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# Exploring Patterns of Resilience in Individuals Who Identify as Native American

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Kimberly Landrau

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2017

Abstract

Exploring Patterns of Resilience in Individuals Who Identify as Native American

by

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MS, Walden University, 2013

MPA, City University of New York, 1983

JD, University of Massachusetts, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

Walden University

August 2017

## Abstract

Native Americans experience a higher rate of homicide, suicide, and injury, on average, than do others in the United States. There has been little research, however, on turning point and epiphany experiences as factors that contribute to resilience in Native Americans. The purpose of this study was to add to this body of knowledge, and promote social change such as greater engagement and dialogue within Native American communities. The theory that informed the study was resilience theory. Two questions were answered: (a) the ways in which turning point life experiences have correlated with resilience in Native American individuals, and (b) the manner in which characteristics (e.g., gender, age, socioeconomic status, spirituality, disability, and sexual orientation) are influential with respect to the turning point experiences that Native Americans report relative to resilience. Inclusionary criteria were purposefully broad in order to encourage participation in the process. Narratives were invited that detailed life histories, for a psychological study. Snowball methodology was also employed in an area where census records indicated that Native Americans resided, resulting in a sample of 4 adult individuals (2 men and 2 women) of Native American descent. Data from the autobiographical narratives were analyzed for themes. These participants experienced a pivotal experience or group of experiences that led them to engage in behavior that produced beneficial results impacting career prospects and producing subjective life satisfaction. Findings support the theory that certain turning point experiences (specifically, interactions with supportive family and community members) enhance resilience in Native American individuals.

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## Dedication

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my children and to the memory of my mother, Yolanda C. Landrau, Ed.D.

## Acknowledgments

I wish to extend thanks to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Augustine Baron, Jr., Dr. Tony Wu, Dr. Barry Linden, and Dr. Ray W. London. I am grateful for their guidance and for the insights they have provided throughout this process.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The topic of this study is resilience, and the way it is manifested in the lives of Native Americans in the United States. The study was necessary to explore the resilience capabilities of an underserved population. Study findings may assist clinical psychologists to promote resilience in their clients of Native American descent. This researcher sought to increase the body of knowledge on resilience issues in clinical psychology and provide useful guidance on ways to allocate resources to support resilience in Native Americans. In this chapter, this researcher will explore the reasons that resilience has become a topic of interest; and will identify the types of experiences contributing to resilience, and the types of characteristics associated with resilience. In this chapter, this researcher will present the conceptual framework, provide definitions, and state assumptions of the study. Finally, the limitations of this study will be considered and a summary will be provided.

### **Background**

Resilience studies with Native Americans have been few and characterized by employing various methodologies. One group of researchers selected a group of Native Americans, and used a resilience measure to determine the level of resilience experienced by the participants. Specifically, the 185 participants were aged 55 and older, and the data was obtained from a study that was conducted with elderly persons from a Native American tribe (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Schure, Odden, and Goins (2013)

determined based on their findings that these participants, who were mostly female and single, ranked high on a resilience scale. Besides resilience, the research team looked at other pertinent physiological conditions that the participants were experiencing, such as pain (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Another group of researchers collected autobiographical information and determined that the challenge to identifying the source of resilience in aboriginal persons in Canada is related to the communal nature of their experiences, meaning the ways in which they are connected to the community by sharing history, language, customs, etc. (Kirmayer et al., 2011). There are a number of studies that use college students, presumably due to the ability to gain access to this convenience sample. One study determined that family was extremely important, but this may also correlate with the developmental stage of young adulthood (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Developmental factors may also have influenced research results of one study with adolescents that determined peer relationships led to greater resilience (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Adolescents experience a high degree of affinity for their peers. For this reason, a pattern of responses highlighting the importance of peers is predictable, and may not be indicative of a stimulus for resilience.

In a rare study that examined attitudes, it was found that the level of aspiration, or the desire to live up to one's inherent capabilities, was correlated with resilience in school achievement, but again the population studied were young adults (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Looking through the lens of a young person, who possesses certain values and goals, may furnish a different perspective than that from a person in their thirties, forties, or fifties. Certainly, the aspirations of each group changes, and something other

than 'school achievement' may be desirable. Erikson (1950, 1997, 1982) described a concept he defined as 'generativity,' or the desire by persons who are aging to help others (Gruenewald, Liao, & Seeman, 2012).

Another study with a similarly youthful population found that adolescent Native Americans were interested in interpersonal sources of strength and acquiring resources (Wexler et al., 2013). These young people valued the relationships they had with others primarily, but also were concerned with obtaining adequate material resources to permit them to function as members of their society (Wexler et al., 2013).

One qualitative study yielded results showing a tremendous depth of insight in the participants' responses (Goodkind et al., 2012). This qualitative study built upon work such as that produced by Goodkind et al. (2012), by studying adult Native Americans who reside apart from the reservation to determine sources of strength and resilience. Goodkind (2012) studied 74 individuals of various ages through the use of ethnographic interviews conducted in 2009. The author focused on the role of historical trauma, or trauma as the result of the negative impacts of colonialism, in the lives of resilient Navajo individuals. This study examined resilience by looking specifically at experiences that produced resilience, such as a specific relationship or educational or vocational programs. The Goodkind (2012) study also had the purpose of designing improved mental health services that incorporated awareness of issues related to historical trauma. This study did not involve a community intervention. This qualitative study focused instead on the narrower topic of resilience and attempted to obtain respondents from similar populations and age groups who are not residing on the reservation, and use similar qualitative

methodologies. This study was necessary to fill the gap in the literature that existed by describing factors resulting in resilience for Native American persons, and based on a positive psychological framework.

### **Problem Statement**

Although Native Americans have higher rates of homicide, suicide, injury due to accidents, and alcoholic substance abuse than the national average, there are fewer resources available to the Native American communities in the areas in which they reside (Stumblingbear-Riddles & Romans, 2012). An examination of injury statistics is relevant to the subject of resilience because it is indicative of health, both physical and mental. For example, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that Native Americans sustained injuries at the rate of 276 per 1,000 persons in the population compared to the general population rate of 120 per 1,000 persons for a twelve-month period (Centers for Disease Control, 2012). These injuries are described as “medically consulted injury and poisoning episodes” (Centers for Disease Control, 2012, p. 20). Wexler and Gone (2012) stated that suicide rates are higher for Native American individuals. Rutter (2012) has documented the potential impact for turning point experiences to enhance resilience in persons exposed to trauma such as orphans and soldiers.

Researchers have documented that research about Native American resilience is lacking and needed (Stumblingbear-Riddles & Romans, 2012). This specific research focused on Native American adults who are residing outside of reservations, and constitute the majority of tribal members, serving to fill a serious gap in the literature

(Stumblingbear-Riddles & Romans, 2012). Although the body of research on the subject of resilience has been growing incrementally in recent years, there was still a gap in the literature for resilience studies of adult Native Americans, especially living outside of reservations (CNPAAEMI, 2000). This study attempted to address the nature of resilience among an adult group of Native Americans living off reservations.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe resilience factors of adult Native Americans who are living in communities located outside of reservations in order to increase understanding of what factors are involved in the transformative process among Native Americans that result in the experience of resilience. Understanding how resilience is affected, and the specific transformative experiences that effectively produce resilience may be instrumental in assisting practitioners and planners to implement interventions that foster resilience. This study was implemented using exploratory phenomenological methods. Autobiographical data was collected in order to develop an understanding of how Native American individuals experience resilience in their lives, and how their life experiences have been a factor in producing resilience. In particular, the experience of turning point life experiences that produced a re-alignment of priorities and values was examined closely.



## **Research Questions**

RQ1: What are the turning point life experiences that have promoted resilience in Native Americans?

RQ2: Which characteristics (such as gender, age, socio-economic status [SES], spirituality, disability, and sexual orientation) influence the pivotal or turning point experiences that Native Americans report relative to resilience?

## **Conceptual Framework**

Resilience theory, based on positive psychology, is the conceptual framework that was used in this study (Linley et al., 2006). The definition used has been advanced by Rutter (2006), who defines resilience as a phenomenon that occurs consequent to a transformative experience resulting in a beneficial psychological result (Rutter, 2006). The author has indicated that psychologists should determine the status of resilience by identifying those who have experienced a “good psychological outcome” due to resilience factors such as “ ‘turning point’ experiences in adult life” (Rutter, 2006, p. 1). A turning point experience may be the net result of a diversity of experiences such as a meaningful relationship or participation in a growth enhancing activity (Rutter, 2006). This study evaluated autobiographical data that was submitted by participants to determine ways in which Native American individuals experience pivotal, or turning point resilience experiences in their lives.

The concept of resilience has been explored in its many aspects. Different researchers describe this abstract concept using different criteria, making it difficult to

measure, and hence difficult to correlate with specific stimuli. A person may experience deprivation and hardship and still experience results that suggest a resilient nature. It is not unusual to find that a theorist will define resilience in multiple ways. Rutter (2006b) has defined resilience as a healthy and affirmative psychological condition, and mental status, which is the product of harmful encounters that have been ameliorated or mitigated in some fashion.

A phenomenological study that examines meaning in person's lives, is the best way of identifying resilience themes in Native American lives. The question of evaluating transformative experiences and identifying pertinent characteristics was achieved by looking at autobiographic data that was prepared by the participants and supplemented with open-ended interview questions. (Atkinson, 1998).

The positive psychology/resilience conceptual framework has guided this study and informed the development of methodological approaches of inquiry including the use of research questions designed to empower the participants to produce their own construction of what specific factors they believe have produced resilience. By focusing on strengths and attributes, this researcher developed a study that may guide future researchers to predict under what circumstances a resilient outcome may be expected.

The respondents described their life histories in detail without direction or interference by the researcher. Then this researcher examined the constructed narratives to identify life altering circumstances that have produced resilient outcomes, and outcomes that were perceived by the respondents as positive psychological outcomes.

## **Nature of the Study**

This study utilized Ryle's (1949) "thick description" in the interest of providing the maximum amount of information to clinicians, researchers, and other interested stakeholders (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). The use of 'thick description' as a methodology involves the use of interpretation along with vivid descriptions (Ponterotto, 2006). Ponterotto (2006) has suggested that the writer must be mindful of both the "context" of the situation, and the "intention" of the actor (p. 539). Ponterotto (2006) stated that this approach popularized by Geertz (1973), enhances the credibility of the writing, because the reader is invited to identify which "constructions" belong to the researcher, and which of those may be attributed to the participant (p. 539). Denzin (1989) has indicated that reflecting "meaning" is an essential component of writing that employs "thick description" (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 540). The use of "thick description" should invoke a feeling of empathetic understanding in the reader (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 543). The technique is now widely utilized as a methodology in a variety of qualitative social science research activities (Ponterotto, 2006).

Although there are approximately 600 tribes in the United States, this study captured the stories of tribal members of less than a handful of tribes (CNPAAEMI, 2000). This study used "The Life Story Interview" as a qualitative methodology to derive data and to interpret and codify resilience themes (Atkinson, 1998). Interviewing participants for their life story is a technique that involves asking open-ended questions to collect autobiographical data (Atkinson, 1998). This study attempted to identify the

pivotal experiences that produce resilience in the lives of Native Americans living away from the reservation. It is important to note that Atkinson (1998) did not recommend that any particular set of questions was required, and that the most effective way of acquiring information was to give the respondents as much latitude as possible by not explicitly directing their narratives in any way, but simply by asking for the story of their lives.

Among the potential choices for qualitative methodology approaches there are: narrative, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, or phenomenology (Creswell, 2007). The narrative approach uses autobiography to explore a single person's life (Creswell, 2007). When a researcher wishes to explore the lives of several individuals, then phenomenological inquiry is the better method to select (Creswell, 2007). The use of phenomenological theory guided the interpretation of the experiences of the individuals who were the subjects of this study. A case study would be appropriate to study one individual (Creswell, 2007). Ethnography looks at the cultural group as an entirety, in one locale (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory is best utilized to create a theory and obtain the data to support it (Creswell, 2007). Out of these five methodologies, it is the phenomenological approach that is designed to accurately provide the information that was desired in this study.

### **Definitions**

*American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN)*: Native Americans residing in the United States (Yuan et al., 2014).

*Native American:* Persons who identify as members of the tribes of the United States and are considered indigenous (Wexler & Gone, 2012).

*First Nation:* Indigenous persons from Canada (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

*Pivotal, epiphany, or turning point experiences:* An experience that causes a transformation that promotes resilience (Rutter, 2006).

*Resilience:* A person has adversity but is able to realize a positive psychological outcome (Rutter, 2006b).

### **Assumptions**

This research is predicated on the assumption that autobiographical data is a representation of actual facts and experiences as recalled, based on memory. Persons who are asked to describe past events may interpret the events differently in later years than they would if asked about the events while they were occurring, or immediately thereafter.

The researcher assumed that the participant identified the actual reason that they have experienced resilience, although in fact, the resilient experience may be attributable to numerous causes that have not been mentioned by the respondent in his or her autobiography. The researcher assumed that the intervening circumstance described was of a nature that one could reasonably anticipate could produce resilience.

## **Scope and Delimitations**

This study focused on learning about and recording pivotal experiences that have occurred in the lives of persons who are Native American and residing away from the reservation. The participants identified if these experiences helped or hindered their life course events. The researcher noted whether or not the recurring themes such as gender, age, socio-economic status (SES), spirituality, disability, and/or sexual orientation influenced the pivotal experiences producing resilience.

This study was implemented by extracting resilience themes from autobiographical data that was provided by Native American adults who reside away from the reservation. The data was provided via written autobiographical statements and through individual interviews. The study described the results in detail so that interpretations could be made regarding how resilience is defined by the participants of the study. Various theorists have attempted to explain the causative factors that determine resilience. One theorist has suggested that it is a turning point experience that is predictive of resilience (Rutter, 2006). In order to determine how resilience is nurtured in people, and to learn about this, the strategy of asking the open-ended question: "Tell me about your life," was used in order to obtain autobiographical responses that were genuine and not in any way suggested to the respondent by the researcher.

Native American individuals were invited to participate, and were screened for ethnicity during the intake process, in order to ascertain ability and willingness to provide autobiographical data. Respondents were asked for names, addresses, gender, ethnicity,

level of education, employment and disability status, and other routine demographic questions. Both males and females participated from varied socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. To enhance the diversity of experience and background, this study was conducted using respondents from different geographic regions of the country, although generalizability to all Native Americans, all Americans, or all human beings is not feasible. Because of the geographic diversity, more than one tribe was represented in the results. The decision to expand the study to more than one geographic location with a Native American population was made due to logistical concerns.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include generalizability due to the small numbers of tribes represented by the participants. The majority of the participants interviewed resided in smaller towns rather than either urban or rural settings.

The researcher evaluated the data to determine if the experiences that are the subject of the narratives have constituted evidence of resilience. The participants were consulted to member check the interpretations of the researcher. This was especially important because the researcher is not Native American, and may perceive the life histories from a different worldview than that embraced by the participants. The researcher maintained a diary to record reflexive experiences during data collection and interpretation in order to eliminate potential bias.

Autobiographies are a form of self-reporting, and fall into the category of any self-reported observations such as those obtained in personality inventories and through

the use of other measurement devices. These instruments rely on the honesty and insight of the individual, as well as their ability to remember the past. There will be times when useful data is obtained and times when the data has limited value because it does not pertain to the topic of resilience. There will be some individuals who are better able to express themselves in a narrative writing venue and others who are more articulate at expressing themselves during an interview. For this reason, the autobiographical data will be supplemented with a reflexive exit interview (DeWaele & Harre, 1979). The reflexive exit interview will elicit data on the experience of the participant during the process, and their thoughts and feelings about the process and the researcher.

### **Significance**

This study enhanced professional practice by providing information to psychologists about factors that may increase Native Americans' resilience, in order that they may have better outcomes with their patients. This study has relevance because of the gap that exists in the literature identifying factors contributing to Native American resilience in adults. There are a few studies that focus on resilience in members of Native American tribes, although there are several that discuss resilience factors for individuals who are members of First Nation tribes of Canada. It is anticipated that this study will create positive social change by opening up a dialogue that fosters understanding about Native Americans, but other positive social change may occur.

This study may inform policies by state and local governments and federal agencies that affect Native Americans by identifying factors that promote resilience, so



that resources might be more efficiently allocated. This study may improve practice by directing the attention of clinicians and other health practitioners to relevant aspects of Native American lives that can enhance resilience and positive psychological attributes. This study may provide useful information for practitioners to develop collaborative goals that support resilience. This study has added to the scholarly research and literature in the field, by describing in detail what Native Americans identify as the pertinent factors in their lives that support resilience.

### **Summary**

This chapter explored the reasons that resilience has become a topic of interest, as a concept originating in humanistic and positive psychology with relevance to Native American communities today. This study was designed to identify pivotal, turning point, or epiphany moments experienced by Native American adults that result in resilience, and other characteristics that may be correlated with the experience of resilience. This study provides information that identifies where gaps now exist in the literature related to the resilience of adult Native Americans residing away from the reservation. In particular, the work of Rutter (2012, 2006, 2006b, 1999) was relevant for the analysis and the interpretation of the data. The next chapter will provide a review of the literature related to resilience and Native Americans.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

When Europeans first arrived in America, they regarded the Native Americans as less civilized than persons from mainstream Europe; yet despite the attitude of the Europeans, Native Americans frequently extended hospitality in all areas, including providing agricultural advice and instruction (Collier, 1947). This fact was observed wryly in a publication by one of the past U. S. Commissioners of Indian Affairs, now known as the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Subsequent interactions with the Europeans, some of whom eventually became the first Americans, included numerous incidents of armed conflict (Thornton, 1987).

Evans-Campbell (2010) has stated that it behooves clinicians to emphasize during work with Native American families, the personal narratives that illustrate how the Native Americans have successfully overcome adversity. Cross (1998) has defined the Native American world view regarding resilience as interventions that assist families to develop strengths.

### **Problem and Purpose**

Native Americans experience serious mental health maladies at a higher rate than the general population (Centers for Disease Control, 2012). Experts in the field have verified that research on Native Americans is limited (CNPAAEMI, 2000). The purpose

of this study was to identify pivotal, turning point, or epiphany moments in the lives of Native Americans that may define resilience in their lives.

This study used phenomenological methods to elicit data on resilience themes from Native American participants in order to expand the knowledge base that currently exists in the literature. This information may contribute to our understanding of resilience in general, as well as providing information on how best to serve American indigenous populations. Resilience is a necessary concept to explore for Native Americans because information is needed on strengths in Native American communities in order to promote the development of programmatic interventions that enhance these factors.

### **Synopsis of the Current Literature**

More than half of the studies of Native Americans on the subject of resilience have studied the lives of adolescents and young adults (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010; Stumblingbear-Riddle, & Romans, 2012; McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012; Wexler et al., 2013). Although it must be emphasized that these studies have tremendous value, the results may be influenced by the weight of developmental issues that may have a tremendous impact on perceptions, attitudes and emotions. The remaining three studies have sought a more balanced mix of age groups, and reveal a great deal about cultural values and practices that determine to what extent an individual is able to realize his or her life goals and sustain resilience (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Goodkind et al., 2012). Most of these researchers have employed qualitative

methodologies, although the exact details of the studies reveal a variety of techniques succeeded in eliciting informative data.

### **Major Sections of the Chapter**

This chapter will present the results of the literature search on resilience and Native Americans, including a discussion of resilience theory. The reasons for the choice of resilience theory will be provided, and its relationship to this study. The conceptual framework for this study is based upon the work of Rutter (1999; 2006; 2006b; 2012), which emphasizes the significance of turning point experiences as being instrumental in promoting resilience in a person's life. Resilience themes in the participants' lives will be described and interpreted in this study. This chapter will conclude by identifying the existing gaps in the literature.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

#### **Databases and Search Engines**

The psychology database PsychARTICLES, maintained through the American Psychological Association (APA), and available at the Walden University library was the primary search engine utilized for this study. The Walden University search engine was used to search for full text, scholarly, peer reviewed journals using resilience as the key term for the period from 2000 to 2015 (Ling Pan, 2004, p. 27). This yielded 630 articles on the topic of resilience. The search was then limited to resilience articles which focused exclusively on psychological aspects of resilience, which produced 73 articles. These

articles reported research on a variety of subjects, such as students and resilience, military survivors and resilience, and Hurricane Katrina survivors and resilience. A small number of these articles provided information on the general topic of resilience theory.

### **Key Search Terms and Iterative Search Process**

A search was next conducted on the subject of resilience and Native Americans, using the Boolean connector “and,” and truncating the word resilience to “resil\*” (Ling Pan, 2004, p. 23). This search yielded less than ten articles that were specific to resilience and Native Americans.

### **Addressing the Gap in the Literature**

This search was supplemented with a corresponding search with Google Scholar.com, and a few additional articles and books were identified as having relevance to the topic of resilience and Native Americans. This study was needed to address the gap in the literature that exists.

## **Conceptual Foundation**

### **Theory and Source of Theory**

Resilience theory has formed the foundation for this study. Resilience is defined as: “...the maintenance of high levels of positive affect and well-being in the face of significant adversity” (Davidson, 2000, p. 1198). Davidson (2000) indicated that different individuals possess distinct “affective styles” (p. 1196). Davidson (2000) believed that

following stressful events, persons derived meaning from these events and consequently experienced biological changes. His research has involved neuroimaging studies of parts of the brain (Davidson, 2000). Other researchers have studied the relationship of brain activity to traits (Davidson, 2000). Cortisol levels as well, have been found to be related to affective style (Davidson, 2000). The regulation of emotion is controlled by the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex (Davidson, 2000). This is known alternatively by researchers as “recovery from emotional challenge” (Davidson, 2000, p. 1207).

Researchers discovered participants had reduced ‘negative affect’ along with corresponding imaging evidence of ‘left prefrontal activation’ (Davidson, 2000, p. 1208). Studies with animals have demonstrated that increased maternal nurturing resulted in resistance to stress and other indicia of “plasticity” (Davidson, 2000, p. 1208). Similar studies have been conducted with humans who meditate (Davidson, 2000).

Hart and Sasso (2011) suggested that positive psychology (PP) is encapsulated in: “(1) the study of positive subjective experience and (2) positive personal traits” (p. 82). Resilience studies have increased in popularity in recent years, and Hart and Sasso (2011) attribute this dramatic increase in popularity to two factors: (1) the promotion of the concept by past APA President Martin Seligman; and (2) the promotion of research through the allocation of funding sources such as “the John Templeton Foundation,” that financed “forgiveness” research at approximately the same time, in the late 1990’s (p. 85).

Pangallo et al. (2015) conducted a review of studies of resilience and concluded that resilience could best be studied by looking at individual behavior that is consistent

despite changing situational variables. Pangallo et al. (2015) agreed with the definition proposed by Rutter (2006): “Resilience is a phenomenon that results from the interaction between individuals and their environment” (p. 1). Resilience is not considered a trait by these researchers (Pangallo et al., 2015). Pangallo et al. (2015) opined that the type of stressor was a relevant variable to consider, and whether or not the stressor was ‘chronic’ or episodic and ‘acute’ (p. 1). Endler (1983) has been instrumental in defining the concept of ‘interactionism’ as it relates to personality (Pangallo et al., 2015, p. 2). This process is described as an identification of “defining features of a situation” (Pangallo et al., 2015, p. 2). Interactionism is a personality theory (Pangallo et al., 2015). Pangallo et al. (2015) distinguished between the following four categories of resilience constructs: “process, trait, state or outcome” (p. 4). The construct of outcome most closely correlates with Rutter’s (2006) conceptualization of resilience. Measures typically focus on traits or states (Pangallo et al., 2015). Pangallo et al. (2015) favored the Multidimensional Trauma Recovery and Resilience Scale (MTRR) as the most interactionally oriented measurement tool due to its reliability; however, it has limited applicability to this particular study, due to its focus on trauma recovery (pp. 10, 15).

### **Major Theoretical Hypotheses**

Rutter (2012) explored the concept of “steeling effects” relative to resilience, and reviewed the studies supporting this phenomenon (p. 335). Rutter (2012) discussed both “life course” and “turning point effects” as well (p. 335). One earlier longitudinal study demonstrated a correlation with a limited population with the specific turning point

experience of military service (Rutter, 2012). Rutter and Sonuga-Barke (2010) completed studies with Romanian orphans that revealed that distinct outcomes following adversity were noted and attributed to “risk and protective factors” (Rutter, 2012, p. 342). The studies noted by Rutter (2012) would appear to suggest that additional research is needed on resilience, in order to provide greater clarity on the variables that correlate with resilience. Rutter (2012) stated: “...a key feature of resilience research has been the use of qualitative data to determine the meaning of experiences. The research into marriage constitutes one example of this and the study of positive outcomes following inpatient psychiatric care in adolescence constitutes another rather different example” (p. 342).

### **Analysis of How the Theory Similarly Applied**

Resilience theory informs the interpretation of a few studies on Native Americans, and at times has involved the direct measurement of resilience status (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). In these studies, resilience has emerged as a phenomenon to be described following the administration of interviews or surveys that accumulate data derived from narratives (Goodkind et al, 2012; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Researchers have determined that resilience is correlated to a degree with other states, such as self-esteem, or positive emotions (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013; Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012).

Cicchetti and Blender (2006) p. 249 have recommended that the study of resilience occur within an interdisciplinary context. They state that there are numerous paths to resilience, including “psychological, biological and environmental.” They further state that one reaction by the body to adversity is “early and continuing neural plasticity”



(Cicchetti & Blender, 2006, p. 251). Resilience studies have examined long term impacts under a wide variety of circumstances, including studies of children with a history of experiences of abuse. Future neuroimaging studies may focus on the activation of the brain in resilient persons under stress, for example (Cicchetti & Blender, 2006). Scientific research supports the correlation between “the neurotransmitter-metabolizing enzyme monoamine oxidase A (MAOA)” and reduced “antisocial behavior” in persons with histories of maltreatment (Cicchetti & Blender, 2006, p. 255).

Luthar, Sawyer, and Brown (2006) have suggested that socio-economic status (SES) is a relevant variable for consideration in studies on resilience. They provide a specific example: “Whereas limit setting showed positive simple correlations with competence among low-income children, it was negatively correlated with competence among middle-income youth (for whom stringency can imply harshness)” (Luthar, Sawyer, & Brown, 2006, p. 109).

### **Rationale for the Choice of this Theory**

Rutter (2006) believes that as psychologists, we wish to identify those who have experienced a “good psychological outcome” due to resilience factors such as “‘turning point’ experiences in adult life” (p. 1). Rutter (1999) has indicated that “interpersonal relationships” are relevant to the production of resiliency in individuals (p. 120). Rutter (1999) has identified through his work with Romanian orphans that persons can undergo the same experience but have very different psychological outcomes as a result. Turning point experiences can alter a downward trajectory in this manner: “...It is evident that, in

order to break the vicious circle, new experiences which provide a break from the past and open up new opportunities are likely to be important” (Rutter, 1999, p. 132). Rutter (1999) cited a longitudinal study conducted by Elder (1986) which found that membership in the armed forces constituted a protective factor for low income individuals. Such events are also referred to as “‘neutralizing’ or ‘fresh-start’ life events (Brown et al., 1988, 1992; Craig et al., 1994; Tennant et al., 1981)” (Rutter, 1999, p. 133). Rutter (1999) has explicated the importance in the development of resilience, of “cognitive processing” or “adding meaning” to lived experiences (p. 134). Rutter (1999) stated that building “on the positive while not denying the negative” may be instrumental in creating resilience in individuals (p. 135). These turning point experiences constitute an epiphany in a person’s life, altering their life course, and leading away from risk, and toward the state of resilience.

### **How the Theory Relates to the Present Study**

This proposed study of Native Americans and resilience builds upon this framework by attempting to capture descriptions of epiphanies in the lives of individuals as expressed in their autobiographies. Whereas earlier studies have identified phenomena such as interpersonal relationships as having relevance to the enhancement of resilience (Wexler et al., 2013), this study proposes looking at the relationships to determine what meaning is derived from the circumstances surrounding these interrelationships, and identifying the existence of critical turning points.

### **Literature Review of Native Americans and Resilience**

Native Americans experience serious mental health maladies at a higher rate than the general population (Centers for Disease Control, 2012). Experts in the field have verified that research on Native Americans is limited (CNPAAEMI, 2000). The purpose of this study is to identify the pivotal, turning point, or epiphany moments in the lives of Native Americans that may define resilience in their lives.

The majority of the studies of resilience in Native American individuals have focused on adolescents, and only three have included an array of adult age groups. These qualitative studies have been successful at gathering a vast amount of data on the topic of Native Americans and resilience. This chapter presents the studies identified in the literature search, and a discussion about the theories offered by the authors in support of their findings. Approximately one half-dozen articles on the topic of Native Americans and resilience were published between the years 2010 and 2013. Since then, there have not been any relevant publications on this topic.

#### **A Narrative Analysis of 19 Native American College Students**

The first of these articles appeared in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*. One researcher from an Oklahoman university interviewed nineteen Native American college students (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Drywater-Whitekiller (2010) focused on the role of cultural resilience in the lives of Native American students of higher education. The study built upon the risk/resilience literature that is the foundation for

more recent studies in resilience (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). The goal of the Native American student, according to Drywater-Whitekiller, is to further the welfare of their cultural group. Native Americans have had an arduous task of having to transform themselves to adapt to a foreign American culture (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). This change was not volitional, but rather has arisen as a means to adapt out of necessity (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Native Americans value the retention of their traditional Native American identity (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010).

Drywater-Whitekiller initiated this study because a gap existed in the literature identifying the way that culture plays a role in fostering Native American student perseverance in college. Drywater-Whitekiller's research was based on the theory of cultural resilience as articulated by Strand and Peacock (2003). This worldview conceptualizes cultural resilience as a methodology of using culture to foster personal strengths in order to adapt to aversive circumstances (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Culture is defined by Drywater-Whitekiller (2010) as "commonly shared indigenous values" (p. 3). Qualities that are unique to Native American cultures include: spiritual beliefs and ritualistic practices; a shared history, family, extended family, and community; and identity as Native Americans (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Drywater-Whitekiller studied the perspectives of students from various tribes from four separate university systems.

Drywater-Whitekiller stated that the implication of the prosperity of Native Americans is that they are a resilient cultural group. The problem that Drywater-Whitekiller sought to address through this research project is the lower than average

college retention rates of Native Americans. This problem had previously been addressed in the literature by drawing attention to the substandard quality of educational resources available to Native Americans (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Additionally, the studies suggested that Native Americans possessed inferior abilities as students (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). These quantitative research studies failed to address the issue of Native American student retention because of lack of sufficient participation and other errors (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Drywater-Whitekiller posited that a qualitative approach focusing specifically on Native American students would be more effective. Drywater-Whitekiller opined that an examination of Native American students who are successful, and a more focused evaluation of cultural factors would be preferable. This researcher set out to learn how Native American students accomplished successful completion of their goals, and which cultural factors were especially relevant to the process (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010).

The methodology that Drywater-Whitekiller (2010) employed involved using “thick description,” and “narrative analysis” (p. 4). All of the students were in their senior year of college (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Students participated from three separate states in the United States (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Drywater-Whitekiller selected the educational institutions based on their level of service to Native American student populations. A slightly higher number of females than males participated, and nineteen different tribal members were interviewed, aged 20 to 56 (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). The researcher worked with both criterion and snowball sampling (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Drywater-Whitekiller looked at both personal and environmental experience,

based on the responses to open-ended interview questions. The author coded the data based on themes identified by Heavy Runner and Marshall (2003) as being dispositive of resilience (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). These are the Native American cultural qualities enumerated previously in this discussion. Drywater-Whitekiller adhered to ethnographic research procedures by allowing participants greater voice through both the creation and the response to interview questions. In this manner, Drywater-Whitekiller was able to expand on the initial list of Native American cultural qualities.

This researcher commented on the ‘holistic’ nature of Native American understanding, where all knowledge is valued (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). This philosophy is described as both ‘circular’ and unifying, comparable to many Eastern philosophies that advocate promotion of ‘balance’ (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010, p. 6). Drywater-Whitekiller presented the results in an ‘in vivo’ format, quoting the students’ replies. The students commented on their desire to use their education to advance social causes and to be of service to the community (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). They envisioned assisting their respective tribal communities to progress and to address social problems (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010).

One student that was interviewed observed that one of her goals would be to develop a Native American Studies program for school systems (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). More than one student expressed the opinion that Americans are taught both inaccurate and stereotypical information about Native Americans, and these students wished to remediate that (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Another student emphasized the fact that the real danger lies in the credence Native Americans themselves place on the

misinformation and stereotypes (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Therefore, this student proposed a more positive “focus” (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010, p. 9). Among the factors that students described as instrumental in promoting their educational success was the attitude of their families (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Families were described as being proud, helpful, and interested in their day to day progress (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Sometimes families had an active role in providing emotional support (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Families expressed their belief in the students’ capabilities and ability to succeed (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Families provided tangible support such as child care, and academic advice (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). More than one student stated their desire to create a lifestyle that other members of the Native American community would be inspired by and wish to emulate (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010).

When the students spoke of spiritual factors producing resilience, they mentioned the significance of prayer (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Some students favored traditional Native American spiritual practices, and others were Christian or believed in a hybrid form of spirituality that combined both traditional Native American and Christian perspectives (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). What is notable about this study is that the researcher found commonalities among the responses as well as distinctions that were reflective of differences in tribal affiliations and the characteristics of the respondents (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Drywater-Whitekiller (2010) commented that the perspectives of respondents embodied an optimistic “self-determinism” (p.16). Drywater-Whitekiller (2010) felt that these cultural resources that the participants have enable them to evolve toward a resilient state, within the context of “tribal community” (p. 16).

Drywater-Whitekiller concluded her article by articulating a vision for the future for Native Americans, one that combines progress and adaptation with internalization of traditional beliefs and attributes.

Based on the theory of cultural resilience, Drywater-Whitekiller (2010) used narrative analysis of interview transcripts of nineteen college students to complete her qualitative study. Cultural resilience is a term that means that cultural factors produce resilience (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). The students were from three states, were proportionately male and female, and were 20 to 56 years of age (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). What is unique about this study is the researcher's ability to obtain data from 19 distinct tribal members (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). The researcher used both criterion based and snowball sampling approaches (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). The subsequent thematic analysis revealed that "giving back," a practice similar to 'paying it forward,' as well as "prayer and family support" were instrumental in producing resilience in the lives of these college students (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010, p. 6). The researcher used 'thick description' to report the results of the study (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). This study is pivotal for this researcher's study because of the age group that participated, and the fact that Drywater-Whitekiller was able to involve so many tribal representatives. It is difficult to obtain input from numerous tribes due to logistics and limited resources. There are 600 tribes in the United States, and locating individuals who live away from the reservations is more challenging than approaching residents of reservations (CNPAEMI, 2000). This dissertation study utilized many of the methodologies described in the Drywater-Whitekiller study, and increased the amount of information



that is now known about resilience. A more in depth analysis of information was performed on fewer participants from two or three tribes, and produced a great depth of information on factors producing resilience.

### **Understanding Barriers to Resilience in Indigenous Communities**

The second of the articles on the topic of Native American resilience was published by the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry. Kirmayer et al. (2011) defined resilience as doing “well” in the face of adversity (p. 84). Kirmayer et al. regarded the worldview of their participants as collectivistic. They conducted their study under the auspices of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR; Kirmayer et al., 2011). The writers acknowledged that the literature on resilience that pertains to multicultural populations may not be relevant to persons from indigenous cultures (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The goal of the researchers was to understand barriers to resilience in indigenous communities and to understand cultural collectivistic concepts of resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Kirmayer et al. equated resilience with the ability of a system to achieve homeostasis, or restore balance. Kirmayer et al. contrasted the perspective with a psychological theory of resilience that relies on specific traits and significant relationships. In contrast, this study aimed to understand ecological foundations of resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Kirmayer et al. (2011) further acknowledged the detrimental impact of historical policies directed toward indigenous populations, having the net impact of institutionalizing “marginalization” (p. 85). These policies have also

interfered with the ability of aboriginal individuals to establish healthy identities (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Kirmayer et al. (2011) theorized that resilient persons can experience “transformation” (p. 85). Their plan was to study individuals, families, and communities through the use of a semi-structured interview (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Kirmayer et al. anticipated that their research would focus on both individual and community identity formation. The research methodology provided for exploration of the role of narrative in the lives of these persons (Kirmayer et al., 2011). It is through narrative that cultural intra-generational “transmission” takes place (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 86). Kirmayer et al. anticipated that their research would result in the identification of different manifestations of resilience based on varying characteristics such as age or gender. The researchers encountered many similarities within tribal communities (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The researchers discussed the role that treaties with the colonizers have had in the lives of Native Americans (Kirmayer et al., 2011). For the Mi’kmaq tribe for example, honoring the treaties is a value that has endured to the present day, and was exemplified by the efforts of Mi’kmaq employees in the construction trades to help 911 victims in New York City in 2001 (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Mi’kmaq value “harmony” in the community (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 87). In addition to the Mi’kmaq, these Canadian researchers have worked with Mohawk persons in Canada and in New York State in the USA (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The Mohawk are members of the Iroquois Confederacy (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Due to expansion of neighboring communities, these individuals have gradually reduced their initial land holdings (Kirmayer et al., 2011). This has resulted in the Mohawk community organizing en masse

to protest the loss of their lands, and to discuss past abrogations of treaty agreements (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Many positive outcomes resulted from this movement for the Mohawk people (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Some of the infractions against Mohawk communities included interference with the use of native language and other types of local autonomy and decision-making (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Language is the vehicle for the expression of worldviews and values (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

These researchers also worked with the Metis, who are a mixture of French and First Nations tribal members (Kirmayer et al., 2011). In Canada, members of Native American tribes are also referred to as First Nations persons (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The Metis are set apart from other First Nation tribal members who are not descended from Europeans (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Thus the Metis are both independent and individualistic (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Metis consider resilience to be the equivalent of “resourcefulness” or what they call “la débrouillardise” (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 88).

Because the Inuits have lived in remote Northern areas, they have lived off the land without assistance from Europeans (Kirmayer et al., 2011). There has been a gradual encroachment on Inuit native lands over the past century (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The Inuits believe in nurturing hope as a method to acquire the benefits of resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011). These researchers regarded some of the beliefs of the Inuits as a form of “animism” (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 88). The Inuits believe that some things are beyond the control of the individual, and so they strive to achieve “balance” (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 88). The Inuits have become advocates for awareness of climate change (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Kirmayer et al. (2011) observed that aboriginal persons value resilience constructs of “collective history,” language, and “activism” (p. 88). Indigenous persons harbor a strong connection to the “natural environment” as an avenue for “sustenance...and healing” (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 89). Kirmayer et al. suggested that their research has resulted in an understanding of resilience that extends beyond the individual and into the community and the environment. As the result of their ethnographic narrative research, Kirmayer et al. (2011) learned that resilience is a function of “collective solidarity” as much as it is the manifestation of an outcome for an individual (p. 89). Kirmayer et al. made an interesting point when they theorized that in a culture where oral history is so pre-eminent a feature of transmission of values and attitudes, the history of the past two hundred years for the Native Americans has been one of both defeat and neglect; and this may have a meaningful correlation to some of the social issues they have experienced. In recent years, the process of litigating to earn their rights has inspired a new generation to feel capable and empowered (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The communal stories are now ones of overcoming adversity in the face of opposition by a more powerful entity (Kirmayer et al., 2011). This has enabled indigenous communities to move forward and to continue to evolve (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Kirmayer et al. (2011) studied four tribes in Canada: the Mi’kmaq, Mohawk, Inuit, and the Metis. These researchers collaborated with the communities studied, developed key informants, and led focus groups (Kirmayer et al., 2011). This qualitative research project was designed to obtain both individual autobiographies and collective narratives, or communal group histories (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Kirmayer et al. (2011) suggested that resilience constructs may need to be revised to incorporate the distinct perspectives of indigenous populations, and emphasized the transformative nature of the creation of resilience in individuals. Researchers learned that the Mi'kmaq value a construct which they refer to as "apisiktuaqn," a word which signifies "forgiveness" and "reconciliation" (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 86). The Mohawk community relies on their "Creation Story," which is similar to the biblical creation account, with a creator who asks the humans to "beautify the earth" and care for it for "seven generations" (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 86). They are also governed by "the Great Law of Peace," a "democratic covenant" that links together 'humans,' 'nature,' and the 'supernatural' (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 86). The Metis value "self-reliance, autonomy, and independence" (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 86). The Inuit propose that maintaining an attitude of hope is instrumental in promoting resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

This ethnographic study is limited in its generalizability to United States Native Americans, because the tribes are from Canada, and have a distinct history. This study focused on a wide range of age groups, although exact information on demographics was not provided. These researchers obtained data on tribal myths, language, and spiritual practices that may reflect the subjective ways that these tribal members experience resilience in their lives. This researcher's dissertation study may be contrasted with the Kirmayer et al. study because it focused on Native Americans in the United States, but it built upon this study by using autobiographical narratives to obtain data on resilience. Although this researcher's dissertation research project did not use collaboration with the

community to achieve results, it is anticipated that this study may provide an impetus for constructive social change.

### **A Study of 196 Urban Dwelling Native American Adolescents**

A study published by the Colorado School of Public Health the following year, expanded on the resilience themes identified by Drywater-Whitekiller (2010). In addition to the significance of social support that had been previously identified by Drywater-Whitekiller, these researchers from the Oklahoman University system looked at “enculturation, self-esteem, and subjective well-being” as potential factors inherent in the process of producing resilience in Native American individuals (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012, p. 1). Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans recruited a total of 196 urban dwelling Native American participants. Again, the number of female participants was slightly higher than the number of males as in the study by Drywater-Whitekiller (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). These Native American individuals were between the ages of 14 and 18 years of age, and resided in the southern and central area within the United States (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). This younger sample emphasized the significance of support from peers, a somewhat predictable adolescent response (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans commented on the enormous heterogeneity among tribal members. These researchers sought to address the trend of comparably higher mental health issues in Native American populations (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Stumblingbear-Riddle

and Romans preferred the term ‘American Indian (AI)’ when used to describe their participants.

Like Kirmayer et al. (2011), Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans identified the history of traumatic occurrences as a relevant factor when attempting to discern causality of the higher mental health treatment needs of AI persons. Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans (2012) indicated that the mental health field is engaged in a process of “paradigm shift,” where instead of focusing on areas of risks, or individual traits, researchers strive to isolate environmental factors that appear to develop resilience in individuals (p. 2). These authors sought to address a gap in the literature because the majority of studies of AI adolescents are limited to participants who reside on AI reservations (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans acknowledged the relevance of culture when attempting to understand AI populations. Although urban dwelling AI individuals have access to greater educational resources, feelings of isolation, suicide and the absence of hopefulness have been identified among these AI individuals (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The goal of these researchers was to identify “protective factors” within the population (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012, p. 3). Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans (2012) used the term “enculturation” to refer to the amount of connection to AI culture maintained by the individual (p. 3).

These researchers built on the results of earlier studies from between the years 2000 and 2009 to determine which factors were identified as promoting resilience and “school success” (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012, p. 3). School success involved

in part both grade point average and articulation of future educational goals (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The researchers selected a community based research model that incorporated opportunities for participation in the process (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans did not reveal the tribal identity of participants in order to preserve privacy. The sample was selected based on United States Census data (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012).

With this particular study, the lead researcher is a member of a distinct AI tribe from a rural part of the United States and has previously been employed in the area where this research was conducted (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The method of recruitment of participants was through the distribution of various marketing materials mailed to programs and displayed in areas where AI groups gathered (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). After obtaining both parental consent and participant consent, a variety of questionnaires were administered to the participants in private and a gift card was provided to them (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012).

The first measure utilized was the Native American Community Health Survey: Youth (NACHSY; Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The questionnaire was re-designed by the researchers to collect demographic information and by adding questions related to tribal membership as well as social support information (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The researchers described the format as consisting of both open and closed questions (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The next measure, the American Indian Enculturation Scale (AIES), was expanded from its original format to include additional questions based on suggestions from the community advisory board



(Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The use of the measure was intended to reveal attitudes about AI cultures (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The non-modified version of this instrument is reported by Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans to have construct validity, internal consistency, and reliability. The measure used to report self-esteem was the Tri-Ethnic Center's Self-Esteem Scale (TECSES; Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). This instrument was reported to have both construct validity and reliability (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The researchers administered the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) for information regarding subjective well-being (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). This instrument has demonstrated reliability and validity (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Neither the AIES nor the SWLS had been used with adolescent populations before (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012).

Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans used both the Perceived Social Support from Family (PSS-Fa) and Perceived Social Support from Friends (PSS-Fr; Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). These scales have both validity and reliability including construct validity (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans (2012) limited their measure of resilience to a questionnaire on school success, characterized as a "self-report survey" (p. 7). This instrument was determined to have an acceptable rate of reliability (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Their rationale for this choice is that the focus of their studies of resilience in adolescence is limited to school success (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012).

In the results, these researchers reported a weak relationship between culture and school success (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). They also sought to compare the results to the adolescents that resided on reservations (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The researchers found that the results obtained from urban dwelling AI adolescents were different from those obtained from reservation dwelling AI adolescents or from AI college students (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). For the latter pool of participants culture was a stronger factor in the production of resilience as expressed by school success (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans explained this phenomenon as revealing that because reservation resources and culture were not as available to urban dwelling AI adolescents, the influence of culture was minimal. Elsewhere, a higher rate of hopeful attitudes has been noted on the reservation by AI adolescents when compared to either urban or rural areas (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). AI adolescents removed from the reservation report feelings of isolation and are less hopeful (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans conjecture that this experience is due to the inability of urban AI adolescents to become fluently bicultural. This in turn, impacts negatively on rates of school success (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Certain cultures are less tolerant of biculturalism as well (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Previous research has demonstrated that persons capable of adapting and identifying with both European and AI cultures experienced a higher predominance of hopeful feelings (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Family or culture in isolation did not appear to

influence school success as much as the confluence of the four variables of support from friends and family, culture, and subjective well-being as a bundled set of factors (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012).

The results of this study differed from the results of earlier studies of the same influences (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans hypothesize that the differences may be attributed to the distinctive lifestyles of urban dwelling AI adolescents. The researchers found similarities between the results of urban and reservation dwelling AI adolescents with regard to the correlation between self-esteem and school success (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Urban dwellers emphasize the importance of school and friends to school success whereas reservation dwellers are likely to regard cultural experiences as an impetus for school success/resilience (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans attributed this to a reduced opportunity for urban dwellers to participate in tribal activities.

This exploratory, quantitative study is limited in its ability to explore the complex experience of culture in the lives of urban dwelling AI adolescents (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans complied with requests of the community board in their design of a quantitative study. These researchers believed the sample size to be smaller than desirable and questioned the efficacy of self-report measures (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The measure of resilience was also limited to school success, which is a small component of resilience outcomes (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Only one urban community was sampled, and

only twenty tribes were represented (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012).

Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans suggested that a great deal of additional research is needed, both qualitative and quantitative, in order to determine resilience factors in AI adolescents' lives. One practical application of this study would be to increase the number of cultural programs available to urban dwelling AI adolescents (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012).

When Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans (2012) completed their study, their results supported the existence of a relationship between social support and the experience of resilience. These researchers looked at the experience of adolescents residing in the southern and central area of the United States (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). They studied 196 adolescents in an effort to identify the protective factors that would yield resilience (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Resilience was positively correlated with school achievement, defined as graduation, grade to grade promotion, and passing examination scores (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). These researchers collaborated with the community that was studied and one researcher was a member of the Kiowa tribe (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). A slightly greater number of females than males were interviewed (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Researchers administered the following instruments: Native American Community Health Survey Youth (NACHSY), American Indian Enculturation Scale (AIES), Tri-Ethnic Center's Self Esteem Scale (TECSES), Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), the Perceived Social Support from Family (PSS-Fa), and Perceived Social Support from Friends (PSS-Fr; Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). These

instruments were shown to have acceptable rates of validity and reliability as reported by these researchers (Stumblingsbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). For the purpose of this study, the researchers have defined “enculturation” as a tie to American Indian culture (Stumblingsbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Researchers found a low correlation between enculturation and resilience, and between self-esteem and resilience (Stumblingsbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). Data was analyzed with regression analysis, and the correlation between peer relationships and resilience was strongest (Stumblingsbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The adolescents identified that having strong and supportive relationships with peers helped them to achieve resilience (Stumblingsbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The adolescents that were studied were described as urban and not reservation dwelling (Stumblingsbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The limitations of the study as expressed by the researchers were that the study focused on members of only 20 tribes, was exploratory, and fell under the auspices of only one American Indian agency (Stumblingsbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The implication of this is that a higher number of agencies would produce less bias, and be more representative of the Native American population as a whole (Stumblingsbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The researchers recommended additional research on social support and culture and its relationship to resilience (Stumblingsbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). The researchers noted the distinction between the lower rates of graduation of Native American students when compared to other groups (Stumblingsbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). This researcher’s dissertation study focused on adult Native Americans of a few tribes that live in suburban areas and away from the reservation. Through the use of open-ended questions, the meaning of

resilience in the lives of Native Americans was identified and described. This dissertation differed from the study by Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans because resilience was not defined as school achievement, but a more expansive model of resilience was emphasized.

### **A Study of 95 Native American Adolescents**

In an article published the same year as the one by Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans (2012), researchers from the University of South Dakota and from Nebraska, also published an article on the topic of resilience in AI youth between the ages of fourteen and twenty (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). This study was conducted in a north central region of the United States (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012).

These researchers sought to address the gap in the literature on the topic of resilience of AI youth and their communities (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Using open-ended questions, McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter surveyed ninety-five young persons. The participants consisted of slightly more females than males who resided on reservations (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). In this study, just fewer than fifteen percent self-identified as being ethnically diverse in addition to AI (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter argued that focusing research efforts on resources would be a more efficient way to address risk factors within a community, and to obtain funding for projects that emphasize positive qualities about communities. McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter cited earlier studies that have suggested that AI youth

possess beneficial traits, and can avail themselves of the benefits of a strong, supportive social network. AI youth also derive benefits from their culture that promote resilience (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). One study by Filbert and Flynn (2010) appeared to show that emotional difficulties were negatively correlated with a strong cultural outlook (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). AI youth have also reported benefits from spirituality and community involvement (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). A study by Stiffman et al. (2007) had demonstrated that in addition to the resources already named, youth appreciated “financial disbursements” and a sense of “security” (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012, p. 695). Significantly, McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter cited a study by Lalonde (2006) that found that community expression of cultural history combined with tribal authority over decision-making was correlated with overall greater mental and physical health for AI adolescents. McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter suggested that their descriptive study was intended to promote an increase in available resources for communities that build on existing assets.

The format of the survey used by these researchers was that of semi-structured questions with an emphasis on examining “challenges” and “hardships” by these rural AI residents (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012, p. 695). McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter intended to build this study on the theoretical foundation of positive psychology with a strengths-based perspective. These researchers preferred an approach that encouraged the client to identify their own assets and resources, in contrast to having these promoted by the therapist (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). This would be followed by a process of goal formation, again to be accomplished by the client him or herself (McMahon,

Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). This philosophy has been adapted in educational settings as well (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). In the health care field it is often presented as a 'prevention' approach (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter noted that this is a "paradigm shift," in a movement away from a focus on identifying dysfunction (p. 695). McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter stressed the fact that having a positive psychology focus does not mean that dysfunctional issues are denied. Instead, "proactive" methodologies such as planning are favored (p. 696). These researchers favored an approach that includes a review of contextual issues related to the environment in addition to the individual (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). These authors cited the numerous strength-based studies and one community-based intervention project that successfully created change by encouraging participants to examine their personal resources, and that resulted in empowerment (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter suggested that qualitative research can highlight not just the number of strengths but the type.

McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter sought to build upon the existing literature by creating a study that encourages AI adolescent participants to identify their strengths and areas of strength within their communities. These researchers obtained consent from the parents of these high school students and their parents, and offered a twenty dollar retail gift card. The survey that was administered to the students was approved by local area review boards and by the participating tribal authorities (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). This study was limited to high school age students in attendance at both the



regular and alternative academic programs (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Only one third of the students resided with both parents (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012).

To analyze the results, McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter (2012) used “inductive content analysis” (p. 697). This is defined as a process of identifying thematic emphasis, and then applying codes (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen’s Kappa and found to be adequate (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). In addition, the researchers found acceptable levels of descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). The participants wrote their responses and also recorded verbal responses (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). The researchers recorded the data in an ‘in vivo’ format, coding the responses by using the respondents’ words (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Students enjoyed a higher response rate to questions concerning strengths rather than questions concerning challenges (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). The strongest connection that the youths had was to their family members (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012).

Ten percent of the youth surveyed indicated that they were appreciative of everything in their lives (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). The researchers attributed this pattern of response to AI cultural collectivist values (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Some adolescents struggled with completing their education, unplanned parenthood, and substance abuse; factors that have been reported in other studies of AI adolescents (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Respondents enjoyed many different community activities according to this survey (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). The most valued attribute of their community was “the people,” with only ten percent stating

that there were no observable strengths in their communities (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012, p. 701). Twenty percent of the youth surveyed were concerned about community levels of substance abuse, an issue that has been noted in previous research studies (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Close to twenty percent of teens commented on the condition of the roads in the reservation (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Ten percent of the adolescents advocated for more resources devoted to recreation (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). These researchers suggested that family interventions were needed based on the results of this study; interventions which supported and nurtured families (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012).

Many of the student responses reflected an appreciation of the educational resources within their communities (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). One strategy that McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter recommended in response to the survey results was to involve the youth in planning and implementing of community intervention/prevention programs. The researchers advised that obtaining feedback from school-aged youth who were not attending school may have altered the results of this study in unknown directions (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Only one tribe participated in this study and so the results may not be transferable to many tribes (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). These researchers suggested that additional qualitative research is needed using diverse methods of investigation (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Additional research with AI adolescents who reside away from the reservation would be desirable (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). The authors concluded by recommending strength-

based community interventions that are grounded in culture (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012).

A study of Northern Plains Native American participants, having more females than males participating, corroborated the theme that social support is critical in producing resilience in Native American communities (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). The goal of the study was to identify strengths in American Indian youth, as reflected by their attitudes about themselves, their families, and their communities (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Ninety-five high school students were selected to participate, and a gift card incentive was offered, as occurred in some of the previous studies described in this review (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). One limitation of this study noted is that drop-outs were not included in this group of participants (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Inclusion of individuals who had withdrawn from school would provide a more complete evaluation of the attitudes of the entire cohort of high school students. Researchers surveyed the respondents with open-ended questions (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). The reliability of the survey instrument was verified and thematic analysis was conducted (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). The findings of this study were that participants had positive attitudes about themselves, their families, and their communities and did not believe any changes were necessary (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012).

The researchers recommended additional strengths research with community partners (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). Because respondents were members of only one tribe, generalizability is limited in this study (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter,

2012). The researchers also recommended the use of many different qualitative methodologies, such as case studies to acquire additional information on the subject of resilience (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). These researchers opined that additional research could serve to promote the creation of additional programmatic interventions to sustain resilience in Native American individuals and communities (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). This researcher's dissertation research study was similar to the McMahon, Kenyon and Carter study because it focused on adult populations, but this researcher used qualitative methodologies to acquire data. This researcher's study looked at intrinsic and extrinsic factors that may produce resilience in Native American individuals.

### **A Study of 37 Native American Adolescents, Parents, and Grandparents**

In 2012 researchers from the University of New Mexico conducted ethnographic interviews with 37 adolescents, parents, and grandparents from the Navajo tribe (Goodkind et al.). Their ambitious research design included exploring historical trauma within the context of resilience, and evaluating strengths (Goodkind et al., 2012). They also intended to examine the factors violence and poverty (Goodkind et al., 2012). Their goal was to recommend interventions that would improve mental health and overall "well-being" (Goodkind et al., 2012, p. 1).

Goodkind et al. cited studies that have documented the higher rate of suicide and substance abuse by Native American adolescents when compared to mainstream Americans. These researchers commented that the problems experienced by Native

Americans would require social justice strategies to alleviate (Goodkind et al., 2012). Goodkind et al. wished to fill a gap in the literature regarding resilience within the context of historical trauma and the ramifications for interventions with Navajo adolescents. Resilience includes recovery from stress due to innate abilities to cope and to derive support from social networks (Goodkind et al., 2012). A careful examination of the obstacles the Native Americans have successfully overcome in post-colonial times demonstrates their innate capability to handle and surmount challenges (Goodkind et al., 2012). This achievement is not due to personal traits, Goodkind et al. believed, but due to the collective competence of their community.

Understanding resilience from the indigenous perspective requires developing an understanding of culturally-based social, spiritual, political, ideological, and communicational practices that constitute measures to promote resilience in the indigenous population (Goodkind et al., 2012). Attempting to understand the historical trauma that Native Americans have experienced may be a difficult process from the perspective of a European (Goodkind et al., 2012).

Goodkind et al. (2012) explored the tribal narratives and identified the repeated use of the terms: “historical trauma and healing,” that have been used in a strictly collectivist sense (p. 4). For the Native American, his or her mental health is inextricably linked with colonialism and the loss of autonomy, resulting in a state that Goodkind et al. (2012) notes has been referred to as an “existential exigency” (p. 4). Goodkind et al. (2012) recounted the history of the concept of “historical trauma” that was provided by a Lakota researcher to explain the apparent parallels between Native Americans and

American Jewish holocaust survivors (p. 4). Goodkind et al. (2012) cited research that has addressed this phenomenon of “intergenerational transmission of trauma” (p. 4).

Goodkind et al. identified researchers who have conducted studies of the perceived impact of historical casualties on the present lives of Native Americans. Northern Plains tribes expressed their perspective that these historical events continued to impact them in some way (Goodkind et al., 2012). The researchers compared Southwestern tribes to the Northern Plains tribes (Goodkind et al., 2012). Goodkind et al. acknowledged that experiences across tribes differ. Persons of Navajo descent are unique because they are descendants of family members who participated in “The Long Walk” during the 1800’s, and whose families were also imprisoned during this period (Goodkind et al., 2012, p.5). In 1975 Gloria Jahoda wrote a book called “The Trail of Tears,” that documented the impacts of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, that resulted in the forced migration of several Native American tribes on foot from the South to Oklahoma. The Navajo ‘Long Walk’ occurred after this event.

There are family narratives in the Navajo community that continue to transmit this theme (Goodkind et al., 2012). Goodkind et al. cited an earlier study where traditional Navajo practitioners were approached for their perspectives regarding historical trauma. When Navajo individuals learn of these earlier practices in America, they often may experience both grief and anger (Goodkind et al., 2012). The practitioners then will attempt to engage in a healing process with the individual (Goodkind et al., 2012). The perception by this tribe is that the experience has largely not been acknowledged by American society (Goodkind et al., 2012). The practitioner recognized that this response

is not pathological and that it is at times difficult to differentiate between present day trauma that the individual is experiencing and historical trauma (Goodkind et al., 2012). Another issue is that for some tribes, policy injustices may be an ongoing circumstance (Goodkind et al., 2012). In the present day there are multiple levels of potential impact where a person's experience of trauma may be alleviated by intervention (Goodkind et al., 2012). Individual counseling may be appropriate, or a family intervention may be preferable (Goodkind et al., 2012). There are many organizations that can act to effect change, since the average individual interacts with work, school, church, federal, state, and local government institutions, etc. (Goodkind et al., 2012). Goodkind et al. believed that changing policies at various levels may be helpful in order to promote healing.

The traditional practitioners prefer to implement healing in a holistic manner by including the community (Goodkind et al., 2012). This may involve both ceremony and a public expression of awareness of the traumatizing incident (Goodkind et al., 2012).

Goodkind et al. initiated this research project in 2006, and began to collect data by interviewing participants using ethnographic methodologies. The community participated in the design of the questions (Goodkind et al., 2012). Goodkind et al. obtained approval for this study from the tribe and various research boards. The project was both participatory and community based (Goodkind et al., 2012). Efforts were made to address potential "power differentials" as the researchers desired an emic perspective, and open-ended questions were asked (Goodkind et al., 2012, p. 9). The researchers interviewed adolescents, parents, and grandparents who lived on the reservation (Goodkind et al., 2012). There were approximately the same numbers in each group, with a slightly smaller

number of grandparents (Goodkind et al., 2012). There were a total of twelve families (Goodkind et al., 2012). Seven adolescents had participated in mental health treatment and seven had not (Goodkind et al., 2012). A slightly higher number of adolescent females participated than adolescent males, aged twelve to seventeen (Goodkind et al., 2012). The parents/guardians of the children were aged twenty-four to ninety (Goodkind et al., 2012). The grandparents ranged in age from fifty-four to ninety (Goodkind et al., 2012). The researchers utilized the snowball sampling technique (Goodkind et al., 2012). The researchers administered two interviews per participant and some interviews were conducted in the Dine/Navajo language, in keeping with the emic methodology (Goodkind et al., 2012). These researchers avoided the use of terminology or jargon in the questions (Goodkind et al., 2012). The participants were provided \$20.00 for the interview, and the interviews were recorded (Goodkind et al., 2012). Goodkind et al. used NVivo8 to analyze the data after some of the transcripts had been translated into English by the staff (Goodkind et al., 2012). The researchers identified themes and assigned codes (Goodkind et al., 2012). The themes were then analyzed, through the use of “analytical memo writing” (Goodkind et al., 2012, p. 11). The community advisory group assisted with interpretive efforts (Goodkind et al., 2012).

The results indicated that most of the respondents rarely think about the historical traumas experienced and are more concerned with the present (Goodkind et al., 2012). The adolescents commented that the present time is easier to live in because of the modern amenities (Goodkind et al., 2012). The grandparents voiced concerns over loss of traditions, health, and agricultural practices; and the dearth of emotional sharing



(Goodkind et al., 2012). One woman complained about the impact of alcohol in the community, and the erosion of traditional practices and beliefs, including diminution of interpersonal relationships (Goodkind et al., 2012).

The traditional practitioners have cautioned the tribal members not to speak of the past or it could make them ill, but this leaves a void in the intergenerational narrative (Goodkind et al., 2012). Then there is just silence (Goodkind et al., 2012). The practitioners believe that this is in the interest of harmony and balance for the community (Goodkind et al., 2012). The people in this community benefited from having access to two types of churches, the Native American Church (NAC), and Christian churches (Goodkind et al., 2012). The adults derived resilience benefits from both the Christian and traditional churches (Goodkind et al., 2012). A majority of the parents reported praying was a source of inspiration for greater resilience (Goodkind et al., 2012). The prayers involved expressing gratitude (Goodkind et al., 2012). Both parents and children had devised methods for coping with stress (Goodkind et al., 2012). Some parents indicated that there were insufficient traditional healers available (Goodkind et al., 2012). Adolescents dealt with stress by sleeping, or by consulting family and friends (Goodkind et al., 2012). Adolescents were spiritual in the sense of being aware of traditional beliefs and praying (Goodkind et al., 2012). The majority of the adolescents stated that they needed to learn more about traditional beliefs and language (Goodkind et al., 2012).

The grandparents and parents agreed that the lessons learned from the past are that the Navajo/Dine people are a strong group of people who are capable of surviving difficult times (Goodkind et al., 2012). The youth had the perspective that the families of

their elders helped them to get through these difficult times (Goodkind et al., 2012). The parents of these adolescents had been taken to reside in boarding schools during their adolescence (Goodkind et al., 2012). It is for this reason that Goodkind et al. (2012) speculated that educating all the generations about past events may improve communication and reduce “self-blame” or “shame” (p. 23). Goodkind et al. advocated a multigenerational intervention to improve communication. One idea proposed was the implementation of a “community service project” that could be engaged in by all generational members (Goodkind et al., 2012, p. 24).

The Goodkind et al. (2012) study has relevance to this dissertation study because it is qualitative, and attempts to identify resilience themes as perceived by the respondents. In it, the researchers identified many salient themes that were articulated by the Navajo interviewees. Among those were: concerns about violence and alcohol, reminiscences of “the Long Walk” and removal of Native American children from parents, and sadness over the prospect of losing their “language and traditional ways of life” (pp. 13, 15). One woman mentioned the lack of interpersonal communication as a concern (Goodkind et al., 2012). Goodkind et al. (2012) noted that although in general elder participants tended to ‘idealize...the past,’ these Navajo community members also invoked the traditional healing practice of avoiding negative reflections on historical events (p. 17). Certain of the participants credited spiritual and religious practices with their ability to maintain their resilience (Goodkind et al., 2012). One participant mentioned the importance of praying and ‘giving thanks’ (Goodkind et al., 2012, p. 19). Goodkind et al. (2012) found that many of the elders had “attended boarding schools” (p.

21). The Goodkind et al. (2012) study provides a rich source of data, and these researchers were able to show through their work that: "...One of the greatest effects of historical trauma recognized by elders, parents, and youth is the breakdown in intergenerational communication and relationships" (p. 23). The social transformation discussed in the study by Goodkind et al. (2012) is analogous to the pivotal, epiphany experiences suggested by the theories of Rutter (2012) that were analyzed in this researcher's dissertation study. This researcher's dissertation built on the work of Goodkind et al. (2012) and focused on members of a few tribes, thereby expanding the knowledge of resilience both in general and specific to Native American individuals.

Goodkind et al. (2012) described in detail a study involving participants from one of the tribal groups that was recruited for this researcher's dissertation study, the Navajo tribe. Goodkind et al. (2012) discussed the complex interplay between "individual and community strengths" and "social transformation" (p. 1019). Goodkind et al. (2012) interviewed Navajo/Dine individuals in an ethnographic study, and identified the significance of community approaches to healing as an emerging theme (pp. 1019, 1032). One of the major problems of Native American youth is the high rate of suicide (Goodkind et al, 2012). These researchers have identified sources of stress related to "income, education, employment and empowerment" as a potential factor that correlates with certain mental health problems (Goodkind et al, 2012, p. 1020). Goodkind et al. (2012) cautioned that individual approaches alone may be insufficient to address problems that stem from systemic or environmental stimuli. Researchers have determined that Native Americans are not passive victims of their experiences, but have

demonstrated a unique ability to adapt which has been characterized as both resilience and “survivance” (Goodkind et al, 2012, p. 1020). “Community resilience” happens as the result of “teachings and ceremonies” (Goodkind et al, 2012, p. 1021).

Institutionalized oppressive practices have resulted in trauma for many Native American individuals (Goodkind et al, 2012). Goodkind et al. (2012) explained that this has resulted in “distress and dysfunction” and identity concerns, in addition to numerous mental health issues that may not be appropriate for treatment through the use of the traditional western “medical model” (p. 1022). Nonetheless, what is lacking in this analysis is a specific identification of the nature of symptoms that may be experienced by Native American individuals, such as anxiety or depression, although feelings of sadness have been identified (Goodkind et al., 2012). Future research on “historical trauma” (HT) may produce the desired results (Goodkind et al, 2012, p. 1023). HT has been described as the psychological response to colonial oppressive practices (Goodkind et al, 2012, p. 1023). Another challenge identified is the issue for researchers of how to separate traumatic life experiences from the so-called historical trauma (Goodkind et al, 2012). Goodkind et al. (2012) opined that part of the intervention that may be appropriate for Native Americans may be one that incorporates aspects of advocacy to address specific instances of societal oppression that are manifested in policies and practices. The research study implemented by Goodkind et al. (2012) received approval by “the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board (NNHRRB),” as well as other regulatory authorities, with procedures implemented to preserve confidentiality; and is characterized as “a community-based participatory research (CBPR)” project (p. 1027).

### **A Study of 185 Native American Seniors**

In 2013 researchers from Washington, North Carolina and Oregon produced a study published by the University of Colorado School of Public Health on the topic of resilience in Native Americans, at or above the age of fifty-five (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). A total of 185 American Indian individuals participated in this study, and received \$30.00 compensation in gift cards (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). These researchers defined resilience as adaptation despite experiencing adverse circumstances, and the experience of thriving (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Resilience results in a healthy aging process which includes social interactions, an optimistic outlook, and autonomy in lifestyle (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Resilience is achieved by mobilizing both mental and environmental resources (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). In addition to a history of community trauma, American Indian adults have experienced an erosion of their traditions (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Along with the problems identified by earlier researchers, American Indian individuals may have had to recover from domestic violence (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Schure, Odden, and Goins cited Indian Health Service reports that have indicated higher than the American average incidence of poor physical and mental health, rates of disability and decreased longevity. This is the second study to examine resilience in older American Indian (AI) adults in recent years, but the present study differs because it attempts to correlate resilience with health status (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Schure, Odden, and Goins sought to support their hypothesis that resilient persons are healthier. Just as the earlier study that examined resilience in the elderly AI persons, this study grew out of previous work in the

southeastern part of the United States on the Native Elder Care Study, which was conducted for two years, between the summer of 2006 to the summer of 2008 (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Several review boards were consulted prior to approval (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013).

This study collected demographic data on gender, age and “marital status” prior to the administration of the Conner-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) in an abbreviated version (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013, p.29). This instrument was created to assess the individual’s ability to cope with stress (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). The instrument is reported to have “internal consistency and divergent validity” (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013, p. 30). The researchers assessed mental health by using both the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) and the SF-8 Health Survey (MCS-8; Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). A different version of the latter instrument was reported to have validity when used with AI adults (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Schure, Odden, and Goins used the Chronic Pain Grade Scale as well. The researchers completed the statistical analyses using descriptive statistics and various tests to identify correlations of resilience with demographic qualities (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). They also completed regression analyses using Stata version 12 statistical software (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013).

Most of the respondents were single females (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). One third stated that they enjoyed high levels of resilience, and approximately the same number reported low resilience, and the remainder fell between the continuum of low to high resilience (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Fourteen percent of respondents

characterized themselves as severely disabled by pain (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Demographic qualities did not appear to impact the level of resilience that a person experienced (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Pain and depression were correlated with lower resilience (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Higher resilience was correlated with lower levels of depression (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Males were found to report higher levels of resilience when compared to females (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013).

Schure, Odden, and Goins recommended additional research from a biopsychosocial viewpoint. The limitations of the study are that the correlations identified do not provide information on whether or not for example, persons who have less pain experience themselves as more resilient, rather than persons who are resilient experience less pain (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). This study does not consider the multiple alternative factors that may produce resilience in an individual (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Lastly, it is unknown how many of the respondents used pain medication or anti-depressants and this may effect the results (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Only one tribe participated in this study and so findings may vary among tribes (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). The measurement instrument in this case provides a self-report of level of resilience (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Additional research to determine pertinent environmental influences would be desirable in order to achieve the ultimate goal of improving health in AI communities (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013).

Schure, Odden, and Goins (2013) conducted a study in the southeastern area of the United States with Native Americans older than the age of 55 from one tribe. Interviewers worked with slightly greater than 500 individuals in this quantitative study,

using an abbreviated Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) to measure resilience, because the validity of this instrument has been established (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). The researchers also measured other indices of physical and mental health (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). To analyze the data, researchers used descriptive statistics, and regression models (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). The researchers identified that one quarter reported their resilience to be low; one third indicated that they had high resilience and the remainder fell into the medium resilience range (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Close to seventy percent of the respondents were female (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Researchers concluded that good mental and physical health correlated with the experience of resilience (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Males were found to experience higher rates of resilience compared to females (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Schure, Odden, and Goins (2013) recommended additional research of “positive emotions” and the use of a “biopsychosocial perspective” in research (p. 36). Limitations of the study are that it did not assess the impact of medications (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). These researchers have also indicated that additional research on “resources” both within the individual and externally may be useful in order to promote positive outcomes in Native American communities (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013, p. 37). This researcher’s dissertation study built upon this study by studying adult Native Americans in a qualitative study, and through the use of open-ended questions, identified the internal strengths and resources that individuals develop associated with resilience.



### **A Study of 20 Native American Adolescents**

The final study published in 2013 was produced by a group of researchers from the University of Massachusetts, McGill University in Montreal, and Columbia University in New York (Wexler et al., 2013). It focused on Alaskan Native American children and adolescents between the ages of eleven and eighteen (Wexler et al., 2013). It was a qualitative study of relationships and resilience in the lives of Alaskan Native American youth (Wexler et al., 2013). This study was titled the Circumpolar Indigenous Pathways to Adulthood (CIPA) Study, and was participatory (Wexler et al., 2013). Adolescent Alaskan Native Americans are having difficulty due to the transformations in their communities that have disrupted work, language, and way of life (Wexler et al., 2013). The most significant change was the eradication of their nomadic practices (Wexler et al., 2013). The Alaskan Inupiaq parents may not agree with the values espoused by the educational institutions (Wexler et al., 2013). A conflict has arisen between the collectivist vision of the Alaskan tribe and the individualistic philosophy that is taught in the schools (Wexler et al., 2013). The changes have been both dramatic and swift (Wexler et al., 2013). Alaskan Native American youth who are coming of age have problems that their parents have not had experience solving (Wexler et al., 2013). At times, these young persons relocate to more densely populated areas to seek employment (Wexler et al., 2013). Wexler et al. (2013) distinguished one definition of resilience: "...better than expected mental health outcome after experiencing hardship or trauma..." with the emphasis of this study on the process of resilience (p. 394). Wexler et al. sought to identify the specific resources that are utilized to deal with life altering setbacks. This

is a special kind of resilience of an adolescent attempting to grow up within the context of his or her cultural environment, with all the economic and political repercussions (Wexler et al., 2013).

Alternatively, it is the environment and ecosystem that will impart meaning to the process of adolescent resilience during their transition to adulthood (Wexler et al., 2013). Resilience adaptation has been attributed to behavior and many other factors, including traits, family, and community (Wexler et al., 2013). Wexler et al. theorized that the resources a community brings to bear on behalf of its members will determine the level of resilience of its individual members. Wexler et al. believed that the environment plays a larger role than do individual traits. Both culture and the meaning attributed to success are relevant factors as well (Wexler et al., 2013). Despite the changes in recent years, there is evidence that relationships are still primary motivating factors for Alaskan Native American adolescents (Wexler et al., 2013).

In this study the youth described their experience of creating their identities as Inupiat individuals (Wexler et al., 2013). Wexler et al. theorized that Inupiat adolescents both hold onto the existing culture and reinvent it at the same time. The Inuit and Inupiat culture values family relationships, generosity, and independent control of their destiny (Wexler et al., 2013). Relationships are determined by the amount of reciprocal effort put into them rather than just blood relatedness (Wexler et al., 2013). It is in the daily practical application of cultural values that an individual's culture manifests itself as an integral part of their resilient behavior (Wexler et al., 2013). Wexler et al. also stressed

that symbolic ideology and cultural ceremony have implications for understanding how Alaskan Native American youth create resilience in their lives.

Notably, Wexler et al. reported the median age in the community to be twenty-three. The region has an airport that can transport area residents to Anchorage (Wexler et al., 2013). The family system is described as consisting of hunter/gatherer grandparents, parents who are graduates of mandatory boarding schools, and English speaking adolescents (Wexler et al., 2013). The grandparents communicate through the Inupiaq language only, whereas the parents can speak both languages (Wexler et al., 2013). Just like typical American adolescents, Inupiaq adolescents text one another, and enjoy contemporary music (Wexler et al., 2013). The adolescents decry the limitation of material resources that they are experiencing (Wexler et al., 2013). When resources do become available, the attitude of the community in affirming or negating the acceptance of these resources becomes salient for the Native American Alaskan adolescent (Wexler et al., 2013).

The community steering committee had input into the chosen methodology for this project (Wexler et al., 2013). This study is based on grounded theory and narrative inquiry (Wexler et al., 2013). The researchers used snowball sampling and designed the research questions (Wexler et al., 2013). The life history interviews were conducted with the adolescents by individuals from their community (Wexler et al., 2013). Wexler et al. used semi-structured interviews to explore the adolescents' perceptions of themselves and noteworthy occurrences they had experienced. In addition to providing details of daily occurrences, the adolescents were prompted to explore their reactions to life's

challenging occasions (Wexler et al., 2013). There were an equal number of male and female participants (Wexler et al., 2013). The participants were interviewed for an hour or up to three hours (Wexler et al., 2013). The interviews were recorded and then a transcript was made (Wexler et al., 2013). Then the researchers engaged in thematic analysis and coding, while also sharing the results with the steering committee (Wexler et al., 2013). The researchers used “in vivo” methods of coding the responses, relying on the participants’ spoken words (Wexler et al., 2013). The researchers developed a codebook with descriptions of the recurring themes (Wexler et al., 2013). The authors documented a high rate of interrater reliability among coders (Wexler et al., 2013). Analysis was completed with the use of ATLAS.ti software (Wexler et al., 2013).

The adolescents described their relationships as both complex and buffering (Wexler et al., 2013). The researchers developed abbreviated narratives for each participant (Wexler et al., 2013). These researchers found that the coded information and the abbreviated narratives complemented one another and provided for a greater depth of understanding of the meanings that the adolescents attached to the events of their lives (Wexler et al., 2013). The youth frequently spoke of influential people in their lives who had left them (Wexler et al., 2013). One participant described her family as large and consisting of numerous half brothers and sisters (Wexler et al., 2013). It is unclear how intimate her emotional ties to each of these siblings are (Wexler et al., 2013). The adolescents actively sought to nurture constructive relationships, and this in turn produced a resilient outcome for them (Wexler et al., 2013). These associates helped them to achieve success in school, to engage in healthy lifestyle choices, and to obtain

work (Wexler et al., 2013). These Inupiaq adolescents expressed an interest in learning how to hunt and fish from tribal members, and were concerned when this was not possible because they did not have relatives who were members of the older generation (Wexler et al., 2013). Participants were able to maintain friendships through social networking, but because relatives frequently had to move out of the area to find work, adolescents struggled to maintain those relationships over vast distances (Wexler et al., 2013). Some Native American adults employed professionally within the community attempt to mentor youth (Wexler et al., 2013).

The discussions of the youth about relationships frequently involved the use of concepts such as “responsibility,” and “taking care of” other significant persons in their lives (Wexler et al., 2013, p. 400). These are “support networks” for these young persons (Wexler et al., 2013, p. 400). Moreover, the adolescents who were interviewed expressed having a sense of pride about these qualities (Wexler et al., 2013). These relationships and the positive feelings they engendered were significant forces to motivate these adolescents to set positive goals and to continue to work toward accomplishing them (Wexler et al., 2013).

One of the possible limitations of this study is that because the interviewer was known to the participants, the participants may have been reluctant to share negative information about themselves and others in the community (Wexler et al., 2013). The study focused on resilience and relationships, and so other aspects of resilience may be relevant that were not captured in these results (Wexler et al., 2013). These researchers sought to explore how persons use personal and environmental resources in order to

adapt to adversity and to create resilience (Wexler et al., 2013). These adolescents articulated their appreciation of the fact that relationships are important in their cultural communities, and so the adolescents attempted to continuously develop healthy interpersonal relationships (Wexler et al., 2013). This approach both produces resilience and allows the youth to harmonize their lives with their community's social and cultural prescriptions (Wexler et al., 2013). What is significant is that the adolescents in this study feel that they are not only contributing to the well-being of their own lives in this manner, but also to the community shared cultural life (Wexler et al., 2013). Thus, creating resilience for these participants is a community endeavor (Wexler et al., 2013). It is possible that the youth experienced greater resilience if they had more positive ways of thinking, and if they believed in goals that extended beyond the limitations of themselves as individuals to a larger network of interrelatedness and interconnectedness (Wexler et al., 2013). The evolution in progress is that from a hunter/gatherer society where to share is a matter of survival, to modern society where sharing once again can serve as a means to foster both individual and community resilience (Wexler et al., 2013).

A qualitative study of resilience in Alaskan Native American youth who were ages 11 to 18 produced results based upon two analysis methodologies: grounded theory and narrative (Wexler et al., 2013). Life history interviews were completed with an equal number of male and female participants to determine how they “overcome challenges in their lives” (Wexler et al., 2013, p. 396). Wexler et al. (2013) concluded that youth experienced resilience by devoting time and effort to build relationships. The results

suggested that relationships that were ‘nurturing’ produce resilience in the lives of these Alaskan Native youth (Wexler et al., 2013, p. 393).

The limitations of this study are that because native interviewers were utilized, the respondents may have neglected to discuss the intricacies of cultural practices; also in the thematic analysis, only the most dominant themes received attention (Wexler et al., 2013). The work of this study has been expanded through this research study because adult participants were recruited from areas in northeastern and southwestern United States. The theme of “overcoming challenges” employed in the study is somewhat analogous to the turning point experiences that were identified in this dissertation (Wexler et al., 2013, p. 396).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Native American communities can benefit from resilience research that identifies innate strengths and resources in persons who experience positive psychological outcomes and demonstrate resilience. This can result in a shift in funding priorities, which can precipitate the allocation of additional resources to programs, and initiatives that promote resilience.

The major themes in the literature were resilience and relationships, resilience and resources, and resilience and historical trauma. Regarding the general theory of resilience, the major themes in the literature concerned how to best define resilience, how to measure resilience, and whether resilience is a product of nature or nurture (i.e., the environment, traits, or genetics; Rutter, 2012; Pangallo et al., 2015).

What is known about resilience in the Native American community is that community and culture are integral aspects of building resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Family and spiritual practices are also essential to cultivating a resilient nature (Goodkind et al., 2012).

What is unknown about resilience in the Native American community is how it is experienced by Native Americans. Through the use of an open-ended interviewing methodology, this study attempted to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the aspects of resilience that are manifested in the lives of Native Americans, and what the barriers to achieving resilience may be. A core question has been: Is the acquisition of resilience a life-long quest, or does the experience of developing resilience manifest in a sudden transformative occurrence as Rutter (2006) has suggested?

This study focused on how resilience develops in the lives of Native American adult individuals who live in the United States away from the reservations. Currently, most of the previous studies have focused on Native American individuals who reside on the reservation. The results of autobiographical interviews were analyzed to identify themes and compared to those found by Goodkind et al. (2012), among others.

The following chapter will review the steps that were taken to gather the data and analyze the results. The inherent limitations of the autobiographical methodology will also be discussed.



## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

In order to answer the question of how it is that Native Americans have experienced resilience in their lives it was helpful to employ a methodology that produced descriptions of how resilience is present in the lives of Native Americans. Because this area has had minimal attention by social science and/or psychological researchers, a qualitative methodology was warranted for the purpose of fostering a greater understanding of this phenomenon. Next, this researcher identified when the quality of resilience first appeared in the research participant's life, and made a determination regarding which precipitating factors the participants were attributing to its occurrence.

This researcher approached this problem from both an interpretive and social constructionist worldview (Creswell, 2007). This researcher constructed a subjective examination of another's subjective interpretation of their own experiences.

This researcher acknowledges the influence of Michael Quinn Patton (2001) on her choice of procedural emphasis. Patton (2001) has explained in great detail the complexities of qualitative research. As a researcher/observer of human behavior, Patton (2001) recommended that researchers employ reflective methodologies to assure that they are able to bracket their own experiences and understand them as being distinct from those of the individuals they are observing and attempting to gain an understanding of.

To ensure that the procedural methodologies were sufficiently rigorous, this researcher determined that the most effective method for gathering data was the "life

story interview,” a method that was popularized by Robert Atkinson (1998). For specific examples of this approach, Atkinson recommended an exploration of the works by the famous developmental psychologist Erik H. Erikson (1975), who compiled life histories and analyses of prominent persons such as Freud, Gandhi, and Martin Luther. A similar psycho- biographical approach was utilized by William McKinley Runyan (1984), who studied Jesus, Shakespeare, Lincoln, Van Gogh, King George III, Woodrow Wilson, Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, Benjamin Franklin, B. F. Skinner, Malcolm X, and Wilhelm Reich, among others.

Runyan (1984) recommended the work of J. P. De Waele and R. Harre (1979) for understanding how the autobiographical narrative can be used in the study of a person’s psychology. In particular, De Waele and Harre (1979) suggested the use of autobiography in combination with a focused interview and the addition of some reflexive questions (See Appendix). This detailed approach is expected to produce an authentic account of the history of the person’s life and resolve any questions that arise from the autobiographical narrative itself.

Runyan (1984) also recommended the work of Norman K. Denzin, who has produced more recent works on the topic of interpretive biography. Denzin (1989) suggested the likelihood that persons would speak of epiphanies in their lives as having significant meaning for them. Indeed, in a recent autobiography published by the Canadian singer Anne Murray (2009), she described the epiphany experienced during her initial public performance as constituting a pivotal moment in her life. Consequently this hybrid autobiography/focused interview methodology may serve to produce examples of

epiphany experiences in the research participants' lives that have been instrumental in developing resilience for them.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study was intended to obtain data concerning resilience factors of Native American adults who reside away from the reservations of their tribal enrollment. This phenomenological study explored the pivotal, turning point, or epiphany moments in the lives of Native Americans that may define their lives. This will be accomplished using autobiographical interviews that will be both written and spoken verbally.

### **Major Sections of the Chapter**

The following chapter will present the research design, why it was selected, and what the role of the researcher was. Methodology, ethics, and the trustworthiness of the data will be discussed, followed by a summary.

## **Research Design and Rationale**

### **Research Questions**

The study is designed to answer the following two questions:

RQ1: What are the pivotal or turning point life experiences that have promoted resilience in Native Americans?

RQ2: Which characteristics (such as gender, age, socio-economic status [SES], spirituality, disability, and sexual orientation) influence the pivotal or turning point experiences that Native Americans report relative to resilience?

### **Central Phenomena of the Study**

The central phenomena that was studied was the experience of resilience in the lives of Native Americans as revealed by their life histories. For the purpose of this study, resilience is defined as the beneficent end product of turning point experiences in the life of an individual (Rutter, 2006).

### **Research Tradition and Rationale for the Chosen Tradition**

Phenomenological research is an attempt to describe the direct experience of human beings, and is based on the philosophy of Husserl (Creswell, 2007). Giorgi (2009) stated that phenomenological study in psychology could involve examining conscious memories for interpretation. It is for this reason that the life history approach was chosen, as one that will provide data with which to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon of resilience among Native Americans (Atkinson, 1998).

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of researcher in this dissertation project was to review autobiographical materials, interview the participants, and observe by listening carefully to responses during the interview (Creswell, 2007). The researcher also served as the coder of

interview data to determine essential themes related to explore the pivotal, turning point, or epiphany moments in the lives of Native Americans that may define resilience in their lives. None of the participants were persons over whom the researcher has any direct personal or professional relationships.

### **Research Bias and Other Ethical Issues**

The issue of bias was managed by using member checking which involves having the participants review both the data and the interpretation of the data to ascertain the validity of the researcher's interpretations. Member checking was also utilized for the purpose of validation (Creswell, 2007). Husserl (1962) reflected on the need for bracketing, or putting aside previous experience in order to eliminate bias. Although previous life experience is valuable, this researcher bracketed by not connecting with previous experience, in order to eliminate any preconceived judgments regarding the data (Husserl, 1962). This process of separating perception from interpretation is also known as "epoche" (Giorgi, 2011, p. 91).

The interviews were completed in a friendly, business-like manner in order to minimize power differentials. There were no opportunities for conflict of interest, since the participants did not maintain any direct relationship with the researcher. A nominal incentive was offered of a gift card in the amount of \$20 dollars, which is the same amount that has been used in at least three studies (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010; Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012; McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012). This study did not involve any interventions, did not recruit any vulnerable participants, and

provided informed consent. Since recruitment was not conducted on a reservation, no tribal governmental considerations were requested.

## **Methodology**

### **Population, Sample, and Recruitment**

The population for this study was Native American adults. The particular tribes that were a focus of this study were the approximately dozen or so tribes located in Arizona, some in the Midwest and some in the Northeast. Because additional participants were required the study was advertised in Oklahoma, the second most populous area for Native American residents. Since further recruitment was needed, northern regions were selected. It was reported that the Navajos of Arizona, have 86,000 members on the reservation and 10,000 contiguous to the reservation (U. S. Department of the Interior, 2014). It is from this pool of 10,000 individuals that selection of participants occurred, initially.

The sampling strategy that was used was random sampling (Creswell, 2007). Since the participation of Native American adults was desired, persons who responded to the print local newspaper advertisement were screened via a telephone intake to determine age and ethnicity, along with other pertinent demographic variables, such as gender. A nominal incentive for participants was detailed in the advertisement. Ten participants were deemed adequate for a qualitative research project for the purpose of producing sufficient descriptive data (Creswell, 2007). The project was advertised in the newspaper in the particular region that the target population resides, persons who

responded were telephoned for an initial intake, and an explanation of the informed consent procedure was provided if they were deemed appropriate for selection for the study. The internet was not effective for recruitment because of the insufficient response that was likely due to the limited access to internet in rural areas. After they provided verbal consent to participate, they were asked, as Denzin (1989) has suggested, “to ‘simply...write their autobiographies: no specific requirements or directives’” were given (p. 60), other than to provide as complete an account as attainable (Allport & Bruner, 1941). The goal was to identify epiphanies, or “...interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives (Denzin, 1989a, chapters 1 and 7)” (Denzin, 1989). Denzin (1989) indicated that these “turning-point moments” are expected to “leave permanent marks” (p. 22).

### **Instrumentation and Validity**

The prospective participants were mailed notebooks and consent forms for signature, together with stamped, addressed return envelopes. After the notebooks and consent forms were returned the notebook data was transcribed onto the computer without personal identifying information and the notebooks and consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet. In addition to the notebooks for the autobiographies, data was collected by administering an exit telephone interview that was recorded. The exit interview consisted of a few open-ended questions, produced by the researcher.

This life history approach and the use of open-ended questions have been advocated at various times by psychologist researchers such as Atkinson (1998), Runyan

(1984), and Erikson (1975). Content validity of the use of autobiographies as a phenomenological method has been determined to adhere to the principles of Husserl (Giorgi, 2009).

### **Follow-up and Debriefing Procedures**

The exit interview included a reflexive query in order to introduce rigor to this idiographic study, which focused on the individual (DeWaele & Harre, 1979; Runyan, 1982). An example of a reflexive question that was asked is: “What were some of your thoughts and feelings as you completed your autobiography?” Another question was: “What did you think about the experience of participating in this study?” This ensured rigor by assuring that the researcher followed a standard procedure with each participant.

### **Procedures for Data Collection**

Notebooks were returned by mail to the researcher for transcription and interpretation, through the use of a qualitative software application. The data was reviewed for potential information to answer the two research questions. The software application Ethnograph version 5 was used to code and identify recurring and salient themes. There were two data collection events: the initial telephone description of the project and provision of informed consent instructions, and the follow-up telephone exit interview. The follow-up exit interview included a debriefing question, and an opportunity for member checking. The two telephone calls were expected to last one to two hours each. Autobiographical data was recorded on the computer, and the telephone



exit interview was recorded. A transcript was produced of the telephone interview without personal identifying information, and the voice recordings will be maintained for five years prior to destruction in a locked cabinet. Since initially too few participants were recruited, additional geographic regions were added for recruitment efforts. Data was gathered until no further information was needed to provide information regarding the phenomenon of resilience, and saturation had been achieved (Creswell, 2007).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability**

Husserl (1962) posited that a phenomenological study seeks knowledge of “the true meaning of an objective being that is subjectively knowable” (p. 13). In order to establish internal validity the researcher completed the following tasks: Member checks, and saturation. Participants provided feedback on the transcript interpretation as a member check. The transcripts were described in great detail to permit saturation of themes that emerged. In order to ensure external validity the researcher utilized thick description. Through the process of member checking, the confirmability of the study was heightened. Participants provided their subjective descriptions and explanations of past events based on their recollections. Omissions in the accounts were followed up individually with each participant for the purpose of verification (Erikson, 1975). For example, if a certain developmental period of the person’s life was omitted from their account, then the researcher asked the participant if there were relevant experiences from this time period that the participant would like to include in his or her account. This process was completed by using follow-up telephone interviews.

Credibility and confirmability can be established by triangulation, or looking at historical data to verify events described. Due to concerns regarding confidentiality, no checking of data was conducted with immediate family members. Transferability is reduced in part because of the limitation of the study to a few geographic areas and tribes. Dependability was provided for by replicating procedural steps with accuracy and consistency to the greatest extent possible.

### **IRB Approvals, Ethical Procedures, and Protections for Confidential Data**

For the proposed study, participants were provided informed consent, and the researcher did not have any known conflicts of interest. IRB approval was obtained for this project. The data was kept confidential and numerical identifiers were used. The researcher followed the same procedures during the mailing of the autobiographies as are employed by hospitals when mailing health records. The autobiographies were given a code for each participant, and personal identifying information was not associated with them. The data was stored in a locked cabinet at all times, computer materials were password protected, and data will continue to be stored for a period of five years and then destroyed. A unique consideration to tribal members is the identifying nature of tribal affiliations, and these have been maintained confidential because at no time was any respondent linked to his or her tribe in the reported results with the exception of the published autobiographical account. A person can often be identified by the descriptions in a research study by other tribal members, even if names are withheld. This can result in

ostracism or even retaliation if reported comments may be perceived as critical of other individuals (American Psychological Association, 2010).

### **Summary**

This study explored the resilience of Native American adults using phenomenological methodologies. The researcher advertised in an area with a high population of Native Americans, and screened respondents. Participants were notified, informed consent was discussed, and autobiography notebooks and consent forms were mailed together with a self-addressed, stamped mailer for the return of the signed, written consent and the autobiography notebook. The written consent was modeled after the IRB recommended format. Autobiographies were acquired from participants and then a follow-up audio-taped telephone interview was conducted to clarify any obscure details contained in the autobiography, to accomplish an exit interview, to thank the participant and to announce the disbursement of the incentive item. The interview employed the use of open-ended questions to obtain information. The autobiographical and interview information was entered into the computer using qualitative software. Member checking was used to check the data transcripts to ensure validity.

The following chapter will present the results of the study, including data collection and analyses. Evidence of trustworthiness of the data will be presented and the results will be reported.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

This study provides a description of the factors that are associated with resilience of persons of Native American heritage who reside away from the reservation. The researcher evaluated the turning point experiences of the study participants to determine if these experiences in any way contributed to their resilient status. This dissertation project addressed the following two research questions:

RQ1: What are the turning point life experiences that have promoted resilience in Native Americans?

RQ2: Which characteristics (such as gender, age, socio-economic status, spirituality, disability, and sexual orientation) influence the pivotal or turning point experiences that Native Americans report relative to resilience?

This chapter will present information on the setting of the study, participant demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results.

The researcher initiated the study in the southwestern area of the United States, later expanding to other regions of the United States in order to acquire additional participants. When participants responded to the newspaper advertisement, the researcher completed a brief intake, explained the informed consent procedure, and mailed a packet to the participant which included a stamped, self-addressed envelope, a consent form and a notebook in which participants were invited to write an autobiography of their lives. When the participant returned his or her autobiography, the researcher produced a

transcript of the notebook, scheduled an interview with the participant, and then upon completion of the interview mailed a twenty dollar gift card to the participant along with the transcript of their autobiography and a card that thanked them for participating.

### **Demographics**

The four participants were of Native American descent, and were from four separate tribes. Half of the participants were male and half were female. The participants' ages ranged from mid-fifties to early seventies. Half of the participants described themselves as spiritual, with one identifying as Christian, and one identifying as adhering to traditional Native American spiritual practice. Three quarters of the participants expressed personal health concerns, but none identified themselves as disabled. All of the participants were married to persons of the opposite sex. Half of the participants communicated concerns regarding finances, and the other half worked full time.

### **Data Collection**

All of the participants completed autobiographies of their lives. Two of the participants declined participation in the interview. The researcher placed an advertisement in the newspaper that would reach the greatest number of persons of Native American descent that were living away from the reservation. The researcher mailed the autobiographical materials to all persons that called and expressed an interest in participating in the study. When the participants completed their autobiographies and returned them to the researcher, then the researcher scheduled the interview if the

respondent wished to participate. The researcher recorded the telephone interview on an audio recorder.

Most of the initial respondents to the study dropped out of the study and never returned their autobiography or their consent form. As per the plan for data collection presented earlier, the researcher began to implement snowball sampling in order to acquire additional participants. The researcher initiated outreach to numerous tribes. Three additional participants agreed to participate in the study from three separate tribes, including one participant that offered published archival data.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher transcribed the data from the handwritten autobiographies onto the computer and printed out a hard copy that she mailed to the participants. Then the researcher coded the autobiographical information and analyzed the data utilizing the process recommended by Saldana (2009), and using Ethnograph version V.

From the transcripts, the researcher analyzed and coded the predominant themes emerging in each individual's life. Then, the researcher compared and contrasted similarities and differences among the participants. Finally, the researcher took the information obtained from the comparison data and compared this data to the findings of earlier researchers on this topic.

The one discrepant case was that which relied on archival data from a published autobiography. This autobiography was much longer than the others were. The researcher

condensed the autobiography by editing it to only include the instances of direct reference to the author's lived experience. (Sockabasin, 2007).

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2007) offered the perspective of Lincoln and Guba (1985) to convey the concept of qualitative validation (p. 202). In particular, these writers suggested that aspects such as "credibility," "transferability," "dependability," and "confirmability" were among the attributes that would best lead to establishing the internal and external validity of a given research study (Creswell, 2007, p. 202). One way of cross checking the autobiographies for confirmation was to engage the client in a follow-up interview, a strategy that was not always practicable due to the individual preferences of the participants. Therefore, in order to accommodate the participants, the researcher invited all of the participants to member check the autobiography that the researcher returned to them in a word processed copy to ensure that the researcher had understood the written expressions contained in the autobiography. This process has added to the credibility of the results. When the researcher required clarification of the writing of the participant, the researcher consulted the participant by telephone. The researcher used "thick description" for reporting results (Geertz, 1973; Ponterotto, 2006). This researcher applied a positivistic approach in order to ensure transferability and dependability by using consistent processes in the collection of data, with the appreciation that each of the participants is an individual (Creswell, 2007).

### **Analysis of Findings**

Rutter (2012) has explored the concept of the turning point experience as it impacts resilience in the lives of people. He has identified both marriage and participation in armed services as examples of turning point experiences that can produce resilience in a population (Rutter, 2012). This researcher has applied this concept to interpret the results of this study. Numerous similarities of life experience were identified when examining the data. When they were recounting their life histories the participants prioritized their recollections similarly. This researcher has reported the results by maintaining the order of their priorities to the greatest extent possible. Family ties and cultural identity emerged as salient themes in their descriptions of their lives. Most of these participants also coped with discrimination, and school and work challenges, that they were able to surmount.

Seventy-five percent of the respondents shared commonalities: 1) mentioned discrimination as being a factor in the development of their identity; 2) grew up on or near a reservation; 3) have raised children; 4) reported difficulties with their school experience; 5) experienced the death of family members such as parents or siblings; 6) were members of a large family; 7) expressed great pride in their identity as a Native American; and 8) relocated in order to enhance job prospects.

Without exception, the turning point experience that promoted resilience in the Native American participants of this study was the quality of their childhood in large, extended and highly mutually supportive families. Despite gender or socio-economic



status or spirituality, family interrelationships appeared to be pivotal aspects of the participants' lives that helped each of them to achieve success individually, to overcome adversity, and to recover from hardships and loss.

The researcher will refer to the participants as participants five through eight in lieu of using given names. Participant 5 indicated that her husband had been supportive during the time she was grieving her father's premature death. Participant 6 described her older brother helping her to relocate after she was unsuccessful in completing high school in her hometown community and helping her to re-establish herself in a new community. Participant 7 expressed his belief that his marriage to his wife was an important moment in his life because she was able to relocate with him and support him in his career efforts. Participant 8 described the communal tribal process that resulted in his learning life skills from his brothers as providing him with a solid foundation that permitted future growth.

Gender, age, socio-economic status, spirituality, disability, and sexual orientation did not appear to influence the resilience states of the respondents. Both males and females shared the same perspectives on life events. The respondents who earned higher incomes and the respondents who earned lower incomes both commented on the significance of family members and spouses in terms of influencing their life trajectory in a positive way. None of the respondents indicated that they were disabled or non-heterosexual. Although all of the respondents mentioned having experiences related to spirituality, only one of the respondents attributed the influence of spirituality directly to her experience of resilience in spite of living through difficult times.

### **Application of Rutter's (2006) Theory of Resilience**

Each of the participants described numerous incidents in their lives that they were able to remember. These included high school graduations, first jobs, deaths of close family members, marriages, religious encounters, and discussions with parents or grandparents. Which then, were the most pivotal? Or, to conceptualize it in the alternative, which pivotal moments did the participants believe were instrumental in changing or altering their life course? To answer this question it is necessary to examine which experiences are re-enacted during their lives in an effort to cope or to overcome challenges that are presented to them.

The work of Dr. Michael L. Rutter provided a reference point in the determination of which pivotal moments could be identified as having long term impacts in the participants' lives, and also contributing in some manner to their current experience of resilience. Dr. Rutter is an expert in child development and is an eminent child psychiatrist. He has researched children and families extensively, including the children of parents coping with mental disorders. In particular, he has conducted "long term longitudinal studies," and has studied "turning points in life trajectory," and other topics that relate to risk and resilience among persons of various cultures. (*Award for distinguished scientific contributions: Michael L. Rutter, 1996, p. 307*).

Rutter (2006) has indicated that persons can experience resilience as the result of many "risk and protective factors" (p. 3). Although genetics may contribute in part to the experience of a resilient outcome, Rutter (2006) posited that environment plays a greater role in the determination of a stimulus for a resilient response.

Persons take action during their lives in a manner that serves to protect themselves; either by avoiding risks, increasing preparation, exercising care in personal choices, or ameliorating harm (Rutter, 2006, pp. 7, 8). This does not imply that such persons will never experience adverse outcomes in spite of taking protective action against potential risks. Rutter (2006) recommended that future researchers focus on “a life-span trajectory approach” to examine and compare earlier with “later turning point effects” (p. 10). This perspective is consistent with the purpose of this study.

### **“In Vivo” Quotations of Participants Evaluated**

In order to identify the pivotal, or turning point moments in the participants’ lives this researcher scrutinized the written autobiographies to isolate phrases such as the following made by participant 7:

“The best decision I ever made in my life was to marry her.”

Participant 6 has had a very active and rewarding life. Early on she had a near death experience. Other than that her childhood was uneventful. She stated:

“My [maternal] grandmother influenced me.”

After struggling to obtain a high school education she wrote:

“My brother took me away from here.”

An examination of her life patterns revealed that she has consistently worked through adversity and created new beginnings whenever necessary to overcome hardships. It is clear that although these two statements are essentially nondescript: “My grandmother influenced me;” and “My brother took me away from here;” they signify the

use of adaptive strategies that this participant would employ at later critical junctures during her life.

Participant 5 has experienced innumerable instances of adversity during her lifetime. She described the pivotal impact that meeting her husband had on her because she had a mild physical deformity:

“One time he told me he accepted the way I was, he didn’t care about it he only loved me. To this day he still does.”

Participant 5 disclosed that she has additional sources of resilience:

“God is my support and strength through the Bible. My Dad taught me and talked to me. He was a spiritual medicine man.”

Participant 8 divulged:

“I learned a lot from my father, from my older brothers, and from my other relatives.” (Sockabasin, 2007, p. 32).

It was apparent from his depictions that this participant enjoyed an active childhood. When his mother died he was still a pre-teen. Due to the financial disruption in his household caused by his mother’s death he had to work to contribute to the support of the family. Music had been an integral component of his life experience:

“In my family, our mother was a wonderful singer and drummer, although most times she did not use the actual instrument. She would tap on anything within reach, and this was how she encouraged me and my siblings to dance....My father was also a great singer and sang with the other men at our village church.” (Sockabasin, 2007, p. 76).

During his adolescence Participant 8 worked and played in bands, a practice he would continue into adulthood. He stated that he experienced a pivotal time in his life when his mother died; interrupting his relatively carefree childhood and requiring him to assume adult responsibilities of working in order to eat during his pre-teen years:

“After my mom died in the mid-1950’s, I learned two of the most valuable lessons that would carry me into my teens and eventually into adulthood. One was to work and the other was to learn to speak English well.” (Sockabasin, 2007, p. 134).

Participant 8 continued to work and to perform songs in his tribal language that he learned from his mother, throughout his lifespan.

The pivotal events in the lives of the participants took the form of: 1) assistance provided by a sibling; 2) experiences with family members during childhood and adolescence that fostered a sense of self-reliance; and 3) a marriage to a significant other at a critical juncture in early adulthood.

Denzin (2001) defined reflexive interviewing as a stratagem that is a form of drama, involving a dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. Qualitative research presents many challenges, not the least of which is interpretation. Denzin (2001) reflected that “...certain experiences, epiphanies, are more authentic than others, they leave deep marks and scars on the person....” (p. 28). In the process of evaluating turning point experiences from the entirety of a human life span, it is revealing that experiences can have a tremendous impact on a person that on the surface would appear banal or mundane. It is the meaning that the individual attributes to the experience that has relevance and the potential to guide efforts at interpretation.

### **Summary**

Turning point experiences in the participant's lives included experiences with family, spouses and friends, which resulted in their acquiring new skills or engaging in productive and adaptive behavior. Gender, age, socio-economic status, disability, and sexual orientation were not relevant. One participant out of the four, indicated that reading the bible has been of tremendous assistance in helping her to cope with losses she has encountered in her life.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

This study is intended to extend our understanding of the factors in the lives of Native Americans living away from the reservation that have resulted in a resilient life experience. Specifically, the researcher examined turning point experiences of individual participants to determine if these were in any way connected to the experience of resilience in their lives. The key findings differed in part from those anticipated. Rather than a specific experience as instrumental in producing resilience, it was the interactions with significant family and community members, and spouses that produced a lasting impact. Rutter (1999, 2006, and 2012) has suggested that a healthy marriage can be instrumental in fostering resilience.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The study confirmed in part the theory proposed by Rutter (1999, 2006, 2012) that a healthy relationship such as a marriage can constitute a resilient factor that serves to provide a buffer against adversity. The significance of early interpersonal relationships confirmed the findings of both McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter (2012) and Wexler et al. (2013), that were described in Chapter 2 of this study.

These findings also correspond to general research in the field of psychology on the significance of relationships in determining resilience. For example, Sanford, Backer-Fulghum, and Carson (2016) studied couples in marital relationships as well as those who

were living together to identify how and why such persons who are members of a couple dyad tend to realize resilience benefits even when they encounter stress. These researchers refer to this phenomenon as “dyadic coping” (Sanford, Baker-Fulghum, & Carson, 2016, p. 1243). An earlier study examined the impact of “engagement” of youth with adults and found that such relationships can be helpful for youth who are “marginalized” (Unger, 2013, p. 328). Noble and McGrath (2012) stated that constructive relationships between parent and child, with a caring adult, and with peers can increase the ability of youth to adapt to adversity. These studies appear to affirm the results of the present study that identified relationships as being critical factors in producing resilient outcomes.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One of the limitations of this study was the small group of participants, although saturation was achieved, because the data did not produce any “new information that adds to ...understanding....” (Creswell, 2007, p. 240). An additional limitation was that only four tribes are represented in the results, although they are from disparate regions of the country. Lastly, although this is a study of adults, only persons aged between 50 and 75 participated.

### **Recommendations**

Future research is needed to determine if the findings would correspond to those of adults in the age range between 18 years and 49 years. In addition, the majority of



these respondents experienced their childhoods on or next to their respective reservations. It would enhance the understanding of practitioners to compare these results to those obtained from examining the experiences of Native American individuals who were born and raised away from the reservation.

### **Implications**

Positive social change would involve designing ways to incorporate the positive aspects of tribal community life into the lives of average Native American children irrespective of residence; such as opportunities to observe elders living in the traditional manner, as well as opportunities to receive ‘teachings’ from elders, and acquire life skills training. It also would be constructive for persons who identify as Native American to have opportunities to participate in the life of the tribal community in a meaningful way at an early age. Positive social change may be achieved through program design and by fostering opportunities for individual Native American persons to sustain involvement in their tribal communities, for the purpose of strengthening familial and community relationships. These strategies could be integrated into the planning initiatives presently promulgated by tribal governments.

### **Conclusion**

Four individuals who identified as Native American participated in this study by providing an autobiography of their lives that the researcher supplemented with a follow-up interview and/or member checking. The results confirmed in part the theory of

resilience proposed by Rutter (1999, 2006, and 2012) which detailed the significance of pivotal life experiences as producing resilience, and supported the earlier work of McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter (2012) and Wexler et al. (2013). The understanding of the significant factors affecting resilience in Native American persons residing away from their tribal reservations could have implications for future tribal human service program design and the interventions chosen by non-tribal mental health practitioners who serve Native American persons.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Please describe yourself.
2. Please describe your family.
3. Please tell me about the area in which you grew up.
4. Please tell me what it was like when you went to school.
5. Please describe any memorable experiences in groups or military service.
6. Please tell me about how you occupy your time when you are not working or going to school.
7. Describe any meaningful work experiences you have had.
8. Describe major life events you have experienced.
9. Please describe times in your life when you have been overcome by emotion.
10. Please describe major crises in your life.
11. Describe accomplishments about which you are especially proud.
12. Who or what has influenced you the most in your life?
13. What occasions have had the most meaning for you in your life?
14. Which events in your life would you say have most shaped who you are as a person?
15. What do you think life will be like for you in the future?
16. What would you say is the single most important attribute that you possess?  
PROBES: Can you tell me more about that?