5. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change (Brayboy, 2005, pp. 429–430).

After the interviews were transcribed, the five tenets guided the researcher in analyzing the lived experience of the participants and ultimately the phenomenon of their attending both types of postsecondary institutions.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Research has been conducted to explore the lived experience of Natives who are currently attending or have attended either a TCUs and PWIs. Research pertaining to the Native experience in postsecondary education has had minimal exploration to when Natives have attended both types of postsecondary institutions. As more research is conducted to understand and help educate postsecondary education about the lived experience of Native students, this study attempts to fill a

add to the literature that is attempting to educate others so there is a greater understanding of the Native postsecondary education experience. Garland's (2007, 2010) scholarship highlighted the omission on the Native narrative in higher education scholarship. This omission has compounded the lack of understanding of the Native postsecondary experience and this lack of insight or understanding has meant that theory, policy, and practice do not take into consideration the lived experiences of Native students.

Because there is limited findings in the literature review, the findings from this study have the potential to compliment the research that has been conducted because it is an early study in the area. Chapter 5 will explore themes that will again help to begin to add to the literature and make recommendations for future research. It is imperative to seek out an understanding as to what types of environments promote persistence, completion, and graduation for Native students.

Critique of Previous Research

Native students are faced with postsecondary environments that attempt to colonize them; this is compounded by student development theory research that is woefully inadequate when it comes to providing insight regarding the Native student college experience (Guardia & Evans, 2008). Guardia and Evans (2008) came to this conclusion based on their own review of the most recently published student development theories. "Tribal college students are unique as a group and do not mirror the image of the traditional American college student," they noted (p. 241). This review suggests that the student development theory that is used for PWIs is not applicable nor relevant as to how Native students navigate postsecondary institutions.

Tinto's student retention theory is contradictory as to what Native students need to succeed. "Tinto's (1975, 1986, 1993) model of student departure implies that, to be successful and integrate into college, students must detach from their community" (Shotton et al., 2013, p. 14). This approach reinforced the Western perspective that is predicated (perhaps unintentionally or in

ignorance) on the forced colonization of Native students. Tinto's model also does not account for racial or cultural difference (Pidgeon, 2008). In other words, Tinto's widely-used model expects the students to change (i.e., colonize) in order to succeed within the postsecondary institution; what Until later in their career, Tinto did not consider the ways in which the institution might ethically wish to change to become more inclusive of Natives and other underrepresented student populations (Tinto, 2017).

The lack of attention to the Native student lived experience in student development theory is problematic. Tinto based his model on a sample that was taken from a predominantly White student population. This resulted in the following theory: "Tinto (1993) contends students must reject their attitudes and values from their previous communities to successfully negotiate the separation process and integrate into their new college environment" (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 346). This is not a healthy or viable development model for most Native students.

The lack of relevant student development theory and ultimately the lack of understanding of Native students is unfortunate because there are TCUs and other indigenous learning environments that could help provide insight to better inform PWIs of their practices and policies in regard to Native students. Tribal Colleges and Universities were founded to meet the educational and community need as identified by tribal governing bodies (Crazy Bull, 2009; Shotton et al., 2013). As a result, TCUs consistently strive to meet the needs of Native people in their communities (Crazy Bull, 2009).

TCUs have emerged in postsecondary education to provide access to postsecondary education and support the cultural needs of tribal community programs (Crazy Bull, 2009). Their approach to education is congruent with tribal practices, customs, languages, and governance. The preservation of language and culture while strengthening Native students' chances of succeeding in postsecondary education is central to the TCU purpose (Crazy Bull, 2009).

Not only is there an absence of student development theory that pertains to the Native student experience, but there is a need for greater understanding of internalized oppression and the impact of the expectation that Native students are expected to live in two worlds (Guardia & Evans, 2008; Ness, 2002). The impact of this divided self or incongruent expectation is very likely to have an impact on Native student populations (Ness, 2002). This expectation is also likely to stand as one more instance in which Natives are being impacted by the compounded, long-term effects of colonization. Finally, there is also a disconnect between the Western curriculum and how the constructs of postsecondary or higher education are incongruent with the cultural identity and socialization of Native students. "Despite meager resources, tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) are actively working to revitalize Native languages and culture, promote tribal sovereignty and further economic growth aligned with tribal values in the communities they serve" (Watson, 2005, p. 6). The curricular revitalization of culture and language is what separates TCUs from PWIs and other classifications of postsecondary institutions.

After closely examining the research, the Native student experience has not been adequately captured or documented in postsecondary education (Waterman & Lindley, 2013). This glaring gap and omission in the literature also is surprisingly present in texts that specifically deal with multiculturalism or diverse curricular recommendations. American history is not the only subject that pays minimal attention to and/or portrays Natives in an inaccurate way. The Native or Indigenous voice has been consistently void in the texts that are used to socialize future practitioners and faculty into the academy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 1996; Tinto 1975, 1986, 1993). The texts that are fundamental to the education and socialization of those who work with and provide support services for college students mimic historical texts. There is not only a lack of student development theory that pertains or attempts to

understand Native college students but there is also a gap in the student development textbooks for educators in regard to the Native student experience (Guardia & Evans, 2008).

To help understand this phenomenon, the target population to be studied is Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs. The centuries of genocide and forced colonization of Native peoples has been problematic in that it has appeared to erase the Native voice from much of the educational curricula (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). This gap transcends almost all disciplines in K–12 and postsecondary education (AIHEC 1999, 2014, 2016).

Not only is the absence of the Native experience in education an issue but Pidgeon (2008) questioned the parameters of how success has been measured when surveying Indigenous students. I, too, question the parameters that have been utilized to study Native student success in the U.S.

Unlike PWIs, TCUs' missions and goals are to serve the tribal communities that created them and the tribal lands on which the TCUs reside. "They are often the only postsecondary institutions within some of our nation's poorest rural areas" (WHIAINAE, 2016). To establish and maintain TCUs on sovereign land and reclaim work towards the reestablishment of Native-based education is why the first TCU opened its doors in 1968. Unlike TCUs, the history of post-colonial education for Natives is abhorrent (Brayboy, 2005; Grant & Chapman, 2008). "Through the colonization of the U.S., millions of Indigenous people perished, and with them Indigenous languages and traditions" (Center for MSI, 2014).

Chapter 2 Summary

Through the use of transcendental phenomenology and Tribal Crit, semistructured interviews were conducted to learn more about the phenomenon of Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs. There are studies that have explored either the lived experience of Natives who have attended TCUs or PWIs but minimal understanding when Natives attend both types of institutions. The research has the potential to aid in adding to the literature and compliment the

other scholarship being conducted and published about the Native experience in postsecondary

education. Chapter 3 will explain the methodology for how the lived experience was explored.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The goal of Chapter 3 is to provide an outline of the methodology that was utilized in order to explore the lived experience of Natives who have attended both tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) and predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Transcendental phenomenology was used to help analyze and describe what is stated in the participants' semistructured interviews.

This study was grounded in Brayboy's (2005) Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit). The TribalCrit frame offers an understanding of the historical impact of colonization on Native communities. The researcher interviewed Native participants who attended both TCUs and PWIs in order to obtain descriptions and themes regarding their postsecondary education. A series of semistructured interviews with Native participants provided an opportunity for the participants to describe their lived experiences attending both types of postsecondary institutions. The participants were all Native and will all have attended both a TCU and PWI at some point in their educational journey.

Research Question

The following research question set the foundation for the study: What are the lived experiences of Natives who have attended both a TCU and a PWI? Dominant educational systems often force Native students to abandon cultural and sociopolitical aspects of their identities in order to "succeed" (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Wright & Tierney, 1991). This study compared the experiences of Native students at PWIs with their experience at a TCU.

Purpose of Study

The present study was designed to explore the lived experiences of Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs. TCUs are unique in that the mission and visions are driven by local

tribal community needs (Foss & Foss, 2012). Because of this local focus, students are not forced to leave their communities obtain a postsecondary education.

> When you privilege the interactional goal of creating community, you are concerned about and committed to the stability and preservation of the knowledge, themes, beliefs, values, and practices that form the core allegiances of the community you are addressing. (Foss & Foss, 2012, p. 26)

Historically, Native students have struggled to be as successful as their White counterparts while attending PWIs (Wright & Tierney, 1991). At PWIs, Native students' experience has been one of colonization and an overall sense of abandoning their identity in order to thrive (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Wright & Tierney, 1991).

PWI leaders have not attended to or acknowledged the needs of Native students, while simultaneously, Native students do not have a clear sense of how to succeed in PWIs. The process of obtaining a college education thus can become arduous and overly frustrating. And while college can be challenging for all students, Native students must navigate both obstacles in learning and structural/systemic barriers to their persistence. Professional literature, though limited, has documented these obstacles and barriers to Native student success within the dominant system of higher education (Shotton et al., 2013). What has yet to be explored through research is how Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs describe the two different learning experiences.

Research Design

Qualitative research, employing transcendental phenomenology, was the research method for this study. In applying the transcendental phenomenology design, the researcher is more discovery-oriented than verification-oriented (Moustakas, 1994). Descriptions of phenomenon addressed by the research question are participant driven (Giorgi, Giorgi, & Morley, 2017).

Transcendental Phenomenology

Transcendental phenomenology was the design for this study because it allowed the participants to determine and describe their lived experiences at TCUs and PWIs. Van Manen (2015) differentiated phenomenology from other designs as centered around the participants' lived experience. Using transcendental phenomenology requires a "shift (that) involves the epoche, which means to set aside all knowledge not being directly presented to consciousness, and then to consider what is given not as actually existing but merely as something present in the consciousness" (Giorgi, Giorgi, & Morley, 2017, p. 180). In other words, the researcher maintains a non-judgmental stance and focuses on understanding and accurately conveying what participants share. Transcendental phenomenology is also useful because it encouraged the participants to define the what, the how, and the essence of the phenomenon. Essentially, the study attempted, through semistructured interviews, to capture the narrative descriptions of those who have attended both TCUs and PWIs. Both Holloway (1997) and Hyener (1999) reinforced the importance of the essence of this research process and how, if too much structure is imposed on the participants, the integrity of the findings could be compromised (in Groenewald, 2004, p. 44).

One of the purposes of transcendental phenomenology is to allow the participants to ultimately dictate the narrative or essence, not the researcher. Phenomenology asks the participants to share their lived experiences honestly, without deception (Giorgi, 2009). This again supports TribalCrit and Indigenous methodologies that do not strive to exploit Native participants (Brayboy, 2005; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Kovach, 2009).

Phenomenology also is described as an "explorative research design" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 42). Utilizing this type of design is important because it helps to limit researcher bias and influence on the participants (Groenewald, 2004). The narrative of the participants will provide findings and outcomes of the study.

Transcendental phenomenology has the potential to be congruent with TribalCrit. TribalCrit was designed because Critical Race Theory does not account for the impact of colonization on Native people (Brayboy, 2005). Phenomenology as a method allows for the interview process to be reciprocal; the researcher is an engaged and active part of the interview process (Groenewald, 2004). This reciprocal process reinforces how phenomenology can support both TribalCrit and Indigenous forms of research—ultimately challenging centuries of researchers who exploited Natives (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

Native participants who have attended both TCUs and PWIs will process and ultimately identify the different ways that they make meaning and learn from the two postsecondary education experiences. Postsecondary education cannot enable students to be invested in their own long-term, positive change if there is not an understanding of their worldview or the context within which they operate.

Semistructured Interviews

Interviews for this study were semistructured. Semistructured interviews are similar to the method of open-structured or conversational methods of interviewing used by Indigenous scholars (Kovach, 2009). Semistructured interviews are parallel to an Indigenous method of research, which are predicated on reciprocal conversation and listening (Kovach, 2009). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) wrote "less-structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways" (p. 111). This is also congruent with transcendental phenomenology. Semistructured interviews are a hybrid between structured and unstructured interviews. "An open-structured conversational method shows respect for the participant's story and allows research participants greater control over what they wish to share with respect to the research question" (Kovach, 2009, p. 124). By definition the two are similar and both employ a conversational method of interviewing used by Indigenous scholars (Kovach, 2009).

Kovach (2009) further emphasized the importance of interviews because they demonstrate to participants that the researcher is actively listening and power is shared between participant and researcher. Based on Western paradigms, semistructured interviews are a compromise and still allow for Indigenous ways of conducting research when paired with TribalCrit and transcendental phenomenology (Kovach, 2009).

Transcendental phenomenology is the design for this study because Native people have not been allowed to tell their own stories (Brayboy, 2005; Kovach, 2009; Vine & Wildcat, 2001). In this study, the researcher listened to Native participants. Native researchers and tribal communities have stated that close listening is crucial to conducting this type of research; it is also important to select participants with whom the researcher has established both trust and rapport, if possible (Kovach, 2009).

With semistructured interviews, the researcher can be reflexive in the process from the start until the end (Kovach, 2009). "Indigenous researchers are grappling with ways to explain how holistic epistemologies inform their research design in ways understood by Western academic minds" (Kovach, 2009, p. 58). For the purpose of this study, I will attempt to bridge both traditional and Indigenous research epistemologies.

Research Population and Sampling Method

The research population for this study were Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs. The participant pool relied heavily on purposive sampling and the relationships the researcher had with Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs. Purposive sampling is a nonprobability sample that is a general representation of the population being studied (Lavrakas, 2008). Purposive sampling can be used when attempting to understand a phenomenon.

According to Groenewald (2004), between three to 10 participants can be used for a phenomenological research project. Five participants were interviewed for this study. In personal

communication with Dr. Stephanie J. Waterman, Onondaga, Turtle Clan, an internationally known

Indigenous scholar and faculty member at the University of Toronto, Waterman stated that the

fewer participants, the richer the data will be (personal communication, January 15, 2018). The

participants ranged in age between 25 and 55. Participants were both men and women who

currently reside in South Dakota, Minnesota, and New Mexico. Participants represented different

tribal affiliations and a diversity of postsecondary institutions attended.

Sampling Method

As stated, participants for this study were Natives who have attend both TCUs and PWIs.

Participants were identified through social media and the researcher's personal and professional

networks. Snowball sampling could be used as a compliment to purposeful sampling (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). The two types of sampling are complimentary because one participant might refer

another potential participant who would be good to include in the study (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). Finally, participants also voluntarily agreed to participate.

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Instrumentation

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The intention of this study was to allow the participants to define their experience attending

two different types of postsecondary institutions. Because this topic has not yet been addressed in

the professional literature, I created a list of semistructured questions to ask the participants who

voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

The interview questions were field tested and reviewed by external parties to help in

establishing validity. Dr. Stephanie J. Waterman provided very helpful feedback (personal

communication, July 25, 2017). Waterman stated that I initially had too many questions and that

the questions needed to be more open and conversational in tone. Based on Waterman's feedback,

I was able to evaluate the tone, process potential probes, and reaffirm the importance of

conversations when conducting interviews.

Data Collection

Through semistructured interviews, the narratives or first-person accounts of individuals who have graduated from and attended TCUs and/or who have also graduated from and attended PWI were audio-recorded. The purpose of the interviews was to have participants relay what is most personally salient based on their memories to describe their lived experiences at both a PWI and a TCU. The data was collected by conducting in-depth, open-ended, semistructured interviews—this allows for flexibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Four interviews were conducted in person and one was conducted via the telephone. I simultaneously observed the participants' verbal and nonverbal responses in person for the four interviews conducted in person (Hatch, 2002). A certain amount of flexibility is necessary because there is minimal research on this topic, and I needed to be able to pursue topics that participants raise.

To begin the interview and help participants begin to describe their lived experiences attending both types of postsecondary institutions, I used an open-ended question: "In as much detail as possible, tell me about your educational journey." This question allowed for the participant to begin describing their experience. When the participant appeared to have responded fully to that prompt, I asked the follow-up questions such as: "You spoke about such and such, can you tell me more about that?" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). This provided opportunity for participants to add depth and detail to their descriptions of their experiences.

The participants' narratives were based on their recollections and there might be memory decay based on time or participant response error (Giorgi, 2009). Flawless descriptions of a phenomenon are not expected. Descriptions delivered in the interviews are still rich with meaning to be analyzed (Giorgi 2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and then the raw data was analyzed. All information that could easily reveal the participants' identities was retracted and replaced with

fictitious representations that maintain privacy. This took place during transcription so that only the participants and I are aware of their identities.

Field Notes

Field notes were also taken during the interviews to help supplement the audio recordings and transcription of interviews. Groenewald (2004) referred to field notes as a secondary data storage method (p. 48). The field notes served multiple purposes and augment the transcriptions. These notes provided the essence that the researcher observed while interviewing participants, the non-verbal cues the participants used as they respond to the interview questions, and any possible artifacts or documents the participants brought to their interview session (Groenewald, 2004).

Identification of Attributes

For the purpose of this study, the identification of attributes could be found in identity-based or Indigenous support systems in postsecondary education. Native student experiences at tribal colleges and universities as well as predominantly White institutions could also be used to identify attributes.

Data Storing Methods

Historically, Native communities have learned to be hesitant to work with external, non-Native researchers due to exploitation (Kovach, 2009). Because of the relationship the researcher has with several Natives eligible to participate in this study, access to participants was earned through the trust and rapport developed with members of their tribal communities (Brayboy, 2005; Brayboy et al., 2012; Kovach, 2009).

Recordings of each interview, field notes and research journal, and hard copies of all documentation were stored safely locked in a cabinet and all electronic documentation were password protected. Both hard copies and electronic documents were stored at the researcher's private residence to protect the participants' identities and to maintain trust with data collection,

data analysis, and data storage. There are backups of both the audio and the transcriptions of each interview are on external hard-drives (Groenewald, 2004).

<div align="center">**Data Analysis Procedures**</div>

Phenomenological Analysis

Before conducting the interviews and engaging in the analysis of participant interviews, I began with introspection reflection regarding my own notions, experience, or biases that pertained to the topic of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is also referred to as bracketing (Moustakas, 1994; Giorgi, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Bracketing is a way for the researcher to determine which "predetermined notions of the phenomenon being studied" may exist (Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, & Cohen, 2016, p. 1189). The research process must begin with the identification of my own presuppositions regarding the research topic. Being cognizant of my own assumptions helped me listen with less bias as well as analyze the transcripts and see the data without imposing doubt or disbelief (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

After I had my own observations and conducted the interviews, then I reviewed the transcripts have been be read and then reviewed in detail to identify essence, descriptions, and lived experiences for Native students. The transcription texts or "empirical evidence" were analyzed for implications (Giorgi, 2009). A compilation of significant statements made by the participants was transferred into a list (Moustakas, 1994). This initial list was the precursor to making a list of "nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements" (Creswell, 2013, p. 193).

The list of emergent statements from the interviews were then grouped into different essences. Essences that emerge from the interviews helped in creating the textural or horizontal descriptions. Moustakas (1994) wrote that textural or horizontal descriptions (the "what") are then written by the researcher to describe, in this instance, the lived experience of the participants who attended both TCUs and PWIs. Horizontalization is when,

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there is an interweaving of the person, conscious experience, and phenomenon. In the

process of explicating the phenomenon, qualities are recognized and described; every

perception is granted equal value, nonrepetitive constituents of experience are linked

thematically, and a full description is derived. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96)

After the textural or horizontal descriptions were captured, structural description were then

written to show the "how" of the phenomenon that the participants described based on their

experiences at both the TCUs and PWIs. The final step in phenomenological analysis was the

overall contextual description that captures the essence of each of the descriptions (Moustakas,

1994). The contextual or composite description captures both the "what" and the "how" of the

phenomenon as described by participants. The culmination of the contextual description "should

yield an explicit structure of the meaning of the lived experience" (Creswell, 2013, p. 195).

Research Journal

The research journal allowed for the organization of the researcher's thoughts and provide

reference points for each individual interview. It helped in processing not only the content of the

interviews but the context in which the interviews were conducted. A research journal was also a

way to record my reactions, emotional and cognitive, to participants' statements. As a researcher

who has not attended a TCU, I am very likely to have my own personal responses to process after

the interviews.

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Limitations of the Research Design

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Limitations

The researcher asked participants to recollect and self-report their own lived experience;

the sample of purposive participants is based on the researcher's own personal and professional

network, and the interviews were conducted over a short period of time based on the constraints of

the doctoral program.

The justification for each limitation is as follows. Transcendental phenomenology is dependent on the participants describing the phenomenon and the data is driven by their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Self-reporting is central to the design. In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher's role is participatory, and the sample of purposive participants is based on the researcher's personal and professional network because of the trust and rapport that has been built (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Due to the constraints of the doctoral program schedule, the interviews, analysis, and writing of Chapters 4 and 5 are predicated on a timeline.

There is always the possibility that the five participants that were interviewed will not provide an essence of the phenomenon for Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs (Simon, 2011). But this does not dismiss the importance of the study (Giorgi, 2009), nor is it the goal of a qualitative research project. Since the lived experiences of Natives who have attended both types of postsecondary institutions are unknown, this study might encourage other researchers to conduct follow-up studies to elaborate or expand the understanding of this particular phenomenon.

Delimitations

For the purpose of this study, Natives who have attended only a TCU or Natives who have only attended only a PWI were not selected as participants. The experiences of Natives who have attended either a TCU or a PWI is captured, to some extent, in the postsecondary literature (Crazy Bull, 2009; Shotton et al., 2013). The researcher wanted to learn about the essence of Natives who have attended both types of postsecondary institutions (Moustakas, 1994).

Native student experiences are typically not reflected in the research literature of postsecondary education (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Shotton et al., 2013). Due to this gap in

postsecondary literature, it might be argued that any contribution to the literature could have implications for Natives who are affected by postsecondary education policy and practice.

Validity

Creswell (2013) wrote that the validation for phenomenological studies is based on how well grounded and supported the study is by the methodology (p. 259). Polkinghorne (1989) asked, "does the general structural description provide an accurate portrait of the outcomes, features and structural connections that are manifested in the examples collected?" (p. 57). Respondent validation was used as a technique in obtaining feedback and possible correction to the described phenomenon (Elliot & Timulak, 2005). "Methodologically, this means gathering knowledge that allows for voice and representational involvement in interpreting of findings" (Kovach, 2009, p. 82). Respondent validation is how the researcher continued to engage the participants in this study as Kovach referenced in the aforementioned quote.

Respondent validation or member checking can minimize risk of misunderstandings and inaccuracies and continues to engage participants in the study after the interviews have been conducted and transcribed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the purpose of this study, respondent validation (also known as member checking) was utilized. I utilized respondent validation once the lived experience or essence of the phenomenon was defined. Again, this continues to engage the participants in the findings—seeking ongoing validation so that the findings are accurate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is also in response to Native participants being historically exploited by researchers.

In order for the validity of a qualitative phenomenological study to be determined, Moustakas (1994) outlined the five following standards that the researcher needs to ask themselves. First, does the researcher demonstrate an understanding of phenomenology; second, is the phenomenon that is to be studied clear and concise; third, is the data analysis grounded in

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seminal phenomenological work; fourth, is the researcher able to capture the essence or lived experience of the phenomenon; and finally, does the author consider themselves a part of the research process. All of these standards are met in this study.

Credibility

In order to obtain credibility, or the truth in the data, the researcher field tested the interview questions. Based on data and themes that emerge from the interviews, there might be implications for faculty and staff who work with Native students at both TCUs and PWIs. However, no generalizations can be expected from a qualitative study.

The participants all voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Participants also reviewed the analysis of their narratives of their lived experiences attending both types of postsecondary institutions. This ongoing engagement of participants not only reinforced the validity of the study but underscored the credibility between researcher and participant.

Dependability

Dependability was supported through careful participant selection, adherence to the semistructured interview protocol, and a collaborative process to data analysis. The researcher also had all participants review the outcomes of the study. The reliability and dependability of the data was reinforced by the researcher's willingness to engage the participants in the final review of what will be disclosed in both Chapters 4 and 5 of the dissertation.

<center>**Expected Findings**</center>

It is expected that students who have attended both TCUs and PWIs had two distinct postsecondary experiences. At the TCU, it is expected that institutional commitment to Native identity and sociopolitical realities for Native peoples will positively impact Native students; this is not likely the case in the lived experience of Native students at PWIs (which also impacts Native

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students). Although this is a small qualitative study, there may be implications for practice that can be drawn from learning details about the lived experiences of these Native participants.

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Ethical Issues

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Conflict of Interest Assessment

Neither the researcher nor the participants received any financial or material gain for participating in this study. As disclosed earlier in Chapter 3, some participants self-selected because rapport and trust had already been established with the researcher. I accounted for my bias (through bracketing and reflective writing in the researcher journal) and was mindful as to how my biases may have emerged when conducting the interviews and analyzing the data.

Researcher's Position

I am a Native who has never attended at TCU, only PWI postsecondary institutions. Thus, TCU attendance is not a lived experience I drew upon when I interviewed the participants. I identified participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study through trust and rapport. The level of trust already established with participants may have influenced the level of their disclosure when responding to the semistructured interview questions.

Ethical Issues in the Study

King titled the second chapter of *The Truth About Stories* (2003), "You're not the Indian I had in Mind" (p. 31). Throughout this chapter, King explored his own lifelong question of whether or not he was "Indian enough." In this study, there were no assumptions about the participants' experiences at TCUs or PWIs. But participants may have been worried they did not have the "right" experience at their institutions or that they are not bringing the "right" Native identity to the research question. I asked questions and had conversations about experiences they have had so participants reflected on those experiences, and this might have made participants worry about being "Indian enough." Because trust and rapport has been established prior to the interviews, it is

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hoped that these concerns among the participants were minimized. Being cognizant of the history of research and Native participants, the researcher attempted to include Indigenous frameworks like TribalCrit that are predicated on the shared power between researcher and participant (Kovach, 2009; Brayboy, 2005).

Ethical consideration for "the protection of subjects from harm, the right to privacy, the notion of informed consent, and the issue of deception all need to be considered ahead of time" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 261). First, the informed consent form was used to start the conversation with the participants about the study and educate them on the interview process. Second, prior to conducting interviews, potential risk was mitigated through the field testing of questions. The informed consent might have also helped minimize risk by informing participants that they can stop the interview process at any time. Minimal risk was anticipated, but even with minimal risk, it was imperative to be mindful as the participants participated in the interview. The researcher was aware of participants' verbal and nonverbal responses because there was the potential for psychological impact when recalling their lived experiences. Finally, participants were selected through both professional and personal networks of the researcher—thus helping mitigate issues of fear of exploitation or deception.

For the purpose of this study, the only institutional review board process was conducted through Concordia University–Portland. To date, the lived experience of Natives who have attended both types of postsecondary institutions has been understudied. I conducted the interviews in spaces identified by the participants, so additional IRB processes were not needed.

Chapter 3 Summary

The method used to conduct this study was qualitative with a transcendental phenomenology design. TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) did provide the framework for semistructured interviews as a way to collect the lived experience of the participants at both TCUs and PWIs. The

study was strengthened by the trust and rapport the researcher had with participants because this was the first attempt to understand and describe this phenomenon.

As stated, the topic of inquiry for this study has not been understudied in the U.S. "People lose the very tools that they need the most: their ability to hear and listen to others, their creativity, their flexibility, their empathy—even their memory" (Hallowell, 2011, p. 95). The experiences of participants who have attended both types of postsecondary institutions has yet to be documented through qualitative methods (or by any other means).

If students are able to obtain an education while not needing to compromise their cultural or sociopolitical identities, are the students more likely to engage in their own self-determination and return to their communities with a greater sense of self and purpose? The interviews of participants who have attended both TCUs and PWIs will inform postsecondary education literature through the sharing and definition Native students' lived experience at both types of institutions (Groenewald, 2004).

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

Between June and August 2018, five participants were interviewed to explore the research question, "What is the lived experience of Natives who have attended both TCUs and PWIs?" The interviews took place in the Plains and Midwestern states. The one phone interview conducted was with a Native who resided in a southwestern state.

Transcendental phenomenology is the design for this study because Native people have not been allowed to tell their own stories (Brayboy, 2005; Kovach, 2009; Vine & Wildcat, 2001). The lived experiences of the five participants will define the essences, the shared experience amongst them (Patton, 2015), of the phenomenon of attending both TCUs and PWIs. As the researcher, I too am an active participant in the research process.

Before I began my interviews, I started with bracketing my own thoughts so I could be aware of my biases and what I brought into the interview environment. I also journaled throughout the interview process to help process my own responses to conducting the interviews, the participants' emotional and verbal responses to taking part in the interview processes, and overall observations.

Description of the Sample

Five participants were interviewed for this study. Four participants were interviewed in person and one was interviewed over the phone. Each participant had tribal affiliation and attended both TCUs and PWIs. The four female participants were given pseudonyms by the researcher and the male participant identified his own pseudonym.

Participants

Dora is a Native in her mid-20s who grew up on her reservation in South Dakota. She first attended a mid-sized PWI in one of the Plains states, did not pass her first semester, and returned

home. Dora then attended a TCU and eventually returned to the first PWI she attended for both her undergraduate and graduate degrees. Dora is the only participant in this study who was not responsible for children while she was in college and was not a first-generation college student.

Violet is a Native in her late-30s who grew up away from her reservation while attending a boarding school in South Dakota. Violet and her family returned to their reservation after she graduated from high school. She started at a 4-year TCU, then returned to a 2-year TCU because of a family emergency. Violet then attended a small Midwestern PWI to complete her undergraduate degree and a mid-sized Plains PWI for her master's degree. Violet had two children while obtaining her undergraduate education.

Marie is a Native in her mid-30s who grew up off her reservation while attending boarding school in South Dakota. Marie and her family returned to the reservation after she finished high school. She is the only participant who started her postsecondary education at a 2-year TCU, then transferred to small Midwestern PWI for her bachelor's degree, and a mid-sized Plains PWI for her master's degree. Marie had two children while working on her undergraduate education and one child while obtaining her graduate degree.

Deidema is a Native in her late 50s who grew up away from her reservation in North Dakota. She started her postsecondary education at a research one, Midwestern university before attending two different TCUs because she did not pass her first semester at the PWI. Deidema then attended a research one PWI in the Plains states for her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Deidema had four children while obtaining her postsecondary education.

Todd is a Native in his early 50s who grew up on his reservation in North Dakota. Todd began at a PWI but did not pass his first semester. After 10 years, he returned to postsecondary education at a TCU and then transferred to a research one, Plains state public PWI. He earned his

master's degree at the same PWI as his bachelor's degree. Todd is the one participant who is gay. Todd was a single parent raising two children while obtaining his postsecondary education.

The participants are Natives from three different tribes. Three out of the five participants started at PWIs, had negative experiences, then attended TCUs, and found academic success. In all, the participants attended five different TCUs and five public PWIs in the Midwest and Plains states. Deidema earned her bachelor's, master's, and doctorate at the same PWI. Dora and Todd also earned his bachelor's and master's from the same PWI—but they each attended different postsecondary institutions. Dora, Violet, and Marie earned their master's degrees at the same PWI. Violet and Marie earned their bachelor's and master's degrees from the same two PWIs. Violet and Marie are sisters and attended college and graduate school at different times.

The following questions were asked of each participant: Could you please tell me about your overall educational journey? Let's start with your time at a TCU; describe what you recall about your best experience there. What do you remember about your worst experience at a TCU? Now let's talk about your experiences at a PWI. Describe what you recall about your best experiences there. What do you remember about your worst experience at a PWI? Overall, how would you compare your experiences at the TCU to your experiences at the PWI? What would you recommend to Native students to be better prepared to succeed in college if they choose to attend a TCU? Based on your experiences, how do you think postsecondary education (in either or any setting) could better serve Native students? Native scholar Bryan Brayboy writes that "Stories are not separate from theory" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430). Is there anything I haven't asked about that you would like to share that would help me better understand the experiences you had at both a tribal college and a PWI?

Research Methodology and Analysis

Before conducting the interviews and engaging in the analysis of the participant interviews, I began with introspection and reflection regarding my own notions, experiences, or biases that pertain to the topic of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By beginning the research process with the identification of my own presuppositions regarding the research topic, I was more cognizant of my assumptions. This helped me listen with less bias as well as analyze the transcripts and see the data without imposing doubt or disbelief (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I drove over 1,800 miles to travel to each participant to interview them in their environment of choice. I found the driving allowed me to prepare and then process before and after interviewing each participant. The bracketing was helpful in exploring my own presuppositions and potential biases but the driving helped me mentally review what the participants had said during their interviews and helped me to start mentally grouping essences. The introspection involved in the bracketing, the drives, and the journaling was helpful. Ultimately the driving was invaluable and an unexpected benefit of the interview process.

Bracketing

Prior to conducting the interviews, I wrote about what I brought into the interview as the researcher. "Prior beliefs about a phenomenon of interest are temporarily put aside, or bracketed, so as to not interfere with seeing or intuiting the elements or structure of the phenomenon" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26). I have friends and colleagues who have either attended or worked for TCUs, so I had some basic knowledge of TCUs. Having never attended a TCU and having worked for the past 19 years at only PWIs, I do not have the experience of attending or working at a TCU. I have only a working knowledge of TCUs based on research, conversations, and now through interviewing five Native participants who have attended TCUs.

I also knew that I had never visited a TCU so my knowledge of what it felt like to be on a TCU campus and observe what was going on around me was nonexistent. As I processed this, I did think this might be a positive thing because the participants would create a picture in my mind based on their experiences and their descriptions.

In regard to my biases about the participants' experiences at PWIs, the literature and the personal narratives I had heard over my career made me wonder if these five participants would have experiences at the PWIs that were congruent with what I had already learned—PWIs are not serving our Native students well. I needed to explore this bias because it was important that I keep an open mind to the lived experience of each of the five participants.

I was also cognizant that I had a pre-existing relationship with each participant. Each participant was willing to be interviewed because of the trust and rapport we shared with each other. Violet stated after I had conducted her interview that "we were meant to share our stories with you. You are the person who was meant to hear them and share them with everyone else. I do not believe in accidents." This reinforced the importance of my work and how very personal the narratives of each participant were—at no point did I want to misrepresent what they told me or take their words out of context.

Finally, as I was interviewing the participants, I was also cognizant that recollecting their experiences at both types of postsecondary institutions might bring out emotions. My own responses to their verbal and nonverbal behavior was documented in my research journal. Not all participants displayed emotions, but some did, and their willingness to be vulnerable with me reinforced the importance of accurately conveying their narrative to the best of my ability.

After I captured my own observations and conducted the interviews, transcripts were read and reviewed in order to identify essences, descriptions, and lived experiences for the Native participants. As described by Tisdell and Merriam (2016), an essence is the "basic structure of an

experience" (p. 26). Because this phenomenon has yet to be studied, the five participants would begin with a basic structure to describe their lived experiences attending a TCU and PWI. A compilation of significant statements made by the participants was transferred to a list (Moustakas, 1994).

The significant statements from the interviews were then grouped into different essences. Essences that emerged from the interviews helped in creating the textural or horizontal descriptions. Moustakas (1994) wrote that textural or horizontal descriptions (the "what") are then written by the researcher to describe, in this instance, the lived experiences of the participants who attended both TCUs and PWIs.

After the textural or horizontal descriptions were captured, structural description was then written to show the "how" of the phenomenon that the participants described based on their experiences at both the TCUs and PWIs. The final step in phenomenological analysis is the overall contextual description that captures the essence of each of the descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). The contextual or composite description captures both the "what" and the "how" of the phenomenon as described by participants.

Finally, each participant reviewed both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 for accuracy. I wanted to make sure that as the lived descriptions and essences emerged, the participants reviewed each chapter and had the opportunity to correct or expand on what I wrote. It was important to me that each participant remained engaged throughout the analysis for accurate member checking. This was a way for me to demonstrate my respect for the participants as well as my trustworthiness as a researcher. Each participant will be contacted separately to maintain confidentiality amongst themselves.

Summary of Findings

There were common lived experiences that emerged among the participants and their collective experiences at both TCUs and PWIs. They were: the TCUs positively impacted participants' confidence that allowed them to see their ability as student as competent students; tribal community and Native identity were integral parts of the TCU experience; children and family presence at the TCUs was appreciated; participants' transitions to the PWIs was impacted positively by their experience at the TCUs; racist interactions occurred at the PWIs; mentors at both TCUs and PWIs were important; resiliency is a key trait; urban, linear, and reservation Native students at PWIs introduced intra-Indian student conflict; Native based spaces and individuals made an impact on the participants sense of belonging at the PWIs; and perceptions of TCUs are inaccurate.

The lived experiences of the participants that emerged in their interviews was the impact TCUs had on creating a foundation that helped them persist and be resilient as they navigated their eventual postsecondary education degrees at PWIs. The TCUs also incorporated the notion of community and culture—this was infused in all of their answers to the questions. All five participants were first-generation college students. Four participants returned to their reservations after leaving their first attempt at college. Out of these four participants, three attended a PWI first and did not pass their first semester—ultimately returning home to their reservation. Four of the five participants reentered postsecondary education at a TCU after having started at colleges or universities and leaving after their first semester. Three out of the five participants, Violet, Marie, and Deidema, had children during their undergraduate education obtainment and three out of the four who had children were single parents. Todd was the only parent who had children prior to returning to postsecondary education at a TCU. Two participants, Marie and Deidema, had children during their graduate programs. One participant, Violet, attended a 4-year TCU first

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before returning home after a semester because of a family emergency. Only one participant, Marie, attended a TCU first, then a PWI to finish her undergraduate degree, and then another PWI for her master's degree.

All five participants stated that they had a lack of direction before attending postsecondary institutions. They also each felt very unprepared for college. Marie said that having her sister Violet attend college first was helpful. Neither their high schools nor their families provided a direction or preparation to help them navigate postsecondary education. Four out of the five participants were first generation college students. Also among these shared essences, all participants eventually completed master's degrees; one completed a doctorate, Deidema.

Presentation of the Data and Results

It is important to start the presentation of data and results by stating that the lived experiences of the participants at both types of institutions unequivocally impacted participants long-term. Next, their essences and descriptions were congruent, despite different TCUs and PWIs attended. All participants stated in their own words that their resiliency and success at PWIs was because they returned to a TCU after their first attempt at postsecondary education. This is significant. All participants credited their success in postsecondary education to their time at a TCU. None of the participants could remember anything negative about their time at the TCU. Each had vivid stories about how instructors and staff interacted with them and supported them as students at TCUs. Participants also disclosed racist interactions, mostly but not exclusively among other students, during their time at PWIs.

Tribal Colleges and Universities

As stated, four participants returned to postsecondary education their second time through TCUs because their first postsecondary education experience was not successful. The three participants who failed out of PWIs and one participant returned home to her reservation after a

family emergency, reentered their education at TCUs. Each participant was on his or her own timeline. Dora reentered right away at a TCU, but Todd waited 10 years before returning to postsecondary education at a TCU. Dora, who also left a PWI after a rough first semester, was extremely active as a high school student and salutatorian, became an engaged student again when she started at the TCU. Her initial experience at a PWI was not positive; this was also true for both Todd and Deidema.

When asked if they had negative experiences to share about their time attending TCUs, each participant stated that they had experienced nothing negative. All five participants told stories of faculty and staff who went above and beyond to ensure their success at the TCU. Each participant's nonverbal cues were positive as they remembered interactions with faculty and staff at the TCUs. Each participant seemed to be more relax, even smile as they recalled memories of their time spent as students at the TCUs. There was a shift in expression for the three participants who were not successful during their first experience at a PWI and were asked to remember their experiences at the TCU. The shift of expression was consistent also with a more positive tone of voice. As the interviewer, I noticed these behavioral responses.

All five participants talked about how instrumental their instructors were in their success. Marie stated how she felt comfortable at the TCU because her perception was that faculty and staff understood her life and personal circumstances. There were other students with similar circumstances or, according to Marie, other students who were worse off. Each participant stated they were ill or underprepared for college, so the notion that the community at a TCU understood their life circumstances was comforting to Marie and the other participants. Deidema stated about her experience at the TCU:

> I ended up going to a TCU and that's where I really thrived in education because I was
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> doing really well. I was concentrating on college. I was getting really good grades, the

faculty loved me because I showed up every day and I tried hard. They just praised me up

and down. The faculty were just giving me all kinds of praise and I was getting A's and

once you get an A, it's like you never want to settle for anything less, you became in

competition with yourself. I got a lot of motivation out of that. A lot of self-satisfaction, a

lot of pride. And I did graduate from there.

Deidema continued her story:

They (TCU faculty members) would stay after class, they would come in early, they would

give one-on-one assistance; many times in my classes there were three, four of us at the

most. The instructors would just spend all the time in the world with us, helping us out,

getting things done, learning what we needed to learn. Everybody was so encouraging

because they wanted us to be successful at college.

Deidema's example typified what the other participants also said about being at a TCU.

Dora regained her confidence after attending a TCU and her instructors encouraged her to

transfer after she completed two years at the TCU. She stated:

The instructors were super engaged and wanted to know how you were doing and if you

had an assignment that was missing or something. They wanted to know how they could

help you or asked what is going on in my life? Faculty and staff approached students from

the perspective of knowing that their students have lives outside of school.

The participants stated that the TCU faculty and staff took into consideration the needs of their

students from a holistic perspective. Dora's statement is evidence of this. Other participants also

talked about how at the TCU, the faculty and staff took a holistic interest in all aspects of the

student's life. Dora's professors really pushed her to finish at the TCU and return to the PWI. This

happened because her faculty took a genuine interest in her and built trust and rapport while also

rebuilding her confidence to return to a PWI.

The community was also a common presence at the TCUs all five participants attended. Each participant remarked about the community aspect to their educational obtainment as the told stories about everyone from elders to children who were a consistent presence. Dora stated "TCUs do have a very huge variety of people taking courses. From 18-year-olds directly of high school to 64-year-old grandmas. So that was cool to having all of those different perspectives in class." Marie stated at the beginning of her interview:

I grew up Indian and on the reservation. To start education through a tribal college was comfortable because it was what I was familiar with. If I would've gone to a mainstream college, I wouldn't have made it. Even at that age. I think I was 22 when I started there.

Marie went on to state in her interview:

I was in a comfortable environment where I felt like I could be myself and everybody understood my situation. A lot of people had similar situations or had it harder than I did. I definitely knew I wouldn't have made it at any other university if I wouldn't have started here. And that's something I knew and I was aware of when I was still attending the TCU.

A theme that resonated was that all participant told stories throughout their interviews about how instrumental TCUs were to building their confidence as students. The perceptions of the participants were that TCUs were institutions that cared for the entire students. Todd described employees at the TCU this way: "the engagement, the way in which they engaged with me always stuck with me. It was very personal. As in Native communities, we know one another either by one, two, and three degrees of separation." This level of care was apparent to each of the five participants who each had their own version of highly similar stories. After taking a few courses at the TCU, Deidema realized that "maybe college isn't so out of my reach." This was a major, positive shift for her because her initial experience at the PWI did not make her feel as if she could be successful in postsecondary education. Deidema stated:

The only reason I'm sitting where I'm sitting today was because of my experience at a TCU. I would not have graduated from a Plains division one research university if I hadn't had the TCU experience first. Because of the TCU I had the confidence that I could go to college, having proven that I belong in college courses.

Deidema went on to say:

I probably wouldn't have done well and probably would have never have gotten good grades from there. I may have never graduated. I probably never would've gone on to finish my undergraduate degree. I have told this story at different presentations that I've done that the tribal college system is definitely the only reason I'm sitting where I am today. I would not have graduated from public division one university if I hadn't had had that experience first at a tribal college. Being at the tribal college gave me the confidence I needed to go to college, having proven that I could complete college courses. Having the tribal college experience was really encouraging to me and helped me go on to college (a PWI). It made all the difference in the world and I know that I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the tribal colleges. So I'm a really huge supporter of tribal colleges.

Violet was able to bring her newborn son to class while she attended the TCU. She remarked that there was never a question among her faculty if she would return after having him in February; her faculty and staff said to her to just bring him with her to the TCU. She had one particular math instructor who would hold her son while she worked on algebra. Violet stated that the instructor was willing to do this daily because the instructor knew that Violet needed to pass the math course. Again, Violet remarked that this instructor demonstrated a holistic understanding of Violet's needs as a student and a mother.

All of the participants had stories like this in regard to their experiences at TCUs. Marie

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remarked about the infusion of culture that she and other students experienced at the TCUs:

> You had to take your language whether you're from this tribe or not, needed to take
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> it or not. If you're a student there, you have to take at least one tribal language. My
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> grandma was the faculty person and then, no matter what program you're in there you
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> have to take some type of Indigenous Studies class. I think the options were Dakota
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> history or culture. Once again, no matter what tribe, whether you were a Native or non-
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> Native student, if you are trying to graduate there, you have to take the class. And I had
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> never heard of that and I thought it was such a cool requirement because it was just kind
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> of asserting that they were a tribal college and what our mission was.

Dora talked at length about the culture and the lack of understanding by faculty and staff about

her culture or other Native cultures throughout her experience at the PWI. This was in contrast

to the TCUs where she felt that cultural elements were incorporated everywhere. The infusion of

culture at the TCU helped Dora because it grounded her and she stated "this is who you are,

this is what's important."

Children and Family and TCUs

Lived experience for the participants at the TCUs was the presence of children, both in and

out of the classroom. Four of the five participants had children while they were in college. The

accommodations made for children at TCUs made an impact on the participants. Dora was the one

participant who did not have children but she mentioned the presence of children at TCUs in her

interview and how this was a positive part of being at a TCU. The role of children and the role of

the family were significant in the TCU community. This was in great contrast to participants'

experiences at PWIs, where children were not welcomed and families were not mentioned or

involved.

Violet talked about the importance of having children present at the TCU. This was referenced by other participants as well. Violet stated that when she attended the PWI she remembered how the TCU embraced the presence of her children but the PWI did not:

> How did you reconcile that transition of not letting people doing things like allowing you to have your son in class, and the instructors helping out in other ways? Instructors watched him in tutoring and then seeing at the PWI or other places that there's more obstacles with less support?

The lack of support for Natives with children was articulated consistently among the four participants who had children.

Both Violet and Marie returned as employees to the TCU they attended as students. During this time period they both also started a master's program at a PWI. While attending Violet's master's program she remembered how other students made her feel about her children and family. "And it wasn't until I actually got into the master's program and the presence of family came up and I realized how some people could feel shame about their families because we were three families living in my parents' house, my mom and dad and my nephew that they were raising. And then eventually my two kids and their dad and I and then my sister and her son all lived together because she was going to the tribal college after she had her son."

Marie felt strongly that she wanted to return to the TCU to give back in some capacity. She did exactly that after she finished her undergraduate degree and worked for five years at the TCU:

> All the experiences I had which were really tough in college, I wanted to be able to help those students so they wouldn't have such a tough experience. That was how I realized what I wanted to do. I think if I would've had that cookie cutter experience at a high school then going to mainstream (a PWI), I wouldn't have had that drive to help Native students.

Although you can argue that Native students don't ever have that cookie cutter anyway, but you know what I mean.

This focus means that children to elders are present on campus on a daily basis. Each participant mentioned how American Indian Studies courses were mandatory for all students at TCUs and were important to each participant. The review of policy and history filled in knowledge gaps and reminded each participant of the significance of having a TCU and the focus on community.

Transitions to PWIs

This community focus was not present for Violet during her studies at a PWI, who stated this during her interview:

I think that's a negative at a PWI is because if you don't see anyone like you and you can't connect with anyone like you, you are unable to surround yourself with people who are like you. But if you don't ever feel like anybody acknowledges your presence or what you bring to the table or the fact that people do not want to listen but would rather try to change you and make you like them, then you don't want to partake in any kind of experience at a predominantly White institution. At least I never did. It was like, no, I'm just here to get what I need. And that's the degree.

Violet compared her experience at a TCU to being a student at a PWI this way: "you just don't ever feel like you don't belong there (at the TCU)." Violet was not the only participant who expressed a sense of isolation or invisibility at the PWI in their interview. When the participants with children transitioned to PWIs, the disconnect with no longer being able to have their children near as they attended class was evident to Violet.

Violet and Deidema both had other students tell them that the only reason they were accepted to their graduate program was because they were Native. All of the participants continued

to have racist, negative experiences in graduate school because they were Native. Deidema stated in her interview:

> But as I think as a Native person that you just learn how to expect that kind of thing. And it doesn't shock you so much and you just kind of expect it and you learn how to, you got to brush it off because otherwise if you don't, you're going to be angry all the time. And if you're angry all the time, you can't get anything done. Your mind is off trying to be mad at somebody when it should be concentrating on your schoolwork. And so I learned how to kind of block a lot of that stuff out that I would hear.

Marie almost withdrew her first semester at the PWI. She stated:

> I can't stay here at the PWI. I don't feel like I'm smart enough. Then I called and told my sister because nobody knew what was going on. I actually did the paperwork to withdraw. But then three people, my sister, another student, and my advisor talked me into coming back that next semester. And I always think about that, like if others like my sister had not intervened or supported me, I would have never gone back. So then there's all those little things I'm teaching Natives as students at the TCU. Trying to remind them that they are going to do what others did for me for each other, that they are going to support each other and lift each other up, and while they are supporting each other I'm going to support them the way with hopefully some additional support from Native faculty and staff that will also support Native students as well.

Problematic Interactions at PWIs

In their interviews, all participants credited their experience at TCUs with providing the foundation for their success in postsecondary education. Their undergraduate experiences at TCUs built resilience that helped prepare the participants for both undergraduate and graduate programs at PWIs. The TCUs helped each participant feel more confident and ultimately, it instilled the

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confidence they needed to realize their academic potential. All five participants discussed racist experiences as undergraduates at PWIs and as graduate students at PWIs. For most of the participants, racist interactions were with fellow students and not faculty.

Dora discussed being asked to speak for all Natives in one of her classes at the PWI. Marie summarized this resilience by saying:

> When I went to a PWI, I was ready. I was ready for the ignorance and the questions and the responsibility of having to educate faculty and students about Natives. I knew I was going to probably be the only Native in that program, and then the added pressure of being in graduate school and not knowing what to expect in graduate school. I was not like all the other students and I accepted that but being older, having two kids by then, working full time, and still commuting, it was the odds are even more against me when I went to graduate school.

Violet remarked about her experience at the PWIs: "but I was like, oh my gosh, what if, what if that is why they accepted me because there's not one other Indian here. Did they need to admit one person of color? So on the way home I cried and I was like, oh my gosh, what am I doing?" Violet then contrasted this with her experience at a TCU: "you know, everybody had something to contribute and that kept people equal and humble, and then you come into a space like this (PWI) where it's like not that way at all." Each participant had contrasting experiences very similar to what Violet described. Yet each participant said in their interviews that they were able to persist at the PWI because of their experiences at TCUs. The TCU had prepared each participant and instilled in them that they each were academically capable of succeeding at the TCU and the PWI. Their academic and personal confidence was impacted by the role faculty, staff, and the community at the TCU that supported their education obtainment.

All five participants disclosed how racist incidents continued throughout their graduate programs. Deidema, the one participant who had earned a doctorate, had multiple racist experiences in her doctoral program. She stated:

> There were rumblings around some of the other students that the only reason that a couple other Native people and I were in the doctoral program was because we were given preference because we're Native. We overheard other students who assumed we were given preference because we were people of color and that kind of thing. So I thought well, I'm just going to prove to you that I can do the work. And so I worked really hard in my courses and I did really well.

Please note Deidema was also a Bush Fellow as a doctoral student. Other (White) doctoral students stated that Deidema and fellow classmates of color were only accepted into the graduate program was because they were Native. All five talked about racist incidents due to the geographic location of the PWI. Each participant also experienced similar racism in other locations in the community outside the PWI. Both the PWIs and the communities in which they were located were perceived as racist by the participants.

The notion of being admitted to the PWI as a quota was a theme for both their undergraduate and graduate experience for each participant. For the one participant who earned a doctorate, Deidema, this negative perception was salient for all three degrees. The notion that each participant was only at the PWI because of their identity and not their ability was frustrating and underscored the racist environments that they encountered. This brought one participant to tears because the idea of quota or their inability to have worth as a student seemed to take a toll through graduate school. One participant, Dora, changed her graduate program emphasis because of the perceptions and lack of sensitivity of her cohort. She stated:

So we start the program and we're the only two Native students on this campus doing the program because they have a branch in another Plains state city. And with the Student Affairs Program I think there's like a very like stereotypical person that you think of when you think Student Affairs, you know, they're very preppy. They were just out there with extroverted permanent smiles on their faces and that was not the other Native student and myself. So I think that was another kind of thing that we ran into as well in class with a lot of students. Also it being Plains state, they were not very interested in looking at things through a diversity lens. So there were a lot of racist comments and stuff to where I was just like, oh my God, you want to work with students? How can you expect to reach all of your students who don't fit this mold? And there's going to be a lot of them that do not fit their mold. So on top of the imposter syndrome, there was the cultural clash in class and then I guess with the imposter syndrome too, it was when professors would like give me an extension for a paper or when they would come and want to talk to me. Because I was totally burning out that first year of graduate school, like completely burning out. There was also that thought in the back of my mind, like, are they offering this to me because I'm Native? Are they always this nice?

At one point the PWI housing office asked Todd to produce birth certificates to prove his children where his own:

In terms of being a man with daughters, I felt like I had to prove more to the housing office that I needed family housing on campus. It felt like housing was questioning me and I was having to validate that I actually had my children. I don't recall ever hearing a story of any of the non-male, single parents having to provide birth certificate to housing to prove that they're with their children. Just some of those things that we don't think about as stereotypes. Having to prove myself through your stereotypes. I very rarely had any

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problems or negative interactions with other people in housing. It was just the housing

office.

Because of racist or other negative interactions the participants had at PWIs, each one spoke of the need for community and to connect with other Native students. Dora was very thankful to have another Native in her graduate program. This connection with the other Native student created a sense of belonging and support that she needed to persist throughout her degree. Todd and other participants stated that finding other Natives at PWIs was critical in their own mental health and need for extended community being away from home. American Indian Studies or American Indian Services or Houses allowed Native students to gather and feel connected.

Todd was confronted with issues concerning Native mascots at the PWI he attended. According to Todd, other students and faculty did not understand the negative implications of asking him to speak on behalf of all Natives on this topic.

Mentors

Imposter syndrome was a genuine concern for each participant while at the PWIs. They also talked about finding mentors and allies at the PWIs. Three had one common mentor who was a faculty member who helped mentor each participant through their graduate program. Participants mentioned that Native and non-Native mentors were equally important, regardless of race. Each participant had different stories in regard to mentors or finding supportive faculty and/or staff, but each story reinforced how the individual was integral to each of the participants' success. Marie stated:

> Maybe you'll find people, maybe you just have one, but you have to find somebody who's
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> going to help you. All three of my mentors were needed, which is kind of crazy, especially
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> the one at our tribal college. Each mentor got it, you know, as much as they could get it.

They got it. And if it wasn't for those three, I wouldn't have graduated at each place. I

know that too.

Deidema stated "there were constantly people who were doubting you, but my faculty

never doubted me. My faculty were great. It was my fellow students that looked down on me and

other people of color in the room. But so again, that that's all it was." Violet, Marie, and Dora had

a common faculty member who was instrumental in supporting them in their graduate degree

obtainment.

Todd found his mentors to be other Natives who worked for the PWI. He stated:

They were older and they had gone to school. They've gone to college and come back to

work for the campus. These Natives in the office had similar experiences with the Native

students on that particular campus. Anyways, it really alleviated a lot of fears and anxiety

to know that although they wouldn't be sitting in a classroom with me that I could go to

them and talk about how I was going to feel. If I was going to feel intimidated or just kind

of sticking out like a sore thumb in a classroom full of recent high school grads.

Resiliency

Participants' stories of resiliency were a testament to their dedication to obtaining their

postsecondary degrees. Deidema had her baby on Wednesday:

So I thought I better just go in and take my midterms Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday or

whatever I had that week. I missed one day of school and I just went back and took my

midterms. And then since I was already back in school, I thought, might as well just keep

going, no sense in taking two weeks off now. So I missed one day of school living all by

myself with three babies.

Each participant told stories similar to Deidema's. At no one singular time in their

educational journey did the participants disclose in their interviews that they just had their

education obtainment to focus on. Four were parents; Dora was and is extremely close to her family, especially younger siblings. Family was a constant theme and this was emphasized as Marie told a story about how she was working full-time and also breastfeeding for a period of time while she was in graduate school. She would work all day, drive over two hours to class, pump her breastmilk, and in the winter put the breastmilk in the snowbanks to keep it cold. Each participant worked so incredibly hard to navigate PWIs and make sure no one kept them from achieving their goals.

Todd found himself educating both students and faculty about Natives throughout his postsecondary education obtainment. He stated:

I felt oftentimes like the Native students, myself included, had the responsibility of bringing the Native experience to the table. Whether it be understandings of what Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) is, what a tribal school is, and what a boarding school is. Is it the Native student's responsibility at that time to be educating instead of being educated? At that time it was our (the Native student) responsibility to educate the faculty and other students about us. I mean re-educate about all the traditional stereotypes. We are still being played out ignorantly in the literature that was being used at the PWI. So I found my voice, the ability to challenge others and seek out literature and stories are big gaps or additional readings to contribute to what was missing in the textbooks used in the department at the time.

Violet worked on the reservation for three days a week and traveled to her postsecondary institution the rest of the week to attend classes as a full-time student. She recollected this part of her education obtainment:

I was offered a job back home. So I worked part-time three days a week. So I actually moved back home for part of the week and my family was still on the reservation so I

would drive up on Monday morning, go to work. And then I would work Monday, Tuesday

and Wednesday and then come home. I was working part-time and then in school full-time.

I had a very demanding job and so I worked a lot of hours. I didn't work just eight-hour

days when I was there, but it was really good experience and then I was able to use that as

my internship site and just to move into a different role. I was working for the tribe. With

the internship they ended adding an additional day. So then I was working full-time, in

school full-time because then I was also a graduate assistant when I was in the program. So

it was pretty intense couple of years.

Violet's persistence during period of her postsecondary education obtainment was predicated on

living and working in two different locations while be a mother of two children. Again, the lengths

she went to in order to finish her education are a testament to her resilience and persistence.

Urban, Linear, and Reservation Native Students at PWIs

The Native students at the PWI Marie attended had an inter-Native struggle amongst each

other. Because Native students received a tuition waiver at this PWI, there were three types of

Natives Marie talked about. First, the Native students who grew up on the reservation, second, the

linear Native students who only learned they were Native recently, and the urban Native students

who knew they were Native and engaged in their culture but grew up in urban settings. Marie

discussed the tension among these three different Native student populations and how the tension

came into the classroom. Marie, a single mother, was not interested in the tension and focused on

her family and degree completion.

Marie went on to further explain the intra-Native tension:

I was there to learn, yet I had to navigate the complaints that were happening because of

these faculty and it trickled over into our Native club and everything else. It was just

something that I look back now and I'm like, wow, they had no business putting us through

that. We knew was going on and that we weren't treated right. And it's like, God, we barely get here. I mean you get there, you make it and then you have to navigate all that stuff or even just deal with any of it on an on-going basis. It just wasn't right. So that was one of the most difficult things to navigate, you know. Being the only Native in each classroom and then having that responsibility of hiding our feelings about what was happening in our community on campus because the burden was placed on us to represent the whole population, especially on that campus.

Native Spaces at PWIs

As three of the four participants reentered PWIs, they talked about finding Native spaces at the postsecondary institutions. Diedema stated that she found the Indian Center because she found they were more willing to work with her and help her than the other offices on-campus:

You don't want to go in and ask for help at most offices on campus. So if I went to the Indian center and I got smiley faces and if they're helping me out, I'm willing to do it. So that is the things I remember the most. And just meeting other Natives. I really met other Native people hanging out at the Indian Center. I know that they had families or you know, I'm not so much single people, but I mostly found other Native families that had kids too that I would hang out with whether there were other single parents or whether it was families with two parents or whatever. And so we would have something to connect with. Sometimes we take classes together and everything. So that was kind of my community outside of college was other Natives that were kind of just like me.

Diedema talked about how her own experiences in postsecondary education have impacted working with Native students in postsecondary education throughout her career:

Later on I went to work at a college to serve Native students and now I work for all underrepresented students. When I talked to my students and they come in and they say,

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you know, I'm having a really tough time because I'm a single mom and I've got this three-year-old with me. You know, on one hand I empathize with them, but on the other hand I'm very hard on them too because guess what, honey? I did it too and I was single and had three kids, so don't tell me you can't do it. If I can do it, you can do it. And I have to rebalance myself though, between being empathetic and saying, okay, I know it's hard, but on the other hand it's not that hard. And so having a level of, I know where you're coming from but I'm also going to challenge you. And so that has really affected my work and, and it's really made me empathize with students that are going through the same kind of struggles. But in addition to that when I work with new freshmen students that don't have any kids and they're not doing well in college, I remember my days where I didn't do well in college and I remember and I don't lose hope on these students. I know that I hear they're out partying and they're doing this and that but I don't lose hope on them completely. I think, okay, do your thing and when you're ready to get serious, come let me know. And sometimes it's after they leave for a couple of years they might come back with a child in tow but they come back and they're ready to get serious because it's become more to them.

Violet also worked with Native students at postsecondary institutions and shared similar stories to Diedema's.

Dora talked about finding the Native spaces right away as she reentered the PWI. For Dora, the connection to other Natives was imperative for her sense of belonging and not feeling isolated like her first time at a PWI:

So I came back and this time I knew I had to be involved or I was just going to feel isolated again and alone. I'm essentially found my place on campus, found my people on campus

whose support would help me. So I did that in getting involved with the American Indian

Student Center or back then it was like the American Indian Education and Cultural Center.

Dora continued to talk about how involved she became at the PWI in Native centered activities:

So I had two people that I knew at the PWI and they were very helpful. I joined American

Indian Science and Engineering Societies (AISES). My involvement in AISES came about

because they were starting the chapter again. It had been dormant for quite a few years. I

was in the American Indian Student Association. And then through that I met a Native staff

member when she was starting at the PWI and when I met her she was like, hey, do you

want to be an officer at the center? I was like, no, I've never done anything like that. I don't

think I can. And she was like, it's okay, we'll totally help you through it. We'll all be here

for you.

Dora continued to talk about the feeling of isolation at the PWI despite her growing involvement:

I still felt isolated even though I had people around me when I was getting involved. It's a

gradual process as far as finding your place. My advisor at the time was great. She was my

professor as well as my advisor and my class with her was social work. I took sociology

before and I think I went to that class like two times other than when we had exams, which

is awful. She was still very caring and very genuine and just gave me a lot of chances, I

guess. So I met with her a lot and bawled my eyes out with her a lot. I think she was really

like my rock in that first year as far as someone kind of cheering me on, but also keeping

me accountable. The next year after that I did an internship with the American Indian

Students Center and was able to kind of lead there. I'm leading a living learning

community for Native students at that time. And so that's kind of how I got involved in

Student Affairs where that was my first taste of that and being like, oh, I can do this for a

job.

For Todd, the first office that contacted him after being accepted into Plains division one university was from the Native center:

> My best experiences started shortly after my application to readmit to the Plains division one university were multiple letters and emails from the American Indian student services staff. Not just welcoming you to campus, but inviting me to their offices, inviting me to the building. It really made me feel welcome as part of that, even without really knowing me. It was unique because to a lot of other Native students on other campuses, they would have to get to campus and find the Native people seek them out on their own. The onus is on the students at other campuses but not for me at Plains division one university at the time. They reached out to us and it was always warm and welcoming despite some of the political things are happening on campus.

Marie offered this advice during her interview about what future Native students should consider when attending at PWI:

> In my experience it is hard for Native students to seek out help and I feel I would really try to stress that with other Native students. You have got to find some connection as a student. Any connection you can get to campus is going to help you make it through. When you're coming from a tribal college you just automatically have a connection to the TCU, you know? And that's why you're more likely to make it at the TCU. So when you go out on your own to a PWI, it's like, oh, okay, I don't have that support like I did at the TCU. Emphasize that Natives can get support in little pieces from the American Indian Center, if the PWI has one, or the Native student club or the other Native students that are enrolled in the classes the student is taking. Support can come in so many different forms and maybe it's in all of the ones I mentioned. For me it was all that stuff. Being on the Native committee at the PWI was super important for me, for my retention. It makes no sense but

it was a way of me being able to teach people a little bit about us and the pride we have in ourselves as Natives being on campus and then displaying that. So to future Native students, find connection no matter what it is and find whatever those connections are that are going to help them make a connection to the campus.

Perceptions of TCUs

Participants talked about how their TCU experiences impacted them long-term. Each participant wanted to change what they believe is a negative perception of TCUs. This was especially articulated by the four participants who returned to TCUs after their first attempt at postsecondary education. During her interview, Dora was emphatic about wanting to share her own personal narrative as a way to help reinforce the importance TCUs and how they serve tribal communities. She stated:

It really bothers me the way that people view these tribal institutions, that they're not valuing what it provides for the students and for the communities and how important it is. How special it is also because it's very culturally based, not only in the classrooms, in the content that they're teaching. It also has to be relevant to the culture, but also just in the way that the types of relationships that students have with the staff members and with the faculty members really do build those strong relationships.

After Todd returned to a TCU, 10 years after he had failed out of a PWI, he shared the story about a Native faculty member who came home to a TCU and the impact the TCU had on her own sense of community and self:

She was writing on the board and she was saying something about how she was returning to the reservation the same year that I started and she started writing. She turned around with tears in her eyes and she said you know, I just realized I'm home, I'm comfortable. I am where I belong. And that really resonated with me because as we work with Native

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students to do whatever it is they want to do, the idea of home and that connection to home

is really important to a student's identity and to their success that they may not go home,

but the idea that someone is working with them and understands what home is, about home

being in tribal communities is really important to them.

Todd went on to say that he thought TCUs and PWIs were equal:

I think educationally they're very equal. I think we have a tendency to think that tribal

colleges are not as rigorous as mainstream institutions or even their community college

counterpart. And that is so untrue. I felt completely prepared going from tribal college to

the university. I felt equally challenged in my coursework and my readings and my

expectation to produce quality work during and at the end of the classes.

Participants talked about speaking for all Natives or being asked to speak out on Native

issues like mascots. Marie expected people to be open to diversity at PWIs "and then to be on a

college campus, you expect people to be there to be inclusive to diversity. And I learned right

away that that's not the case. It's whatever diversity there they want it to be."

Each participant discussed the difference between TCUs and PWIs. For Todd, the idea of

community is what differentiated the two types of postsecondary education:

PWIs talk about the campus community, the university community, but I don't think it has

sustained meaning or the same impact as being educated in your community and by your

community. I think the way in which faculty and staff constantly engaged with tribal

college students gave us more confidence, more self-identity around being Native in higher

education. I really felt and still feel that our students who are enrolled in tribal colleges are

not getting a less rigorous education, but they're getting more education.

Native students at the PWIs were expected to educate non-Natives, including faculty. Each participant had a distinct story that illustrated times they were asked to speak for all Natives on numerous topics versus others taking the initiative to learn about Native issues. In response to this, Todd stated:

> I really found myself studying a lot about the concepts of multiculturalism, diversity, inclusion, and tolerance. Each concept influenced the impact these curriculums had on me. I was noticing that we (Natives) were not included in the literature, that the vignettes being used in postsecondary education weren't about us. We were portrayed stereotypically at best at that time. I tried to work with teachers at PWIs trying to correct how we were portrayed. Native students were invisible at PWIs out of comfort to others because people were afraid to see into their soul and what was really happening to us in higher education.

Chapter 4 Summary

All five participants had congruent experiences attending both TCUs and PWIs. Details of their stories and lived experiences were distinct, but overall their experiences were highly similar. Each participant attended a TCU and reported that their experience at the TCU prepared them for what they later encountered at the PWI by preparing them academically and strengthening a foundation of self and identity. The differences between their experiences at TCUs and PWIs were stark, but all participants persisted until they obtained their graduate degrees at PWIs.

Deidema summed up the importance of this study and other studies that are attempting to help postsecondary education understand the lived experiences of Natives who attend their institutions:

> What I don't want you to say is that we, as Natives, have to do less work or it doesn't have to be as high quality, that's not what I'm saying at all. I'm saying recognize that we have stories and come with life experiences. Help us through them. Don't give up on us, don't

give up on yourself, you know, because it's not a stereotype. It's the truth and a lot of the

time we're not perpetuating a stereotype by telling people our stories, this is what happened

to me or this, you know, we're saying this is what's going on in my life right now and that

is why I'm not doing well and I need some help here. So recognizing those kinds of things

as students and to not be ashamed of your story and to not be ashamed of who you are.

Again, the participants stated in their interviews that their resiliency at PWIs was because of their

positive experience at the TCUs. Todd provided a summation of this in his interview: "I love

challenging that tribal colleges are not as rigorous as mainstream institutions or even their

community college counterparts. And that is so untrue. I felt completely prepared going from tribal

college to the university. I felt equally challenged in my coursework and my readings and my

expectation to finish products during and at the end of the classes. I think the difference is the idea

of community.

Marie said to me at the end of her interview:

I've never met anybody who had a story like mine. I will not say mine's the most difficult

but I will say that when I worked with the students at the TCU they were like, wow, you

did it. And it was like, yeah, I did. I then told them, if I did it, you can do it too. And people

always say that once I would share my experience that I had at both the TCU and the PWI

and everything that happened, my story would give them hope. Whatever knowledge I had

to be able to help them, I shared and I felt that my story was giving them some hope with

how I overcame a potentially negative story.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

Five participants were interviewed about their lived experiences attending both tribal college or universities (TCUs) and predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The five participants all had positive experiences at the TCUs and in the long run persisted to completion through multiple degrees in spite of the difficulties they encountered at the PWIs. The minimum educational obtainment among this group was a master's degree for all five participants, and their stories of persistence are formidable.

This study has implications for PWIs, Native communities, and families who are trying to determine their students' postsecondary education options. It also underscores the importance of the work and impact that TCUs are having on Native students' long-term development and success. The study finally suggests several additional lines of inquiry. Future related research might further explore and inform how Natives navigate both types of postsecondary institutions.

Summary of the Results

The tribal colleges were transformative for all five Natives, and each of the five individuals felt their long-term accomplishments were due to the foundation they received at the TCU. Three of the participants were not initially successful at the PWIs they attended due to a lack of belonging and no sense of community for them at the PWI. As a result, four of the five participants left their first postsecondary institution and reentered postsecondary education through a TCU. After returning to postsecondary education through a TCU, each participant realized they were in fact a capable student and postsecondary education was within their grasp.

It is worthy to re-emphasize that each participant had no negative stories that they could recollect in regard to their respective experiences at the TCUs. Each participant attributed their eventual later persistence at the PWIs to the cultural, academic, and social foundation the TCU

provided. All participants sought to dispel the myth that TCUs provided an academically inferior educational experience. The five participants for this study would suggest otherwise based on each of their own personal narratives that attribute their long-term education success on their time spent at TCUs. Relaying this message to the readers of my dissertation was imperative to the participants. The fact that every participant in this study went on to successfully earn an advanced degree at a PWI indicates that the TCU experience prepared them for that achievement.

The other factor mentioned by all participants were the presence of children and elders at the TCUs and the impact that the sense of community had on the participants' persistence. For those participants who had children while obtaining their postsecondary degrees, the TCUs were by far the friendliest towards the integration of their children, not only at the institution in general but also in the classroom.

The transition from TCU to PWI was difficult for each participant. The participants attended PWIs to obtain their bachelor's degree, their master's degree, and for one participant, their doctoral degree. They all experienced racist interactions as undergraduate and graduate students at PWIs. These racist interactions primarily took place with other classmates, but Todd endured racist interactions with faculty members as well. Each participant found solace in finding other Natives at the PWI—both in formal and informal interactions. The Native based spaces, Native faculty and staff, and Native peers helped each participant in their journey navigating the PWI. The person in this study who earned a doctorate, Deidema, continued to have classmates who questioned whether or not she was capable or deserving of a spot in the doctoral program. Even though this participant earned a prestigious fellowship that covered her salary for a year so she could finish her dissertation, she was judged to be less capable by student peers.

Unlike the rest of the participants, while attending a PWI, Marie encountered a unique experience as she observed tensions amongst the Native students. The terms Marie used to

describe her fellow Native students were reservation, urban, and linear Natives, each having its own unique worldview and experience. Reservation Natives came to college from their reservations; urban Natives lived in urban areas but were still connected to their identity and culture; and linear Natives were just coming into their identity as Natives as they entered college. According to Marie, the tensions among the three different lived experiences of these Native students distracted from the overall experience at her baccalaureate PWI.

Finally, Deidema and other participants talked about how their persistence was partly because of mentors at both TCUs and PWIs. Finding mentors, either Native or non-Native, was important to each participant as they recalled their experiences at both types of institutions.

Brayboy

The five tenets from Brayboy's (2005) TribalCrit help reinforce why the TCU experience was so very different from the PWI experience for the Native participants in this study. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens and this Indigenous lens was evident at the TCU and absent at the PWI. As a result, the participants had two vastly different experiences at the two contrasting types of postsecondary institutions. Todd stated:

> Higher education works really hard to find who is going to fit instead of making higher education fit people from different backgrounds. Higher education is always looking for who is ready for them versus who they are ready for. I think if higher education prepared itself to be ready for Native students, it would have higher completion rates, higher success rates, higher graduation rates, and higher engagement from the students. I think that this is very relevant to many other communities as well.

Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation. This tenet was articulated and a theme in all of

the lived experiences of all five participants and their experiences at PWIs. The TCUs did not force the students to leave who they were at the proverbial door. Violet stated:

> I had already even seen other people bringing their kids and not just babies, you know, there would be little kids in the class with us and they'd be sitting there coloring or doing whatever and they were never a problem. Nobody thought of them that way. I t was like, okay, if that's what you have to do to get here and to finish the class, then that's what you're going do. People were really invested in you (at the TCU). I mean obviously they have policies and whatever, but they don't make them to impede your success. They're (TCU faculty and staff) willing to work with you and be flexible to compromise in a way where it's like, okay, what do we need to do to get you through the class. In general, I think it's like, we're really here to get you graduated. And the question is, what do we need to do?

Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups. The lived experience of bringing children and families into the TCUs demonstrated the holistic commitment to Native students there. Education takes on a new meaning when the entire self is brought into the postsecondary institution. As Todd stated in his interview, the difference between a TCU and PWI "is the idea of community."

Ultimately, the TCUs prepared all the participants for the environments that they each were forced to navigate at PWIs. Among these five participants, the racism and lack of understanding of who they are did not stop when they finished their undergraduate degrees at PWIs and decided to pursue graduate degrees at similar institutions. Identity and education are interconnected at TCUs and allowed the three participants who did not pass their first semester at a PWI thrive when they

returned to postsecondary education. Dora recalled how this happened after she returned to the TCU:

> I made sure that I was involved at the TCU. I joined their student Senate and their speech team. I got back into what I think fueled me in school before. There was also the sense of community and so that's what it (the TCU) really provided for me aside from the academics and stuff.

There was no one singular experience for Natives who attended TCUs but rather a common essence that described their experiences attending as one that is congruent with who they are as Natives. Each participant is still serving Natives in one capacity or another. The need to give back to their community or Natives where they live is significant and central to each of their work.

The participants demonstrated what Brayboy (2005) wrote about by sharing their lived experiences. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430). I believe this was evident as I listened to the participants talk about their two very distinct experiences at both types of postsecondary institutions. Their lived experiences are the data that will help inform external readers. Dora stated "I was just thinking about stories of like, family stories, not just from your parents or your grandparents and then your great-grandparents and just going way back and how those define who you are and you don't necessarily understand it and that's just how it is and you can't separate those things from yourself." Dora's statement was reinforced by what each participant said at some point during their interview. Todd stated in his interview:

> I like the idea of story and research being connected, story not being separate from research. It's also about distance traveled for Native communities versus distance traveled for primarily White communities. We still have generations of people alive who had no access to higher education. We haven't traveled a great distance from home. We haven't

seen as many people or other communities. If you've read history books all the way back to

the fore-fathers of education, all the curriculums for education are about White people.

Their distances traveled for their educations was very short, if not abrupt. Our distance

traveled is so much greater and we have nothing but our stories because our stories aren't

told. That's totally not fair. Our stories are still missing or being interpreted incorrectly,

which is why it's so vital that the academy recognize the importance of our stories, but also

the validity of our stories as part of the research, if you will.

Todd continued to share about stories in his interview:

You've heard stories from grandmas and grandpas and aunties and uncles, dad, and others

about how the education system treated them. I don't think that our students go to higher

education with the expectation that it's designed for them. They go in with the suspicion

that education is going to try to change them, that education is going to make things less

Native than others or less than a person that they know that they are. They go into

education with the expectation with the suspicion that higher education's going to remove

them from their family. That it is going to put miles and miles between you and your

family because we've often been told and seen education is about changing us. And watch

how other people who are more educated, family members not always be able to engage

because there is a perceived and read divide because they are not educated as well.

Discussion of the Results

The participants in this study disclosed through their narratives that they had two distinct

lived experiences attending both TCUs and PWIs for their postsecondary education obtainment.

Participants in this study clearly attributed their long-range educational success to their time

enrolled at the TCUs. TCUs prepared each participant in this study to be both personally resilient

and academically successful at the PWIs. Their experiences at the TCUs were grounded in an affirmation of their identity and strong sense of community.

Participants in this study greatly valued the cultural immersion offered by attending a TCU. Brayboy (2005) wrote that when some Native students attend PWIs, they often experience an abandonment of culture in order to achieve perceived "success" at the PWI. The participants in this study made references in their interviews to the TCU requirement that all students take American Indian courses and Native language courses of the people of that particular Native community. The impact of culture and community extended beyond the confines of the classroom and was a powerful aspect of the experience of each participant. Crazy Bull (2009) wrote "our languages and customary practices define our interactions with family members, extended family members, with other tribes and with others of different cultures and races" (p. 211). What Crazy Bull (2009) referenced in her chapter was confirmed by each participant in the stories they shared. Participants talked about seeing other family members present at the TCU in a variety of roles. Honoring one's identity and culture rather than rejecting it made a significant difference in the success of the participants in this study.

Natives have the lowest postsecondary degree completion rate in comparison to any other ethnic group. Lopez (2016) found that Natives who have persisted to graduation, 12% finish their undergraduate degrees versus 37% of their White peers who graduate (Lopez, 2016). As I reviewed Chapter 4 and the findings, I began to wonder if Lopez's findings (2016) of 12% completion rate of Natives who have attended postsecondary institutions could be higher if Natives attended a TCU before attending a PWIs? The narratives of participants in this study clearly indicated that they attribute their academic success to time spent at the TCUs. The responses of the study participants are extremely important and could have implications for future generations of Native students who are planning to pursue postsecondary education. To

know for sure, the completion rates of Natives who attended TCU's prior to a PWI should be contrasted with Natives who attend just PWIs. I was unable to fully answer this question within the confines of this study, however, because the data does not exist.

Moreover, there is an emerging body of scholarly research that has been written to document the Native student experience at both TCUs and PWIs (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). This body of research can be strengthened by including the lived experience of Natives who have attended both types of institutions. Knowing that this research is accessible, what is preventing PWIs from reading, assessing, and implementing change at their institutions? The scholarly literature is being published not only to support and aid Native students throughout their entire experience in postsecondary education but to educate all institutions of postsecondary education (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). The scholarly research being produced can inform and impact the decisions Natives are making about the type of postsecondary institution they decide to attend. The scholarship also could benefit PWIs and they work to improve their retention and graduation rates of Native students in ways that are culturally sensitive and competent.

One question that was not answered was whether or not a student who goes from a PWI to a TCU is considered a failure? Of the four participants who returned home to their reservations, none of their families conveyed this message nor did the TCUs make the participant's feel as if they had failed as they began the enrollment process. Is this a message being conveyed by the PWIs or other Natives? This study was unable to determine the source of this type of messaging towards the experience of leaving a PWI and reentering postsecondary education through a TCU. If we can end these negative stigmas by helping both Natives and non-Natives realize the value of TCUs, then Native students can potentially be more successful at PWIs while also maintain a strong sense of self and community.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

This study supports the research exploring the experiences of Natives who have attended TCUs and PWIs. It also brings forth new research to enrich the understanding of this topic. Since the phenomenon of the lived experience of Natives attending both types of postsecondary institutions was not studied prior to this study, the descriptions provided by the participants begins to fill a current gap in the literature that was highlighted in Chapter 2.

First, this study reinforced that Natives are a population of students that have been, and are still, being marginalized through both formal and informal systems, including educational systems (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 162). This was demonstrated in the narratives about the experiences each participant had at the different PWIs they attended. Also, the invisibility these Native participants experienced at the PWIs they attended was an unfortunate but not surprising finding. Each participant who was not successful at their first attempt attending a PWI talked about feeling invisible and not belonging at the PWI. Dora was the salutatorian of her high school class, but she struggled at her first attempt attending a PWI.

Even so, each participant shared stories that attest to their persistence and resilience in regard to education obtainment. Waterman and Lindley (2013) wrote about the perseverance of Native women in postsecondary education. The authors wrote about how the master narrative perpetuates a "deficit ideology that is commonly assigned to people of color" (Waterman & Lindly, 2013, p. 151). Similar to the women in their study, all participants in this study (both women and the male participant) defied this deficit ideology and were successful in their education obtainment throughout their time attending PWIs. A great deal of their success was formed through their TCU experience.

Each participant had positive experiences at the TCUs and their connection to community and culture reinforced their sense of belonging at the TCUs unlike their lack of connection at the

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PWIs. "Lee (2009) found that curriculum that connects to Indigenous students' lives, communities, and values of reciprocity is an effective approach for educating Indigenous students" (Reyes & Shotton, 2018, p. 17). This connection to the participants' culture in the classroom was important to each participant at the TCU and the connection to culture at the TCU went beyond the confines of the classroom. This demonstrates that in order to navigate and persist despite the issues at the PWIs, students who first encounter a postsecondary experience that values their culture find much more success.

This study clearly reinforced the positive impact TCUs have on Native students. Each participant was eager to share how the TCU experience enhanced their overall postsecondary educational achievement through the support from faculty both in and beyond of the classroom, the presence of community throughout the TCU, the confidence the TCU instilled in them that they were strong students, and the preparation they received to be successful at PWIs. The TCUs laid the foundation for each participant to persist through later advanced degree completion at the PWIs.

The presence of family was also a factor that supported the success of four of the participants. Even the participant who did not have children appreciated the presence of the community at the TCU. TCUs annually serve thousands of Native students and "more than 46,000 community members rely upon TCU services, which include libraries, job training and health programs, and Head Start and youth programs" (Paskus, 2012, as cited in HLC.org). Reyes and Shotton (2018) also reinforced the importance of Native students staying connected to home and community in their ASHE-NITE paper.

Beyond supporting the research already done about Natives who attend TCUs and Natives who attend PWIs, this study has created a new line of inquiry. There is documentation about the experience of Natives at TCUs and Natives who have attended PWIs but, until this study, the lived

experiences of Natives who attended both types of postsecondary institution have not been studied and therefore this lived experience has gone unknown and undocumented. It was significant to discover that the lived experiences of the five Natives who participated in this study were so similar, regardless of different ages, sexes, sexual orientation, tribal affiliation, and postsecondary institution attended. This implications from this study reinforce why TCUs matter, especially in the lives of Natives who plan on attending PWIs. This study also has implications for future Natives as they make decisions about the type of experience and type of educational institution they want to attend.

Limitations

One participant stated that I was meant to hear their stories and share them with the world. If I had interviewed participants I had less rapport with, would the narratives be different? How did my rapport with the participants affect the level of honesty is a potential limitation? In order for the research to be honest and helpful, one must have a rapport with the participants. If the trust is earned, the vast knowledge gained from the lived experiences of the participants, it can effect generations of future Native students.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

The participants were asked how their experiences could help inform postsecondary institutions. Their answers in Chapter 4 and the stories they shared have implications for practice, policy, and theory. PWIs should listen to and read the experiences of Natives who have attended TCUs. It cannot be emphasized enough that the academic success of each participant was contributed to the impact TCUs had on them as students. This is a unique finding because it has implications for both practice and policy at the PWIs. PWIs may not be asking the hard questions when Natives leave their institutions. By not asking the "why" as to the reasons the student left, they are missing the "how" as to possible ways to implement institutional change to retain future

Native students. If PWIs wish to better support Natives, they must ask these questions and grapple with the answers.

Of the many ways PWIs could improve their approach to educating Natives, I believe PWIs could learn a lot from TCUs and their definition of community. Understanding how TCUs define community could improve the Native student's transfer process.

Based on the interviews for this study, especially Todd, I believe that TCUs have a very different definition of community than PWIs. Todd's quote in Chapter 4 referred to community at the TCU being grounded in a sense that the TCU is committed to educating the entire student in culturally centered spaces, curriculums, policies, and practices. The implications from my research might lead to exploring how TCUs define community and how they articulate this to their students, then ask similar questions of the PWIs and contrast the two. Clearly for the participants in this particular study, their experience of community at the TCU was better than at the PWI. PWIs need to be open to listening to the lived experiences of these Native participants and other Natives who have or are currently attending PWIs. Similar to allowing the literature to guide current practices, policies, and theory.

Knowing that these five participants transferred to PWIs, PWIs should also work to create articulation agreements with TCUs. Another implication for policy might be to create these agreements to ease the tensions around moving back and forth from a TCU to a PWI and vice versa. Solid articulation agreements could be put into place to aid in the transition and help the students have a more seamless, intentional experience. These policies would have the potential to force communication between both postsecondary institutions that would ultimately benefit the students.

PWIs should help with the transfer of Native students from TCUs to PWIs. PWIs could intentionally recruit transfer students from TCUs by contacting those who have completed an

associate degree to encourage them to come to the PWI to complete a bachelor's degree. If PWIs are recruiting Native students, do they have adequate or appropriate structures and programs put into place to help with the transition from TCU to PWI? Again, participants talked about their sense of isolation at the PWIs and this isolation could be perpetuated by the lack of intentionality PWIs have when recruiting and then attempting to retain Native students. PWIs have been known to perpetuate colonization and work towards assimilating Native students into their study body. Reviewing the policies and programs in place for transitioning Native students to PWIs would be imperative. This deeper understanding might inform the PWIs as to how Native students are sometimes forced to feel they need to abandon culture and home to be successful.

Another way to support Natives at PWIs is by valuing the voice and lived experiences. Violet discussed the importance of stories in her interview. At one point, Violet remarked that she had noticed that some people do not want to know her stories or the stories of other Native students. This statement resonated with me because the participants talked about the disconnect they felt at PWIs. Again, I wondered if the lack of sense of belonging translated into the lack of wanting to know the participant's story or when the participant shared their story, the lack of listening or care is what reinforced their isolation at the PWI. I think that PWIs need to realize the power in stories and the great responsibility that comes when people share them. This too could make a significant difference in transitioning from one institution to another.

Finally, each participant had advice based on the experiences they had at both TCUs and PWIs. The participant's talked about the need for Native spaces at PWIs, the importance of mentors at both TCUs and PWIs, the impact the presence of children and family had at the TCU, and how their classmates continued to perpetuate the notion they were only present because the PWI needed Native students to fit a quota. Based on the lived experiences of all five participants, PWIs must partner with TCUs to help with both the transition of Native students who transfer to

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PWIs but also must strive to assess how their policies, curriculums, and environment might affect Native students' sense of belonging.

Recommendations for Further Research

In the chapter titled "The Need for Indigenizing Research in Higher Education Scholarship" by Davidson, Shotton, Minthorn, and Waterman (2018), the authors write "research in the academy often represents a continued form of oppression and colonization for Indigenous scholars, whose voices are marginalized and perspectives as Indigenous people are challenged" (p. 9). This statement not only reinforces the importance of this study but also provides insight into Deidema's daughter's experience with her supervisor—how Natives continue to navigate postsecondary education and attempt to integrate our ways of being. This statement also supports how the TCUs do not force students to abandon who they are in order to be successful as students. Finally, this statement is also important when considering recommendations for future research and how Natives navigate postsecondary education as undergraduate and graduate students.

Geographically, TCUs are located all over the country. Are the stories of Natives who have also attended both types of postsecondary institutions similar if they are located in different geographic locations or from different tribes? Replicating this study in other geographic locations may reinforce the findings or find variations in the narratives of the participants.

Now that this study has been conducted, are there more probing or different questions that could be asked to further understand the phenomenon? There are follow-up questions I would have for each participant as I have attempted to understand their own lived experience based on the transcriptions of their interviews.

The implications from my research could inform future research that would interview more Natives who attend TCUs before PWIs to see if they also persist at a higher rate than Natives who go directly to PWIs. The academic success of each of the participants could encourage further

inquiry since this data has yet to be documented. One could also explore how many other Natives began at PWIs and then returned home and eventually attended TCUs? What are their stories? Did they then go back to PWIs, and what were their experiences?

Another strain of inquiry could explore the impact of Natives who are parents who have attended TCUs and PWIs. The impact of having children in the classroom or present during their education obtainment was critical for both Violet and Marie. Marie, Deidema, and Todd were single parents either throughout their education or at different points while earning their degrees. Violet literally stated that she did not think she could return after she had her firstborn in February but the instructors at the TCUs encouraged her to bring her newborn to class so she could finish the semester. Another implication for practice might be that PWIs can learn from TCUs about including family and children in the higher education scene. The presence of children then impacts policy and a shift in culture at PWIs but could be crucial in a Native, or even non-Native student, persist to graduation.

Based on Marie's experience at her bachelor's degree postsecondary institution, one could explore the Native experience when urban, reservation, and lineal descendants Natives are all attending the same institution. Marie's experience was unique because according to her, 15% of the student body were Native students. This is a significant population of Native students, yet the tension amongst Native students was disruptive and at times distracted from her undergraduate experience at the PWI. After hearing Marie's interview, all three groups of Native students could find more success if their lived experiences could be understood and respected amongst each other.

Conclusion

This study has added to the literature because it has shared the stories of what the lived experiences were like for five participants who attended both a TCU and a PWI. Each participant

has unique contributions to understanding this phenomenon. Their stories are embedded through both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Each person who participated in this study is giving back to Indian country in some professional capacity. The connection to community is different but equally important for each participant. One participant is an executive director of a not for profit organization, two participants work for their tribe in different capacities, one participant works for Indian Health Services, and one participant is an executive administrator for a university. The long-term impact their postsecondary education had on each of the participants manifests not only in their commitment to their community but their stories of strength and persistence, which inspires and impact those they encounter every day.

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Appendix A: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association.*

Heather Marie Kind-Keppel

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Digital Signature

Heather Marie Kind-Keppel

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Name

November 19, 2019

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Date