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## Creation of the Myth The Lived Experience of Native Americans in Schools

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Creation of the Myth  
The Lived Experience of Native Americans in Schools

By

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MSW Student of St. Catherine – St. Thomas

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University – University of St. Thomas school of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publically present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

**Abstract**

Native Americans are one of the lowest performing racial groups in the United States public education system. Native Americans have among the lowest graduation rates, low post-secondary attendance, and are overly represented in special education. A review of the literature provides insights on the dynamics of academic oppression. This research attempts to add to a great deal of quantitative research on different forces of oppression by providing the daily lived experience of Native American youth attending public schools in the United States, which has not been fully researched. The purpose of this study was to answer the question: what is the lived experience of Native Americans who went through the United States mainstream public education system? Five participants were interviewed and analyzed through an analytic induction process. Themes of connection to culture, meaning of being Native American, silencing of culture, exclusion, stereotypes, racial aggressions, family, resilience, transformative experiences, views on Indian Education, and suggestions for social workers were explored. Implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

### **Acknowledgements**

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The concept for this research project came primarily from a single, profound moment. I was working as a teacher's assistant in a school when the class went on a school field trip to an observatory. While at the observatory, the staff played a video on our solar system. The video opened up with an explanation of a Native American tribe's belief system about the solar system, which involved a coyote character, before delving into the 'truth' of the solar system. For the rest of the movie, they used an animated character of the coyote from the previous story, who consistently guessed questions wrong.

While the video was clearly going for a fun way to tell the story to kids, the video conveyed an extremely mocking tone to me. A quick google search reviews two definitions for myth: "a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events" and "a widely held but false belief or idea." The video put Native American's world view into the second definition of myths by placing them next to a scientific understanding of the solar system and directly stating that the world view presented in the video is false. This also seems to suggest Native American culture has no place in education. After all, they are just backwards people of the past. I could not help but feel that if a student from the tribe the video specifically addressed, or indeed any Native American student, saw this video they would be profoundly impacted in a negative way.

Unfortunately, stories like this are common. At the same time, however, there is not a great deal of research on the lived experience of Native American students that have gone through this kind of experience. There is a robust amount of quantitative evidence on Native Americans in schools that can provide background for this research, however. Research indicates that Native Americans are one of the worst performing racial groups in

schools. Nationally, around 64% of Native Americans graduate from high school, and only 9% go on to gain a Bachelor's (Quijada Cerecer, 2013; Flynn, Olson, & Yellig, 2014). While this does not reflect the variation that occurs between schools, it still paints a dark picture of overall outcomes for Native American students. Outside of schools, Native Americans have high rates of mental health problems, criminal victimization, poverty, and problems with having enough food (Quijada Cerecer, 2013; Flynn, Olson, & Yellig, 2014). Cornel Peweardey once said "for me, it's not an American dream, it's an indigenous nightmare" (as cited in Clark & Reed, 2010, p.43).

This underperformance appears to be from several sources. One of the most important considerations is the history of Native Americans in the United States and with schools in particular (Wallace, 2014). As Wallace (2014) stated, "Americans live in a country where race was once legally institutionalized. In fact, it was only 50 years ago that the United States' legal system officially ceased to operate as a mechanism that explicitly condoned racism" (p.91).

This history of racism was heavily targeted at Native Americans. Our nation engaged in a slow cultural genocide to wipe out the indigenous population, and schools were intricately involved in the process (Wallace, 2014). Boarding schools are an excellent example of this. Native American students were taken from their homes and placed in boarding schools for the sole purpose of erasing Native American culture. Students at these schools were beat for speaking their language, let alone practicing their spiritual beliefs. They were forced into whiteness.

This historical racism, particularly how recent the racism is, has an important implication for the U.S. education system: School curriculum, which is founded on historical roots, is steeped in racism to this day (Brown & Au, 2014). Schools still teach the concept of manifest

destiny (Wallace, 2014). Manifest destiny refers to a colonist belief during the expansion to the west, which justified land as rightfully belonging to the colonists (Wallace, 2014). Although manifest destiny is not necessarily portrayed as right, it does continue to justify the United States' genocide. After all, even if they were wrong, they thought they were following God's orders. This portrays settlers as righteous crusaders rather than murderers and thieves. Students are not taught to recognize the greed, violence, and oppression behind the founding of America.

In addition, academics are simply immersed in white ideology. The history, theories, concepts, and values present in the U.S. education system are steeped in dominant culture (Quijada Cerecer, 2013). This is further enforced by standardized testing, which prevents teachers from expanding their curriculum to be culturally sensitive under threat of funding cuts.

This continued academic oppression will be explored further in the literature review. There is another consequence of this historical racism, however. Native American families have been taught through pain, death and suffering that the U.S. school system is not to be trusted, and that the school system will teach their kids to be white and leave Native American culture. Although the true effect of this is not known and should be studied further, one can imagine it has complicated the relationship with schools immensely.

Racism in schools is further complicated by the lack of a clear consensus about what constitutes race and what constitutes discrimination against these races. Wallace (2014) defined racism as "culturally sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities" (p.93). I find this to be the best current definition of racism, and intend to use this definition for this study.

In addition, I find it useful to define whiteness, in order to paint a clear picture of what I mean by curriculum steeped in whiteness. Whiteness was defined for me by Dr. Rev Hillstrom



(personal communication, 2017) as a ‘normative set of values and beliefs which determine access and opportunity with the primary factor being race.’ Thus, whiteness in education is not simply the overrepresentation of white teachers and white sources of knowledge, but a systemic way of creating racially predictable outcomes.

The issue of defining race is still particularly salient with Native Americans. As one of my committee members, Priscilla Buffalohead (personal communication, November 21, 2017), pointed out to me, many Native Americans view themselves as belonging a nation rather than a race. Native Americans belong to a sovereign nation, and some identify being a Native American as being federally enrolled in a tribe. In addition, many Native Americans have different goals than people of color, as many issues are connected to Native American rights as a sovereign nation. Native American struggles can thus be understood through ethnocentrism, or discrimination against their culture and nation.

This issue of federal enrollment and sovereignty is further complicated by blood quantum. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 first introduced the concept of blood quantum on a national scale, although authority to determine membership lies with individual tribes (Native-American-Online, n.d.; Hair, 2016). Blood quantum refers to the degree one needs to be from Native American descent to be enrolled for membership in a tribe (Hair, 2016). For example, some tribes require a person to be 1/8<sup>th</sup> Native American to enroll in their tribe.

To be counted as a Native American in this country, the Indian Reorganization Act required indigenous people to be registered with a federally recognized tribe (Hair, 2016). This requirement was in response to new services provided to Native Americans, which in turn encouraged the government to create clear guidelines around who was Native American (Hair, 2016). This authority to determine who was enrolled in tribes was eventually passed to the tribes

themselves (Hair, 2016). Many tribes today still have this blood quantum requirement, although not all of them do (Hair, 2016). As sovereign nations, this blood quantum represents requirements to become citizens of tribal governments.

The blood quantum amount to enroll in ranged from fully half Native American to a sixteenth depending on the tribe, but there's an additional catch for some tribes: the blood has to be fully from one tribe to count (Hair, 2016). Thus, a Native American man who was half of one tribe and half of another could be considered a half blood, despite having full Native American blood (Hair, 2016). Although some tribes, such as the Cherokee, do not have a blood quantum requirement, this still shows an example of a restriction on who is allowed to be Native American as a method of lowering population counts (Cherokee Heritage Documentation Center, n.d.). In addition, this illustrates the concept of Native Americans as a nation and the unique struggles that have evolved as a result.

Native Americans made up only 1.7% of the United States' population in 2010, with roughly 0.8% of them identifying as having more than one race (United States Census Bureau). This makes their population and struggles relatively easy to overlook. This is exacerbated by the fact that Native Americans are often studied as one entity (Faircloth, Alcantar, & Stage, 2014). There are over 500 federally recognized tribes. There are over 220 tribes not federally recognized by the government, many of which have signed treaties with the United States Government (Manataka American Indian Council, year). Around 150 tribes are currently petitioning for recognition (Manataka American Indian Council, year). While many of their struggles are similar, they all have their own beliefs and values, and many tribes have adapted to their struggles in profoundly different ways (Faircloth, Alcantar, & Stage, 2014).

As Wallace (2014) stated, “all forms of racism, which are specific to each race, merit their own emotional and historical analysis” (p.97). Dr. Sue (2006) adds “the experience of American Indians in America is not comparable to that of any other ethnic group” (p. 269). America formed out of the genocide of indigenous people, and this violence must be acknowledged and addressed to heal the resulting practices of oppression.

This study focused on schools for several reasons. The first is schools have been one of the major tools in the cultural genocide surrounding Native Americans. The second is school attendance is federally mandated, meaning schools are often one of the first and most present times Native American children face assimilation and oppression. This is multiplied by the fact that schools are working with children still in the process of forming their personal and cultural identity, making the effect upon their development all the more profound.

A review of the literature provides insights on the dynamics of academic oppression. However, while research has overwhelmingly examined the institutional effect of academic oppression, such as graduation rates, what is not fully understood is the daily lived experience of Native American youth attending public schools in the United States.

This study will attempt to answer the question: what is the lived experience of Native Americans who went through the United States mainstream public education system? The focus will be specifically on the ways Native American culture and spiritual beliefs are portrayed in the education system, and how Native Americans have personally responded to these portrayals. The research on the ways Native Americans responded to these portrayals will extend to effects on their identity and connection to school. I am interested in knowing if identity as a Native American came into question because of these portrayals, or alternatively if students ceased to

value and engage in school because of these portrayals. In addition, I am interested in the forces which may have mitigated these hypothesized reactions.

### **Literature Review**

Nationally, Native Americans are one of the lowest performing racial groups in the United States education system, and have the lowest graduation rates in both high school and postsecondary degrees out of any group (Quijada Cerecer, 2013; Flynn, Olson, & Yellig, 2014). The research shows a history of exclusion, oppression, stereotyping, and other negative influences preventing academic success of America's indigenous people. Microaggressions, stereotypes, and misportrayal of Native Americans in curriculum and schools has a negative effect on students' identity and socio-emotional well-being (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015).

However, while we know these things affect their identity, the literature is unclear on exactly how their identity is changed. Additionally, there appears to be little acknowledgement of the daily lived experience of Native Americans. Thus, this literature review will explore some of the ways Native American's have been institutionally oppressed and the factors contributing to their performance in schools. The paper will then focus on answering the question: What is the lived experience of Native Americans who went through the United States mainstream public education system? The focus will be specifically on the ways Native American culture and spiritual beliefs are portrayed in the education system, and how Native Americans have personally responded to these (mis)portrayals. In this way, I aim to develop a clearer picture of how Native Americans interact with the forces found in previous research, as well as start developing a picture of how this shaped their identity.

**Exclusion**

The theories, narratives, values, culture, history, and knowledge of Native American students are often purposefully left out of school curriculum (Brown & Au, 2014). This is referred to as a “contribution approach”, which positions white American values and knowledge at the forefront while simultaneously portraying students of color as having no real contribution or place in academia (Quijada Cerecer, 2013). Various curriculum experts have recognized this overvalue and representation of white values and knowledge, and yet chose to do nothing (Brown & Au, 2014). This gap further distances a population which already has a long history of oppression with the United States government, and whose relationship with schools has been scarred through boarding school experiences.

The Kennedy Report (Clark & Reed, 2010) found one of the primary failures preventing nation-wide improvement in relationships between states and Native Americans “has been the exclusion - or only token involvement - of Indians in determining policy or planning of programs” (p. 39). Thus, despite recent policy aimed at increasing Native American success in an American society, Native Americans’ unique needs are often unmet.

In schools, this exclusion may be present in the curriculum, in teachers, and in assessment. This exclusion may contribute to racially predictable outcomes. Gritzmacher and Gritzmacher (2010) noted the overrepresentation of Native Americans in special education and suggested there is a failure to differentiate cultural disconnectedness from general learning problems. They conducted a study aiming to determine satisfaction of Native American parents and best practices for referral, assessment, and placement of Native American students in rural school districts. They found fully one third of the districts surveyed had no Native American staff involved in the pre-referral strategies for Native American students.

According to Gritzmacher and Gritzmacher (2010), in those school districts which had Native American staff:

34.3% indicated that Native American staff was always involved in the prereferral process; 41.4% indicated that this was usually the case; and 24.2% indicated that Native American staff was sometimes involved when developing prereferral strategies for Native American students (p. 7).

This may contribute to why “very few respondents indicated that they believed there were any formal assessment instruments that reflected cultural sensitivity” (Gritzmacher & Gritzmacher, p. 8, 2010). One of the interesting findings in this study is special education directors and teachers often expressed more satisfaction with the assessment process than Indian Education directors, which may suggest blindness to the struggles of Native American students.

This exclusion may also prevent students from learning the curriculum. Students naturally filter information through the schemas they have previously built (Oyserman et al., 2003). Thus, schools working from a different cultural perspective often fail to reach any of the schemas students have built, and thus students filter out the lessons. This illustrates how the differences in worldview can effectively prevent learning.

A White teacher’s lived experience is from a dominant white perspective, so it would be unreasonable to expect them to be perfectly culturally sensitive to Native American culture. However, the problem lies both in the false belief of sensitivity and in the lack of positive Native American teachers to turn to (Oyserman et al., 2003). This is exacerbated by microaggressions which prevent the formation of effective learning environments despite teachers’ best efforts (Quijada Cerecer, 2013). Originally coined by Chester Pierce, Dr. Sue (2010) defined microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and

environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group” (p. 5). For example, asking a Native American student what Native American people think on an issue or assuming the poverty of a Native American are both examples of microaggressions.

Microaggressions may serve to cement a label of otherness upon Native American students and instill a sense of not belonging. This in turn may help prevent students from having positive relationships with teachers in schools (Quijada Cerecer, 2013; Oyserman et al., 2003). Attachment theory has looked at positive relationships with role models as having a tremendous influence on children’s psychological well-being, including self-esteem and overall sense of self (Connors, 2011). While this is primarily true for caregivers, I would argue teachers have a similar effect due to the amount of time they spend with students.

While most of this exclusion is done in the shadows, some of it has become blatant. Some states have started to ban racialized community studies “in the name of a unified American dream” (Clark & Reed, 2010). These states view community study courses, which are in a position to reaffirm students of color as well as to challenge systems of oppression, as instilling dissent or non-patriotic sentiment among young people, in effect upsetting the status quo. These states explicitly ask students to assimilate to the ‘American norm’ (Clark & Reed, 2010). This appears to reflect the view that we should give every student the chance to be white.

This censorship of culture and narrative hit kids at a sensitive time. As Sykes (2014) stated, “identity is fluid and influenced by context” (p. 6). This means a student’s identity as a Native American is both shaped and challenged by the context of school and curriculum. Sykes

(2014) goes on to say the two greatest human desires are “to be included and have a sense of agency” (p.7). The seclusion of Native American students from curriculum can have a profound impact on identity, agency, and overall well-being.

Uhrmacher (2014) found education can have a zombie effect on many students, removing their sense of identity and recognition. Uhrmacher (2014) describes the zombie effect as one in which the individual is incapable of speech, self-advocacy, and basic defense. In many ways, this zombie effect is like the loss of human desires Sykes (2014) states are so critical: the loss of speech or agency and the loss of inclusion or identity. This stands out to me as an area of importance for school social workers. As social workers, we believe in advocating for our clients and encouraging healthy identity formation.

This loss of identity negatively impacts a child’s socio-emotional well-being as well as their academic performance (Gritzmacher & Gritzmacher, 2010; Sykes, 2014). Identification with culture has been shown to improve these areas. Similar to Sykes’ (2014) experience, students from Native American backgrounds need to know they can be Native. In addition, they must be allowed to express this identity in schools and have it affirmed by the adults around them.

Identity is also attacked by stigma. Previous research has shown students of color and American Indians who perform the worst in schools are often the most marginalized (Gritzmacher & Gritzmacher, 2010). Citing Cummins, Gritzmacher and Gritzmacher (2010) state students of color and Native Americans “appear to have developed an insecurity and ambivalence about the value of their own cultural identity as a result of their interactions with the dominant group” (p. 4). Thus, stereotypes about Native American identity are internalized, creating a negative self-image and a negative image of one’s culture.



### **Academic Oppression**

Racism and ethnocentrism are heavily present in many school curriculums. Brown and Au (2014) describe cultural memory as the “discourses, texts, and artifacts that shape how we conceptualize and imagine a historical moment or a body of knowledge” (p. 362). Cultural memory can be used to portray history in a way that marginalizes the role of social injustice as well as sustaining unwarranted privileges for the dominant group (Brown & Au, 2014, Anderson, 2012).

This is further accomplished through silence, which refers to the seclusion or absence of knowledge (Brown & Au, 2014, p. 373). Influenced by power, silence imposes a dominant narrative and either restricts or prevents other narratives (Brown & Au, 2014). Silence is quite similar to the idea of whiteness, in which white privilege and culture are normalized and therefore do not need to be addressed or questioned. While cultural memory imposes an ideology, silence hides an ideology (Brown & Au, 2014).

Scholars are aware of racism in curriculum, yet allow it to continue (Brown & Au, 2014). While a great deal of the racism and ethnocentrism present in schools is either unintentional or a result of misunderstandings, experts recognition of racism inherent in curriculum yet failure to act represents an intentional act perpetuating a racist system. Under the previous definition of racism, this is thus a racist act, despite the intent that may be present.

One of the starkest representations of the overvaluing of dominant culture in the United States public education system is the overrepresentation of white students in gifted and talented programs and the overrepresentation of Native Americans in special education (Gritzmacher & Gritzmacher, 2010). Part of this is due to outside influences such as economic standing (Gentry & Fugate, 2012). However, while all students with low economic standing face struggles, the

additional role of race cannot be ignored (Gentry & Fugate, 2012). It is clear we as a nation are not adequately serving our students of color.

Native Americans cope with a great deal of historical trauma. Even worse, schools were a great part of this. Native American youth were taken from their homes, were forced to speak English, cut their hair, dress in dominant culture clothes, and generally abandon their culture (Flynn, Olson, & Yellig, 2014). “In short, the historical solution to the “Indian problem” (Hertzbert, 1982) was education, which attempted to eliminate all that was indigenous” (Flynn, Olson, & Yellig, 2014). This continues to be true, as many schools still devalue and limit or omit study of Native American culture.

“To paraphrase Thomas Jefferson, there is nothing more unequal than treating all students equally” (Moeller, Anderson, & Grosz, 2012, p. 6). Many educators perpetuate color blind ideology, or the belief that we should treat everyone the same, by viewing “academic knowledge as the central objective of education” (Quijada Cerecer, 2013, p. 198). This belief devalues non- dominant cultural pedagogy and frames dominant pedagogy as superior (Quijada Cerecer, 2013; Campbell Wilcox, 2015). This undermines the inclusion of cultural teachers and undermines students’ ability to practice cultural practices (Campbell Wilcox, 2015).

### **Native Americans Spirituality**

As a matter of fact, until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, Native American spirituality had no real freedom (American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, 1996). Between 1870 and 1934, Native American spiritual freedom was actively suppressed in an attempt to eradicate Native American culture (NativeAmericanNetroots, year). This is evidenced by boarding schools, where students were forcibly taken from their parents. These

schools would physically abuse kids who spoke their Native language or practiced their spirituality.

The Wounded Knee Massacre occurred in retaliation to the Ghost Dance. The Ghost Dance occurred as a spiritual ritual meant to cleanse America and restore it to Native American residency in the late 1880's (Weiser, 2016). The U.S. government gunned down unarmed woman and children during this massacre. In addition, Native American religious freedom was suppressed in smaller ways before the Religious Freedom Act. The law covers access to sacred sites blocked off by conservation programs, the right to practice traditional ceremonies, and recognized an inherent right to belief and exercise their spirituality (American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, 1996). The specific focus of these protections suggests these things were infringed upon, infringements which are even acknowledged in the act.

This comes in a world where religious freedom acts allow Christians to deny jobs and services to LGBT individuals (Sanchez, 2016). DAPL comes in an age when the white protesters who took over a federal building were acquitted of charges (Scottile, 2016). One can only imagine the messages sent to Native Americans in cases where it appears Christianity is valued and protected by the court, while Native American spirituality is disvalued, unprotected, and in some cases actively attacked.

### **Loyalty and shame**

Wallace (2014) outlined two responses that have shaped the interactions White people have had with Native Americans. The first is loyalty, which is defined as “faithfulness or devotion to a person, group, country, or cause” (Wallace, 2014, p. 111). White people who practice loyalty dismiss injustices in the name of patriotism. This may be part of the reason Native American culture and the genocide that marked our nation's founding does not find a

place in our nation's history books. This can also create “a fierce loyalty to a particular version of events” (Wallace, 2014, p. 111).

In general culture, a great deal of Americans have developed loyalty to the idea of American democracy and equality (Wallace, 2014). Thus, to admit this country was founded on the back of genocide would betray our vision of our country (Wallace, 2014). After all, many Americans remain fiercely loyal to the founding fathers and argue for returning to how they perceive the founding fathers wanted the country ran, despite the fact that they owned slaves and only allowed white men to vote. Even among those who admit injustice existed in the past, many believe these foundations no longer shape our laws, policies, or privileges and our country is equal today.

Arizona’s law removing federal funding from schools who have ethnic studies may be interpreted as stemming from this loyalty (Clark & Reed, 2010; Phippen, 2015; Wallace, 2014). This seems to be done under the guise of preventing anger against dominant culture and ensuring students conform to the dominant norm. This case may show how loyalty to a culture can lead to anger or retaliation against those who are perceived as threats.

The second emotion described by Wallace (2014) is shame, which “is defined as a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming or impropriety” (p. 113). Wallace (2014) asserts shame is one of the most important racially charged emotions. Often times, the absence of appropriate shame is as important as the presence of shame. Courts and schools fail to acknowledge shame for the injustices it fuels, instead choosing to believe a level playing field exists today. As Wallace (2014) explains:

Dr. Elspeth Probyn asserts that individuals tend to want to overcome or avoid shame in favor of pride. Experiencing shame is important: it arises out of a personal interest in the

world and an obligation to society and stems from a desire for a connection to that society which remains unfulfilled.

Thus shame, if accepted and appropriately managed, can be the catalyst for moving towards anti-racist behaviors and cultural sensitivity.

### **False Narrative**

Silencing of Native American narratives is partially accomplished by the view of their culture as dead or archaic. As Christina Sweet (1994) puts it,

Teachers have enthusiastically delved into the mysteries of the potlatch, the romance of the Sun Dance, and the masks of the False Face Society, as exotic traditions from another time....A solely historical perspective of aboriginal cultures reinforced the attitude that these cultures have failed in attempts to adopt the dominant culture and that the sons and daughters of these cultures remain backward in a so-called progressive society.

Native American culture is viewed in many schools like the culture of the ancient Greeks: a dead relic of the backwards people of the past (Quijada Cerecer, 2013, Sweet, 1994). Native Americans are not seen as contributing citizens of the United States of America, and they are not seen as a people who are still struggling to keep their culture alive (Quijada Cerecer, 2013, Sweet, 1994). Rather, they are a primitive and quaint, archaic culture steeped in the romanticism as a noble people from the past while simultaneously prevented from being allowed to live current and authentic lives (Sweet, 1994, Quijada Cerecer, 2013).

In many schools, Native American history is only taught around Columbus Day and Thanksgiving, and Columbus is still given credit for discovering America (Quijada Cerecer, 2013, Sweet, 1994). What many schools do not teach is that Columbus was here looking for gold, and would cut off the hands of Native Americans who did not provide enough. One of my

sister's elementary school teachers was quite shocked when she refused to write a paper on something good Columbus had done, and instead wrote on his misdeeds.

Similarly, some schools still teach manifest destiny. Some schools teach how settlers believed it was their destiny to claim the west, as ordained by God (Wallace, 2014). While schools do not necessarily teach their perspective as right, they nonetheless teach the perspective. The viewpoints of the Native Americans who occupied the land being flooded are not always considered. Critical examination of the true reason settlers wanted the west, for the land, and how they used religion to justify taking it are rarely considered (Mason & Ernst-Slavit, 2010; Anderson, 2012). The systematic slaughter of buffalo herds to remove a food source as well as disconnect the Native American people from the spiritual significance of the buffalo is generally not taught in the United States public education system (Jawort, 2017).

Manifest destiny is furthered by another belief of settlers. This belief is Native Americans were lazy and misusing the land (Wallace, 2014). Rather than the traditional sense of ruining the land, settlers argued Native Americans were failing to be productive with the land, treating it as something akin to a gigantic game reserve (Wallace, 2014). From a puritanical point of view, hard work was valued as a pathway to heaven, and the colonist assessment of laziness was an affront (Wallace, 2014). While schools do not necessarily teach this perspective, it has transformed into another concept: civilization. This idea is broken down into the concept of civilized Europeans, who had advanced along the evolutionary ladder, and the uncivilized Native American, who was still stuck in primitive ways.

Wallace (2014) stated “embedded in the idea of race is a socially constructed debate over what it means to be a human being; embedded in the idea of racism is a debate over what it means to be a just democratic community” (p.104-5). Thus, the Native American became sub

human, and laws which targeted Native American people and their culture became just. This concept is not just important as a study of the history of Native Americans, but as a phenomenon still occurring.

Furthermore, the historical perspective of Native Americans is rarely viewed through a critical lens (Lavere, 2008). Lavere's (2008) study reviewed United States history textbooks across the K-8 spectrum and compared them to texts of other grade levels (2008). Lavere's (2008) research found questions provided in United States history books surrounding Native Americans tend to be offered simplistically rather than in a style which encourages more analytical thinking. In addition, Lavere (2008) found these simplistic questions are found in various grade levels. This implies higher grade levels are not encouraged to provide more analytic thinking than students in lower grade levels. This may serve to reinforce a singular and basic perspective. In addition, it may indicate a lack of effort to broaden and deepen students' understanding of the history and historical struggle of Native Americans.

This lack of critical thinking around Native American issues in history is an area of concern for me. I have a grandmother, Ruth Kreps, who lived in Germany during the holocaust. She told me that in Germany, they teach in detail the history of the holocaust as a way of preventing it from happening again. We both believe this same concern and intentional effort to prevent history from repeating itself is not present in the American mainstream education system. This lack of analysis around Native American history, with a critical debate on the underlying causes behind tensions, battles/massacres, and struggles, ensures Native Americans continue to struggle. The simple fact most schools do not apply the word genocide hampers students' ability to understand the extent of what America has done to her indigenous people. We are more concerned with what others have done wrong than with our own history.

## **Media**

One of the ways Native Americans are stigmatized is through media (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015). This shows up in both terms of quality and quantity. Native Americans often do not get to see representations of themselves. They almost never get to see modern representations of themselves (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015). Rather, they are shown as primitive savages in westerns. When they are given modern roles, they are often poor, addicted, or drunk. Often times, they play an overly mystic role that fails to portray their particular culture.

This can have a tremendous influence on non-Native Americans, particularly if they have little contact with Native Americans (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015; Flynn, Olson, & Yellig, 2014). Many of the opinions of individuals outside of a minority culture come from the media, which is often full of negative stereotypes. For example, the prevalence of drunk Indians and the invisibility of Native Americans in successful roles accepted by dominant culture, including education, politics, or business, creates both negative stereotypes and the belief Native Americans do not belong.

These media representations also have an effect on how Native American children see themselves (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015). “These representations convey information about the good or right way to be a person, including how individuals represent or think about themselves in the past, present, and future” (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015, p.41). Thus, media influences how Native Americans see their own culture in a broader context, and how they should ‘act native’. While this is mitigated by having strong connections with one’s culture, it can still cause a degree of role confusion. Combined with media telling



others how to approach Native Americans, this can affect their relationship both with other Native Americans and with non-Native Americans.

In addition, research suggests inequitable representations in media can have an adverse effect on a group's psychological health (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015). Relational theory suggests health is strongly affected by relationships, and we often define ourselves according to our relationships (Dr. Hinchman, 2015). When the media creates stress between Native American's relationships with non-Native Americans, this is bound to have an effect on their mental health.

Representations do not always have to be negative to negatively impact a group either (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015). Positive representations also force a group into a mold (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015). For example, portraying Native Americans as a collectivist culture can cause psychological stress for atypical members. Several Native American authors have written about the acculturation of their youth as they blend Native American values and European values, moving slightly away from the more traditional collectivist culture (Flynn, Olson, & Yellig, 2014).

### **Sign of the Beaver**

A prevalent example of false narrative came from a critically acclaimed book used in a public elementary school: *The Sign of the Beaver* (Speare, 1983). This book portrays the relationship between a white settler and a Native American child, Attean. Valerie Lambert and Michael Lambert (2014) wrote an article explaining their, and more importantly their daughter's, reaction to the book. Simply stated, their daughter hated the book. What strikes me most about Lambert and Lambert's (2014) story about this book is they did not tell their daughter to hate this book. Rather, their daughter "expressed high levels of anger and resistance to *The Sign of the*

*Beaver* (Lambert & Lambert, 2014, p. 527).” When Lambert and Lambert’s (2014) daughter was asked:

Why she so strongly disliked this book she said, among other things, that she did not like the way Attean, an Indian child who is the primary Indian character in the book, was portrayed. What struck her most was his use of ‘baby talk’, his lack of interest in learning, and what the author describes as his laziness (p. 527).

Their 5th grade Daughter had an adverse reaction to the book causing her parents to more closely examine it. In fact, they reported she still wanted to burn the book two years later.

Beside the immediate negative effect this book placed on a child and her identity, this book is important for illustrating the negatives of false narratives for two reasons. The first is the massive misportrayal of Native Americans in the book (Lambert & Lambert, 2014). The book had Native Americans calling their women ‘squaw’, an extremely derogatory term. This carried the meaning to non-Native American’s that it was okay to call Native American women ‘squaw’ (Lambert & Lambert, 2014). In addition, the Native American men were portrayed as lazy, and left all the work for the Native American women. Native Americans in the book also spoke like toddlers, despite the fact that when the book was set in the 19th century and many Native Americans were speaking English competently. This was exacerbated by the English colonists, who spoke grammatically correct English per our current standards, entirely inaccurate for the time and location. In addition, they valued hard work and formal education. This creates a divide where the White settlers are good and intelligent, and Native Americans are bad and unintelligent (Lambert & Lambert, 2014).

Secondly, what stood out to me about Lambert and Lambert’s (2014) story was the school’s acceptance of the book. This is a critically acclaimed book which actually won a

Newberry award. The school and larger culture had accepted it as an endearing story of friendship (Lambert & Lambert, 2014). Rather than say the misportrayal was ignored, it would be more accurate to say it was invisible to them. This is a normative narrative that has both affected and reflected the ways Native Americans are viewed in our country and in that specific classroom. When Lambert and Lambert (2014) asked the school to remove the book, they were told by the gifted specialist they had raised valid points. They were never actually told if the book would be removed from curriculum, and received no response from either the principal or the fifth grade teacher.

For the purpose of this research, this portrayal of Native American culture is one of the main foci. Lambert and Lambert (2014) quote an analysis by Students and Teachers against Racism which stated, “can you imagine how an American Indian child feels about this when they are described in such disrespectful terms?” (p. 536). With the popularity behind these portrayals in media, as indicated by Disney’s Pocahontas and countless cowboy versus Indian movies, this becomes a question I feel deserves thorough exploration.

### **Stereotypes**

Human beings take actions based on expectations, which tell us what is likely to happen (Moeller, Anderson, & Grosz, 2012). Thus, stereotypes tell us how groups are likely to behave (Moeller, Anderson & Grosz, 2012; Quijada Cerecer, 2013). Often, people feel stereotyped by policies without an overt racial bias. For example, Quijada Cerecer (2013) quote a student, who shared the following anecdotes:

Last year the school hired a police officer. We were all surprised...my friends and I were like, ‘What? How can they do this?’ We feel like they think we are criminals and need a

police officer to secure them from us. I guess they don't trust us...we just couldn't believe it.

This occurred at a school in New Mexico which had little history of crime or violence. The students at this school reported feeling like the teachers and adults of the school were constantly monitoring their behavior as well.

“Race-ethnicity, like gender, is used by others to define the self and is considered fixed, whether or not one chooses to self-define in these terms” (Oyserman et al., 2003, p. 333). These stereotypes negatively affect the success of minority students. Thus, members of minority groups are the targets of stereotypes regardless of their connection to their group. Oyserman et al. (2003) asserts that “individuals who are the targets of stereotyping do not merely incorporate these stereotypes and the accompanying negative attributes into their identity and behavior...rather they develop strategies to handle situations in which stereotyping may occur” (p. 333-4). Thus, some Native Americans may show resiliency, some may disengage, and some may lash out.

### **Critical language**

Critical Language Awareness (CLA) calls for specific attention to the ways language perpetuates and encourages stereotypes or belief systems (Mason & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). The use of language to perpetuate social injustice is often unintentional (Mason & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). One way language is unintentionally used is in the creation of the other. The simple use of the word ‘us’ Americans, or Minnesotans, or any other word, can create an ‘us-them’ scenario and create the ‘other’ (Mason & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). In conversations around Native Americans, American government becomes the ‘us’, and tribes become the ‘other’. These tribes are further labeled as primitive compared to the ‘enlightened’ Europeans.

CLA also looks at empathetic and historical language (Mason & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). For example, taking an empathetic approach to Native American history can actually discourage more critical conversations on the topic (Mason & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). Empathy and language use combine to create the view of Native Americans as a pitiful ‘other’ from another time (Mason & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). This prevents both a critical analysis and a connection to present day issues. As Anderson (2012) noted, social progress is viewed as a steady march forward. In this way, students are taught to view racial problems as relics of the past which have already been fixed in our current culture (Mason & Ernst-Slavit, 2010; Anderson, 2012).

The use of CLA illustrates a key point in Native American education. Simply having Native American narratives or struggles is not enough (Anderson, 2012). Anderson (2012) conducted a study on Washington and Arizona policies around historical studies. Arizona schools tended to frame Native American interactions with European settlers into a simplistic and unquestioned narrative to be routinely memorized. Washington schools, by contrast, attempted to use the study of history surrounding Euro-American and Native American interactions to inform critical debate. However, Anderson (2012) found Washington schools still fell short of promoting multicultural competency. Anderson (2012) suggests this may be due to the lack of Critical Language Awareness. Although the Washington policies encouraged debate, these debates often included artificial boundaries and used emotional or empathetic language which failed to encourage or enlighten student behavior. The use of emotional language, while encouraging empathy towards Native Americans struggles, often leads to lack of knowledge around the complex forces regarding Native American’s interactions with the larger American society, as well as prevents them from truly being able to make use of their empathy to create social change.

## **Indigenous Language**

CLA asserts the use of language influences ideology, politics, power relationships, and societal norms (Mason & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). This assertion clearly illustrates the importance of Native American language, which carries the ideology, norms, politics, and relationships of the cultures they stem from (Cohen & Allen, 2012). Yet continually the language of Native Americans is viewed as unnecessary or otherwise devalued (Cohen & Allen, 2012).

Cohen and Allen (2012) make the assertion “language and cultural identity are inextricably linked” (p. 755). Language development has been shown to be affirming to identity and sense of well-being (Cohen & Allen, 2012). Even past the contribution of values and ideologies, language is critical for its role in identity development.

## **Solutions**

One of the most common solutions to closing the achievement gap and encouraging Native American achievement in schools is providing Native American values, ideologies, spirituality, and culture in curriculum, particularly in a contemporary sense (Sparks, 2000; Stokes, 1997; Inglebret, Jones, & Pavel, 2008; Quijada Cerecer 2013; Gentry & Fugate, 2012). Community and family are two important values in many Native American cultures, and the engagement of both are useful in introducing Native American values, ideologies, and culture into curriculum (Sparks, 2000; Stokes, 1997). The inclusion of Native American stories is another useful tool (Inglebret, Jones, & Pavel, 2008). Connecting to specific values including the environment, family, community, language, and interconnectedness also encourage positive learning outcomes in Native American children (Stokes, 1997; Sparks, 2000).

Learning styles are another important consideration (Sparks, 2000; Stokes, 1997). Native American children generally learn better in a collaborative and community forming environment

(Sparks, 2000; Stokes, 1997). This is in sharp contrast to the more competitive learning style commonly practiced in the United States (Sparks, 2000; Stokes, 1997). In addition, a hands-on approach often works better with Native American children (Sparks, 2000; Stokes, 1997). Combined with CLA and an intentional effort to end academic oppression, the introduction of Native American values, ideologies, and overall culture shows promise in improving the socio-emotional well-being and academic performance of Native American students.

Another problem Native Americans face is how much of the literature has focused on deficits rather than resiliencies and strengths (Gentry & Fugate, 2012). This focus can lead to increased stereotypes and fails to explore all the needs and strengths of the population. Thus, my research, while looking for some of the mis-portrayals of Native Americans in school curriculum, will focus on strengths and resiliencies as well.

A critical examination of Native American relations and injustices against them must occur in education (Quijada Cerecer, 2013). Educators must examine how their policies and curriculum privileges white students and underprivileged, minimizes, or silences Native American students. In addition, Native Americans must be portrayed and included as active learners. Native Americans must be empowered through positive relationships with teachers (Moeller, Anderson & Grosz, 2012; Gritzmacher & Gritzmacher, 2010). This can create a sense of belonging which may allow Native Americans to flourish in education (Gentry and Fugate, 2012).

A focus on resilience and strength within the Native American population and an intentional and focused effort at empowering Native American identity rooted in their culture is something that also must occur in education. As a social worker, I see this as something where

we can lead the charge. While teachers are focused on curriculum, social workers can focus on the social aspects around identity and how to maintain strength and find empowerment within a cultural context. This will give students the skills to not only deal with struggles around their cultural identity with teachers or students within schools, but also to apply the same skills in a larger American context that all too often does not meet their needs. As part of meeting this goal, this research will include a question on the role social workers played in the lived experience of Native Americans in the United States public education system as well as what those same individuals wish social workers would do for Native Americans going forward.

### **Conclusion**

The research shows Native Americans have been actively systemically oppressed, and that in general educators have been complacent with this slow cultural genocide. One of the recurring themes in the research is the various ways this oppression has prevented the formation of academic identity in Native American students. Native Americans are ostracized by an institution critical to success in mainstream American culture. This paper will explore the complex ways Native American academic identity is prevented by answering the research question: What is the lived experience of Native Americans who went through the United States mainstream public education system? By focusing on the ways Native American culture and spirituality are silenced and misrepresented in the American mainstream education system, we can explore one of the ways Native Americans are excluded from a sense of belonging within schools.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The goal of my research is to examine the ways Native Americans' lived experience is shaped by the racism and false narratives present in the United States public education



system. Although Native Americans can be viewed as a nation rather than a race, they are categorized as a race by dominant society. In addition, they experience racism in addition to ethnocentrism, which makes it appropriate to use Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a conceptual framework. In essence, CRT views “race at the center of critical analysis” (Roithmayr, 1999, p. 1).

One of critical race theory’s (CRT) guiding premises is “that racism is an omnipresent social and institutional force, in that it impacts the development of all things in the sociopolitical realm” (Brown & Au, 2014, p. 362). Racism is deeply ingrained in our society. Race must be put on the table and addressed as a social problem. A critical step in addressing the problem is changing the historical analysis to a more minority affirming, perspective diverse, and power critical lens (Brown & Au, 2014).

CRT directly questions three beliefs of the dominant culture (Brainard, 2009, Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002). These beliefs are color blindness as anti-racist behavior, that racism is an individual behavior, and racism is isolated from other aspects of identity (Valdes, Culp, and Harris, 2002; Brainard, 2009). CRT believes cultural identity provides a sense of belonging and strength. Thus, color blindness, which fails to recognize cultural identity, is ineffective. In addition, racism is only one aspect of identity: gender, class, sexual orientation, age, and other parts of our identity all must be considered.

The second CRT challenge, that racism is not only an individual act, is one of the most important assertions to me (Brainard, 2009, Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002). While individual racism is very real and even prevalent, as evidenced by the hatred and deep seated mistrust of Mexicans and Muslims as well as the flippant racism expressed by many of America’s political

leaders, racism is also present within the law and larger institutions (Brainard, 2009). Not only is racism present on a systemic level, but this is the driving concern of CRT.

The third belief simply states that racism is only one of our identities (Brainard, 2009, Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002). One cannot understand how race affects lives without also allowing or building an understanding of how sex, class, geographic location, and other factors interact in our lives.

In addition to fighting these beliefs, racism in the law is present in other formats. Freeman (1978) argues America's justice system looks at victims and perpetrators. The justice system looks at who was wrong, and looks at who concretely committed the act. By viewing racism in these terms, I can view police officers who shoot unresisting, unarmed, or restrained people of color and American Indians as racist without admitting to my own racism or analyzing the deeper systemic forces that contributed to their racism. By viewing racism as an institutional force, responsibility is placed on all of those who belong to dominant societal groups, such as white, male, heterosexual, etc. In addition, the myth that law and educational curriculum is inherently unbiased is challenged. Rather, CRT views both laws and curriculum as steeped in racism.

In addition to opposing those three beliefs, CRT follows six principles (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Brainard, 2009). The first is that racism is normalized. Racism is so deeply entrenched in American society that it has become both omnipresent and invisible. The second principle is interest convergence. Because whites have the majority of power, racism will continue until white people decide it is in their best interests for racism to end. The third principle is that race is socially constructed, rather than being genetic.

The fourth principle is that the oppressed are experts in experiences of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Brainard, 2009). Because racism is so omnipresent and hard to distinguish, people of color and Native Americans are often questioned on whether they truly experienced a racially discriminatory event or not (Sue, 2016). CRT asserts people of color and Native Americans must be given the voice to express their experiences without doubt and questioning. As social workers, we know clients are the experts of their own lives. In my understanding, this is both to provide a safe place for the client to talk as well as to acknowledge they are the ones who experienced the event, they are the ones living their lives, and they truly are the experts of their own lives. In this way we manage our own bias and empower clients, which is critical to change and basic human health. Thus, I view this principle as especially critical for conversations around racism.

The fifth principle is that the face of racism and stereotypes changes due to dominant culture's needs over history (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Brainard, 2009). For example, Native Americans are either primitive savages or lazy drunks depending on the time period. The sixth and final principle is that race is only one aspect of our identity. As previously stated, our identity is composed of many different variables.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research aims to give a voice to the experiences and thoughts of subjects being studied, providing researchers a chance to delve deeper into how each specific person experienced targeted phenomenon (Monette, Sullivan, Dejong, & Hilton, 2014). While a great deal of research has been done quantitatively on Native Americans, and we know a great deal of academic oppression exists, there does not appear to be a great deal of research lending voice to

Native Americans experiencing this oppression. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experience of Native Americans in the United States public education system, with a specific focus on the ways the misportrayal of their culture and spirituality shapes this lived experience. This methods section will cover the sample, protection of human subjects, the data collection tool, and the data analysis methods.

### **Sample**

Since this study is aimed at exploring the lived experiences of Native Americans, only Native Americans were recruited for participation. Specifically, the target demographic for this research was Native American adults, over the age of 18, who went through the United States public education system for the entirety or majority of their k-12 educational experience. While not necessary, experiences in the Minnesotan education system were preferred.

Respondents were contacted through convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods. Convenience sampling entails using resources at one's disposal. This included contacting associates for potential research candidates. The second method, snowball sampling, entails asking respondents at the end of the interview if they know anyone who might be interested in the study. To preserve confidentiality, I asked these respondents to reach out to others and waited for them to contact me. Of the respondents contacted, six agreed to an interview and five were interviewed.

For this research, five interviews were conducted. The respondents were given the codenames Stephanie, Luna, Sara, Guinevere, and Johnny. Stephanie grew up on a reservation in North Dakota, and went to a Catholic mission school before attending a public high school. Luna grew up in Minnesota suburbs near the Twin Cities. Sara lived in Florida, and went to public school through the eighth grade before going to a private school for her High School

experience. Guinevere went to school in two very different cities in Minnesota, one of which was near several reservations. Johnny went to boarding school in North Dakota for 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grade, and returned for the second half of fifth grade and stayed through 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Johnny was in public school for the first half of fifth grade and from 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Before recruiting respondents or performing research, an application was submitted to the St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. After adjusting the research according to IRB suggestions and approval was gained, the recruitment process proceeded. An email script to recruit respondents is available in Appendix A. A flier, included in Appendix B, was handed to participants if they know any individuals who may be interested in participating in this research. Additionally, a Consent Form is included in Appendix c. This form allowed the respondent to provide informed consent. The form details the intent and nature of the study. Respondent answers had any identifying information provided, such as names, addresses, or work, removed and was stored on an OneDrive server. Respondents were given the option to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. A list of clinics in Minneapolis and St. Paul is provided in Appendix D, which was provided to respondents during the interview in case they should wish to seek counseling.

Respondents were given the choice of picking the interview location. The purpose of this was to encourage a feeling of safety and control in the respondent. A quiet and private location was encouraged to help protect confidentiality and ensure a smooth transcript. If the respondent chose not to select the interview location, an open room at St. Thomas or community centers was to be considered. For example, the Hennepin Library in downtown Minneapolis has suitable rooms.

**Data collection**

A list of interview questions is included in Appendix E. I created the questions with the aim of exploring themes addressed in the literature review, including the presence of Native Americans and Native American culture in curriculum (exclusion), the narratives surrounding Native Americans, experiences with Native American spirituality being portrayed as a myth, open and subtle hostility or racism from teachers and peers, and strengths of Native American students. The interview opens with the question: what does being Native American mean to you personally? This question is aimed at determining the respondents' connectedness to their culture as a possible variable. The second and third to last questions ask for general strengths and weaknesses of the educational system to provide respondents the opportunity to offer themes or data I had not previously considered.

The interviews were approximately an hour long, depending on the amount of information provided. Some questions were skipped if they had been adequately answered by previous questions.

In his book, Wilson (2008) talks about the importance of practicing from Native American pedagogy when studying indigenous populations. One of the concepts Wilson (2008) addressed that stood out to me personally is the importance of relationship. Thus, the interview included a brief segment on what I think they should know about my research in general and about me personally. The goal of this was to build a relationship between me and the interviewee as well as create a bridge between interviewee and the research.

**Data Analysis**

The interview transcripts collected were analyzed through analytic induction. Like content analysis, analytic induction involves transcribing and coding the interviews. Unlike

content analysis, analysis begins with a hypothesis of what the data will show, or at a minimum a list of sensitizing concepts (Smelser & Baltes, 2001). The goal of the analysis is to look for disconfirming data which requires the researcher to conceptualize the initial hypothesis or expectation of the data. This allows the researcher to develop new themes in order to deepen understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

In this case, the themes I expected to find in the lived experience of Native Americans who went through the United States public education system included: disconnects between Native American culture, spirituality, and values, and the values and narrative told in school. The themes I expected to find were portrayal of Native American spirituality as a rebuked myth, false narratives told about Native Americans, value disconnect, exclusion, devaluation of Native American peoples and cultures, and experiences of racial aggressions and microaggressions. I also expected to find these themes caused conflict in former Native American student's ability to build academic identity and perform successfully in class. I expected to find these variables were somewhat mitigated by connectedness to culture. However, the more connected to traditional Native American culture, the more struggles I would expect respondents to have in reconciling their Native American culture with dominant perspectives. Thus, for my analytic induction I looked for cases which contradicted the hypotheses and lacked these themes. I then compared these negative cases to other interview data to determine the difference. These differences were then used to shape my findings.

## **Results and Findings**

### **Native American Pride, Perspective, Spirituality, and Beliefs**

The first question I asked every participant was: what does it mean to be Native American to you personally? My intent with this question was to build a framework for

understanding the importance the interviewee placed on being Native American, how participants viewed the cultural meaning behind being Native American, and flesh out a picture of who they are in relation their cultural identity. As this question deals with cultural identity, the first issue to bring up is the connection to the term Native American. As Johnny stated, “the term Native American is like, ah, is a umbrella term, it’s like saying, you know, European, right?” Sara took this disconnect with the umbrella term of Native American one step further, expressing,

Native American really, um, gives me the impressions of someone who is born here in America, so...that makes everyone born in America Native American. So I prefer the term indigenous or I prefer my own Native nation, ah, which is Dakota.

Three participants either stated they preferred to be identified with their tribe of origin or otherwise redirected the conversation back to identification with a tribal group. Stephanie identified with Ojibwe, and Sara identified as a Dakota woman. Johnny identified with several different tribes, stating:

Culturally I’m Ojibwe, you know, I was raised around Ojibwe people, and I’m enrolled in Oneida because my father’s, um, grandmother was from Oneida...I think chronologically though I also think of myself as, you know, um, strongly identifying with Dakota culture because my sons that I adopted sons at birth nine years ago. And so their Dakota and my ex-partner is also Dakota and we, with intention I raised them around Dakota culture and language and ceremony and stuff. Um. I probably now in my life practice more, more Dakota, um, cultural practices then I do Ojibwe. But that’s just because, it’s because of, um, a specific choice I raised my sons in a specific way.



In this way, Johnny expresses both identification with his heritage as well as a set of values and beliefs he intentionally chose in order to raise his sons in an Indigenous way. Guinevere, while she did not identify immediately with any tribe, did state she learned about some of the Ojibwe culture when she moved to the Twin Cities.

Another theme in response to this question was the importance being a Native American had on their sense of identity. As Stephanie states:

It's a big part of who I am, um, how I carry myself, how I *view* myself, um, who I associate with, um, my passions in life are very much about being an American Indian person. Um...the work I do, the work I've always really done, raised my children, um, and... being *in* community, so it's a big part of, ah, self – Identity.

Sara placed a similar importance on how Dakota has shaped her identity:

Truthfully, well, as a Dakota woman, um, it means...my very identity. Um, the foundation of which that makes me who I am, so it means everything to me. I'm not particularly fond of the name Native American but, um, but as a Dakota woman it makes me feel, ah, strong and grounded and, um, aware, much more aware of myself. When it comes to my senses, um, and things like that. So...being Native American for me makes me a stronger woman, a better mother, a better teacher.

Luna, who identified as Native American, White, and Black stated, "On every piece of paper, everything that matters, I'm Native American, because it means more to me than my other cultures." These three examples illustrate how important being a Native American has been in these participants lives. This identification has had a lasting impact on the way they view themselves and the lens through which they view the world.

Along a similar vein, a common thread expressed by respondents was pride in their identity. As Guinevere said:

To be a Native American today means a lot. I mean I feel like I'm fortunate to be Native American, because there's hardly anybody that is Native American. So it makes me feel proud. Because, it's like a, there's so much value to, to it that we don't know.

These themes of pride demonstrate a deeper connection to being Native American than merely belonging to a group.

Lastly, this question prompted several respondents to relate their identity as Native American to different attitudes or spiritual beliefs. One of the themes linking these beliefs together was a sense of connectedness. For Luna, being Native American was about "being attached to the lifestyle. You know? I have strong beliefs that everything is in a circle. You take care of the children, you take care of the elderly...Native Americans are big on respect." This expresses a theme of community connection and responsibility that comes with being Native American.

Sara expressed the following value on her spirituality,

As a Dakota women, um, I follow closely my own spiritual values and, ah, I was always taught, um, we had more than six, five senses, so. And it's really important to understand that we have, um, an intuitive sense that is so important and that is, um, the ability to acknowledge what your body and mind and spirit is telling you and be able to act upon it. And one-one example that I can give is that, um...fear. That's not something that we just say...that's nothing. It is something, and it's something that our biological bodies are telling us, you know, somethings not right...also pain. It's something your body is telling you to acknowledge, you know? So taking an aspirin might stop it for a minute

but it's really an intuitive sense, understanding what your body is telling you is an important sense. As important as sight or smell or the other things. Um. We are kind of brought up to think we only have these five senses so we disregard the others. We also, um, believe in the ability to see the future through our dreams. We talk about our dreams, we acknowledge our dreams in daily conversation, and it's something that always comes around to an understanding. And so acknowledging that we don't know everything and there is this greatness being, and understanding that we are allowed pieces of that puzzle becomes to us as we are gathering them, always being aware of what's happening in the world. And that to me is a gift, the gift to be able to know that we have so much more power and strength than we are taught to use or acknowledge.

In this way Sara expressed a sense of greater connection with both her own body as well as a larger reality.

For Johnny, being Native American came with a greater attachment with his ancestors.

As he stated,

What I think personally, for what it, for me it means, um, you know that I have this connection to this, um, this, um, this long history, ah, of ancestors that were here before me, that were the original people of this land. I think that for me it also means that, you know, because of my particular world view I think that the other thing that it means is that I, that I realized and I know that my ancestors are always with me. So even though they're not here, um, presently with me in the physical form I know that they're spiritually that they're always with me and they're kind of, you know, that they're always standing with me. So that's a really important piece of it.

These themes of connection were expressed throughout most of the interviews, displaying a deep value placed on interconnectedness with ancestors and the world around them.

### **What Makes Someone Native American**

As Stephanie states, “one of the biggest debates in Indian country today is who gets to be an Indian.” Stephanie expressed her understanding of who gets to be Native American by quoting one of her mentors: “some people might be born Indian but they will never have an Indian heart.” She went on to say “It’s your heart that will tell you who gets to be, and being Indian in your heart really just takes you to a lot of the core values of a decent human being.” Although Stephanie experienced this debate, she never had the debate directed at her. As she puts it, “I don’t know anything different. I’ve always been a Native in the United States.”

Luna also experienced this debate. Unlike Sara, this debate was directly aimed at Luna and had a large impact, not necessarily on her identity but certainly on her sense of acceptance. As she expressed, “I am always mistaken for something. You know? I’m either too white, or I’m not black enough, or I’m not Native enough, my hair is not straight enough. Something’s always wrong.” Although Luna never appeared to question her own self-identity as Native American, she expressed several times through the interview that others did not see her as Native American. At the end of the interview, this led to her expressing a fear that she was not suited for the interview due to not being seen as Native American. This shows some of the effect which the duality of identifying as Native American while not being identified by others as Native American can have. This fear could have come partially from the negative bias in which the questions were phrased as well, however. For example, questions eight and nine look at hostility and microaggressions from peers or teachers because of race, which may have made Luna feel like she needed to have experienced that hostility to be a valid participant.

### **Belonging and Exclusion**

All five respondents suffered from exclusion in the curriculum as well as racism and microaggressions. The reason these forces are being included under the umbrella terms of belonging and exclusion is because of the effect this racism seemed to have was to foster a sense of exclusion. I felt more than a sense of active attack or disempowerment, the effect of exclusion in curriculum and negative racial experiences was to create these sense of not-belonging, which in turn influenced identity for several of the respondents, namely Johnny and Guinevere.

#### **Compounding factors.**

Before going into the various forms of racial oppression, two participants had significant compounding factors which should be addressed. Luna has a significant mental illness. This included bipolar episodes and panic attacks which started when in high school. She reports being ostracized and bullied. Most of this bullying was centered on her mental illness and because she was viewed as “a freak, a weird-o”. Many of Luna’s negative experiences in schools were colored by this other facet of her life.

Johnny experienced a great deal of trauma at boarding school, including physical and sexual abuse. Johnny stated the sexual abuse stemmed from both older boys and staff members. He viewed himself as a target for this abuse because of several sources. There was a volatile school culture at boarding school, with teachers demonstrating physical abuse. This culture may have served to norm abuse and abusive behaviors. Johnny was also enrolled in Oneida and culturally Ojibwe in a boarding school with mostly Dakota peers, which he views as making him somewhat as a target as well. However, he views his growing understanding of himself as a gay man and lack of masculine traits or interests as the main thing which made him a target for abuse.

**Invisibility.**

On top of the stereotypes and microaggressions which will be discussed later, one of the ways in which the interviewees described being excluded was through sheer invisibility. For Luna, this showed up in two ways. One is the invisibility of her own cultural identity, in that people often did not recognize her Native American identity. The other way this showed up was in the lack of Native American Kids. As mentioned earlier, Native Americans make up only 1.7% of the nation's population (United States Census Bureau, 2015). For Luna, this meant that when she participated in Indian Education programs, only four or so students showed up most of the time. This may have contributed to Luna's feelings of isolation. In addition, this may have helped schools keep Native American culture invisible, as there was less students to bring their culture up or question teachers.

Another common theme I found was lack of representation in the classroom. As Luna put it, "I think...in seventh grade we had a whole paragraph in our history book about Native Americans, and I think that was the most up until then." She went on to add:

(Native Americans) weren't mentioned. We didn't get to really do projects on it. Now some of my teachers were more forgiving in the creative department so I could, but most of the time I couldn't even express that I was being proud, I am proud to be Native American, cause it just wasn't talked about in anything, not even history.

In this quote, not only was Luna's cultural identity suppressed by the lack of representation in school, but her ability to bring her culture into school work and make it culturally relevant was also suppressed.

This theme of lack of history taught about Native Americans was prevalent throughout several interviews. Sara, when asked if her culture was valued in education, stated:

Well, I would have to say that there was somewhat of a value, um, in education in...oh, let's see, myths about Thanksgiving. Making up, you know, these nice, um, stories about how friendly the Indians were and how they, you know, created this Thanksgiving meal. Um, so the culture was valued in a way that wasn't true. But in order to at least acknowledge the Native people that were indigenous here, you know, they were some myths and some stereotypes, you know.

When asked what narrative existed about Native Americans in education, Sara went on to add:

Thanksgiving. Columbus Day. Are two, two major narratives that are completely false. That every educated, even somewhat intellectual person knows, that Columbus never set foot on this continent. Um, yet we continue to teach that in schools...And Thanksgiving is the same so it just, um, devalues the people. It devalues history. And that I heard it that...to the victor gets to write the history, and. Which is true obviously, but that...doesn't make the history true. And so what we do is we raised generations of kids biased on false history who became leaders of this country, who are making really bad decisions about our environment, about caring for our elders, about caring for the people, about the ability of the decisions we're making. Because we're just creating the same generation of...ignorant people.

In Sara's experience, Native Americans were only brought up during these two holidays. As well as the invisibility this represents, a major theme present in Sara's story is the misrepresentation of Native American culture.

For Johnny, this misrepresentation of history showed up less in his own school experience. However, Johnny found his two Dakota children experience the similar misrepresentation of Native American culture as Sara,

I go to their school all the time, and then I walk into the space I see like, you know. You know, the few times where they do have something that's, like, ah, a, a Native picture or a Native this or some...reflection of...Indigeneity, in any way shape or form in that classroom or in the hallways it's always a microaggression. It's always like, you know, some real distorted perspective of who we are as Native people reflecting me and, and that's what my sons see and that's what the other Native kids see there...I have this interesting story about, like, when my sons were in second grade, my one son brought home this, um, this word search thing, right around Thanksgiving time, you know, the stuff you get at Thanksgiving time was always like, you know, it's like the worst time of the year as a parent. It's like oh god, what's going to come home in the, in the study folder this week, right? It like. So I pulled this thing out, it's a word search, and at the top of the word search there's this...image of, um, these Indians that kind of looked like, they're sitting at Thanksgiving banquet table and the, um, the Indians look like they're kind of drunken. Like they were kind of, they look like they're drunken, you know. One has like half asleep eyes and there's just like, they look like they're drunk, right? Um, and then the pilgrims at the table are like, you know, scarfing up all the food and the crumbs are falling from their mouth and stuff like that. And they look angry, everybody at the table looks angry. This Thanksgiving image right? And then so, I get that, on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving I pull it out of this folder and I'm like oh Jesus Christ, right? So then I have a conversation with them about it. And then I go back to school the next week and I talk to the teacher about it, and I talk to the principal about it, talk to all these people about it and how all these things not okay, right? And they all ignore it.



In this way, Sara and Johnny not only experienced a general lack of narratives about Native American culture but an even greater lack of narratives that were positive and reinforcing.

Similar to this theme, this research found themes of Native Americans portrayed as a dead culture. For Sara, they were presented as,

Ah, as...being, um, no longer here. So, if you are talking about the public education system, ah, you can open any book and most of the time it talks about the past. As if we don't...we aren't here anymore. I've heard the term extinct, and...I wondered if people are just ignorant or do not realize that people die of genocide, animals become extinct. So that the, a very, um, ah, that term I don't, you know, just hits me wrong.

Johnny experienced this focus on Native Americans as people of the past in the following way:

But that stuff, sometimes, um, the way in which some of that stuff got language or positioned was as though Indians lived long ago. Like, you know, kind of like this idea of like we weren't here anymore...I think that's the biggest challenge that I've had, and I think it's also the biggest challenge that my sons and kids have now today in academic environments where it's sort of like, you know. In public schools it's to sort of have this much more sort of like, present orientated time sort of, kind of perspective, you know, about who we are now. Not about, like, that we lived long ago. We were, you know, we were legends or we were myths. Our stories. And I think that's the way that, that stuff got language to me all throughout school was that, you know, these stories that were told, you know, our creation stories, our stories about who we were chronologically, um, our legends and myths, um, that, um, and that they don't reflect accurate history right, because it wasn't written down it didn't actually happen . . . And in the five years that they've been there, I have had numerous conversations with their educators and their

teachers and the staff at the school about the way in which they portray Native, um, Native images, Native language, Native history, those kinds of things. You know, as being, like, things that are so far from, far from now. The contemporary time, right...and in fact that's when they sort of like include that kind of stuff, when they talk about, you know, other cultures, cultures that were like, you know, lived long ago, then they bring up Native people.

By portraying Native Americans as historical, schools helped prevent them from experiencing a lived culture.

For Stephanie and Guinevere, this invisibility contributed to a lack of knowledge about various aspects of their own culture. Stephanie felt that because she was not reflected in curriculum:

I lacked knowledge of my own history. Right? And history informs and is a big part of our culture. So, a lot of my own education has come...in college and in grad school and ever since then is I continued to learn the history and there is more than one version of history! Um, and there are more then, more importantly is, within the histories of the land and the people on the land, is, there's history even before this country was this country that we have, um, and that's the other kind of history, that's that learning more about our culture, and those traditional stories of our people and how we go back, and that that doesn't have to be, you know, those things may never be documented. Um, and so, it's having the respect to continuously be willing to seek out and hear and listen for that history. Um, but it does also, you know, in history is one perspective, it's writers, it's artists, it's scientists, it's athletics, it's everything. And making it a point to ensure

that it's there, it's pushed, and it's anything and everything, whatever that kid's interested I can help you find something that makes sense so he can see himself reflected...

This lack of knowledge gained during her public experience caused Stephanie to adopt some stereotypes about her own culture and spirituality,

Because I was raised catholic to begin with, um, I had my own, um, stereotypes, right? And when I first started working in Indian education, um, I didn't understand a lot, actually, I understood nothing about the Midewin society, right? And, um, so I had a lot of educating of myself to do to learn about that...And so a large part of my adult life...has been recognizing, learning, and educating myself to understand some of the spirituality of that, at least Ojibwe people.

When asked what stereotypes she held, Stephanie said:

Well, medicine men, smoking pipes, all of, you know, those are probably the two most common, okay, and okay, yeah, okay okay, so smoking a pipe, what does that mean? Well, you still deal with, ah, you got some Mary Jane in that pipe of yours? We still get some of that so, we have lots of friends, and...certain friends we have conversations with, other we don't. And the whole I need me a medicine man, I need to get me, like, well that's a whole 'nother complicated conversation about understanding medicine people, and medicines, and the respect for, um, those are probably, you know, some of the biggest stereotypes, right?

Although Stephanie's lack of awareness was mitigated by her family and being around Native Americans, she still lacked awareness and thus developed stereotypes of Native American spirituality. While it is not the place of education to teach spirituality, it is the job of education to teach history and prevent the stigmatization of spirituality.

For Guinevere, this invisibility led her to disconnect from her culture. As she said, In the public school system, I didn't really know what it meant to be Native American, or what Native American, what Native American was, or didn't know that they were a thing. And so growing up and going to school I just, I didn't learn much about being a Native American until I was in the end of seventh, eighth grade, close to ninth grade, what Native American, what a Native American was. Or what my race really meant.

For Guinevere, historical aggressions led to lack of knowledge gained through family as well:

I don't even know if my family knows much of their traditions and values. Because of, my mom went to foster care, went to boarding schools, so it's still like, I don't know, like, that's what I know. That's what they did.

Thus Guinevere was isolated from her cultural heritage until she moved to a city near reservations while she was in high school.

The family support which Stephanie experienced, which mitigated her lack of knowledge, is an important resilience factor in preventing this lack of awareness of cultural heritage. Luna and Sara both learned this cultural heritage from family members and the larger community. Johnny learned from his family, the community, and available school programs. Thus, rather than needing to teach the spiritual side, schools can focus on teaching the history as well as providing safe places and encouraging community involvement.

The themes of invisibility may be perceived as a self-perpetuating cycle as well. For Sara, this invisibility actually became a learned behavior. When asked what she felt it meant to be Native American within the public education system, she stated,

I'm, you know, I thought about that question a lot and, because I teach Native children, and I think what it means is that you are not important, you are invisible, your history

doesn't matter, and if you bring it up that master narrative will just be further, you know, repeated and, so what you learn to do is to know it's a lie and you just repress your responses to it. Which internalizes a shame. Finally. And so if we are a Native person in the education system we are already taught from the very beginning that we're not as valuable as other groups.

Sara went on to add:

I mean, you know, I grew up in Florida. Um, there's really not a lot of Natives in Florida. There's Seminole, Miccosukee, is a part of Seminole. And so being an Indian in Florida was, like, awesome. You were different, you were awesome. It didn't mean anything in the public education system because you still were taught, you know, this master narrative that wasn't true. That highlighted patriotism rather than truth. Um, yes. Did I go home to my reservation? Did I go to finally Sundance in 1974? Um, did my family practice our spiritual ways? Yeah. So we did have to fill outside that system, to learn it, but within in that system, you just learned that you had to remain invisible.

In these two quotes, Sara expressed a learned response to this undervaluing of culture. This learned response is the repression of response, which in turn allows invisibility and stereotypes to continue.

Sara saw the lack of value on Native American culture and resulting invisibility as resulting from, at least to a degree, a value difference. When asked if Native American culture was valued in education, Sara stated,

I think it is seen as having no place in education. When you really look at, you know, the culture, um, because we had a completely separate value system, in fact it's almost contradictory. So when we talk about leadership and Dakota people, we talk about

community, and everybody has strength, and when one, when we need to lean on the strengths of one person, um, they become the leader. And when they're done they go back to the group. And so leadership to, in the Dakota way, is not rising to the top and standing out in the crowd. Because we don't want to leave our people. And so the values are very contradictory.

In this way the oppression of Native American culture and values in the public school system are mitigated by family and community support.

The theme perpetuating these various forms of invisibility is, once again, belonging. The lack of Native American role models, narratives, peers, history, and view of Native American culture as dead all seem to lead into the same message: Native Americans and their culture do not belong in education. Their culture and history is not important enough to teach and they are not important enough to recognize.

### **Cultural and personal aggression.**

All five respondents experienced some form of racial aggression towards Native Americans. There were some stereotypes shared between the experiences. Luna expressed a portrayal of Native Americans "as savages, basically. They were either not talked about or they were somebody that needed to be stomped on." Likewise, Sara experienced Native Americans described as "savages, absolutely." She viewed the name of the city Savage as coming from that label. Drunk was also a common stereotype experienced. Stephanie experienced "a lot of the impression is that that you weren't, you weren't good enough, you know, those no good drunk Indians..." Later, when listing expectations she had surpassed, she again mentioned the drunk stereotype. Sara listed drunk as a stereotype she experienced as well. Guinevere heard Native Americans described as "drunken Indians and alcoholics..." Finally, Stephanie, Sara, and

Guinevere all recounted being personally referred to as ‘squaws’, a derogatory term for Native American women.

Another aggression experienced by Sara and Johnny, who both interact with schools around Native American issues, is a lack of respect. Sara recounted the following experience when asked if she was ever snubbed or insulted by teachers or peers,

Absolutely. Um, and that is as an adult. I’m mentioning that as an adult at work in a school system. As an Indian education teacher. Staff will, I have gone and asked for my students, they’re supposed to be ready for class like any other teacher, and the secretary looks at me and says why don’t you sit down and wait, and if the students don’t come then we will call them down. And, yeah, that didn’t work for me. I, I don’t put up with it. And now I’ve been admining for well over, um, 12 years. And so they don’t do that. But the, the, the guy who had my job didn’t even go to classes cause he couldn’t get his kids. So you have to be able to manage and navigate a white system as well as be a strong role model for your Native kids, so you know, it’s walking in the those two worlds and being able to navigate...but I ended up going all the way to the superintendent and saying, you know what I don’t need this job, I don’t even really want this job but I, if I’m going to do it I need the ability to see my students. And she created an entire, um, staff development. For teachers, and-and principles, and held them accountable for me to see my kids.

In this experience, we see how Indian Education was undervalued to a degree that the superintendent had to intervene.

For Johnny, this lack of respect for Native Americans while talking to a teacher about his two sons:

I remember I had this conversation one time with an educator who was talking to me, oh it was one of their stud, their teachers from, ah, a couple years ago when I went to parent teacher conferences. And the, the teacher was telling me like, you know, you know my son was struggling in something, I forget what he was struggling in at the time. Probably reading or something like that. Because they're boys and boys don't like to read in general...But I remember having this conversation with this teacher one time and she was telling me about, you know, my responsibilities as a parent. You know. In a very, um, in a very, um, arrogant, and a very, um, you know...Condescending way. And telling me, well you know, you know, your job as a parent is really to help, you know, reinforce what we're teaching here in school, and you know, you should be reading with them and doing this and you should be teaching them these things, and all these other things. And you should really be spending your time doing that so they can get as best an education as possible, and I said, you know, thank you for your, thank you for your comments and your recommendations but you know what I think I should be doing for my child? I should, I should be teaching them more about what it means to be a Native boy and going to school in an all-white environment. Because you're not gonna teach them anything about that. In fact this environment is gonna try to strip everything about them from that, everything about their indigenous identity, as a Native boy from them by the time they get out of high school. It's my job as they're dad to protect that. Right? And I don't, and I, I don't need you to tell me what my job is. Right? And that was, and I think she just sort of kind of like, you know, with true flabbergast-ness she just kind of looked at me with her jaw hung open. And I was like, you know, um, I said, and I just told her I was like, you know, that's my job. And, and, and just for the record I have a PHD. I'm



not, you know. You know? I was just like...for the record, I'm, I'm much more educated than you are, I have a PHD in psychology. Now. And I, and, in child psychology specifically, so I would like, I know a little more about what I'm talking about than you do. Right? So I think when, when I talk to educators in that way, um, I think they get a little bit, um, off put by me.

Johnny again experienced this lack of respect when talking to the principal after the Thanksgiving word search issue:

And I have to have repeated conversations with the principal who's, who, who's a doctor as well, has a PHD in, um, we would exchange emails back and forth and I'd always address her as dear Dr. [name of principal]...you know, list out all my challenges from my email. And she'd respond to me, she'd address me as like, you know, dear [Johnny] thank you for your letter, that kind of thing. She did that several times in our email communications one time about stuff that was going on with my sons. And so finally one day I went into the school to talk to her, we we're having a conversation. And she said, um, you know, and I was trying to explain to her, you know, the-the, um, the process of discrimination and unseen bias and, and oppression and racism that was prevalent within a system, right? And what, and what those unforeseen forces do to an individual who's a person of color when they walk into that space. We're having that conversation, she was, you know, we're really trying really hard, we work really hard to try to be inclusive and be supportive of all people's culture identity, dah dah dah, the typical thing you're supposed to say in that sort of, from an administrator perspective, right? . . . And I said, I said let me give you a very very concrete example of what I'm talking about, and she said okay, and I said, I said you and I have had multiple communications back and forth by

email about some of the, some of the conditions that my sons are having a challenge with. And I said in every single one of my communications with you, I have always addressed you as Dr. [name of principal] [pounding table for emphasis]. When I come in and I see you, I address you as Dr. [name of principal]. Right? I give you the respect that your education deserves and that title deserves. And I said in every single one of your communications back to me, you never refer to me as Dr. [last name] even though you know I have a PHD, and you never address me as Dr. [last name] when we're talking, you always address me as Mr. [last name] or [Johnny]. I said that's what I'm talking about when I say that your biases is so innervig you that you don't even recognize that you and I are equals. And you, and you treat me as though my, you're, you're treating me in every one of our interactions as though my thoughts and my ideas and my recommendations don't have as much weight as yours.

In both these examples, Johnny experienced two things. The first was a lack of respect for his culture, as evidenced by the teacher's shock over him defending his culture and the principal's lack of response to the Thanksgiving microaggression. The second thing Johnny experienced is lack of respect towards himself as a person, as evidenced by the teacher's condescending tone and the principals lack of acknowledgement of Johnny's educational status.

Each of the participants experienced additional aggressions which made them feel like they did not belong. Stephanie described her experience in public high school as:

It was the first time I went to school off the reservation. My sister lived there, it was like ah, spread your wings...and going to school with a bunch of non-Natives was hard. I never realized how difficult...or how much I took for granted...being around Native people...and people who...well, in any small community, in any small town you all have

the ways you say things, you know, those kinds of things, you know, so it was a huge cultural shock for me to deal with. And I got treated like shit a lot of times by a lot of the other students who were just ignorant, I mean, straight ass ignorant, say stuff to me about being Native that was like, what!? Um...to the extent that there were two times I ended up in trouble because it resulted in fights . . . It was just so stupid, it was, what? What's that, you know...they didn't get to read the clues that I was getting upset about their conversation, you know, and having this conversation around Indians right in front of me, um was even more offensive...More verbal. I was never, you know, ah, there was a couple girls that tried to call me, 'you fucking dirty squaw'...it was a lot of shaming verbal kind of business. And a lot of it was just ignorant, I mean, are you serious?

Later, Stephanie had expressed that she had surpassed the expectations. When asked what these expectations were, she responded,

Well, you know, Indian girl from the reservation, what did you expect? What's the, the demographics, you know, say about Indian girls? Pregnant by such and such a date, in an abusive relationship, alcoholic, drugs, you know, it's unfortunately this whole thing around, um, prostitution and sex trafficking, it's like oh my god they finally termed . . . and it's ugly. But those, those are what Indian girls face today. Um. Especially if you haven't had a hand up along the way, um. Growing up on the reservation I can tell you right now my graduating class, which we had like one of the coolest graduating classes, there was like 80 of us, right? Graduating class. Um...but did we start with 80 when we started in 9<sup>th</sup> grade? No. And, and so, I didn't end up pregnant, I didn't end up, you know, a drunk, I didn't end up in jail, I didn't end up with an abusive blah blah blah, I didn't ended up working some minimal, or worse, on welfare, right? Um, none of that.

And so I knew the negative stereotypes that existed so when I said I succeeded, I didn't have to do a whole lot to succeed all those expectations, right?

Even though Stephanie did not hold herself accountable to these stereotypes, they left a lasting image of the way her people were viewed by dominant white culture.

For Luna, her culture was not addressed as a myth in classroom, but it was in larger societal culture:

I mean it wasn't like a teacher in the front of the room telling me, but...I know that I have been aware of the way that they portray things as wrong. You know, in certain movies, the way the Native Americans and what they do are portrayed as, like, almost like witchcraft. I don't like it. But it was never anything direct.

In addition, the way that peers reacted when Luna expressed her spirituality perpetuated a sense of other-ness:

I think it's only because I haven't been able to go to pow-wows now that I'm not able to dance and stuff, and so since I'm not actively doing that, I don't get as much weird looks as I used to before. Um, but normally when I would talk to people about what I do, like the pow-wows or wanting to go, you know, to sweat lodge or something like that I just get all these weird stares and people would either tell me that that was weird or actually ask questions or not say anything at all...I had less people actually ask questions than anything else.

Through students viewing Luna's culture as weird they perpetuated a feeling that the culture did not belong and could not be expressed without recrimination.

As well as these experiences with movies and peers, Luna also had a vivid memory of the following interactions with a teacher,

Yeah, the one I told the principal on, yeah, the first day of class he put Ojibwe and Chippewa on the board as two separate tribes, and since I felt like you're not really supposed to correct the teacher I said I'm only pretty sure that's wrong instead of outright telling him that was wrong. And he said 'I don't know, you'd have to ask one of them'. And from then on I was ignored in his classroom. I think that also had partly to do with me being female, cause he didn't really call on any females in the classroom, but because I challenged him that first day, every time there was a Native American topic, he'd like, ignore me. I'd have to repeat something over and over and over out loud, out loud before he acknowledged I existed...and then when he would acknowledge that I said something it was very, you know, angry. I heard you the first time, why are you being, you know, whatever.

Rather than simple invisibility or unintentional slights which produce an environment of exclusion, this appears to display an active and intentional effort to exclude a student.

Sara had a slightly different experience from the other respondents, in that she did not experience a great deal of direct racism until later in life when she moved to Minnesota. However, she did allude to a master narrative which created a culture of oppression. When asked to explain more about the master narrative, Sara responded:

The master narrative is, in the public education system it probably hasn't changed for over a hundred years, its, um, patriotism. So, what you learn is everything that's great about being a white American and, um, you don't hear anything about the truth of genocide. Um...so sovereignty. We don't talk about sovereignty, we talk about manifest destiny. So when you look at those two things when we talk about sovereignty and the power of nations to govern themselves as opposed to God said it was okay for us to, you

know, this land was meant for us. And when you really looked at those whole history rather than that of immigration you know, we're skipping a lot of that true history. The people who came here came to escape oppression, and when they got here they did exactly what was done to them. And we don't really teach those things, we don't teach any of the truth about what built America. Those things are left out, those, those, um, important narratives about slavery and, um, boarding school, things like that, we leave those things out.

In this way, even though Native Americans in Sara's school in Florida were thought as of cool by peers and there was not direct racism, there was still a narrative which hid oppression and demeaned Native American history.

Like Luna, Sara also had issue with the way Native Americans were portrayed in media. When asked if she ever experienced her spirituality or world view portrayed as a myth, she brought up the following example:

Ah, I guess I would say yes, just look at Disney's Pocahontas. You know, how she actually talks to the animals and things like that. You know it really warps the truth, or romanticizes the truth. Sexualized our women... So I was, I would use the example of Disney's Pocahontas as one really great example as portraying our spirituality and world view as a myth. And it's um, the reaction is that definitely puts us in the past, it kind of makes us, um, seem less intelligent, you know? If you look at our spirituality and world view, it is so complex and so deep, it is so connected to the star world and the star knowledge. Um, when I see our Native women oversexualized like Pocahontas, um, then you look at the state of Native women in general is there 6 times more likely to be raped than any other group of women. And so when you have a master narrative that portrays

your spirituality and world view in a different way and people believe it, grow up believing it, it hurts the people. So that's not, that's, that's called cultural misappropriation. And what that means is that not only did you appropriate, misappropriate the culture but you're hurting the people by doing it. Cultural appropriation is one thing. It's just taking it over or changing it or whatever. But cultural misappropriation is when you, when it gets to the point that it actually hurts that group of people. And I see examples of that a lot. I mean, in mascots.

This again creates a national sense of not belonging as well as brings up anger over the misportrayal of a people.

Again like Luna, Sara also had a prominent memory of racial aggression:

When I finally did my thesis in high school, I wrote about the U.S. Dakota war, but I was in Florida. And I had four grades, I had a grade from a history teacher, a teacher I got to choose, an English professor. Maybe there were only three. So, um, it was a 20 page paper, and the teacher I chose gave me an A, the English teacher gave me an A, and the history teacher gave me a D- with, with a statement written on it. And it said this paper reminds me of a cowboy and Indian movie with the roles reversed. D-. That was a history professor. With a master's degree. Or, no, he was a doctorate

When asked how she responded to receiving a D- with that note, Sara responded,

Ah, I was devastated. I spent so much time learning that history, learning that story, um, we did a lot of work and ah, researching our family history anyway, so I, I knew the truth. I grew up coming to Minnesota and going to those battle sites and collecting the earth of my ancestors. And we had, reunions we called it, touch the earth of our ancestors and remember. That was the theme of our, our family history research. And so I, I didn't just

write a paper, as a senior, it was my life. You know, it was I knew, what I lived. And it was shocking. It was...devastating and shocking...because I knew, I knew who the ignorant one was at that point.

In this example we again see active racism from a teacher. Rather than aimed personally at Sara, this teacher attacked what Sara knew to be true and refused to believe a perspective outside of his own.

When asked what narratives existed about Native Americans, Guinevere contrasted her experience in a school in a Minnesota city removed from reservations and her experience in a city near reservations:

None that I can, like, depending on like, if I, when I went to school in, in [city] there was no, like, stories. Just the negative stereotypes, stereotype stories that you already know. About the negative things about Native Americans. Because when I went to [town] high school...yeah. Because I, we moved from [city] to, um, [area] so for the first time I went to Indian school, it was different. It was a different experience. It's almost like a culture shock. You go from like, you're like the only Native American in public school and know nothing about your culture to like a big area. And they were more, there was just more things like, you know, our people are sacred, and like, you know, they, you know, we people want to, you know, people go to pow-wows because it's a spiritual thing, people have sun dances because it's part of, um, a spiritual journey that they're seeking to find, like, sto, you know, like, a vision or something like that. And I was like oh I didn't know that we did these things. And so it was more of like, just different. I didn't ever really hear any stories of like, what a Native American was when I was in public hi, in public school until I left public school.



When asked if she experienced open hostility from teachers or peers, she expanded on her experience in the school near reservations:

When I moved to um, [town]...So they're surrounded by one, two, three reservations. And so, it was, ah, it was a lot of racism there. Yeah. And I didn't really experience that much racism until I lived in there. I may have experienced some down here but I, I never, but never like direct racism...so it was a first time, like those first times, I got into a lot of fights. In, in high school because, like, we-we would just be hanging out walking with our friends and then like a group, you know, I remember, you know, walking downtown...and like a car full of high school kids drove by and there's like, you know, 'you fucking squaws', and 'you guys are dirty squaws', you know, or whatever, 'you dirty, dirty Indians' or whatever. 'You guys go back to the reservation.' And I'm like...that was the first time I ever experienced like, direct [racism]...And I experienced a little, you know, there were a lot in (town) high school. It was almost like an everyday thing. It was like their norm.

When asked what kind of effect this racism had on her, Guinevere responded:

Um. I felt angry. Upset. Because it's like. You know. Why do I have to be like a dirty person go live on reservations, I grew up in [city] it's like. I didn't even know that there was a reservation [laugh.] So it made me upset, you know, like, why do I have to go back to a reservation, like I went to a reservation, like I barely survived, you know, like I would like went to my first Indian school and read, like, and I was like, it was crazy and there was so much racism within the Native Americans towards the white people. So I was totally confused, um, just like why is there so much hostility and racism towards white people, you know. When I grew up down in the cities and it was more so black

versus white. That's what I grew up with. It was mostly, you know like, that's the only time that I, that I heard racism, you know like, black peo, black and white people didn't get along. That's the only thing growing up. And then I went to, went up in, went and moved to (town) and we finally left, I was so happy we left that, like, school, because I was like its crazy up here. And then they were racists to me because I grew up in [city] so that was not like, the typical Native American that grew up on the reservation so they had racism towards me. So they, and so they treated me like I was like, the foreigner. And they would call me and be like, they would call me and like, ah, I have to look, they would just call me like the N-lover. Yeah. And there was like r, like, ah, that was the, you know. They said I was black...just because I dressed in, you know early nineties all the kids dressed in baggy clothes and looked like Gangsters or whatever. So. That's what I grew up with but when you move to a reservation nobody's like that and everybody's kind of like who are you and who are you trying to be and like. And they wanna be your friend and yet they wanna fight and so it's like. I tell my mom, like, I need to go to a different school cause if I stay in the school. Like they want to fight me, you know. It's like go down here [town] school and it was like same thing but then it was like white versus the Native Americans and I was like, what is this? You know? Like, why I, why is there so much like hate? You know? Why does, why does somebody want to hate for what you look like? And growing up and not knowing like your background and somebody not like you because of who you are is confusing, I think. You know and it makes you think like why doesn't somebody like you for who you are, when you don't even know who you are...Yeah, so it was confusing, and I, I ended up getting into some fights in school because of race related stuff. Mostly from he

said, she said stuff. Um. People trying to fight me at school because, telling me to go back to the reservation and, I fought with a girl, you know, guys and girls. It was just to survive, you know, because people wanted, you know. They wanted to provoke you and make you angry because, I don't know. It was weird. So.

Through Guinevere's quote, we see how she was made to feel like she did not belong. In the school near the city, this was due to stereotypes. In this quote, while she was at the school near reservations, the racism became far more direct, as well as placing labels on what it meant to be Native American. An example of these labels is when Guinevere was told to go back to the reservation, marking an assumption that all Native Americans live on reservations.

Eventually, Guinevere would stop attending high school classes except her Ojibwe language and math classes. When asked why she stopped going to other classes, Guinevere responded,

I just felt like I didn't fit in, like I was, and I didn't. I felt like I was why should I learn about the U.S. History? Why should I learn about, why should I continue to learn about stuff? Why can't I learn about my own people? So I just disconnected myself, and shut it off. It's like I don't wanna learn about the U.S. history, I don't want to learn about the English history, I don't want to learn about different periods through, you know, I'm just like, I just, and I don't want to learn different languages, I want to learn my own language. You know. So I didn't go to Spanish, and it's like I just like, and why, I just became resistant...just was kind of like, fed up. So I stopped going. Then I just like, and that didn't help me. [Laugh]. Can't resist going to school, you know, and so I just felt, you know I can't select which classes you went. So I just stopped going, so. Which sucked. And then I dropped out of high school.

The feeling of isolation created by the invisibility of Native Americans in curriculum as well as exclusion created by racism and hatred caused Guinevere to disengage from her education.

These experiences also had a profound impact on her identity.

Johnny also faced racism which would have a profound impact on him. As previously mentioned, Johnny faced a great deal of trauma at a boarding school. When asked if his culture was valued, he responded:

Well at boarding school it did to a certain degree, but it was a catholic school so the, the value was really pushed on more, like, religion, Catholic religion. It was, that was a challenge to me because I think there was a part of me that always sort of like, you know I was one of those kids that always questions things. So I got in trouble a lot with my, with the adults, the people who were sort of like responsible for like, you know, educating me and guiding me. Because I'd always be like, I'd question things and be like well, you know, I'd start questioning lessons and things they were teaching me and, you know, Catholicism and that kind of stuff, and I question it and be like, how do you, how is it you teach these principles but then you kind of behave this way or. Like I'd point out contradictions in the way that they were teaching things but how they were practicing them. And nuns and, um, nuns and the brothers and the fathers would get mad. They'd get angry, right?

This trauma had a profound effect on Johnny. As he explains it:

I also, because of my experiences early in boarding school, I, I read a lot. I would be, I remember my mom used to, my mom saved all of the, um, report cards that she got from us. From boarding school from all us kids. She saved them in this little grey, like, you know, suitcase. This little styled suitcase with the little buttons inside. So I remember

when I was a little bit older I would go back and sometimes I would look at old pictures and stuff like that in the suitcase, but I'd find the report cards and I always saw the remarks that the nuns would write on my report cards. They were consistent from one year to the next. You know? They were always expressing, like, you know, [Johnny] is a sweet boy, he's this, he's that. We're really concerned cause he's so quiet, he's always by himself, he'd prefer to read a book than be, interact with other people, right? There are, like, kind of like this, they described me as just being this really really internally focused child, right? And, and when I, you know, I'm a child psychologist now and I understand trauma and, you know, its impact on children and family system and those kinds of things. And so when I, when I look back on it now, its like, all the signs and indicators were there and everybody just missed them, right? Like, you know, I'm not interacting with people, I'm not, I'm not being friends with anybody, yeah, I'd prefer to be alone and read than be social on any kind of level. It's like, yeah, um, and, and a lot of that stems from the kinds of things that were happening to me, right? It's like, the only way that I could control my environment is to try to keep as many people away from as possible so that I could kind of control what happened to me. And, um, and so, um, and so that was my boarding school experience.

In this way Johnny's experiences later in life were colored by the trauma of his early life in a very real way. Johnny would later have transformative experiences that would peel back some of the layers of this trauma, but it still had a very real impact on him.

One of the prevalent things in Johnny's life is what happened when he left boarding school to escape from this trauma,

And so, and then I was also like, early in my life around, I'd say probably nine, ten, eleven years old, I was also starting to come to this understanding of myself as a gay man, as a gay boy, like, this budding sense of sexuality and my attraction to other men. And so when I was eleven years old, in fifth grade, I said to my mother, I said to her if you send me back to that place I will kill myself. I remember having a conversation like that. You know, it wasn't a conversation as much as it was a threat, you know, it's like, if you send me back then I'll kill myself. And there was some crying at first and a few other things and I think that she understood, like, how at risk I was. And so she kept me, she sent the older kids back to boarding school in the fall, and she kept me home. And I went, I went to public school. Um. By myself. When I, when I entered fifth grade. And when I entered fifth grade at [school] elementary in [city]... You know, it was a decent experience. I felt, I felt pretty competent... but the things I had to contend with that were really challenging for me were all the sudden, these things that were happening at school in the school environment. I, um, with my peers. Um. But I went to fifth grade in (school) was like one of the first times that I got this concrete awareness that, um, I was different from other kids. That I was different in a very fundamental way. The first time that I went to school with, um, non-Natives. Right? In a predominantly non-Native environment. At boarding school I was at school with all Native kids and, you know, other Ojibwe people, but mostly probably Lakota people. And that was really the only way I knew them to be different from me, right? We didn't do all of things differently, where I was at boarding school, they would make it obvious that I was Ojibwe and they were Dakota and sometimes beat me up about it, right... There was this intra tribal stuff going on. But I pretty much realized that we were all the same in that environment.

When I went to school in [city], it was like all of a sudden I'm around like a lot of non-Native kids, right? Then I started getting picked on in the playground and the school environment, people calling me, you know, names, you know, doing the war hoop things and, you know. Calling me 'dirty little Indian' and, um. I would have people look at my clothes and laugh, because you know, they were hand-me--downs. I had four older brothers and sisters and my mom was poor, right? So they would say things, it was my first time in my life where I realized, like, I'm really really different from the rest of the individuals in my world, right? I'm poor, I'm Native, um, and so I started developing this other sense of shame about myself that was sort of, you know, compounded by the fact that I was, had this other stuff going on in my life. The sexual abuse and the, and the, um, budding gay identity and stuff, and how clear it was that that wasn't going to be okay as well. So I just kind of had this sense of myself very early in my life around eleven years old or so, that, you know, I really belonged nowhere. Right? There was no place I belonged. Right? And so, um, and so as painful as that stuff was to experience in my first, um, my first few months at, um, at, um, [school name], I begged my mom to send me back to boarding school. At Christmas break. And, um, and I remember the first time sharing this story and telling somebody this, they were sort of kind of like befuddled about, like, why would I do that, why would I willingly choose to go back to an environment where I was getting beat up, where I was being sexually abused, and where I was at risk for a bunch of other things, right? Instead of staying at home, and staying in, um, boarding school or staying in public school. And the only way I could make sense of that, I don't know I made sense of it at that age, you know I didn't think of it in this conscious way, but the only way I can make sense of it now as an adult is to

recognize that, you know, the other experience of being sort of like, so starkly different from my, the rest of my peers and to be...facing, you know, racial discrimination and racism, and other...forms of oppression on a daily basis on my learn, academic environment, my new academic environment. That that was so overwhelming to me that I would rather go back to this other place where at least I could predict, right? At least I could kind of predict pretty accurately...I had a little bit more control of it. Not necessary control in the sense that I could stop it but at least I could predict what would be happening, you know, there was some pretty concrete things that would happen that I would kind of predict what would happen to me. So that to me is probably, um, the beginning of sort of understanding, like, um, the, how the two environments were significantly different from each other.

When I followed up and asked if he felt he belonged to a greater degree in some ways at boarding school, Johnny replied,

Well, least I felt like I had a little bit more control, I don't know that I felt like I belonged there...and...there were other Native kids there. I felt more, I think I felt more at home there then I felt at, at the, in the, in the public school environment. And when I was, when I was at [public school name] there was not a lot of other Native kids there. You know? There weren't a lot, other Native kids there.

In this quote, we see how racism and a profound sense of not belonging was so damaging and overwhelming that a Native student chose to retreat back to a place of traumatic abuse rather than face this level of racism. A level of racism which was primarily verbal, which may not have been at significantly higher level than that which kids face on a daily basis in schools.



There were other factors in Johnny's decision. He had a protective system of brothers and sisters at boarding school. In addition, the sheer number of Native kids prevented the feeling of isolation from being as profound as it was at public high school. Still, for me, this quote highlights the disastrous impact of racism and the ways in which it isolates a kid.

### **Identity**

This isolation in turn can actually have an impact on a child's sense of identity. Guinevere experienced less racism when going to school in a major city, and the racism she experienced was through stereotypes, rather than a direct attack. However, as a result of these stereotypes and her weakened sense of connection with her Native American identity due to familial factors, Guinevere had the following reaction,

And so when I heard that that was what Native Americans were, I didn't want to be Native American. So I told people I was, like, Mulatto. I even told people I was black. Because I didn't want to tell anyone I was Native American. Because I didn't want to feel like I was like some piece of nothing that lived on the streets and drank all the time.

Guinevere later returned to this theme, stating,

Yeah I kind of felt like I had, like, um, a slight identity crisis. Like I didn't know who I was, you know, feeling lost or disconnected as a person, like, or as a, as myself, like, who am I? Like I know like, you know, we had, you know, I felt like it was more about the black and the white versus, then there were, there was me. But everybody, nobody talked about Native Americans. It was like we were, it was like an unknown. Growing up in [city] and it was like never going to any, like, traditional things or learning about your culture. I think it was just kind of like mm, you just know oh, we're going to a pow-wow and people dance, you see your cousins or family members. And then like, go to

funerals. Cause everybody dies, like. And so, that's all I grew up knowing Native Am, to be Native American was to go to Pow-wows and go to funerals. So it's just, and then from what I learned from school it wasn't nothing. So, okay...um, lost.

This quote illustrates how stereotypes and cultural disconnectedness can have a severe impact on the way people see themselves on a fundamental level as well as the way they portray themselves to a larger culture.

Of all the respondents, this racism appeared to have had the most prevalent impact on Guinevere. This is likely due to being from a family which was not connected to the culture. The theme of family as a source of resilience as well as cultural learning was present in all of the other four respondent's stories, and is an important theme to explore.

### **Family, Community, and Resilience**

Family was shown to be a large source of resilience for Native Americans. One of the ways Stephanie and Johnny experienced family as resilience was as a protective force. As Stephanie put it, "my parents were always really, um, kind and gracious people. So in so many ways I didn't get the brunt of, um, they were very good protectors, right?" Later, when I mentioned I felt I should have addressed the family aspect more, she stated:

For me it was huge. Um, but I think it's huge for all Indian people. Especially to get through, you-you survive because of, and sometimes in spite of, your family. Right? Nobody else can pull you down faster but no one else will build you up faster either.

This quote illustrates the importance Stephanie places on family for protection of identity and emotional well-being. This is evidenced again in the following quote,

So, a lot of my other sisters, I was one of the baby girls, right? I have one of the baby girls right? I have one younger sister and one younger brother, right? So, that means I

had a lot of people watching for and helping take care of me. Um, and a lot of that is a big part of theirs, um, was that engagement with them, that protection of them and from them, and the challenge of 'you better figure out how to do it' kind of sisterly thing.

So one way family provided resilience for Stephanie was by providing a sense of having people to rely on and watch out for her as well as responsibility for her younger siblings.

For Johnny, his family provided a partial buffer against abuse while he was in boarding schools:

But I also went to, I also went to boarding schools with my five older brothers and sisters, or four older brothers and sisters. So I have two older brothers and two older sisters who were also in boarding school with me. Which I think would have been a much different experience for me had I not been with them...it was pretty bad even with them there, but...

This importance of the family sticking together and protecting each other is shown again when Johnny explains why he left boarding school for the second time:

Um, so I went back to boarding school for a couple of years and then. In, um. So I finished 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> there, then I came, we came back home and. All of us actually came back, none of us just, like we got to an age where we were just, you know, as, as tweenagers or teenagers we were able to be a little bit more vocal with my mom about, like, us not going back there. None of us wanted to go back. Um. And so. My two older brothers, my older brother and my oldest sister both graduated from there and after that, um, my other older sister were back or got kicked out cause, you know, she retaliated some, some of the nuns and stuff like that. Fought back. Um. And then I came back home, and my brother [name], he was my older brother, he was the last one there by himself, and then the next year he came back and there was just like, you know. It's kind of like, you know, as soon as there wasn't a group of us

there, as a family to kind of protect each other, it was just, you know, we all just sort of came back home. So when we lost our older brothers and sisters there, just, we were more vulnerable I guess. And we came home...

Although the family was not able to fully prevent the experiences of abuse and trauma Johnny experienced, they did serve to mitigate them to a degree and provide a protective factor to fall back on. This is evidenced by the family leaving boarding school together when their protective force started to fall apart.

As well as providing resilience by providing a protective force, Stephanie, Sara and Johnny all experienced family as a place where their identity was formed and reinforced. This identity reinforcement helped to buffer the forces listed earlier. As Stephanie puts it, "family is where you learn how to be." She also said, when asked what it meant to be Native American, "I also come from a very large extended family. Lived, you know, half a mile down the road from my Grandma...raised around my cousins...so there are circles of identity and the innermost circle to me has always been about family..." In this way, Stephanie views family as not only a place where in identity is formed but also an integral part of identity.

Sara reflected on the strong affect her family had on her identity as well providing her a source of resilience,

Oh, let's see, the effects of your experiences in education on your identity...my identity was formed at home. Um, it really had nothing to do with the school. It seemed to me that, you know, that the school was the place where you went and, I don't know...I had such a strong identity from an early age...

By having a strong identity built up at home, Sara had a protective force which allowed her to buffer any attack which the school culture placed on her identity. This was aided by the

perception among her peers and social network that Native Americans were something cool, even if this perception did not make its way into the curriculum.

For Johnny, he was inspired both by the community in which he lived and by the political involvement of his mom. As Johnny reflected on his experiences, he said:

In a lot of ways I feel like I was raised by the community. Like my mom, you know she was really really busy in politics, in community activism and those kinds of things so she was really really involved in this. And she didn't have a lot of time for me and my family specifically. And there was lots of, there was some significant challenges that we as a family had because of that, but she taught me a lot of things about, from watching her, she taught me about, you know, that my purpose here in, on this earth, is bigger than just me. It's bigger than just me getting my high school degree. It's, it's bigger than me getting my PHD. It's bigger than me graduating. It's bigger than me, you know, having just these two children. It's bigger than those things I have because I have this connection to this ancestral world, I have a bigger commitment that I, I have to change things not just for me and my immediate family, I have to do for all Indian people who, that's what we do, that's what we are. So she modeled that for me in lots of ways, and, because she was busy off, off busy doing that stuff, wandering all over the country doing stuff, working with Indian child welfare and all of this other stuff and doing stuff for Indian Ed. And being on the board of the Indian center and doing all of this stuff for [community], like the community really raised me in lots of ways. My older brothers and sisters raised me. So I got this other experience of my life than my children are getting. And in some ways I feel sad that they're not getting it all because I feel like I've been benefited from that in such a tremendous way.

In this way, Johnny's mother modeled a sense of connection and community responsibility that was integral to Johnny's experience of what it means to be a Native American.

Finally, family and community provided a source of acceptance and belonging which Native Americans can fall back on when times are tough. When Luna was asked if she was ever accepted, she replied "probably only by my grandma...and a couple of my Ojibwe teachers, and Native mentors. But that's about it. Small circle of people." Although this circle was small, Luna was still provided some place where she felt she belonged.

Guinevere did not experience her family as a source of resilience. This is not to say her mother was absent, but her mother was less connected to the culture and thus could not provide cultural knowledge, skills or values. On top of the lack of cultural resilience, Guinevere went through a lot in her home and community life, as she described,

Ah, no, I don't think so, I mean, I think I, I grew up in, ah, family that had, you know, just my mother. Lived off of, you know, she tried to work and then lived off the welfare system. And then I went to foster care a couple of times. Um. I don't know what else I. Yeah, I went through a lot. Yeah. A lot of, ah, different, um, I experienced a lot of violence growing up outside of school. Just walking around in south [city] I think I was like in a couple of drive bys, like, somebody shot at us or walking down the road...you know, my first cousin was murdered...he was murdered over his jacket and shoes. He's not, and then like my family fell apart after that. And so it was interesting, you'd think that a lot violence and a lot of poverty. And so that was probably one of the biggest things.

This lack of community and familial protection appears to have made her more vulnerable to the identity crisis she went through in high school.

### **Positive Role Models and Relationships**

As well as family and community, all the respondents had positive experiences which helped strengthen their identity, sense of belonging, and provided sources of support, helping to strengthen their resilience. Often these sources came from individuals who were particularly supportive or provided a role model or mentor. For Stephanie, this was the presence of Native Americans during her educational experience,

Um, I actually, when I was in fifth grade, my sister was actually the teaching assistant and, um, was actually in the classroom, um, and we, you know, worked with me. So, in some ways when you looked at role models by the time I was coming through I, I got to see Indian teachers, I got to see people who were, you know, n-n-not just nuns, so my perception already of education, education and educators were already being, um, probably ahead of the curve at that point cause like I said I got to see Native teachers and Native people around me all the time.

By having Native American role models who supported her education experience, Stephanie could see herself represented in a very real way.

Stephanie also experienced a transformative experience when she left high school, coming to accept and value people more as well as let go of her own biases:

I went to [college] and there are very few Indian people. Maybe a few more people of color, but predominantly, you know, white, upper-class, well to do, you know, um, people. Um, so, in that experience I had to learn, well I learned a lot about, you know, making friends with black people, making friends with Hispanic people, making friends, well and the difference between Hispanic and Mexican and all of that stuff, and, and Asian people and then, life continued to evolve and now I know even more, better understanding of Asian people.

Right? There's certainly more than one Asian race so to speak, so...growing up on the Rez I had no idea how to interact. So those were hard lessons because I would say things, and my friends would call me on it, you just said such and such, and I'm like yeah, and it's like that's offensive! Well, what do you mean, and I didn't mean to be offensive, I'm not trying to insult you, and then that's where a lot of that education for me came to life, cause I too had a lot of prejudice about black people, about hispan, I mean, without understanding them. Um, so that's what I mean, it's like oh, I had to stop and start looking at people as individuals beyond, you know, our physical appearances, um, although fully understanding that in the world we live in we still all get judged on our physical appearances. So getting to know people, finding those common things, experiences, values, um, has been, you know, a lifelong continuing, you know, um, lesson, so to speak. But it is what allowed me to understand that people are people first and foremost.

By letting go of her own biases in this way, Stephanie was also able to let go of some of the impact other people's biases had on her as well.

In addition to these learning experience, Stephanie found a great source of power because she got to be,

...raised in the women empowerment era, right? Women were emerging, you know, and so I got the benefit of never having been...I grew up thinking I could be anything I wanted to be. Right? And I understand that to be a huge part of my generation was there was no more, well, in reality there stills stuff, but women could be whatever they wanted to be, they could be doctors, lawyers, judges, blah blah blah. I got to grow up thinking I could be anything I wanted to be. Now the foundation of growing up around Indian people that instilled, that made that core identity of who I am a big part of how I became to be. Um, were, were some



of some of the strengths, right? I did have people around me who cared about my future, who guided me, who held me accountable, um, high school was fun, I had lots of teachers who absolutely, go to college, go to college, I had...[a] counselor who absolutely supported me, so when I think of my school experiences, I had a pretty good experience. I was a pretty smart kid, I knew how to toe the line, and I had parents who absolutely there was no ifs, ands, or buts, it was about education. Um, so in all of those I think of those strengths, um, resiliency factors. Those are what I also come to understand or now consider part of what built the factors, or the influencing factors that have made me such a resilient person. So when you're looking into understanding social work, understand that resiliency is even more important than understanding all of this other negative stuff, right? Is helping a child or a person find their strength to be resilient is what will help them, um, get through all of the hurdles and barriers that exist. Um, I think of myself as having been a very fortunate person in my educational experience. I think it was in college I kind of got some grief once in a while from some professors but even then it was pth. I can, I was, shit, I was gonna save the world back then. [Laugh]. I changed to understand what the world is and how to save it. Um. I don't get to save the world but I get to influence and save the world I live in, and I do that one family at a time, one interaction at a time, one experience at a time, to know that supporting and loving someone is what most people just need. They don't need to be criticized, they don't need to be judged, um, cause a lot of those experiences coming through the education system, cause not all of my siblings, I was the only one who went for a...college. Um, it's not like it was, um, a common experience in my family. So somehow in there I had the benefit of that protection, that love, um, that kindness, that guidance, that accountability, um, that came from around me. Um, family. As well as in the school setting.

I got to have a generally positive experience. Um, I also know that that's not the most common experience among American Indian people. Does that make sense?

This quote illustrates how family, community, and these other resiliency factors not only we're able to mitigate harm from racialized aggressions but made Stephanie's school experience positive.

Luna listed two sources of strength which supported her educational experience. For the first strength, Luna listed:

I served as a student representative on their [Indian Education program] committee, and that was actually I think one of the things that kept me going back. When, you know, getting bullied was a little too much and I wanted to quit school.

When asked why this helped her keep going back to school, Luna responded by saying "I had a responsibility. I had to be there, I had to make sure that I could get to know the other Native students because I was the one speaking for them." By being in a position to empower others, Luna was put in a position to also empower herself.

For the second strength, Luna listed a couple good teachers. When asked what made them good teachers, Luna responded:

They weren't burnt out. They hadn't given up on all the kids. And they were the ones that came even after, you know, the problem kids made them cry or threw things in their room. I mean, I had one teacher who, since we had a lot of kids from over north, would look up sex offenders and tell them [the kids] the safest way to walk home from the bus. I mean, it was the teachers that kind of went above and beyond to make sure that all the kids were included, that all the kids were safe, that all the kids were able to say what they needed to say even if maybe they didn't say it the right way. They realized that they

can't get respect just from standing up there and being a teacher. They have to show the kids they care. I think that's what made them stand out more than the others.

These few teachers were able to create a place of belonging and feelings of being cared for during sections of Luna's day.

For Guinevere, one of her first positive experiences came when she started to learn about her culture and history:

Then I started learning when I moved to [town] high school, they had Indian Ed and then they had Ojibwe teachings, and that's when I finally learned that, you know, about the reservations and the massacres and what happened from [town] high school. And that was like early 90's so. I didn't even know that that happened. And then I started learning about Ojibwe, some stuff, and so those are the only classes I went to.

This experience started building a cultural resilience which had been missing from Guinevere's life, and created one of the only attachments to school Guinevere had left.

Although Guinevere would stay tentatively attached to school through Ojibwe and math classes, she would eventually drop out:

I had, so I got pregnant when I was in high school. And with my son. And so I dropped out. I tried to go back to school, but I was like, my hormones were, and I was super emotional...your emotions change. And it's weird, like your eyes open up, and you realize like, things are different. Things aren't as messed up as they seemed. And so I tried to go back to school and I was like, ultra-sensitive, emotionally distraught, couldn't even do it. And the school didn't really want me there because I was pregnant. And so they basically got me out of there because they didn't want to like, you know like [town] high school, we can't have a pregnant girl here, we can't have her here. So they pushed

me to the alternative learning center to get my high school diploma. So, and I was happy, I just wanted to get out of there because I was like a wreck, wanted to cry, and I was like oh my god there's like, you know, like developmentally kids I didn't even know so they were here. You just started noticing people that weren't there before, like. And they're struggling, just trying to get through their daily life. You know, like, people are helping them out, and your like thinking, you know, like the world's bad, you know, like because of who you are as a person or your race or you like started looking around you and like I'm not the only person here, like, you started looking around like there's more to school then just, everybody has something going on. And I couldn't handle it, like I need to get out of here. So I left.

However, through this experience of dropping out, Guinevere had a transformative experience, And then I got a public health nurse that came because I dropped out of high school and went to ALC suddenly and I was pregnant. And so [town] or [county] got me a nurse. And so she started coming to my house and seeing me, so this was in nineteen eighty-seven. And I was like oh my god, this nurse coming to my house, you know, and like she took the time. You know, white. Took the time to meet with me all the time. Talked to me about being healthy and not to smoke or do drugs or drink alcohol, obviously I didn't do any of that, but very understanding. Didn't look at me as, you know, as who I thought everybody else look at me. You know, like, oh she's an Indian, drunken Indian, and then my mom's family was like, oh she's pregnant, your gonna end up with her kids, you know, like. And I was like, so I was totally distraught, like I was thinking is my mom going to take my kids, you know, or my kid. So it like changed me. Like I was like I'm not going to be like your daughter, like you have her kids, so I'm not going to have this

public health nurse that likes me, takes care of me, comes and sees me, talks to me. And I was like I'm gonna finish school. You know, and, and I have a healthy kid and I'm gonna stay with, you know, I'm gonna be a good parent and I'm not gonna lose my kid to like foster care or, you know, social services or anything like that or have my mom or somebody take care of my kid. So I'm. It changed me. That person made a difference. So. So it was like I'm going to go to school. It's like I can't, I can't not go to school. So it opened up, you know, made me think it wasn't about my race. So. It's like okay. I'm gonna change me. So.

Guinevere became motivated to succeed for her son and to avoid the fate of having her son cared for by others. However, it was the positive acceptance of the nurse that appeared to open up this possibility.

Johnny had what was possibly the toughest school experience of any of the kids. His experience included physical and sexual abuse, which led him to shut down in reaction to his trauma. However, even in this environment, Johnny found a source of strength. Johnny revealed that when he talks about his experience in boarding school, he is often met with the statement "they couldn't have been completely bad..." Johnny stated he replies to this questioning with:

I love the fact that I had a really good education. I got-I got a solid education, um, at boarding school. Or, you know, um, for my formative years, right? I came out of boarding school with, you know, reading at a high school level when I was eleven years old. Um. Able to do math at a high school math, all this, like, you know, some pretty, pretty, you know, impressive things considering that I was just a poor Native kid from south [city], right? So there, there were some really good things academically about going to boarding school...

These positive experiences obviously did not outweigh the trauma Johnny faced at boarding school, but they did provide a source of strength later on in life.

The second time Johnny came back from boarding school, he found restorative experiences from a larger cultural shift as well as the presence of cultural learning opportunities in his school,

And then things shifted and changed, um, when I got to the, the, when I came back the second time and I started high school, or junior high...the abuse and things like that had stopped and I was a little bit further along in my own social development and, and sense of identity as a, as a Native boy but also as a, as a, um, as a, two spirit boy it gave, um, a budding homosexual boy. And then I think one of the things that was different for me was that, you know, so at Catholic boarding school, they didn't really, like, they didn't really emphasize culture, they kind of like, they sort of like, well at that time in 19, late 60's early 70's they kind of paid homage to and, like, you know, really, you know, um, surface ways. Not in any definites or ever like, you know. Like we didn't, we didn't participate in any language classes or anything like, anything you see kind of now... so when I came back to Minnesota and I started going to public school, um, and then, um, in about 1974 or so, 73, that was on the heels on some really significant things happening social in the Native community...The Indian center opened in 1971, or 70, yeah, 1971. Um. The early 70's, my mother was very involved in that, my mom, you know, AIM was really really prevalent...at that time...so we had all this, like, stuff happening in my early childh, my early adolescence with, you know, the renaissance of Indian culture, right? That's when like, Native American literature, Simon Ortiz, and you know, that's [garbled] writing prolific books about, you know, the lived experience of the Native

people. That stuff was happening at the same time I was coming into myself, as understanding myself in a different way as a young man, you know. And that was, because I was into books, I was reading those things, right? And I was having this interesting experience, like outside my life, my external life. At the same time I was having this other lived experience, it broke some of the other things through my, through my internal world through, when I was during reading. And it really shaped who I was, as, um, as a young man because my mom was really politically active in south [city], and so were a lot of my other relatives, right...and those are the things that started to shape who I was, my understanding of who I was as a Native Man. About our history, about our oppression, about our fight for liberation and all this little things. And it really laid for the foundation for about how I would think about myself and the world as, and you know what my sense of purpose was here too. Um. And that was, that was a significant challenge, just kind of navigating that too because, you know, it was the mid 70's and Minnesota was still pretty, I was gonna say. Minnesota was still pretty, pretty, pretty racist. And that was, I think, I'm chuckling about that because, like, you know, you could say that they're still pretty racist...so, um, but that was the context of my life, and so I started to have this deeper and dif, different understanding of myself in tru, in relationship to myself, my family, my nationhood. I, in my, in my nation, put my identity as a Native man, as a, as an Ojibwe man, right? These different stuff, there was all these things that were happening externally in the world at the time that really helped shape those things. Um. And I was lucky enough to go to Minnesota, um, when I left boarding school, one of the things that they did when boarding school happened was, and the, and when I went to, finished up middle school and boarding school, like, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 7<sup>th</sup>

grade, the school started this thing where they put everybody in the same pods together. And they tried that, this new method of, like, um, of teaching where, you know, first second third graders, and fourth graders are all together, fifth sixth seventh eighth graders were all together, and you all studied the same curriculum, but you studied at your own pace, and. That was really an interesting model, and I think, in some ways I think that was a really indigenous model where like younger kids are learning from older kids. And certain things you are teaching people or teaching the students are being taught across generations. And that's a really indigenous way of thinking about education because. It's really too bad they didn't integrate, like culture and those kinds of things as well. But that's how we were taught, like the three r's, reading writing and arithmetic. So when we left, um, when I left boarding school, um, at sixth grade, when I left at the end of sixth grade, um, I was reading at a ninth and tenth grade level, I was doing ninth and tenth grade level math, and those kinds of things. And my brother who was in one year ahead of me, we both went into [school] next year. And I tested out of seventh grade. So I went from sev, sixth grade to eighth grade. With him...And they [the high school] had this, they had this, ah, they had this, ah, group there. . . called the, called [group name]. . . And [group name] had a back page or a page in the school newspaper called, um, um, [newspaper name]. And I was a prolific writer by that point in time by, um, spending a lot of time reading and stuff like that. And so I was very involved in both [group name] and also the publishing of [newspaper name] so. Um. All of a sudden, um, I was starting to come out of my shell and blossom as this, you know, you know, I wasn't sitting in the corner reading any more like the, like I was in boarding school. I was able to sort of kind of like much more socially, right. Um. And. And all of a sudden I was in a public



institution where there was hundreds of Native kids, not just like one or two like before. So that was a significant game changer for me as well...I became the district rep for, um, [area]. For the Indian, [city] public school Indian ed program, so I was the student rep to the, um, parent, um, parent advisory committee. So I started kind of getting this like deeper understanding of all these other layers that were sort of kind of going on in the world. My education was a, it was a really really good education and not really, I learned more probably through those processes than I learned in actual school, right? Um. I also had an, um, you know there was, um, our teacher at high school...he was the art teacher and he taught a class called Native American art every, every spring semester. So it was like every year, you know, it's really, it's really really very different, like, um. To go into public, um, school environment and you see classes that, you know, where you are reflected in the curriculum, right? I was better, I was lucky enough to go to high school at a time when in Minneapolis public schools you could go and you could take a Native American art class. You could take a Native American literature class. You could take Native American history. You could take, um, all of these specific classes about Native American history, language, art and culture. And it was, it was phenomenal. It was like, you know, it, I think in many ways it made the difference between me and kind of foreclosing on myself early in life. Um. And it just allowed me to blossom. Become this, you know, become. I really, I really think of that time in my life as being fundamental in shaping who I am today as a Native man, you know. I don't think, I don't think I'd be a doctor today and I don't think I'd have the role and leadership that I have in my community today with all, all of those things, right? I saw Native people in leadership. I saw Native people leading organizations and changing lives. And all of

those things were really really fundamental things for me to see as a young man, right...And I was really really, I was really lucky to have that experience, you know?

All these different factors served to peel back some of the walls Johnny had built. This served to strengthen Johnny's self-image and identity, helping him obtain a doctorate. These transformative experiences continued into college, when Johnny had a conversation with a professor,

She was just this amazing women, right. At one point she said to me, did you ever think about getting a PhD in psychology? And I was like, um, no? Like, why would I think about that, you know? I remember having this conversation with her, I said like, I said to her, I said PhD's are for smart people, people have like a lot of intelligence, right? And she was like, well you absolutely have what it takes to have a PhD, or get a PHD. She said you are an amazing writer, you are an amazing critical thinker, you're this or that. Telling me these kinds of things about myself that I, that I couldn't see in myself because most of my early life, those things were not reflected back to me. They were not, stories that people had told me about myself. That I was intelligent. That I could, um, that I could solve problems, that I could think critically for myself in that way, and that my opinions were important. Right? And so those were some of the experiences that I had that were really fundamental and so, when I think about the contributions way back to this other question we were talking about from, that what can social workers do in an academic environment, those were the kinds of things that they can also do too. Is that they can, with intention, help Native children understand themselves differently than, than the academic experience will give them, right...They can help them to understand, like, you are intelligent, intelligence doesn't look just like this, it also looks like this.

Right? Um. Like I remember leaving, um, that conversation with my, um, my, my professor and I had a conversation with my tea, my sister. I called my sister and I said, told her this story, called her she lived in [State] at the time. Said, she told me that I should go to grad school, she said that I would be in, make a good PhD, that I could do a PhD in psychology. And I was kind of chuckling and laughing when I told her this story. And my sister said you absolutely could do that. She said you're, she said you're one of the smartest individuals I know. And I said I don't think I'm smart. And she said, okay, she said, um, intelligence isn't just book knowledge. Anybody can read a book and memorize the content. You know? And feed, and feed content back to you. She said but intelligence is really the ability to take that information and integrate your lived experience and make it meaningful and do something with that. And she said you have the capacity to do that. And nobody had ever told these things to me before, right...Like, within all of my academic experience nobody ever said that what, that's what knowledge is, that's what knowledge production is. That's what, um, that's what the creation and the intellectual pursuit is about. It isn't about learning concepts and memorizing them. It's about learning concepts and this other area and then applying it to your lived experience and doing something different with it. And so, and that's what we as Native people and Indigenous people have been doing all of our lives, right?

Although this research focuses on the public education system, I think this quote shows both the lasting and drastic impact negative experiences can have as well as the healing that comes from these kind of corrective positive experiences.

### **Indian Education and the Use of Native American Culture**

Although Stephanie did not have Indian Education, she was part of an ‘Indian club’ after school where she learned about different cultural practices. Sara also did not participate in an Indian Education program, but currently works in one and provided insights from her work with children. As a result, all five participants had comments to add about Indian Education.

Between the five of them, two major themes emerged: 1. How Indian Education helped Native American students facilitate a place of belonging and 2. How Indian Education provided a source of cultural learning for Native American students. The way Indian Education helped Luna feel like she belonged was already mentioned, where in it provided a space of leadership and responsibility.

Guinevere expressed that Indian Education not only provided a sense of belonging but also a culture of being cared for. When asked if Indian education helped, Guinevere replied “oh yeah. Like, they were, like, supportive, and there were caring. They helped. They took the time. They wanted you to graduate. They were there for you. Tried to be supportive.”

However, it is the role of cultural learning that was viewed as the main benefit of Indian Education by respondents. When asked if Indian club helped, Stephanie responded:

Um, it was huge. I learned how to dance, I learned how to bead, I so I learned a lot about, at least, pow wows, right? And-and dance styles. So that’s one kind of one stereotyped things about Native people too, about pow-wows and dancing, but it helped install an even deeper sense of pride, right? Cause there was nothing happening still today that makes me feel as good as standing around that drum, with a pow-wow, with my children, with, you know, family, um, that was huge...so I don’t know if it was a

grant funded thing at the school, what have you, I'm not quite sure, but that's where, you know, where I learned a core, and additional core part of my identity. That makes sense?

Through this cultural learning, the Indian club Stephanie was a part of helped instill additional formation for her identity and connected her to a deeper sense of community.

When Sara was asked how she believed Indian education helped her students, she replied: Oh my goodness. Um, our current education, Indian education program tremendously helps the students in my district because we are allowed to have a cultural program and conduct it in the way in which it was intended to be conducted. So it's cultural, its family engagement, it's, um, has nothing to do with reinforcing white education. So why would you have an Indian education program which is culturally based, and then make the teacher go and, and, ah, help with math, or tutor math. So personally I believe that every student right including indigenous children, their right to right education and when they're failing their right, they have a right to a tutor to help, ah homework help or something like that. But not the job of Indian Education to come in and reinforce white education because it's very much like boarding school again. So in my district it's very very successful because we do not do that. But in other districts, and we look at Minnesota's failing miserly at, especially educating Native kids because White administrators are making these statements about Indian education that they have no business making. They don't know what Indian education is, they just feel like they're gonna make rules about it. And so if you understand the law and the legislation of Indian Ed, which is as strong as special education, same legislation. Um. Except we have one powerful tool and that is, ah, our parent advisory committee. The parents have a voice and its, and their voice goes directly to the school board once a year. And that really is

our saving grace, so if we have, ah, educated parents and strong parent engagement, all those things have to come together in order to create a strong program. The other thing that's really helped our program be successful is that we're kind of out of the city. And so we have less attrition. So our kids pretty much, I can have a student k-12. All the way through. And I have them every single year. And so that's really a blessing. We create really strong relationships, and, and trust. And, you know, you know they're family, you have just a different relationship.

In this quote, Sara illustrates the importance of cultural learning. In addition, she alluded to a struggle Indian education faces, where in they have to defend their position of cultural learning as opposed to merely a means to support Native American students in their main stream education.

Johnny faced a similar struggle with defending the need of Indian education to be focused on cultural learning, as evidenced by the following quote,

I'm actually, I'm actually the chair of the Indian Ed. Committee and I'm in a, I'm in a daily if not weekly and monthly fight with the...school superintendent or the assistant superintendent over these very issues, right? Like, you know. Um. They want a, they're always pushing back on, you know, the things that we want to do in our program, like, you know, they're always trying to do things like, you know, we should spend our Indian money on tutoring and we should spend our Indian money on, you know, um, testing material, you know. This and that. And I push back and I'm like that's not the intent of Indian education. Indian education is to support the cultural identity of the Indian child within this environment. Like, it's your job and the school district's job with your own resources that you get through public education dollars to tutor them and provide it, the

education opportunities and all those other things. Just like you would do for any other child. This, this is specifically to develop, to create a place where my child and every other Native child that enters this place, this space and place, feels like they belong and they feel like they can flourish. And they don't get that. They don't understand that, and I think more, social workers need to be trained to understand that is their job. Their job is to create and protect that space so those Native children can kind of develop and flourish and they can occupy that space with pride and dignity and, and they can be all who they are supposed to be in that space. They don't have to leave their Indigeneity at home when they walk through that door or through that space, because it's such a threatening environment, right? My, my children experience microaggressions in that environment every single day. There isn't, you know, I can't count how many times I have to have conversations with them throughout the year about things that they either seen, heard, or experienced in the academic environment that are, that are microaggressions to them as Native people.

In this quote, Johnny illustrates both the importance of cultural learning and the ability of Indian education to create a safe place where in Native American students can be their authentic selves.

### **Role of Social Workers**

In trying to understand how social workers specifically could contribute to and support Native American Students, I asked the following question: A Social Worker's role in the school seeks to aid students to have a sense of connection, as well as being a voice for those whose voice might be drowned out, as well as respecting the identity of all students. In thinking about your school experience and the description of these social work values, what do you wish social workers would do more/less of for Native American students?

From this question, four major themes came through: historical trauma caused by social workers, social worker connectedness to Native American culture, combating systemic racism, and fostering places of belonging. Sara expressed the theme of historical trauma. When asked this question, Stephanie stated she had very little interaction with social workers, which she viewed as a good thing. When asked why this was a good thing, she responded:

Well, because social workers in the lives of Indian kids is child protection. It's out of home placement. It's, it's all over the place right? You, in Indian education now some programs have social workers and it is their job to help build that bridge between home and school, um. And so, there's just a negative perception of who social workers are in the Indian community...and, and in many instances, and I spent now, you know, almost 30 years serving the Indian community and families and children, it is, it's a, often a negative experience, that results in court some kind of, you know, out of, unfortunately out of home placement. Trauma. Um, so, that's why I now know how fortunate I was to have the family and the upbringing I had cause it's the core of how and who I got to be, who I am, and what I do. Cause yeah. It's, it's a negative perception...But it's also based on a whole lot of history and reality.

This quote shows how the historical practice of taking Native American children away from their families and placing them within non-Native American families has left a scar. This scar placed a distrust of social workers in Stephanie.

In the second theme, Sara mentioned that she felt social workers should be more connected to Native American culture to be more effective:

Um. I would say I would...I guess it really depends, I would-I've seen some really great social workers that um, I think it depends on how connected they are, ah, to our culture.



You know kids need those social workers that are right in the school to support them, all kids need that. What my kids, my Indian Ed kids, they have my phone number, you know, so, they call me and they say [Sara] says if there's a meeting she would like to be invited and she will come right away. And I will, so. So yeah, I don't know so much about the social workers. The ones that I know are great...I don't know what I wish, I guess, I wish they would, um, just be more, and all teachers need to be more connected with the true Minnesota, the true Minnesota Indian history. That would really change a lot of the way our system works, I think.

By becoming more connected to this history, social workers would be more effectively able to intervene in systemic racism.

This intervention to stop racism and other factors which cause kids to disconnect reflects the third theme. As Guinevere states:

Social workers. I think, um. I think a social worker, but more of like a community health worker or a public health worker would be more supportive for students. I think of, you know, if they're struggling, you know, that much in school, where they decided to disconnect, you know, social emotionally to school, and figured that, you know, school. Blaming the school or, um, the people that they go to school with, they need to look a little bit deeper and figure out what's going on, you know, at home. You know, and kind of help them figure it out. Because I feel like a social worker can only do so much. I think they can help coordinate their schooling, but also look at like, what do they need supportively outside, you know, do they have a good healthy relationship with their parents or guardians or whatever, foster care, whoever's taking care of them. And do they have things that they're doing to kind of like, help them with their school work or do

they have like a, do they have co, do they have dinner together. Do you know what I mean?

In this way social workers can help connect home life with school.

Johnny viewed combating systematic racism as essential to the social worker's role as well,

I think that, um, I think that one of the things I think that, like I remember when I was in high school and I took this, I took this, um, this social work class and I had to read this book about this poor inner city black kid. And it was a story about, like, how this social worker kind of helped, you know, helped to rescue him and, from poverty and all these other things and. Um. And, um. I think about that now within this context and I think about like, you know. I think that, what social workers, what, what Native kids need from social workers is, they need, they don't need rescuing so much as they need, um, an ally. Right? And I think what they need is, I think what's helpful is, for social workers to be, um, allies within the institution and fight institutional racism. Right? Kind of institutional, um, ah, oppression. And create a safe place for Native people to sort of have to help to create this space inside the institution where Native people feel, um, they can occupy the space where, in that they can kind of define what that space. I think that's the biggest challenge that Native kids have these days is that, they don't see themselves reflected in the curriculum, they don't see themselves reflected in the environment.

There's no, there's no, um, there's no real, um, effort made in a lots of, um, schools, our school environments. To create and support this space and place for Native children to have that, to, to really own that space, right? And to be visible. And I think what happens is that when you, when you, when you're in a, when you sort of kind of enter

into a space and you sort of kind of move through it on a daily basis, and there is no real lived, there is no space for you to be who you are culturally, what, what the, what the environment eventually does is make you throughout all kinds of seen and unforeseen, um, forces and processes, it makes you feel like you have to give that part of yourself up. To belong. Right? And so I think that, you know, social workers are, social workers are trained to sort of kind of, um, not just deal with the individual but the individual work in their environment, the person in the environment, right? So in that way you're all, social workers are also trained to kind of, kind of pay attention to the structure and the macro level sort of things that are going on. I think the things that, that are, that are, so threatening to the identity and the well-being of Native children in, in our academic environments, is that stuff that's happening at that macro level that nobody pays attention to.

Johnny views social worker's main role as combating racism and creating a safe place which fosters belonging for disenfranchised Native American youth.

This fostering of a place of belonging is the fourth theme of what social workers may do for Native American kids. When asked about what weakness the school had, Guinevere replied:

I think the school's weaknesses, um, I think they need more, I think they need support groups. I think a support group, like if a kid is struggling with like their identity or like who they are, you know, what their culture, like if they had a support group that they can like talk to, and like, and even just like, like a culturally competent, not competent, like competency kind of class, or what is that? Like, um, for everybody, not just Native Americans, but even other races. Ya know? Like even just anybody, you know, just talk

about different races and how people work and how it's okay that people are different. I think that's where the school lacks.

Luna expands upon this theme of creating belonging with her reply as well,

I wish more of the students would have known what was going on. Like I remember the school having pow-wows, but it was like the whole school outside of Indian Ed didn't know about it. So I wish there had been more things that, you know, the kids did that we were able to include the rest of the school, because I think that would have been a place for conversation at least, you know? So many people were ignorant about Native Americans in general and by high school I think I came across more people willing to learn, but there was still no advertisement...Yeah. And I wish there'd been, like. Cause it, you know, they all had clubs, or whatever. There was no club for Native Americans. And, I think if we had had a club and been able to, you know, opened it up to everybody, did teaching things, it would have been cool...And I just wish I guess there was more exposure. Because with, working with the Indian Ed, I had people that would advocate for me. Like, when I went to the principal with that teacher, my Indian Ed teacher went with me, along with my Grandma...So I had advocacy for when, you know, I felt like my voice wasn't being heard. So I least I feel like they did that really well.

As I argued earlier, one of the main effects racism and microaggressions have is creating a sense of not belonging. Thus, I feel this last theme of fostering belonging is a particularly important one for social workers to pay attention too.

### **Discussion**

Through this research, I have come to a new understanding of belonging and identity. Earlier, I mentioned exclusions, microaggressions and racism had a negative impact on identity, but the

research was unclear on how it negatively impacted identity or how their identity changed. I have come to believe that this effect on identity is fundamentally attached to a sense of belonging.

To go back to Sykes (2014), inclusion, or a sense one belongs, is one of the two biggest human desires. The effect microaggressions, racism, and exclusion have is to target a piece of identity, in this case race, and use it to create a sense of otherness, of not belonging. By framing Native Americans in a negative light, by not having their history or culture shared, and by the negative treatment of Native Americans, they are all told that they do not belong here, they are not wanted.

Since inclusion is one of the two greatest human desires, individuals are forced to find another way to belong. I believe that the psychological defense mechanism that kicks in when exclusion occurs in any form is to weaken ties with the aspect of identity which is in question. By becoming less attached to one's identity as Native American, one can increase the amount they fit in.

To illustrate this effect, I would like to use a section of the quote I used from Johnny in the section on social work:

And I think what happens is that when you, when you, when you're in a, when you sort of kind of enter into a space and you sort of kind of move through it on a daily basis, and there is no real lived, there is no space for you to be who you are culturally, what, what the, what the environment eventually does is make you throughout all kinds of seen and unforeseen, um, forces and processes, it makes you feel like you have to give that part of yourself up. To belong. Right?

As Johnny states, if one does not belong, they may feel like they have to weaken their attachment in order to increase feelings of belonging. Guinevere is an excellent example of this. Guinevere had tried to avoid the negative stereotypes of Native Americans and the resulting sense of otherness by actively denying part of her identity, telling others she was black or mixed rather than Native American.

This concept may serve to illustrate why Native Americans displayed insecure attachment to their own cultural identity in Cummin's research (Gritzmacher and Gritzmacher, 2010). This insecure attachment may be viewed as a coping mechanism individuals use to belong, rather than a passive effect of interacting with whiteness.

In this research, I expected to find themes of disconnect between Native American culture and curriculum, portrayal of Native American spirituality as a rebuked myth, false narratives told about Native Americans, value disconnect, exclusion, devaluation of Native American peoples and cultures, and experiences of racial aggressions and microaggressions. I also expected to find these themes caused conflict in former Native American student's ability to build academic identity and perform successfully in class. I expected to find that these variables would be somewhat mitigated by connectedness to culture. Filtered through my new belief about belonging, I expected to find forces of exclusion based primarily on race.

Through these five interviews, themes of invisibility in curriculum, racism, microaggressions, devaluing of Native American culture, and false narratives were prevalent throughout all the interviews. Of the five respondents, four had experienced their culture portrayed as a myth. Guinevere stated that she did not really know, stating "thinking about its like, nobody really talked about it." Luna had not experienced this portrayal in schools, but saw Native Americans portrayed as a myth in the media. Sara brought up Pocahontas as a portrayal

of Native American culture as a myth as well. Johnny experienced his culture portrayed as a myth at boarding school, and Stephanie did at Catholic mission school. Thus, for the most part, the portrayal of Native American spirituality as a myth came far more from media than from schools.

Of the racism experienced, most of it seemed to come from peers. Although Luna and Sara both have vivid memories of teachers who were racist, the majority of racial slurs, stereotypes, and exclusion came from their peer group. Four of the respondents recall facing racism from peers. Luna felt she did not feel this racism from peers due to not being seen as Native American. Thus, a great deal of what makes Native Americans feel like they did not belong came from a school culture perpetuated by peers.

This school culture may have been perpetuated and allowed by the exclusion or only token involvement of Native Americans in school curriculum. In addition, when Native Americans were portrayed, they were often misrepresented, building potential bias and racism. This underrepresentation and misrepresentation served as microaggressions and prevented a broader knowledge of people which may prevent racially based biases towards those people from building.

### **Implications for Policy**

This research has several implications for policy. One of the things this research highlighted is the importance of family in the lives of Native Americans. Family was a key factor for building resilience within Stephanie, Luna, Sara, and Johnny. Guinevere faced significant struggles with her identity and education due to lack of cultural support at home as well as a generally chaotic life outside of school. Thus, engaging family in the school becomes a critical factor in the success of Native American students.

To do this, educators and social workers need to acknowledge the historical trauma Native American students carry and the role in which our profession has played in that trauma. Only by recognizing the trauma and intentionally working to heal the wounds caused by it can we be effective in reaching out to families which are affected by it.

Another important implication for policy is how social workers and administrators approach Indian education. The two major things the five participants in this research looked to gain out of Indian education was a sense of belonging and to develop cultural identity. Thus, it is important for social workers to recognize and honor this wish. In providing a source of belonging, Indian education can provide a source of belonging. In developing cultural identity, Indian education can provide a source of connection, security in personal identity, and a source for building resilience. In addition, by keeping the focus of Indian education on cultural matters, schools can begin the process of framing Native American culture as a current, authentically lived experience rather than a historical one.

Finally, there are important considerations social workers can take from this research. I have made the argument that the biggest effect of racism and exclusion is on belonging and, through belonging, identity. Thus, one of the largest things social workers can do to foster the identity development of Native American children, and subsequently build self-esteem and confidence, is simply create a culture of belonging.

This can be done through support groups such as those mentioned by Guinevere, Indian education, and ensuring the representation of Native American students in the school and curriculum. It must also be done through encouraging the development of consciousness around Native American issues in peers. As a great deal of racism comes from peers, social workers must intentionally work with the entire student body to create change.



This facilitation of belonging may also be accomplished through advocating for a Native American voice. As shown in an earlier quote, Sara endorsed educated and involved parents, particularly those on a parent advisory council which reported to the board once a year, as foundational to the success of the Indian Education Program in her district. By advocating for student roles in such positions, as well as advocating for increased connection and influence with the school board, social workers can empower Native American individuals to influence their educational experience and counteract forces of exclusion and invisibility. By empowering Native Americans to influence their own education, social workers can also prevent some of their own biases from negatively influencing the education of Native American students.

### **Implications for Research**

One of the major reoccurring themes was family. When I was creating the list of interview questions for this research, I was so focused on questions around the school experience that I neglected to address the family experience. The five respondents' identity was first forged in their homes, and the way they experienced school was influenced heavily by family. Thus, I would highly encourage future research to take into account this important aspect of Native American's lived experience.

The second implication for research is the importance of belonging and identity highlighted in this discussion. I feel the full effect of belonging on identity, and the role of oppression in shaping that sense of belonging, would be an ideal topic for a future research study. This is a particularly salient topic for Native Americans, who are forced to defend their culture and their own identity as Native Americans on a daily basis.

The third implication for research can be addressed through the following quote from Sara: "So when you're looking into understanding social work, understand that resiliency is even

more important than understanding all of this other negative stuff, right?” The resiliency factors I found in this research are family, cultural representation, community, and individuals whose support provided corrective positive experiences. Increasing the research on these and other resiliency factors and how to encourage their development would contribute to social workers’ ability to effectively aid Native American students.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

A strength of this study is that it provided the opportunity to explore the lived experience of Native Americans in the United States public education system. I hoped to gain sufficient data on the narratives present in education curriculum, how they were perceived by Native American respondents, and what reactions, both internal and external, Native American respondents experienced. In addition, the qualitative nature of this study provided Native Americans a chance to verbalize their experiences, tell stories, and build a relationship both to me as a researcher and to the study as a whole. This format is more suited to the unique values and epistemology of Native Americans.

One limitation of this study is the small sample size. Only five interviews were conducted, which could not possibly catch the entire scope of Native American lived experience in education. In addition, these respondents were obtained through convenience and snowball sampling, meaning that they are not representative and to a degree mitigated the chance I would find contradictory experiences. Another limitation of this study is the broad scope: the interviews explored many different themes, which may prevent each question from being answered to the fullest extent. A further limitation of this study is I did not initially consider the importance of family to Native Americans to a great enough degree, and thus failed to fully address this important piece of Native Americans lived experience in education. Finally, this

data was not triangulated with other sources of corroborating data, and thus may not be generalizable.

**Appendix A:**

Hello (Participant name)!

My name is Michael Olson. I am a graduate student in the St. Thomas-St. Catherine joint social work program. I am conducting a study researching the way Native American culture and spirituality are portrayed in mainstream public education and how Native Americans responded to these portrayals. You are eligible for this study because you are a Native American who went through the United States mainstream public education system. You were selected as a potential candidate for this research. This would involve participating in an hour to two hour interview. Your participation in this study would be entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with me, my committee members, (referral source), and any other individual affiliated with me, this research, or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. Please see the attached consent form for more information. If you wish to participate in this study, or have any questions, you can contact me by phone at 763-535-9152 or by email at [Mike.p.olso@gmail.com](mailto:Mike.p.olso@gmail.com)

Have a good day!

Michael Olson

**Appendix B: Flier**

Hello!

My name is Michael Olson. I am a graduate student in the St. Thomas-St. Catherine joint social work program. I am conducting a study researching the way Native American culture and spirituality are portrayed in mainstream public education and how Native Americans responded to these portrayals. Individuals who can participate in this study are Native American who went through the United States mainstream public education system. I am looking for interested parties to take a 1-2 hour interview answering roughly 16 questions.

Your participation in this study would be entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with me, my committee members, and any other individual affiliated with me, this research, or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you.

If you wish to participate in this study, or have any questions, you can contact me by phone at 763-535-9152 or by email at [Mike.p.olso@gmail.com](mailto:Mike.p.olso@gmail.com)

Have a good day!

Michael Olson

**Appendix C:****Consent Form****Creation of the Myth**

You are invited to participate in a research study about the lived experience of Native Americans. The focus of the study is on the way Native American culture and spirituality are portrayed in mainstream public education and how Native Americans responded to these portrayals. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you were identified by a professional or social contact, or by me personally, as meeting the eligibility of the study and having a possible interest in participating. You are eligible to participate in this study because you are a Native American who went through the United States public education system. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not you would like to participate. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Michael Olson, as graduate student in the St. Catherine-St. Thomas joint social work program. This study is advised by a committee comprised of the committee chair, Mary Nienow, and two advisors, Teresa George and Priscilla Buffalohead. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

**About the Researcher**

I (Michael Olson) am a white male raised in Robbinsdale Minnesota. I was raised by my mother and my Cherokee step-father, Dr. Rev Hillstrom. I became connected to the Native American community through my father, an Ojibwe class, and an after school drum and dance program in high school. I have become passionate about social justice for Native Americans, and have followed and researched the unique struggles faced by the Native American population throughout my college experience. I remain committed to diversity and equity for all populations.

**Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to answer the research question: What is the lived experience of Native Americans who went through the United States mainstream public education system? This research is trying to explore the daily lived experience of Native Americans in the public education system. This research is focusing specifically on false or offensive stories told in schools about Native American culture and spirituality. This research is also interested in the types of reactions experienced because of these stories.

**Procedures**

Participation in this study will include completing an hour to two hour interview. This interview will take place at a location of your choosing. This location should be someplace quiet and somewhat private to protect your confidentiality. If you wish to have the researcher select a location, a room at St. Thomas or a convenient community center will be used. This interview will be recorded and transcribed. The transcripts will be kept on a locked computer. A follow up email will be sent out to thank you for your time and to offer you a link to the final research paper.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

The study has risks. Depending on the level of stress present in school experience, there is a risk of possible emotional distress, probing for personal or sensitive information, and a sense of mental fatigue or embarrassment, and possibility of data breach. While the risk and impact of these variables is relatively small, I will provide a list of clinics in Minneapolis and St. Paul so seek mental health services.

There are no known benefits to participating in this research.

**Privacy**

Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. You will have control of picking a location which ensures privacy. In addition, you will have control of which questions you wish to answer and what information you provide. You have control to skip any question if you would so wish.

**Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. The types of records I will create include recordings, transcripts, emails, and consent forms. The transcripts will be coded to ensure confidentiality, and will be deleted after May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The recordings will be deleted two weeks after the interview or after the interview is recorded in a transcript, whichever comes later. These recordings will be kept on a locked iPhone or device, and will remain with the researcher while traveling. These recordings will be transferred to OneDrive and deleted from the iPhone within 24 hours of the interview. These recordings will be deleted from OneDrive after the interview is transcribed and checked for errors. Emails used to keep track of participants will be deleted by August, 2016. All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years upon completion



of the study. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas reserve the right to inspect all research records to ensure compliance.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with me, my committee members, individuals who referred me to you, and any other individual affiliated with me, or the University of St. Thomas.

There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw up to two weeks after the interview or when the recording is transcribed, whichever comes later, without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. After two weeks or the transcript is recorded, transcripts will no longer have identifying information, and thus I cannot guarantee the possibility of withdrawal. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will not be used in the research study. You can withdraw by verbally stating you wish to withdraw at the interview, calling me at 763-535-9152 and requesting to withdraw, or emailing me at [Mike.p.olson@gmail.com](mailto:Mike.p.olson@gmail.com). You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

### **Contacts and Questions**

My name is Michael Olson. You may ask any questions you have now and any time during or after the research procedures. If you have questions later, you may contact me at by phone at 763-535-9152 or by email at [Mike.p.olson@gmail.com](mailto:Mike.p.olson@gmail.com). You may contact the research advisor, Mary Nienow, by phone at 651-295-3774 or by email at [nien3538@stthomas.edu](mailto:nien3538@stthomas.edu). You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or [muen0526@stthomas.edu](mailto:muen0526@stthomas.edu) with any questions or concerns.

**Statement of Consent**

I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I give permission to be audio recorded during this study.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

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**Signature of Study Participant**

**Date**

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**Print Name of Study Participant**

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**Signature of Researcher**

**Date**

**Appendix D**

Native American Community Clinic  
1213 E. Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55404.  
612-872-8086  
<http://nacc-healthcare.org/>

Walk In Counseling Center (Free Clinic)  
2421 Chicago Avenue South, Minneapolis MN 55404  
612-870-4169  
<http://walkin.org/counseling>

Hennepin County Mental Health  
1801 Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis MN 55403  
612-348-41111  
<http://www.hennepin.us/residents/health-medical/adult-mental-health-services>

Ramsey County Mental Health  
Crisis Hotline: 651-266-7900  
<https://www.ramseycounty.us/residents/health-medical/clinics-services/mental-health/adult-mental-health>

Alina Health Mental Health United Clinic  
280 Smith Avenue North, Doctors Professional Building, Suite 450, St. Paul, MN 55102  
651-241-5959  
<http://www.allinahealth.org/Health-Conditions-and-Treatments/Mental-health-services/Locations/United-Clinic-overview/>

**Appendix E**

1. What does being Native American mean to you personally?
  - a. What makes you a Native American?
  - b. Can you explain your connection to Native American culture? Spirituality?
  - c. To what degree does being a Native American shape your identity?
2. What does it mean to you to have been a Native American in the United States public education system?
  - a. Were you valued?
  - b. Were you seen as belonging?
3. Was your culture valued? Or is it seen as having no place in education?
4. What stories about Native Americans did you experience?
  - a. Where these stories good or bad?
  - b. Did they portray Native Americans as something other than what you understand them to be?
  - c. What were your reactions to these stories?
  - d. Did these stories cause you to lose interest in the class or school in general?
5. How have you personally been described as Native American by others?
  - a. Slang?
  - b. Racist Names?
  - c. Derogatory statements?
6. How are Native Americans described in general?
  - a. Referred to as savages? Lazy? Brave? Current? Past?

7. Did you ever experience your spirituality or world view being portrayed as a myth?
  - a. What was your reaction?
  - b. How did this make you feel?
  - c. Did this cause disengagement?
  - d. Were your cultural or spiritual beliefs discussed or ignored in education?
8. Did you ever experience open hostility from teachers or peers because you were Native American?
  - a. How about acceptance?
9. Were you ever snubbed or insulted by teachers, staff, or students, intentionally or unintentionally?
  - a. How did these shape your experiences?
  - b. What kind of reactions (both physical and mental) did you have to this?
10. Did any of your schools have an Indian Education Program?
  - a. Did it help?
11. A Social Workers role in the school seeks to aid students have a sense of connection as well as being a voice for those whose voice might be drowned out, as well as respecting the identity of all students. In thinking about your school experience and the description of these social work values, what do you wish social workers would do more/less of for Native American students?
  - a. What did they do?
  - b. Why do you think these things do not occur?

12. Were there any strengths of the schools which supported your educational experience and helped you be successful that was not covered yet?
13. Were there any weaknesses of the schools which hampered your educational experience and prevented you from being successful that was not covered yet?
14. What do you think were the effects of your experience in education on your identity, or who you are today?
  - a. Did it change the way you viewed yourself? Native Americans in general?
  - b. Did it change the way you viewed yourself as a student?
15. What do you believe Native Americans can bring to the table in education?
  - a. What strengths do they have?
  - b. What can they contribute?
  - c. How might these be included and encouraged in an educational context?
16. Is there anything else I should know about you or your experiences that I haven't asked yet?

## Appendix F

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