Race Ethnicity and Education

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cree20

Paying-it-forward: Indigenous leadership in American higher education

Rhonda Povey, Michelle Trudgett, Susan Page & Stacey Kim Coates

To cite this article: Rhonda Povey, Michelle Trudgett, Susan Page & Stacey Kim Coates (2023) Paying-it-forward: Indigenous leadership in American higher education, Race Ethnicity and Education, 26:2, 240-256, DOI: 10.1080/13613324.2022.2033197

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2022.2033197

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 12 Feb 2022.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 873

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=cree20

RACE ETHNICITY AND EDUCATION
2023, VOL. 26, NO. 2, 240–256
https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2022.2033197

Paying-it-forward: Indigenous leadership in American higher education

Rhonda Povey, Michelle Trudgett, Susan Page and Stacey Kim Coates

Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership, Western Sydney University, Parramatta South Campus, Australia

ABSTRACT
This study focuses on Native American experiences of senior leadership in higher education, presenting a paradigm of Indigenous leadership based on the principle of paying-it-forward. The qualitative study, underpinned by Indigenist methodology, centers the responses of four Native American senior leaders in mainland America and Hawai´i who have strategically designed community-building policies and practices to counter ongoing isolation in higher education. Findings detail place-based leadership paradigms and practical strategies derived from Native American leadership rationales, showing the power of Native American leadership to challenge systemically biased perceptions, policies and practices that endeavor to isolate Indigenous peoples from each other, culture, language, and ways of being knowing and doing. The study is part of the international phase of an Australian-based project not only gives insight into higher education internationally, but also creates opportunity for consideration of what we can learn to our advantage in other colonized contexts.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 22 July 2021
Accepted 20 January 2022

KEYWORDS
Indigenous educational leadership; higher education; America; colonialism; isolationism

Introduction

The impact of colonization of Native American[1] Peoples has been well documented by Native American scholars and allies, representing a concerted effort to increase awareness of and contribute to the healing of Indian nations who were subjected to dispossession of their land, language and culture (Beyer 2017; Brayboy 2013; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Lajimodiere 2011; McClellan, Fox, and Lowe 2005; Minthorn and Shotton 2019; Pewewardy 2015; Salis Reyes 2019; Shotton 2018). Pewewardy (2015) argues there are two fronts for colonial conquest of Native America peoples: one front involves political and military strategies to move Indigenous peoples from their Ancestral lands; the second front entails a spiritual and cultural assault on Indigenous peoples, waged by the United States government and missionaries of many denominations. It is the latter form of conquest that is the concern of this paper, as we consider the role isolation played in attempts to colonize Native American nations (Daes 2000).

CONTACT Rhonda Povey r.povey@westernsydney.edu.au

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Western education both on mainland of America and in Hawai'i[2] was purpose built as a technology of colonialism to isolate First Nation children from culture, language, connection to land, connection to each other, sources of tribal knowledge and continuity (Cross, Pewewardy, and Smith 2019; Lee and Ahtone 2020; Stewart-Ambo 2021). The consequences of such isolation are hard felt at all levels of Western education, nonetheless so than in the higher education sector, where Native American students continue to be separated from each other and tribal ways of learning, with few models of Native American leadership in the higher education sector (Brayboy, Solyom, and Castagno 2015). Yet, Indigenous leadership plays a crucial role in higher education (Page, Trudgett, and Sullivan 2017), and creates a site for reconciliation. As argued by Brayboy (2015), as well as Minthorn and Chavez (2015a), the call for Native American people in leadership is related symbiotically with healing the wounds of the past and building a strong future (Brayboy and Huaman 2016).

The intention of this paper is to extend scholarship into the realm of Indigenous leadership in higher education by centering the voices of Native American leaders in senior positions who have developed paradigms for speaking back to the ongoing technologies of colonialism. By detailing the responses of four Native American senior leaders who have strategically designed community-building policies and practices to counter the ongoing isolation of Indigenous students, faculty and leaders in higher education, the paper will explicitly challenge systemically biased perceptions, policies and practices Rather than offering hypothetical or conceptualized findings, this paper is pragmatic: findings will explicitly detail place-based leadership paradigms and practical strategies derived from Native American leadership rationales. The paper will also reflect on what we can learn from these leadership initiatives: when viewed through a global lens we expect global issues will resonate through the project, despite the different traces colonial regimes may have left on some higher education systems, and different shared histories of colonial experiences (Gonzales and Colangelo 2010).

Literature review

Isolationist policies and practices

Although literature shows the Hawai'ian story of enforced Western education differs from that on the American mainland, the shared experiences of educational colonization are not dissimilar, as boarding schools became an expedient weapon to advance the cultural, spiritual and linguistic isolation of children (Adams 2008; Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013; Beyer 2017; Bordas 2016; Brayboy, Solyom, and Castagno 2015; Lajimodiere 2011; Reyhner 2018; Tuck and Yang 2012). Nevertheless, despite these colonial incursions on the sovereignty of Native Americans, in the higher education sector undergraduate Native American student enrolments have increased, with enrolments doubling between 1990 and 2019 (Chee, Shorty, and Robinson Kurpius 2019) and the participation of women in higher education has increased fourfold over 30 years (Shotton 2018). But let's not be misled: although the number of graduates has increased over the last 20 years, data collected by Patel (2014) indicate the number of doctoral graduates has recently declined, positioning Native American doctoral graduate as the lowest minority group over the last two decades.

The experiences of Indigenous academics and leaders in senior positions correspondingly lack parity, with literature chronicling cultural discontinuity, marginalization, disparity in recruitment and employment, and lower rates of promotion to leadership positions (Brayboy, Solyom, and Castagno 2015). While data shows the number of Native Hawai'ian scholars moving into leadership positions is increasingly close to attaining parity, as an indicator of racially divided leadership in the higher education sector, mainland Native American and Native Alaskan people comprise 0.5% of US faculty compared to 79% White, 6% Asian Pacific Islander, 7% Black and 4% Latino (Brayboy et al. 2012). Similarly, assimilative practices of miseducation and federal policy further disrupted intergenerational transmission of leadership skills (Tippeconnic Fox 2005), isolating upcoming generations from each other (ontology), epistemologies, and axiology.

Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013) contend colonization also sought to erase traditional understandings of gender, arguing 'heteropaternalism and heteropatriarchy lead to the imposition of Western gender roles on American Indian nations' (15). The ramifications of imposed Western power constructs reach beyond the tribal nations into how Native American women are positioned by institutions. Women in leadership positions in educational contexts have historically been subjected to homogenization: circumstances of class, gender, and ethnicity have been overlooked in favor of the metanarratives of what a White woman in leadership means (Fitzgerald 2003). The dominant construct for analysis then is one of race blindness and cultural bias. In response, Indigenous women in educational leadership positions are speaking back, and, following the precedent of early Native American feminists (Green 1975), continue to argue the intersectionality of gender and race need to be moved from the periphery to centre stage in order to counter the normalisation of White masculine leadership paradigms.

In 2015, Native American women comprised 51% of total Indigenous American faculty, compared to 47% in 2005 (Minthorn and Shotton 2019). However, as noted by Minthorn and Shotton (2019); Shield (2009) and Tippeconnic Fox (2008), despite the growing number of Native American women in leadership positions, literature concerning Indigenous women in leadership, especially in higher education, is sparse (Minthorn and Shotton 2019). As four female authors, it would be remiss for us not to write back this disparity, as women carry a legacy of isolation from positions of leadership not only in post-contact American history (Minthorn and Shotton 2019), but also in other colonized nations, such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada (Essed 2000; Fitzgerald 2003; Fredericks et al. 2011; Moreton-Robinson 2020). To this end, this paper will promote the voices of Indigenous women, increasing visibility (Shield 2009) and supporting the privileging of intersectionality of gender and race in contemporary research.

Native American leadership in higher education

Indigenous leaders, researchers and allies are working tirelessly to challenge dominant discourses that promulgate racism, and thus are creating an increasingly prominent position in educational discourse and playing an important role in advancing Indigenous rights. We acknowledge the contribution studies cited in this paper authored by Native American scholars make to our understanding and knowledge. Furthermore, it is not our intention to generalize Native American perceptions of leadership: such

homogenization of Indigenous perceptions and experiences reinstates colonial myopic views of Indigeneity, disallowing discourses of individual agency and the uniqueness of communities' experiences (Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson 2016). Rather, this review of Indigenous leadership will home in on leadership perceptions held by Native American scholars and leaders in Hawai'i and on the mainland of America, specifically with reference to countering colonial isolationist strategies that sustain White hegemony in higher education.

Indigenous leaders cited in this study contend the American sector is 'dominated by individuality, understanding through disparate parts, linear and futuristic thinking, and competition' (Minthorn and Chavez 2015a, 10), arguing leadership imbued with Western values of individualism and merit do not advance the well-being and persistence of Native American students (Shotton 2018), nor does leadership oriented towards individual success (Cross, Pewewardy, and Smith 2019). In sharp contrast, Native American scholars in leadership positions posit the centrality of relationships, identities and histories (Minthorn and Chavez 2015b). Thinking collectively is central to Native American leadership, and, as Wright (2015) explains, Native American leadership 'supports students' journey while reaffirming a sense of responsibility for others' (135): Native American leaders are purposeful in nurturing relational responsibilities to serve tribes and communities. Shotton (2015) explains: 'I consider myself part of larger community of Native people working together toward a greater goal. In my life, that larger community is a group of Native scholars and educators working together for Native students' (144).

The notion of responsibility is guided by the principle of 'living and leading to benefit current and future generations' (Minthorn and Chavez 2015a, 34) and carries a legacy grounded in service (Brayboy 2015; Shotton 2015); of paying-it-forward. Wright (2015) contends mentoring carries a legacy of responsibility to carry forward the benefits of being mentored 'so others can carry on their work and the work of the ones they in turn mentor' (133). In sum, the leaders in higher education sector cited in this study are in accord that Native American leadership circulates around the cultural values of relational responsibilities, reciprocity, and paying-it-forward. Thus, Native American nation-building, as a response to historical and ongoing isolation, challenges the gestalt so as to enable equitable outcomes.

Methodology and method

Context: The Indigenous leadership study

This paper is part of a project funded by the Australian Research Council exploring and evaluating the roles, responsibilities and influence of senior Indigenous appointments in higher education. The project, *Walan Mayiny: Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education* is comprehensive, ranging from the experiences of recruiters responsible for the recruitment of senior Indigenous positions in Australia (Trudgett, Page, and Coates 2020); Indigenous Australians who hold Indigenous-specific senior leadership positions; senior executive positions; and Australian Indigenous academics (Coates, Trudgett, and Page 2020). This paper is one of four papers reporting on international Indigenous experiences of leadership in higher education: the current paper reports on

leadership in America with a paper on Canadian experiences (Povey et al. 2021b), a paper on New Zealand experiences (Povey et al. 2021a) and a relational paper, focusing on what can learn about Indigenous senior leadership in higher education (under review). These relational similarities will assist in the development of a model of best practice for embedding sustainable and ethical Indigenous leadership structures in higher education.

Theoretical framework: An Indigenist approach

Rather than using a Western lens that looks in on Indigenous worlds (Smith 1999), a theoretical framework that critiques the Western world from an Indigenous standpoint is required (Castagno and Lee 2007). This study is grounded in an Indigenist approach to methodology. Indigenist research highlights the relationality of research practices, emphasising the significance of ethical research to projects that respect Indigenous epistemologies, axiology ontology (Smith 1999). Founded on the three principles outlined by (Rigney 2014), Indigenist research promotes an emancipatory imperative, political integrity, and privileging of the Indigenous voice. Grounded in a colonial critique of racism, Rigney's principles promote anticolonial epistemologies and methodologies as a means of 'representing Indigenous aspirations, of strengthening the struggle for emancipation and liberation from oppression' (114). Similarly, Smith (1999) argues the privileging of Indigenous voices in research, both as researchers and participants, plays a critical role in emancipatory imperatives, given the history of exploitation, racial prejudice and 'speaking for' (McConaghy 2000) that has dominated the Western academy. Indigenous authors, scholars and allies are speaking back not only to the historical dominance of Eurocentric ideologies in academic discourse (Kovach 2018), but also to Western-centric and racialized governance models and structures that dominate the higher education sector in colonized nations.

Sampling and recruitment

The sampling criteria was based on being a Native American academic in a senior role, located by a google search using the keywords: America; Hawai'i; Native; Leaders. As a result, we approached nine Native American leaders in senior positions in the American higher education sector and four accepted. The participants are located at universities on mainland America, and in Hawai'i. Interviews were conducted using zoom technology, after initial plans to conduct the interviews in person were abandoned early in 2020 due to Covid-19 travel restrictions. A review of the transcripts shows that while participants acknowledged the impact of Covid-19 in the workplace, the evidence suggests participants' commitment to supporting Indigenous rights in higher education was not diminished, as they engaged with the interview process in deep and meaningful ways. Participants were asked to respond to 14 questions about their leadership position, role, challenges, successes, and perceptions of their sphere of influence, with interviews lasting between 38 and 59 minutes. All transcripts were

transcribed by a professional transcription service and following guidelines of Indigenist research (Povey and Trudgett 2019), transcripts were then sent to the participants for member checking.

Data analysis

As Indigenist and Indigenous researchers, we acknowledge the need to 'write up responsibly' (Kovach 2018, 227); a process that requires consideration of respect for the tenets of Indigenous epistemology, ethics and protocols. To ensure privacy and cultural safety, participants were deidentified and the generalized term of Native American is used to conceal participants' tribal affiliations. Although this level of deidentification risks homogenization of Native peoples (Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson 2016), we felt the decision was justified, based on an understanding of moral imperatives in Indigenist research (Povey and Trudgett 2019), especially considering the small size of the Hawai'ian higher education sector in combination with the small number of Hawai'ian Native leaders. We also acknowledge the limitation of anonymizing place, potentially decoupling historical specificity from power struggles (Nespor 2000) and how this might impact on relational validity (Tuck and McKenzie 2015). Nevertheless, we are bound by our ethical agreement with the participants and so the specific details of participants' place of employment have been occluded in order to protect participants' identities.

Interviews were conducted by authors two and four, and the data analysis was conducted by the first author in consultation with the authorial team. The first author initially inductively coded the data using NVivo 12 technology, using a descriptive approach (Neale 2016) of identifying the narrative elements of 'what, why and how' of the participants self-identified agential actions. Data was then coded inductively by ascertaining the main concepts and ascribing themes, improving the rigour of analysis by combining both deductive and inductive analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). This data analysis method captured the complexities, differing perspectives, and points of agreement (Bazeley 2013).

Patterns across the transcripts quickly became apparent: firstly, the four participants' focus was student centered, an avowal to the leaders' commitment to service and nation-building for a strong future. Second, participant use of narrative as a structuring device was discernable in all transcripts, as participants wove stories into their responses to interview questions. Not only did these narratives facilitate the process of capturing deep and rich meaning, an important consideration when working with a small sample size (Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam 2003), they also enabled the potential use of extracts contextualized within a story, as recommended in Indigenist research, as opposed to those extracts identified as 'smash and grab' (Kovach 2009, 9) in positivist data collection. Finally, a strong thread of agential themes emerged from the transcripts, indicating the thematic analysis had revealed participants' willingness to tackle White hegemonic norms of higher education. These agential themes have been named initiatives. This was valuable in data analysis because the purpose of the study was not to look for patterns and then generalize across higher education, but instead to focus on specific Indigenous leadership initiatives developed in response to systemic racism.

Findings

This section will detail four Native American led initiatives that have been shown to succeed. Each initiative is place-based and lead by Native American senior leaders as a response to ongoing institutional constructs that continue to disadvantage Native American students and faculty.

An Indigenous-serving institution

Speaking back to historical injustices, this leader is determined 'to drive policies that are good for students'. With a plan to make the university a model Indigenous-serving-institution, the participant steered reform through a series of collaborative groups of Native American and non-Native American leaders. Guided by the principle of relationality, the participant described the groups as 'very synergistic, meaning that there was good chemistry around everything'. The leader identified three areas of reform to realize the vision of the university as a model Indigenous serving-institution, the first being parity 'in the number of students, parity with language and culture': The second area, 'university in the community and community in the university', strategically develops programs for and with the Native American community, seeking feedback so the university knows they are 'doing right by them'. The leader identified the establishment of community-based groups, who act as advisors on how to implement Native strategic directions across campuses, as a goal that will strengthen the relationship between community and university. The third identified area is 'Native [Tribal Nation redacted] success and looking at what that is'. The leader believes success and cultural identity are interrelated, and the integration of cultural concepts and associated development of credibility are key factors influencing positive cultural identity.

Albeit the process of reform has achieved positive outcomes, the participant recognises the work of leadership has not been easy, drawing our attention to the differences between Native American and non-Native American leadership styles and priorities:

> Look, they [non-Native leaders] definitely see the world a little bit differently. I mean, especially policy . . .. I said, you guys, you don't want to build policies that are good for the institution, we need to have policies that's good for the students, or the staff, the people.

Over an extensive period of involvement in the higher education sector, the leader has seen many changes, reinforcing their resolve for service:

> Because I really do believe that the strength of who they are and who their ancestors, or who their parents or what their values and beliefs are makes them better leaders or better members of this society.

By focussing on structural supports for students, the leader also influences the strategic direction of the institution. It is clear the leader's role is one of visioning, strategizing, administrating and enacting student-centred policy that will benefit Native American students, faculty, community and the broader university population.

Enabling students' success through accountability

Unlike the first leadership model described above, the second model of effective leadership in this study is an identified (Native-specific) position. The Native American senior leader articulated a policy shift towards a role circumscribed by strategizing to improving student outcomes; a direction marked by the participant's appointment to the current leadership position. The leader explained the purview of the role is framed by the need for parity for students and associated equity:

> I am shifting back to really focussing more on our Native students' success . . . because our senior leadership has come to realise that our success efforts in graduating Native American students from post-secondary education, particularly at [institution name redacted] we haven't really moved the needle very much.

Research advises persistence and retention rates exist within a complex set of variables (Brayboy et al. 2012; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; McClellan, Fox, and Lowe 2005). Correspondingly, the participant contends parameters impacting on students' successes are influenced by a number of factors. Relationships between university and tribal communities are identifed as significant, with the leader articulating the legacy of mistrust counteracts the development of positive and safe relationships:

> It's that relationship . . . our communities are still very distrusting of institutions, of power, of privilege.

Nonetheless, the participant acknowledges institutions can perceive establishing relationships with community narrowly, creating institutionalised rhetoric. The leader makes the point that relationships that are honest and show authentic commitments to student success matter:

> You can't really engage with community on really a whole lot without first reassuring them that we are doing the best job we can to serve our students.

Here, the concept of nation-building is relevant. The participant explains community perspectives:

> They're looking to our young people to get educated, to get skilled and to come back and build thriving nations. So they want to ensure that their own investment, too, is well worth it.

As described above, accountability goes hand in hand with nation-building, the participant proposing the university is held to account for student successes by tribal nations who have a vested interest, not only in the future of their children but also in fiscal investments towards the university, often in the form of scholarships:

> So, when there's not completion it calls into question what are we doing to support their students when they come to the University?

Theoretically, the specific context of status of a land grant university positions the institution to acknowledge its responsibility to serve the community; it is beholden on the university to acknowledge 'Indigenous people as the first occupants of this territory', a stance the participant believes is making a difference: 'there's starting to be more respect and recognition around that which is really important'.

Advocating for Native American students and faculty is another foundational aspect fostering success. The senior leader considers Native American identity remains under threat as many students experience cultural and pedagogical isolation. For many students English is a second language, and they seek 'a Native community to associate with so they can sort of strengthen that identity'. This leader's purview is circumscribed by ensuring the institution meets its responsibilities to Native American education, as the institution is called to account by the Native American leader, community, and students seeking cultural safety and academic success.

It's in the charter

As a Native American senior leader, this participant fulfils the role of a senior administrator, carrying a wide range of duties, including the responsibility to influence teaching and research on Native and Indigenous issues across all schools in the university, support the recruitment, retention and graduation of Native American and Indigenous students, as well as to connect tribal communities and Indigenous communities to the university's resources. The senior leader's commitment to equity for Native American students is explicit and mandated by the university charter. An obligation to meet the agreement for equitable Native American education is at the forefront of the leader's purview:

> We remember the charter, we repeat the charter, we point people to the charter, we remind the administration of the charter, we remind faculty of the charter. Because it really is, for higher education in the United States, kind of the founding of why we have colleges and universities and some of the goals that they were really interested in doing, when they were first created in this country.

The leader and staff actively recruit Native American students by traveling to meetings, conferences, and tribal communities to encourage student enrolment, working with prospective students well before they are eligible to enrol in higher education, and on occasions and liaising with parents of prospective students. Once the student is accepted, the leader invites the new student into their office to 'serve as their mentors, we serve as kind of their confidants'. The leader then endeavours to build a strong body of Native American students on campus, characterized by a palpable sense of community grounded in supportive relationships: 'our students feel it, and they know when they walk in, they're a part of our community'. The creation of culturally safe spaces on campus is supported by strategies to empower student presence and voice, specifically through building leadership capacity:

> We will often look to them as the experts as well, especially when sometimes coming from their - it's an issue in their own community or with their own tribal culture. We are very happy to put students up front if they're willing, to be a voice.

Within their purview, the participant challenges Western governance structures, by implementing a best practice model of relational leadership:

> I feel like one of the characteristics that helps programs grow bigger, build and stay together, is its ability to be non-hierarchical, which is really, really hard at [institution redacted], because [institution redacted] is very hierarchical.

Nevertheless, the Senior Native American leader acknowledges roadblocks that impede comprehensive enactment of the Charter, naming systemic legacies, such as hierarchical structures, and institutional racism, as key challenges. The leader expressed concerns about the tenacity of systemic racism, arguing the higher education institution continues to marginalize Native American students by failing to acknowledge in policy and practice the mandate of the university charter.

Women in leadership

Participant four also holds an identified senior leadership position, with a purview of Native student welfare and success:

> I have particularly focussed in on students as the students and their families as the core of our work and in particular, those students who are most under-served.

The Native American senior leader extends this purview to include nation-building through engagement with the local community:

> So we are also responsible, not only for the providing the academic core that will help build a strong [Nation's name redacted] economy, but also build a sense of a community and leadership.

Yet for this senior leader, leadership, nation-building and Indigeneity intersect with gender, a standpoint greatly influenced by personal experiences not only as the first Native American person to hold an executive position, but also the first female. Encumbered by deficit stereotypical expectations, the leader too often felt 'there's always a sense of me having to prove that I have the capacity, the skillset'. Being the first woman and the first woman of colour in a leadership position, the leader experienced workplace demands of dressing for success 'I wore the heels. Wore the suits'. The leader also experienced racial discrimination of becoming 'the exotic person in the room'. The persistence of racism and chauvinism is detailed by the leader, who 'talks a lot about this because ... it is still a challenge'. In response, the leader argues:

> I think that one of the things that I have found with women - primarily with women, is that the core of the work that we do is really - comes from a deep place of [Tribal name redacted] love. They make you feel that you are absolutely the right person at the right time to be at this place to do the work that you're doing.

For this leader:

> Another quality of Indigenous leadership, human leadership, women's ways of doing things, which is all about relationships, right? The relationships you make now that will continue to grow and reach out.

The participant reflected on reciprocity: inspired by personal experiences of mentoring, the participant came to understand:

> This huge sense of responsibility of every Indigenous woman leader that I've met, that it's important to mentor the next generation.

Intrinsically connected to reciprocity is paying-it-forward, as a core value of Native American leadership is to create legacies for current and future Native American students:

> That's where the legacy is. It's in the people. It's what you're able to inspire from the next generation to the next generation and learned that a lot from the women that I worked with just in my own professional career and that I studied.

In sum, the leader's standpoint is unequivocal: 'This huge sense of responsibility of every Indigenous woman leader that I've met, that it's important to mentor the next generation'.

Discussion

This study brings history into the present by reporting on institutional reform led by Native American senior leaders in response to the ongoing isolation and marginalization of Native students and faculty in higher education. Four Native American senior leaders have given testimony to the vital roles Native American leadership in higher education fulfils in speaking back to the strategic weaponization of education as a means to colonize a people. All four leaders testify to turning the tides against ongoing racism: be it though planning and actioning reform to develop a model Indigenous-serving institution; shifting policy towards strategically planning to improving Indigenous student outcomes, accompanied by consolidating accountability of the sector by strengthening connection with community; by implementing a best practice model of relational leadership and holding the university accountable to their Charter, and by building it forward for Native American women in higher education by modelling leadership that honours service and stewardship.

A student-centered approach

Albeit this is a place-based study with reform led by Native American senior leaders responding to the historical specificity of context, all four leaders determined a student-centered focus to unsettle systemic barriers that impede success. This is particularly notable when contrasted with findings from two studies from the international phase of the *Walan Mayini: Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education* project: findings from the Aotearoa/New Zealand study showed leaders focused on shifting leadership from back-foot reactive politics to a front-foot status of strategic and transformative leadership and findings from the Canadian study showed leaders' determination to unsettle systemic barriers so that universities are facing in the direction they need to be going, and not where they've been (Povey et al. 2021b). The leaders in this current study unambiguously looked to remediate student successes and student welfare with a clearly discernable determination to build student success symbiotically with nation-building and community-building. Stewardship, service, reciprocity and paying-it forward then are shown to effective antidotes to isolationism in higher education.

Relationships and relationality

The appreciation of all peoples 'connected to each other, to the places and spaces they live in and the dilemmas they encounter' (Brayboy 2015, 55) is reiterated by all participants, supporting Brayboy's standpoint (Brayboy 2013, 2015) that Indigenous leaders are responsible to others or to a particular place, thereby foregrounding relationality and responsibility in leadership. Relationships featured prominently in all interviews, participants highlighted the significance connectivity in their roles as leaders, be it through supporting students, liaising with community, building leadership capacity amongst colleagues and students, mentoring, and role modelling.

Correspondingly, Wright (2015) described enacting her 'kuleana', as defined by Ikeda (2018), as 'more than a responsibility, but a right, an obligation, and a privilege' (867). The notion of 'live and lead for the benefit of current and future generations' (Minthorn and Chavez 2015a, 34), is evident in all interviews, encapsulating the distinct notion of relationality that underpins the conceptualisation of Indigenous leadership posited in this paper. Succinctly stated from a Native American perspective by Cheryl Crazy Bull (2015), 'we are all in this together' (63). The notion of relationality and responsibility are enacted by leaders through their work, be it in their work in building a model institution, building success and capacity, enabling institutional accountability to Tribal Nations and to the university charter, or righting the post-contact othering of women in leadership. Participants in this study connected relationality with accountability, modelling reform through strategic planning that speaks back to racism in education to promotes Native American success, rewriting policy, and challenging institutional constructs that perpetuate the isolation of Native American students and tribal communities from the higher education sector.

Service, stewardship and reciprocity

Brayboy (2015) describes leadership through the prism of legacy, built on what has come before and what will come in the future; that is to say, Native American leaders bring forward to the present, and on into the future, tools, skills, knowledge and mindsets that shape their engagement with situations and encounters. In this way, service and stewardship become key aspects of Native American leadership. Shotton (2015) presents leadership as service as one of the four values central to her notion of leadership: the others three being humility, generosity and being a useful person. In contrast to Western perceptions as leadership focussed on the individual and oscillating round constructs of power or influence over others (Cross, Pewewardy, and Smith 2019), Shotton (2015) contends 'leadership is service' (145), arguing leadership 'requires actions to serve and benefit the larger group' (146). The notion of stewardship advocated by Brayboy, Solyom, and Castagno (2015) is about creating a legacy for the future. Native American leaders uphold stewardship as a way of bringing the past into the future and keeping it safe for future generations. That leaders cultivate future leaders to serve the needs of others and community is a central tenet of stewardship that features strongly in interviews.

Reciprocity, or giving back is closely aligned with service, stewardship, and relationality. Just as Native American students maximise the benefits of their education by using their newly acquired knowledge and skills for the good of their nation (Brayboy et al.

2012; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Salis Reyes 2019; Shotton 2018) so too do Native American leaders in higher education contribute to the advancement of their students and associated tribal nations, with the explicit intention of giving back. Minthorn (2015) identifies reciprocity as a way of consciously leading, through 'helping others after me' (184). Although all participants alluded to reciprocity, women in leadership who are giving back featured strongly in the study. Framed around mentoring, one leader expressed a commitment to mentoring others as they themselves had been mentored. Additionally, the leader determined to give back to mentors by 'trying to live into that, to embrace those stories'.

Native women in higher education leadership

Although Native American women are emerging as notable leaders in higher education, the role of tribal culture in women's leadership responsibilities has been given little heed (Minthorn and Shotton 2019). This is despite convincing evidence that a key component of Native American women's responsibility as leaders includes not only giving back to community (Shotton 2018) but also extends into the notion of paying-it-forward, by re-creating paths for the future good of tribal communities (Minthorn and Shotton 2019; Shotton 2018; Shotton et al. 2018). Literature shows Native American women in sector leadership positions are calling for the deconstruction of leadership notions away from heteropatriarchal individualism and competitiveness to be inclusive of Native American women's community-based concepts of leadership (Minthorn and Shotton 2019).

Intersection of sexism and racism was identified as a barrier by Green (1980), and more recently, perceived as a wicked problem by Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013). Feminist literature speaks back by challenging negative stereotyping of women in positions of leadership; Lajimodiere (2011) contends women are prejudged based on deficit assumptions of their competency. One participant in in this study demonstrate the complexity of Native American women's leadership in higher education. The participant cited examples of 'having to prove that I have the capacity, the skillset'. This predicament is compounded as women are subjected to racist, stereotypes in the institution (Salis Reyes et al. 2020). Green (1975) contends harmful racist stereotyping is derived from the 'Pocahontas Perplex', an 'intolerable metaphor for the American/white experience' (714). The stereotypical representation of Native American women as different, wild and exotic, whose presence is permitted but only at a distance, perpetuates marginalization and cultural violence against Native American women (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013; Green 1980). The participant experiences of being 'the exotic person in the room', were formative, and shaped a determination for leadership modelled on 'gracious[ness] in the face of discrimination' and relationships built on love and trust: that the legacy is 'in the people. It's what you're able to inspire from the next generation to the next generation'.

Conclusion: Paying-it-forward

Leadership that does not address race, ethnicity and culture is problematic. As shown in this study, the demand is high for Native American leadership with a remit to drive reform and challenge ongoing racism, in order to end years of isolationist technologies that marginalize and disadvantage Native American leaders, faculty and students. By

detailing the responses of four Native American senior leaders who have strategically designed policies and practices to counter the ongoing isolation of Indigenous students, faculty and leaders in higher education, this study leads by example. Drawn together by a commitment to a student-centered approach, building community and nation-building, the leaders have constructed working models grounded in the principles of relationality, stewardship, service and reciprocity. The work presented herein is a denunciation of colonial isolationist practices and collectively demonstrates paying-it-forward as a viable model for reform, one that we hope will support Indigenous leaders in the higher education sector in comparable colonized contexts.

Notes

1. Following protocols recommended by McClellan, Fox, and Lowe (2005), the term Native American in this study refers to Peoples who identify as Native American, Alaskan or Hawai'ian.
2. The geographical and political context of this study are within the United States of America, and therefore includes Hawai'i, being an American state. For the purposes of this paper, the United States of America is simplified to the descriptor of America. See also Footnote #1.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Australian Research Council for funding this project (IN180100026) and the participants who generously gave their time to contribute to the research project.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Australian Research Council [IN180100026].

ORCID

Rhonda Povey http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2155-2926
Michelle Trudgett http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6022-0169
Susan Page http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4697-3716
Stacey Kim Coates http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9992-1720

References

Adams, W. D. 2008. "Fundamental Considerations: The Deep Meaning of Native American Schooling, 1880-1900." In *Indigenous Knowledge and Education Survivance*, edited by M. Villegas, S. R. Neugebauer, and K. R. Venegas, 9–40. Cambridge: Harvard Education Review.

Arvin, M., E. Tuck, and A. Morrill. 2013. "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy." *Feminist Formations* 25 (1): 8–34. doi:10.1353/ff.2013.0006.

Bazeley, P. 2013. *Qualitative Data Analysis: Practical Strategies*. London: Sage Publications.
Beyer, C. 2017. "The White Architects of Hawaiian Education." *American Educational History Journal* 44 (2): 1–18.
Bodkin-Andrews, G., and B. Carlson. 2016. "The Legacy of Racism and Indigenous Australian Identity within Education." *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 19 (4): 784–807. doi:10.1080/13613324.2014.969224.
Bordas, J. 2016. "Leadership Lessons from Communities of Colour." In *Developing Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning: New Directions for Student Leadership*, edited by K. L. Guthrie, T. B. Jones, and L. O'Steen, L, 61–74. Vol. 152. San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons.
Brayboy, B. M. J. 2013. "Tidemarks and Legacies: Building on the past and Moving to the Future." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 44 (1): 1–10. doi:10.1111/aeq.12001.
Brayboy, B. M. J. 2015. "Views on Indigenous Leadership." In *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, edited by R. S. Minthorn and A. F. Chavez, 49–59. New York: Routledge.
Brayboy, B. M. J., A. J. Fann, A. E. Castagno, and J. A. Solyom. 2012. *Postsecondary Education for American Indian and Alaskan Natives: Higher Education for Nation-building and Self-determination: ASHE Higher Education Report*, 5. Vol. 37. San Fransisco: John Wiley and Sons.
Brayboy, B. M. J., and E. S. Huaman. 2016. "A Journey to Higher Education: Oigins of an Indigenous Doctoral Program." *Journal of American Indian Education* 55 (3): 134–147. doi:10.5749/jamerindieduc.55.3.0134.
Brayboy, B. M. J., J. A. Solyom, and A. E. Castagno. 2015. "Indigenous Peoples in Higher Education." *Journal of American Indian Education* 54 (1): 154–186.
Castagno, A. E., and S. J. Lee. 2007. "Native Mascots and Ethnic Fraud in Higher Education: Using Tribal Critical Race Theory and the Interest Convergence Principle as an Analytic Tool." *Equity and Excellence in Education* 40 (1): 3–13. doi:10.1080/10665680601057288.
Chee, C. L., G. Shorty, and S. E. Robinson Kurpius. 2019. "Academic Stress of Native American Undergraduates: The Role of Ehnic Identity, Cultural Congruity, and Self-beliefs." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 12 (1): 65–73. doi:10.1037/dhe0000094.
Coates, S. K., M. Trudgett, and S. Page. 2020. "Indigenous Higher Education Sector: The Evolution of Recognised Indigenous Leaders within Australian Universities." *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 1–7. doi:10.1017/jie.2019.30.
Crazy Bull, C. 2015. "Designing Tribal Educational Leadership." In *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, edited by R. S. Minthorn and A. F. Chavez, 59–70. New York: Routledge.
Cross, T. L., C. Pewewardy, and A. T. Smith. 2019. "Restorative Education, Reconciliation, and Healing: Indigenous Perspectives on Decolonizing Leadership Education." *New Directions for Student Leadership* 2019 (163): 101–115. doi:10.1002/yd.20350.
Daes, E.-I. 2000. "Prologue: The Experience of Colonization around the World." In *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, edited by M. Battiste, 3–11. Vancouver: UBC Press.
Essed, P. 2000. "Dilemmas in Leadership: Women of Color in the Academy". *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23 (5): 888–904. doi:10.1080/014198700501109599.
Fereday, J., and E. Muir-Cochrane. 2006. "Demonstrating Rigour Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach to Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5 (1): 80–92. doi:10.1177/160940690600500107.
Fitzgerald, T. 2003. "Changing the Deafening Silence of Indigenous Womens' Voices in Education." *Journal of Educational Administration* 41 (1): 9–23. doi:10.1108/09578230310457402.
Fredericks, B. L., N. White, T. Bunda, and J. Baker. 2011. "Demonstrating Indigenous Women's Educational Leadership: Tiddas Showin'up, Yalkin'up and Puttin'up!" *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues* 14 (1): 3–8.
Gonzales, R. G., and P. Colangelo. 2010. "The Development of Indigenous Higher Education: A Comparative Historical Analysis between Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US., 1880-2005." *Journal of American Indian Education* 49 (3): 3–23.
Green, R. 1975. "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture." *Massachussetts Review* 16 (4): 698–714.

Green, R. 1980. "Native American Women." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6 (2): 248–267. doi:10.1086/493795.
Guillory, R. M., and M. Wolverton. 2008. "It's about Family: Native American Student Persistence in Higher Education." *The Journal of Higher Education* 79 (1): 58–87. doi:10.1080/00221546.2008.11772086.
Ikeda, C. K. 2018. "Carving Out Inclusive Sanctuaries for Participation in Higher Education." *Policy Futures in Education* 16 (7): 866–876. doi:10.1177/1478210317723758.
Kovach, M. 2009. *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Kovach, M. 2018. "Doing Indigenous Methodology: A Letter to A Research Class." In *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by N. K. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, 214–235. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks Califiornia: Sage Publications.
Lajimodiere, D. K. 2011. "Ogimah Ikwe: Native Women and Their Path to Leadership." *Wicazo Sa Review* 26 (2): 57–82. doi:10.5749/wicazosareview.26.2.0057.
Lee, R., and T. Ahtone. 2020. "Land-grab Universities: Expropriated Indigenous Land Is the Foundation of the Land-grant University System." *High Country News* 30. https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities
McClellan, G. S., M. J. T Fox, and S. Lowe. 2005. "Where We Have Been: A History of Native American Higher Education." *New Directions for Student Services* 109 (7): 7–15.
McConaghy, C. 2000. *"Rethinking Indigenous Education: Culturalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Knowing*. Faxton: Post Pressed.
Minthorn, R. S. 2015. "Consciously Leading with Ancestors' Prayers and Community in Heart". In *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, edited by R. S. Minthorn and A. F. Chavez, 178–185. New York: Routledge.
Minthorn, R. S., and A. F. Chavez. 2015a. "Collected Insights on Indigenous Leadership." In *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, edited by R. S. Minthorn and A. F. Chavez, 8–49. New York: Routledge.
Minthorn, R. S., and A. F. Chavez. 2015b. "Toward an Indigenous Transformation of Higher Education." In *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, edited by R. S. Minthorn and A. F. Chavez, 245–269. New York: Routledge.
Minthorn, R. S., and H. Shotton. 2019. "Indigenous Women's Approaches to Educational Leadership: Creating Space for Indigenous Women in Education." *International Journal of Human Rights Education* 3 (1). https://repository.usfca.edu/ijhre/vol3/iss1/6
Moreton-Robinson, A. 2020. *Talkin' up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*. 2nd ed. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.
Neale, J. 2016. "Iterative Categorisation (IC): A Systematic Technique for Analysing Qualitative Data." *Addiction* 111 (6): 1096–1106. doi:10.1111/add.13314.
Nespor, J. 2000. "Anonymity and Place in Qualitative Inquiry." *Qualitative Inquiry* 6 (4): 546–569. doi:10.1177/107780040000600408.
Page, S., M. Trudgett, and C. Sullivan. 2017. "Past, Present and Future: Acknowledging Indigenous Achievement and Aspiration in Higher Education." *HERDSA Review of Higher Education* 4 (1): 29–51.
Patel, V. 2014. "Diversity in the Academe 2014: "Why so Few American Indians Earn Ph.D.s, And What Colleges Can Do about It". *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. http://chronicle.com/article/Why-So/-Few-American-Indians/146715/
Pewewardy, C. 2015. "Indigenous Leadership." In *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, edited by R. S. Minthorn and A. F. Chavez, 70–80. New York: Routledge.
Povey, R., and M. Trudgett. 2019. "When Camp Dogs Run over Maps: 'Proper-way' Research in an Aboriginal Community in the North East of Western Australia." *Journal of Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (2): 61–72.
Povey, R, M. Trudgett, S. Page, and S. K. Coates. 2021a. "On the Front Foot: Indigenous Leadership in Aotearoa/New Zealand Higher Education." *HERDSA Review of Higher Education*. doi:10.1080/07294360.2021.1969542.

Povey, R., M. Trudgett, S. Page, and S. K. Coates. 2021b. “Where We’re Going, Not Where We’ve Been: Indigenous Leadership in Canadian Higher Education.” *Race Ethnicity and Education* doi:10.1080/13613324.2021.1942820.

Reyhner, J. 2018. “American Indian Boarding Schools: What Went Wrong? What Is Going Right?” *Journal of American Indian Education* 57 (1): 58–78. doi:10.5749/jamerindieduc.57.1.0058.

Rigney, L.-I. 2014. “Internationalization of an Indigenous Anti-colonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies: A Guide to Indigenist Research Methodology and Its Principles.” *Wicazo Sa Review* 14 (2): 109–121. doi:10.2307/1409555.

Ritchie, J., J. Lewis, and G. Elam. 2003. “Designing and Selecting Samples.” In *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, edited by J. Ritchie and J. Lewis, 77–108. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Salis Reyes, N. A. 2019. “What Am I Doing to Be a Good Ancestor?’: An Indigenized Phenomenology of Giving-back among Native College Graduates.” *American Educational Research Journal* 56 (3): 603–637. doi:10.3102/0002831218807180.

Salis Reyes, N. A., E. K. Wright, N. Goodyear-Ka’ōpua, and K. A-R. Oliveira. 2020. “Embodying Haumea: Wāhine Scholars Cultivating Kanaka Independence in the Academy.” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 33 (2): 240–249. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2019.1681543

Shield, R. W. 2009. “Identifying and Understanding Indigenous Cultural and Spiritual Strengths in the Higher Education Experiences of Indigenous Women”. “*Wicazo Sa Review* 24 (1): 47–63. doi:10.1353/wic.0.0022.

Shotton, H. 2015. “Being of Service to Our People”. In *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, edited by R. S. Minthorn and A. F. Chavez, 143–149. New York: Routledge.

Shotton, H. 2018. “Reciprocity and Nation-building in Native Women’s Doctoral Education.” *American Indian Quarterly* 42 (4): 488–507. doi:10.5250/amerindiquar.42.4.0488.

Shotton, H. J., A. R. Tachine, C. A. Nelson, R. S. Minthorn, and S. J. Waterman. 2018. “Living Our Research through Indigenous Scholar Sisterhood Practices.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 24 (9): 636–645. doi:10.1177/1077800417744578.

Smith, L. T. 1999. *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.

Stewart-Ambo, T. 2021. “We Can Do Better’: University Leaders Speak to Tribal-university Relationships.” *American Educational Research Journal* 58 (3): 1–33. doi:10.3102/0002831220983583.

Tippeconnic Fox, M. J. 2005. “Voices from Within: Native American Faculty and Staff on Campus.” In *Serving Native American Students: New Directions for Student Services*, edited by M. J. Tippeconnic Fox, S. C. Lowe, and G. McClellan, 49–60. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Tippeconnic Fox, M. J. 2008. “American Indian Women in Academia: The Joys and Challenges.” *NASPA Journal about Women in Higher Education* 1 (1): 204–223. doi:10.2202/1940-7890.1011.

Trudgett, M., S. Page, and S. K. Coates. 2020. “Talent War: Recruiting Indigenous Senior Executives in Australian Universities.” *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 1–15. doi:10.1080/1360080X.2020.1765474.

Tuck, E., and M. McKenzie. 2015. “Relational Validity and the ‘Where’ of Inquiry: Place and Land in Qualitative Research.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 21 (7): 633–638. doi:10.1177/1077800414563809.

Tuck, E., and K. W. Yang. 2012. “Decolonisation Is Not a Metaphor.” *Decolonisation: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1 (1): 1–40.

Wright, E. K. A. 2015. “Kulean Acts.” In *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, edited by R. S. Minthorn and A. F. Chavez, 127–135. New York: Routledge.