

**Identifying and understanding Indigenous cultural and spiritual strengths
in the higher education experience of Indigenous women
utilizing a culturally intrinsic research paradigm model**

by

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For the Major Program

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Gitchi Manitou
Who gives breath to all the world
and in Whom all things are possible
with hope my small contribution can be used to serve
the freedom of Indigenous peoples and Nations

I dedicate this dissertation to
the Mitakuyapi
whose generosity and strength
was given freely for future generations
of Indigenous women to create hope
and strength

I dedicate this dissertation to
my husband
Oyate Wayan Kapi
a true warrior
who knows what love is

I dedicate this dissertation to my children
for their courage in being
who the Creator intended them to be

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother
who saw my future before I did
and taught me how to see

I dedicate this dissertation to
Wambli Chante
The One With the Heart of an Eagle
whose honor, generosity and integrity
made this work possible

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Miigwetch

ABSTRACT

Native students have the highest drop out rate of any racial or ethnic group in the United States, exceeding 65% nationally (Hill, 1991, cited in Bowker, 1992). American Indian females have the highest drop out rate for all groups in the United States, male or female (Bowker, 1992). Of those American Indian students who do graduate and enroll in college, between 75% and 93% will leave college without completing (Hill, 1991, cited in Bowker, 1992).

Researchers have investigated causes for the continuing high dropout rates, the relationship between home environment and education, and socioeconomic factors affecting Indian students in their educational experience. Much of this research has been conducted by non-Natives within a non-culturally intrinsic view. In addition, no research has been conducted on **how** and **why** Indigenous people who have completed a higher education experience persisted and achieved their goals. In addition, very little research has been conducted about Indigenous girls and women relative to educational experience, and none relative to higher education.

This research, conducted by an Indigenous researcher, investigated the cultural and spiritual strengths within Indigenous worldviews and value systems that enabled Native women to persist and complete a higher education experience. As a vehicle for this research, a Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model was created, developed, and implemented. It is a conceptual framework based on tribe-specific ideologies, value systems, and ways of being

in the world. It does not rely on Western thought of either quantitative or qualitative paradigms.

Findings from this study lead to the conclusion that the Native women participating in this research relied on traditional Indigenous sources of strength as contextualized by tribe specific affinity. These sources of strength focus on (1) experiencing all facets of life, including higher education, as a spiritual journey, (2) drawing strength from Indigenous stories, metaphors, images, and historical traditions, and (3) identification and attachment to the traditional Indigenous roles of women within their Nations. Utilization of these cultural and spiritual strengths in individual and unique ways was the means whereby the Indigenous women in this study achieved their higher education goals.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

American Indian students comprise 1% of the total student population in the United States. About 85% of Native students attend public schools, with the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools and tribal schools enrolling significant numbers. Yet, Native students have the highest dropout rate of any racial or ethnic group in the United States, exceeding 65% nationally (Hill, 1991, cited in Bowker, 1992). This rate is almost twice that of White students (Hillabrant, Romano, Stang, & Charleston, 1992, cited in Pewewardy, 2001; Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, Hall & Gollnick, 1996). American Indian females have the highest dropout rate for all groups in the United States, male or female (Bowker, 1992). The dropout rate for American Indian females in all levels of education is higher than for any other group within the U.S. (Bowker, 1992.) Of those American Indian students who do graduate and enroll in college, between 75% and 93% will leave college without completing (Hill, 1991, cited in Bowker, 1992).

American Indians have very poor academic achievement in most school systems. In 1969, the Senate subcommittee on Indian education issued its final report on the educational situation and status of American Indian people in the United States. The report, entitled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, documented the significant failure of the American public education system to address Native learners' needs. The report attributed the fundamental cause of this failure to the federal government's policy of coercive assimilation of American Indian and Alaska Native peoples.

One important factor that contributes to culturally meaningful and accurate information about the Indigenous learning experience is culturally intrinsic educational research. Dr David Beaulieu, Director of the Office of Indian Education at the U.S. Department of Education, states in his article, *Comprehensive Reform and American Indian Education*, that “the research that has been conducted in the educational field has been mostly by non-Indians.” In a review of the educational research literature relevant to Native learners within the last 30 years, it was found that the research was in the areas of educational anthropology and sociology (Beaulieu, 2000). It represented a deficit of thought and was guided by assimilation ideology. An Indian perspective clearly was missing (Beaulieu, 2000).

There are no Indigenous paradigm models for research at present. The research that has been completed by Indigenous people and Indigenous education leaders are conceptual frameworks based on tribe-specific ideologies, value systems, and ways of being in the world. A creation of a philosophy and structural model of Indigenous-born research that is Indigenous in its concept and application could provide Indigenous Nations with a framework for a collective vision of Indigenous inquiry, particularly in the field of education, which would be culturally meaningful, protect against assimilation and psychological colonization of Indian people, remove barriers to erosion of Indian identity, world views, and value systems, and provide the flexibility to be inclusive and applicable to the diversity found among Indigenous Nations.

A new theory has emerged that supports Indigenous worldviews and value systems reflective of tribal diversity, *The Resistance Theory and Transculturation Hypothesis* (Huffman, 2001)

describes how some Indigenous higher education students do succeed in achieving their original goals of choosing to obtain a degree within the dominant culture's system of education. Huffman's study describes several stages that Indigenous students experience in entering and coping with higher education systems in the majority culture. The marked characteristics of cultural discontinuity are present in the higher education experience for the Indigenous students, resulting in emotional and physical alienation from the institution, faculty, and environment. Indigenous students in the study chose to separate themselves from their higher education experience (i.e., they dropped out), while others chose to "reach back" and draw on their spiritual and cultural strengths in coping with the cultural discontinuity, continued in the institution, and graduated. In other words, these Indigenous students found that using the spiritual and cultural strengths that have sustained Indigenous Nations through mass genocide, psychological colonization, erosion of Indigenous identity, and cultural invalidation are what sustained them in their higher education experience in the dominant culture.

Conceptual Framework

Utilizing the conceptual framework found in *The Resistance Theory and Transculturation Hypothesis*, the focus of the study will be to understand and describe the truth about cultural and spiritual strengths that provide the foundation and resiliency factors necessary for American Indian women to enroll in a college or university and complete a higher education experience. The study will focus on the development of an Indigenous research paradigm in which to contextualize and conduct the study.

Statement of the Problem

In this study, as an Indigenous researcher, I will explore how Indigenous women: 1) identify and understand the spiritual and cultural factors that have enabled them to complete a higher education experience, 2) develop and establish an Indigenous research paradigm and methodology based on the Medicine Wheel that is constructed and used as a process for identification and understanding these spiritual and cultural factors, and 3) develop a framework that Indigenous people can use as a point of reference in establishing tribe-specific research paradigm and methodologies in educational fields that would strengthen tribal sovereignty and contribute to meeting the needs of Indigenous communities and students.

Research Questions

The following research questions will serve to guide the study:

- (1) How do Indigenous women experience the strengths in their culture to sustain their persistence in obtaining a higher education degree?
- (2) How do Indigenous women use their spirituality as the main source of hope and support in their higher education experience?
- (3) How do Indigenous women describe their higher education experience in the Indigenous traditional venues of metaphor, imagery, and storytelling?
- (4) What Indigenous traditional cultural and spiritual strength have Tribal Colleges and

- Universities identified and incorporated into their educational systems to create maximum opportunities for success for Indigenous women?
- (5) How have Tribal Colleges and Universities incorporated cultural and spiritual strengths into their educational systems so that Indigenous women in higher education can access them easily as they move through the higher education process and experience?

Summary of Methodology

The methodology used in this study is born out of a culturally intrinsic paradigm model congruent with Indigenous reality, worldviews, traditional value systems, and spiritual experience. The methodological approaches used to ascertain and describe the answers to these questions will be culturally congruent and meaningful. Traditional spiritual practices such as ceremony and the offering of tobacco will be utilized. Individual interviews will be conducted with the participants in the study. Field notes will be written after the interviews, and both peer and member checking of information will occur.

Limitations of the Study

This study will focus on a limited number of participants. The participants will be only from tribes original to the North Central region of the United States. Therefore, the results of the study can be understood within the participants' own experience and will not be reflective of Indian Country as a whole, nor of the entire Tribal College and University system. Since only a few members of the respective tribes will participate in this study, the results will not be

reflective of all tribal members. However, utilizing traditional cultural and spiritual practices in the research methods of this study will enable the researcher to identify accurately and describe the inherent cultural and spiritual strengths and resources within Indigenous women. It is these cultural and spiritual strengths found in Indigenous people that have enabled them to survive genocide on many different levels: spiritual, cultural, social, emotional, mental and physical. I expect to find that the inherent cultural and spiritual strengths that have sustained Indigenous peoples for thousands of years foster resiliency, fortitude, and courage in Indigenous women as they have faced cultural discontinuity, adversity, and socioeconomic barriers in their higher education experience.

Delimitations

Due to limitations regarding time, space, and financial resources, this study is restricted to the elements and process described therein. No formal funding was available for this study. Contributions from friends who believed in this work and the researcher was the only reason this study was able to be conducted. In addition, the researcher had a solid, definite time frame in which to conduct the study, due to timelines established for completion of work in order to graduate in August, 2003 from the PhD program.

Preview of Conclusions

The assumption of this study is that internal resilient resources exist within Indigenous women to overcome the staggering “odds” of completing a higher education degree, especially within the majority culture educational systems. These resilient resources often can be identified as traditional cultural and spiritual strengths that have enabled Indian people

not only to complete higher education degrees, but, on a larger scale, to survive and thrive as Indigenous persons despite historical and contemporary external events that erode Indigenous identity, value systems, worldviews, and sovereignty in all aspects of Indigenous life.

To understand and describe these strengths present in Indigenous women within a culturally meaningful context can enable Indigenous Nations, communities, and educators to honor and nurture these strengths more effectively, as a way to strengthen Indigenous sovereignty and future generations of Indigenous women who wish to pursue and complete a higher education degree as well as solidify educational philosophies and foundational principles of many Tribal Colleges and Universities.

Definition of Terms Significant to the Study

Indigenous: The nature of being for an Indian person who is affiliated with the Original Peoples of what is now known in the majority cultures as North, Central, and South America.

Traditional: Worldviews and practices consistent with historical Indigenous beliefs, practices, and ways of experiencing life

Culturally Congruent: Consistent with the worldviews and traditional practices of Indigenous cultures

Culturally Meaningful: That which is relevant to Indigenous cultures within the worldviews, practices, and priorities of Indigenous cultures themselves, as opposed to non-Indigenous

cultures' views of what is important, significant or of priority for understanding and believing the experience of truth.

Elder: An Indigenous individual recognized by his or her community as having acquired wisdom as the result of living in a way that exemplifies the values of courage, fortitude, respect, generosity, integrity, and compassion.

Spiritual Leader: An Indigenous individual who is recognized by his or her tribal community as one who provides leadership and support to others in particular spiritual practices.

Medicine Man or Women: An Indigenous individual who is recognized by his or her tribal community as one who is gifted spiritually and who has received abilities from the spirits and/or the Creator to facilitate healing and help on all levels of being, (spiritual, mental, emotional, social and physical), as well as to communicate with the spirits. The gifts, abilities, and expression of these to help their tribal community members and Nation are diverse, relative to the nature of the gifts, and the particular Indigenous community's beliefs and practices.

Cultural Discontinuity: The disruption of the experience of Indigenous reality and the perception of the Indigenous sense of being.

Organization of Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into five chapters.

Chapter One contains the: (a) Focus of the Study, (b) Statement of the Problem, (c) Research Questions, (d) Research Methodology, (e) Limitations of the Study, (f) Delimitations of the Study, (g) Preview of Conclusions, and (h) Definition of Terms Significant to the Study.

Chapter Two provides a review of current and foundational literature relevant to the topic. The literature reviewed contains discussions of journal articles and culturally meaningful resources.

Chapter Three provides a discussion on the culturally meaningful methodology used relative to the Medicine Wheel Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model.

Chapter Four provides a discussion and conclusions of the results of the study.

Chapter Five contains: (a) Implications for Educational Practice, (b) Recommendations for Educational Reform, and (c) Recommendations for Further Inquiry.

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CHAPTER 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1994, a historic meeting took place between President Clinton and tribal leaders. Indian educators requested special consideration on the part of the President for Indian education. As a result, the Executive Order on American Indian and Alaska Native Education was written and signed in 1998 by the President. The Executive Order reaffirms the federal government's special and historic responsibility for the education of American Indian and Alaska Native students, based on treaty rights and government-to-government relationships with Indian Nations within the U.S.

In 1991, a federally-initiated *Nations At Risk* Task Force evaluated progress made in the education of Native learners since passage of the Indian Education Act of 1972, and concluded that many excellent and creative programs were designed to meet the unique needs of Native students, but that they had little overall impact on the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction in schools responsible for educating the majority of American Indian students (Beaulieu, 2000).

In 1994, as a result of this evaluation, the Indian Education Act was reauthorized to require schools to develop comprehensive programs, using all of the schools' resources to meet the needs of Native learners. These provisions are particularly important for schools in which Native learners are a "minority" learner population. However, success in all levels of education relative to persistence and degree completion remained lower for Indians than for all other groups within the U.S., especially for Indigenous females.

Historical Context

Past events shape current reality (Brave Heart & Weaver, 1999). Therefore, a historical context is crucial to understanding the experience of American Indian students in this country. The victims of American Indian genocide are estimated to be between 3.5 and 13 million of the original inhabitants. Even using the most conservative population estimates, 2/3 of the Indigenous peoples in North America were exterminated between 1500 and 1900 (Brave Heart, 1999).

An innovative concept is used to describe the events and effects of the genocide of American Indian peoples. *Historical trauma* refers to a cumulative wounding across generations as well as during one's life span. For Indigenous peoples, the legacy of genocide includes distortions of Indigenous identity and values. The process of colonization of Indigenous peoples and varying degrees of assimilation have resulted in altered states of self for Indian people (Brave Heart, 1999).

Another component of the historical trauma American Indians suffered was the placement of 90% of Indian children by 1930 in the Boarding School system of "Indian Education," which consisted of 147 reservation day schools, 81 reservation boarding schools, and 24 off-reservation boarding schools (Minnesota Indian Women's Center Research Project, 1999).

From 1879 to the 1970s, U.S. federal policy included the forced removal of Indian children from their homes and their abusive institutional treatment (Brave Heart-Jordan, 1995, cited in Brave Heart, 1999). Indian children were subjected to starvation, incarceration, physical and

sexual abuse, and prolonged separation from their families (Brave Heart, 1999).

In a 1992 study, negative boarding school experiences were recounted by a majority of respondents (Brave Heart-Jordan, 1995, cited in Brave Heart, 1999) and included physical abuse (58.1%), being punished for speaking their language (37.9%), and sexual abuse by boarding school staff (22.6%). The mean age for boarding school attendance was 8.9 years, but 38.7% attended boarding school by the age of six and 48.8% by age seven. Some participants reported boarding school placement as early as age five. The modal distance from home for Indian children in boarding school was 300 miles, and the mean distance was 123.1 miles (Brave Heart, 1999).

Continuing the Colonization Process

Since the Boarding School era, and as part of the process of continuing the colonization of Indian people in the U.S., Hampton (1995, cited in Agbo, 2001) believes that the dominant society's educational systems are antagonistic to Indigenous children and seek to indoctrinate them by substituting non-Indigenous knowledge values and identity for Indigenous values, knowledge, and identity. Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, as well as public and private schools, have and continue to use education to assimilate Indian students into the mainstream society in the U.S. (Beaulieu, 2000). Education has been constructed through and measured by non-Indigenous values, standards, and philosophies (World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education, 1993). Ultimately, the purpose of this education has been to assimilate Indigenous people into non-Indigenous cultures and societies (World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education, 1993).

The dominant culture expects Indian students to blend and assimilate because it is the best thing for them and for the dominant society at large (Paquette, 1986, cited in Agbo, 2001). The dominant society education system does not give Indian students avenues for dignity and honor in being Indigenous, nor does it ensure their interest in maintaining their worldview. This phenomenon is termed *cultural holocaust* (Hampton, 1995) or related to *psychological colonization* (Colorado, 1985).

The transmission of knowledge to ethnic “minority” students in most educational settings and the structure of the dominant societies’ educational system traditionally have been aimed at adequately systemizing the knowledge the dominant society considers necessary for reproducing citizens within the dominant group (Neito, 1996, cited in Agbo, 2001). This hidden curriculum has been used as a systematic structure for socializing Indigenous students into the European-American frames of cultural reference (Harris, 1990, cited in Agbo, 2001).

Perspectives on the Low Academic Achievement of American Indian Students

Volumes of studies of research and reports dealing with Indigenous peoples in non-Indigenous education systems paint a familiar picture of failure and despair. Educational failure happens not because Indigenous people are less intelligent, but because educational theories and practices have been controlled by non-Indigenous people (World Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Education, 1993).

When measured in non-Indigenous terms, the educational outcomes of Indigenous people are still far below that of non-Indigenous people. Reyhner (1992) states that American Indian

students who are quite capable academically often drop out of school because their needs are not being met. For example, the Navajo Students at-Risk Study (Platero et al., 1986, cited in Reyhner, 1992) showed that of Navajo students who drop out of school generally have academic performance of B or better. This phenomenon is present through higher education, where 93% of Indian students nationally drop out of college (Duran & Duran, 1989).

In addition, other Indigenous students are pushed out because they protest, in a variety of ways, how they are being treated. American schools are not providing an appropriate education for Indian students, who are put in large, factory-like schools. Indian students are denied teachers with special training in Indian education, denied a curriculum that is based on their culture, and denied appropriate assessment. Research indicates that a number of individual factors are associated with Indian students drop out rates. Particularly critical factors include large schools, uncaring and untrained teachers, passive teaching methods, inappropriate curriculum, inappropriate testing, tracked classes and lack of parental involvement (Reyhner, 1992).

In regards to American Indian females particularly, a combination of specific factors may cause Indigenous women to abandon education. In the extremely limited amount of literature on the subject, some factors do emerge consistently. In several studies, American Indian females had lower self-esteem, had more negative self-concept, and were more self-critical and self-doubting than females from other groups or than American Indian males. American Indian females who attended public schools had lower self-esteem than those who attended Bureau of Indian Affairs schools (Bowker, 1992). American Indian females also reported that

their teachers did not care about them more frequently than American Indian males (Bowker, 1992).

Hampton (1995, cited in Agbo, 2001) strongly believes that one can explain the school failure of American Indian students in terms of the malevolence of Western education in its structure, curriculum, context, and personnel. He asserts that Western education is a political, social, and cultural institution that represents and conveys European-American values, knowledge, and behaviors (Agbo, 2001). Paquette (1986, cited in Agbo, 2001) contends that the rejection of assimilation by Indians in European-American educational institutions labels them as failures, and the consequence of this is that the education systems try to immerse Indigenous people in even more values, beliefs, and languages of the majority to help them “succeed in school.”

One of the most frequent theoretical explanations that past researchers have used to explain the low academic achievement of Indigenous students centered on cultural differences between Indigenous and mainstream societies (Agbu, 1987; Alteo, 1990; Erickson, 1987, cited in Agbo, 2001). Throughout the literature of the 1960s and 1970s, American Indian youth were labeled as “culturally disadvantaged” or “educationally disadvantaged.” In fact, White (1991, cited in Bowker, 1992) cautioned that the label “at-risk” is another code for “culturally deprived” and is no more than the “continued relabeling and reclassification of ‘disadvantaged’ students.”

Goldman and McDermont (1987, cited in Bowker, 1992) maintain there is considerable

evidence that American schools have been designed to assure success for some and failure for others. Some researchers maintain that the United States' tolerance of exceedingly high dropout rates among minority groups is a manifestation of a social strategy designed to keep minorities out of the political decision-making process (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Carter, 1970, cited in Bowker, 1992).

Agbo (2001) posits that high drop out rates and low levels of academic achievement of Indigenous students are not due to the inability to adjust, genetic inferiority, or cultural impoverishment, but lie in *cultural discontinuity*. The dominant culture's school settings' concept of time and space, discrepancies and distortions in the curriculum relative to Indigenous peoples, the incongruity of the Indigenous world and the dominant culture's worldview, and lack of respect and recognition of ways of life by non-Indigenous educators all combine to cause the low academic achievement of Indigenous students (Agbo, 2001; Kirkness, 1999).

Other contributing factors include the way teachers present subject matter and establish classroom atmospheres as well as the cultural discontinuities surrounding the dominant society and Indigenous value systems (Agbo, 2001). The dominant society's educational systems promote implicit values and behaviors that are harmful to Indigenous children (Kirkness, 1999). From an Indigenous view, the so-called dropout out rates and failures of Native people, male and female alike, within non-Indigenous education systems should be viewed for what they really are: **rejection rates** of an educational system of assimilation and cultural holocaust (World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education, 1993).

Perspectives of the Impact of Federal Policy and Contemporary Socioeconomic Conditions on the Indigenous Higher Education Experience

The lack of presence of American Indians in higher education, as well as efforts to remedy the situation, must be viewed within the context of historical federal policy and the resulting socioeconomic circumstances of Indian people today. Before the American Indian-European wars, more than 400 independent Indigenous nations were prospering in what is now known as the United States (Pevar, 1992). By the early 1900s, as a conservative estimate 2/3 of tribal peoples were exterminated (Brave Heart, 1991). Since that time, there never has been a consistent federal Indian policy (Pevar, 1992). Federal policy relative to Indian people has shifted radically over the last 200 years, from regarding tribes as sovereign equals, to relocating tribes, to attempts to exterminate or assimilate them (known as the Termination Era), and, currently, to encouraging tribal self-determination. These policy changes often have been rapid and highly disruptive (Pevar, 1992).

A major problem Indigenous peoples face today is the complex and confusing pattern of laws, especially federal laws, that dominate their lives. No other ethnic or cultural group is so heavily regulated. Although some federal laws were intended to benefit Indians, as a whole they have placed Indians in a political and economic straightjacket. Indians and Indian tribes are in such a precarious position today that economic survival would be difficult without major support from the federal government. This sad state of affairs is a result of 200 years of federal government regulation (Pevar, 1992).

As a result of the political and economic “straight jacket,” the socioeconomic conditions

American Indians face today are devastating. These conditions have a direct and powerful impact on the higher education experience of American Indian students, as it pervades all facets of their lives.

Many Indian reservations face high unemployment rates (up to 70 percent on some reservations), and massive proportions of residents with low per capita income levels on most reservations (American Indian College Fund, 1996, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). Income disparities between American Indians and the general U.S. population are staggering. For example, while White women in the United States earn 52 cents on the dollar compared to White men, American Indian women earn 17 cents on the dollar (Bowker, 1992). With the dramatic increase in single-parent households headed by Indian women, access to education and degree completion becomes essential to Indigenous people for survival.

Besides economic and educational barriers, there are many social barriers to American Indians as they pursue goals of enrollment in higher education programs and degree completion. The suicide rate for American Indians is more than twice that of other racial/ethnic minority groups, and the death rate from alcohol-related causes is very high. One of the four leading causes of death among Indian women in the U.S. is homicide (U.S. Health and Human Services Statistical Database, 2002). In addition,, the large numbers of single-parent households continues to rise (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). Cultural and language differences also often

present difficulties to students (Pevel et al., 1995, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Although conditions for Indians have improved somewhat during recent years, dramatic improvements in the near future are unlikely due to many problems associated with reservation life, cultural differences [discontinuity], and persistent racial discrimination (Pevar, 1992).

The leaders of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium and the Institute for Higher Education Policy assert that a major reason for the lack of American Indian presence in higher education and low degree attainment is the socioeconomic conditions resulting from historical federal policy regarding Indigenous peoples (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

In 1995, American Indians accounted for approximately 130,000 or less than 1 percent, of all students in higher education. The majority of students enrolled attended two-year institutions rather than four-year schools. Despite progress in recent years, American Indians earned less than 1 percent of the entire associate, bachelor's, and advanced degrees conferred in 1994 (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). In 1995, the graduation rate for American Indians at a group of more than 300 colleges and universities was only 37 percent, the lowest among all minority groups (Carter & Wilson, 1997, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

American Indians living on reservations may be only half as likely as their White counterparts to persist and attain a degree (Pavel et al., 1995, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). College participation, retention and degree completion therefore remain critical issues (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Within the historical context, the cultural discontinuity experienced by Indigenous learners in the Western educational systems, and the socioeconomic conditions faced by Indian people today, how is it that some Indigenous people persist in higher education and complete degrees?

Three perspectives serve to provide a foundational context to answer this question. They include *The Resistance Theory and Transculturation Hypothesis* (Huffman, 2001), the relevance of the Tribal College system, and traditional venues of strength and resilience intrinsic to Indigenous cultures with respect to the role of Native women within Indian Nations and communities.

The Resistance Theory and Transculturation Hypothesis

Huffman (2001) states that no single other factor has been identified more frequently as a contributing factor for poor academic achievement among American Indians than cultural conflict, or, in Agbo's (2001) terms, cultural discontinuity.

Cultural conflict or cultural discontinuity has been conceptualized in myriad ways. Huffman

(2001) conceptualizes cultural conflict or discontinuity as 1) disparity between cultural nuances such as time orientation, 2) cooperation/competition orientation, 3) cognitive domain processing, and 4) social and historical factors that serve to mold cultural incongruities. The major theme in his conceptualization of cultural conflict or cultural discontinuity is the discrepancy between the values, behaviors, or political/economic power of those with dominant status and those of “minority” status.

Huffman (2001) conducted a five-year longitudinal study of 69 Indigenous students who enrolled in a Mid-Western mainstream university to explore the personal perspectives on their academic experiences. He identified 26 Indigenous college students who had assimilated into Western culture and value systems, 15 students who were “marginal” in the assimilation experience, 7 students who were estranged from the university experience, and 21 “transculturated” students.

He found that the assimilated students had little or no problems with cultural conflict or cultural discontinuity within the mainstream higher education experience. Problems occurred with the “marginal” students to some extent. Traditional Indigenous students who were estranged from the university experience had significant to extreme difficulty, while the “transculturated” students found strength in their Indigenous identity, cultural values, and spirituality to persist and move toward degree completion.

Through his study, Huffman (2001) outlined four stages of an *estrangement process* he discovered non-assimilated Indigenous students moving through in their higher education

experience. Initially, the non-assimilated Indigenous students experienced alienation from the institution and described feelings of not being able to “relate to much” at the institution or in their higher education experience at all. This initial stage of estrangement was followed by increased feelings of significant alienation from the institution along with disillusionment with the higher education experience.

Indigenous students at this stage held a strong perception that the university was an agent of assimilation in their lives. The third stage was characterized by emotional rejection of the institution and of the higher education experience by the Indigenous students that they perceived as necessary to reject assimilation. Feelings of alienation by the Indigenous students at this stage were extreme. The emotional rejection stage was followed by a physical rejection, or disengagement, stage that resulted in Indigenous students withdrawing from the university after 1 or 2 semesters, not to return.

The experience of these stages was different for those non-assimilated Indigenous students in the study who did remain at the university. Initially, these students did experience stages of alienation, which were characterized by extremely painful periods of loneliness, depression, and isolation that lasted from months to years. These students perceived that much was at stake for them to lose, in terms of their Indigenous identity and values, while little was to be gained from their higher education experience. They perceived that the institution did not offer an education experience that recognized or valued them as Indigenous.

The non-assimilated Indigenous students who stayed at the institution, even though

experiencing intensely painful feelings and perceptions associated with the initial alienation stage, eventually experienced a dramatic “self-discovery” of connecting with their own sense of Indigenous self-identity, held within traditional cultural and spiritual inner resources. It is important to note that these students discovered *individual* meaning through this process of *what it meant for them* to be identified as an Indian person, rather than relying on external definitions.

Instead of moving through the stages of emotional and physical rejection of the higher education experience, as the “marginal” and “estranged” Indigenous students did, these “transculturated” students used their experience of “self-discovery of their Indianness” to move into two other stages as described by Huffman (2001) as the Realignment stage and the Participation stage.

In the Realignment stage, the “transculturated” students generally began to learn to relate at both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural levels simultaneously, as demanded by the situations they encountered. The students made adjustments as individuals related to the academic, social, and personal areas of their lives.

In the Participation stage, the “transculturated” students made maximum use of their cultural and spiritual inner resources within their individual sense of Indigenous self-identity. They experienced this process as inner strength and security, as well as self-confidence. With this experience, the “transculturated” students implemented a variety of individual ways to position themselves to fulfill the goal of completing their education.

Within the context of Resistance Theory, Huffman (2001) describes the experience of many Indigenous students in higher education at mainstream institutions, as one in which they perceive they have “no choice.” They perceive that the only choices available to them in their higher education experience are to assimilate or to leave the experience, to protect their identity as a traditional Indigenous person.

However, as Huffman (2001) asserts, before many Indigenous students arrive at physical disengagement from institutions and/or their higher education experience, a substantial amount of time and energy is invested in protecting their individual sense of traditional Indigenous identity. This certainly is not the experience of the non-Indigenous student at the mainstream institution, and leads to depletion of internal and external resources that Indigenous students could devote to learning and degree completion.

Huffman (2001) hypothesizes that “transculturated” students use their Indigenous identity as an “emotional anchor” in the face of adversity and cultural discontinuity. “Transculturated” students begin college as “cultural outsiders,” and then at a specific point forge a strong cultural identity. They acquired the necessary confidence, self-worth as an Indigenous person, and sense of purpose to succeed in their higher education experience.

Huffman (2001) cautions that the journey “transculturated” Indigenous students make to arrive at “full confidence in one’s identity and ability” is “a hazardous journey.” Traveling through lengthy periods of emotional pain and isolation, to a spiritual experience of self-discovery and self-identity as an Indigenous person, is an intense, transformational process.

However, at the end of this transformational process, Native students increased their cultural repertoire of adding skills to cope with cultural discontinuity and the institutional environment, while keeping their Indigenous identity intact. In addition, the “transculturated” students who engaged in a cultural learning process, which could be disorientating and intimidating, but remained secure within his/her own cultural identity, persisted and completed their educational goals. Huffman concluded that the main difference between Indigenous students who stayed at the institution and those who did not was *the absence or presence of emotional security the Indigenous students had within their cultural identity as Indigenous persons.*

The Tribal College System of Higher Education

Another perspective on the Indigenous higher education experience is gleaned from recent information on the Tribal College system, whose institutional missions support Indigenous identity and cultural congruency.

Tribal Colleges were created over the last 30 years in response to the higher education needs of American Indians, and generally serve geographically isolated populations that have no other means of accessing education beyond the high school level (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). Although they have been in existence for a relatively short time, Tribal Colleges have become essential in providing access and opportunity to the majority of American Indian students in higher education. Tribal Colleges are unique institutions that combine personal attention with cultural relevance as to encourage American Indians, especially those living on the

reservations and Indian women, to overcome the barriers of higher education (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Tribal Colleges serve a disproportionate number of female students. The typical Tribal College student often is described as a single mother in her early 30s. In the fall of 1996, 56% of undergraduates at all public institutions were women, while 64% of all Tribal College undergraduates were women. This differed by institution; 76% of undergraduates at Sisseton-Wahpeton Community College were female, compared to only 46% at Haskell Indian Nations University (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Inclusive of both genders, Tribal Colleges enroll significantly more Indigenous students than mainstream institutions. Between 1990 and 1996, fall enrollments of American Indian students at Tribal Colleges increased by 62%. In comparison, American Indian enrollment increased by 36% at mainstream colleges over the same period (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Historical Overview of the Tribal College Movement

As stated by a leader in the Indigenous higher education movement in a recent gathering in Washington DC, the history of American Indian higher education over the last several hundred years is one of compulsory Western methods of learning, recurring attempts to eradicate tribal culture, and high dropout rates of American Indians at mainstream institutions. In reaction to this history, American Indian leaders built on the causes of the

Self-Determination movement of the 1960s to rethink tribal education, and became convinced that it could strengthen reservations and tribal culture without assimilation (Boyer, 1997, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

In 1968, the Navajo Nation created the first tribally controlled college, now called Dine College. Other Tribal Colleges quickly emerged in California, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Today, there are 28 tribally-chartered colleges and three federally-chartered Indian colleges in a total of 12 states. The tribally-controlled institutions were chartered by one or more tribes and are locally managed, while the federally-chartered institutions are governed by national boards. Collectively called Tribal Colleges, these institutions are in varying stages of development, and differ in their structures, sizes, and other characteristics (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

In addition, all Tribal Colleges are fully accredited by regional accrediting agencies, with the exception of three Colleges that are candidates for accreditation. All of the Colleges offer associates degrees, and virtually all offer certificates for degrees for programs of less than two years. Furthermore, four Colleges offer bachelor's degrees and two offer master's degrees. Because most of the students are commuters and facilities are limited, only eight colleges provide housing, and just six provide board or meal plans (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Tribal Colleges are similar to mainstream community colleges. However, the trait that distinguishes them from other community colleges is their dual mission: (1) *to rebuild, reinforce, and explore traditional tribal cultures as one avenue to support Indigenous sovereignty and identity*, using uniquely designed curricula and institutional settings, and at the same time (2) to address Western models of learning by providing traditional disciplinary courses that are transferable to 4-year institutions (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Unique Aspects of Tribal Colleges

Another important asset of Tribal Colleges is their ability to provide personalized attention to their students, to overcome the economic and social barriers to postsecondary success that they face (Cunningham & Parker, 1998, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Tribal Colleges also are committed to fostering a family-like atmosphere and strong personal relationships between students and faculty (Tierney, 1992, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). This trait has been shown to be a major factor in the retention of Indian students in educational systems, and its lack contributes significantly to dropout rates among Indian students (Dehyle, 1992).

In another outgrowth of service to their communities, Congress recently designated Tribal Colleges as land-grant institutions, in recognition of the essential ties between the colleges, Tribal Colleges are unique in their role within Indigenous communities. They often offer

adult education, GED certification, remedial education, academic outreach, and preparation in high schools, as well as actively seek to promote local economic development by sponsoring small business centers to encourage private sector growth. They also are a gathering place for tribal members and provide many services to the community, including day care, as many tribal students and community tribal members have family responsibilities. They also offer substance abuse counseling, nutritional counseling, and other services, sometimes in cooperation with tribal government projects (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Enrollment Trends

In a sign of the growing influence of the Tribal College movement, enrollment at the Colleges has increased at a rapid rate. In 1982, enrollment at the Colleges stood at approximately 2,100 (O'Brien, 1992, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education, 1999). By 1995-96, however, enrollment over the 12-month academic period reached 24,363 undergraduates and 260 graduate students. The number of undergraduates ranged from several thousand at Dine College to less than 200 at the Institute of American Indian Arts (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

In addition, during the 1990s Tribal College enrollment has increased more rapidly than has enrollment of American Indian students at mainstream institutions. The growth in enrollment at Tribal Colleges was concentrated in a few states: California, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Moreover, in three states, enrollment of American Indians

increased at a faster rate at Tribal Colleges than at mainstream institutions. Moreover, in three states, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota, the majority of American Indian college students are enrolled in Tribal Colleges (Hines & Higham, 1997, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute of Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Characteristics of Tribal College Students

Tribal College students share many characteristics, including some that present substantial challenges in a higher education setting, especially the prevalence of family obligations and low household incomes. Most Tribal College students enrolled in institutions are the first generations in their family to go to college (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). American Indian students make up the majority of Tribal College student bodies. Tribal College students are largely nontraditional (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). In 1997, data from the Bureau of Indian Affairs showed an average age of 31.5, well above the traditional college age of 18-24 (BIA, 1998, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). Indigenous women make up the majority of the Tribal College student population. In addition, half of all Tribal College students attend on a part-time basis (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Student Success

Despite the socioeconomic barriers and funding issues they confront, Tribal Colleges are doing an effective job of educating their students. There is an increase in Tribal College

students earning degrees, transferring to 4-year institutions, and obtaining jobs. Reports from Tribal College admission officers indicate American Indian students are choosing Tribal Colleges over mainstream institutions (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Although information on the number of Tribal College students earning degrees is limited, available data suggest that a significant percentage of Tribal College students are completing degrees (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). At the 16 colleges that reported completion data for 1996-97, 409 associate's degrees, 58 bachelor's degrees, and two master's degrees were awarded. Of these degrees, 84 percent were awarded to American Indian/Alaskan Native students, and 67 percent were awarded to women (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Substantial portions of Tribal College students continue on to four-year institutions after earning a degree at a Tribal College, most of which have strong relationships with state colleges and universities to facilitate transfers (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). For example, about 70 percent of students at D-Q University transfer to the four-year colleges after earning an associates degree (American Indian College Fund, 1996, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

One study of students from Salish Kootenai College found that American Indian students who

had attended the college and then transferred to the University of Montana earned higher grade point averages and had higher graduation rates than American Indian students who had gone to the university directly from high school (Zaglauer, 1993, cited in American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

Another important measure of success is the relatively low unemployment rate of Tribal Colleges graduates, especially given the high rates prevalent on most reservations (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999).

In the face of difficult circumstances and hard choices about the best ways to spend limited funding to serve Indigenous students and communities, Tribal Colleges are succeeding.

Tribal Colleges **are** emerging as an affective answer to the needs of Indigenous communities. The majority of Indigenous students enrolling in Tribal Colleges are from historically the most underrepresented group in higher education- American Indian women. They are non-traditional, single mothers, with the lowest household incomes of any group in the United States. *Tribal Colleges are doing what no other institutions have been able to do; that is, providing access and opportunity to the least represented group in higher education and still retaining the integrity and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples and Nations.*

Traditional Cultural and Spiritual Strengths of Indigenous Women

Many of the traditional strengths and inner gifts that Indigenous women bring to their Nations are described in traditional knowledge and/or oral history. To encapsulate or categorize these cultural and spiritual strengths into categories, or “boxes,” would destroy

their essence, beauty, and mystery. However, several powerful examples of these strengths found in traditional knowledge and oral histories can be described within certain cultural contexts.

Traditional Status and Roles of Indigenous Women

The traditional status and roles of Indigenous women vary from Nation to Nation, but some common themes emerge across the Native experience. These themes are made most visible often through the words of Indigenous people themselves. As a significant part of this study, culturally meaningful resources were utilized within this thesis section in a culturally appropriate manner. The following section is presented as a way to provide additional foundational support for identifying cultural and spiritual strengths found among Indigenous women in their higher education experience. It is important to note, however, that the cultural and spiritual strengths of Indigenous women are as diverse and multifaceted as Indigenous women are themselves. Cultural and spiritual strengths are dynamic, and emerge in new ways relative to the uniqueness of each individual woman and Nation. Often, they are found in the traditional roles Indigenous women choose to occupy within their societies.

Home as the Center of Society

In many Indigenous Nations, the center of the society was the home (White Hat, 1991). The head of the home was the woman, and the members of the home were considered a household in many Plains Indigenous societies. The following three examples serve to illustrate traditional perspectives about the importance of women in Lakota society, and some

of the inherent cultural and spiritual strengths found within the societal structure relative to women:

When we look at the role of women in prereservation days, women held a place of very high honor in many spectrums of Lakota life. In our creation stories, women were created from Maka, (I am the First, meaning the Earth) and she is fashioned in the likeness of Wooke (the Law) and her name is Winyan. Then a companion in a shape compatible to her is made; he is man and his name is Wica. Women held honorable, necessary roles in the spiritual realm of Lakota society. A virgin woman sat as the doorkeeper during the Sun Dance Inipi. Women evoke the spirits during Yuipi. Economically, women had property rights. She was the lodge (home) owner; the lodge furnishings were hers also. Women stayed single until they had achieved the skills necessary to providing care for a household and its members until they matured and possessed their own economic base. Some qualities valued and sought after by women since girlhood included patience, endurance, bravery, industriousness, humor, modesty, good health of mind, body and spirit and emotions; creativity, skills of adornment; knowledge of plant life, animal life, the seasons and the stars, the desire to and experience in caring for the old and the young; the ability to share and convey knowledge. In true Lakota society, men and women existed on a level of equality. The men and women held definite roles in society that were considered of equal importance to the Nation. The united reality of men and women was a philosophical way of life.

Cante ohitika Win (Brave-hearted Women, 1991)

In speaking to the women:

By your hand the family moves.

White Buffalo Calf Woman

In *Walking in A Sacred Manner* (1995), St. Pierre and Long Solider and describe a similar status of women, and the cultural values that permeated the Lakota society:

When a baby girl is born, the Lakota say, *Wicincala wan icimani*, “a female traveler has arrived.” She is often immediately given an Indian name, a name by which the spirits will know her. In Lakota society, the spiritual and economic powers of women were not only acknowledged, but also well respected. When a man took a wife, he lived in her camp. When the Lakota traced their ancestry, while acknowledging and respecting their father’s relatives, most took the band name of their mothers. This pattern still exists. It is very true in the old days it was the woman who earned and kept the family’s status. Her industriousness, cleanliness, truthfulness, humor, wisdom, courage, and generosity elevated her family in the minds of the people. The Lakota woman owned the products of industry, and used them, traded them or disposed of them as she saw fit.

Another Indigenous woman from an Eastern tribe describes the status and importance of

women in her Nation as it relates to herself and her community:

I am woman. I am life force. The Beloved Woman is one of our principal chiefs. Through her the Spirit often speaks to the people. In the Great Council, at the capital, she is a powerful voice. Concerning the fate of hostages, her word is absolute. Women share in all of life. We lead sacred dances. In the Council, we debate freely with the men until and agreement is reached. When the Nation considers war, we have a say, for we bear the warriors. Sometimes I go into battle.

Spirituality is infused into many Indigenous cultures and societies, and traditionally, distinctions between spirituality and other aspects of life were not made:

Plains Indian life is not neatly segmented, as some anthropologists like to think, into the sacred and the profane. Indian people do not have one way of perceiving the sacred that they use as home and a different one at church, requiring two sets of behavioral codes. Certainly in public ritual there more formal behaviors, but day-to-day life is very much involved in sacred mystery.

Walking in a Sacred Manner, 1995

Traditionally, Indigenous women were life-givers in all ways: spiritually, physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially. Their experience of being in the world embraces spirituality as infused in all stages of life. As an Elder of the Miniconjou Nation reflects:

When white women get near the time in life when they will no longer have their moon (menopause) they get depressed and frightened. In our way, I looked forward to that time when I didn't have to worry about getting pregnant, about caring all the time for young children. In our way, we look forward to it because it is the time when we can pursue other things full-time; become a Medicine woman, or a traditional artist, if it is our calling. Prior to that time, our powers of creation are too strong. Because we can make new people, our spiritual powers are greater than men's.

Darlene Young Bear, Minniconjou Elder

Walking in a Sacred Manner, 1995

In *Walking in a Sacred Manner*, the authors state the foundational importance to Indigenous society of the White Buffalo Calf Woman, or, as she is also known, the Sacred Buffalo Calf Woman, the Sacred Maiden, or the White Buffalo Calf Pipe Woman. The White Buffalo Calf Pipe Woman brought sacred teachings, instructions, and the sacred Pipe. Many Indigenous people rely heavily on the sacred story and teachings of the White Buffalo Calf Woman for direction and strength:

In Western-and in fact most Eastern traditions-men are not only the central characters in creation stories, but also in millennial transition characters. For the Lakota, of the mid-eighteenth century, they came to a difficult time of displacement where they were poor and hungry; both physically and spiritually. During this difficult time of transition, a "messiah" appeared in the

form of a woman. In Lakota belief, Whope (Falling Star), the daughter of Mahpiyato (also called Sky) reappeared before the Lakota as the Sacred Buffalo Calf Woman. This is the most powerful story in Lakota religious life. Many versions exist, but the core is always the same; involving bravery, long-suffering, generosity, humility, honesty, and respect for all things in creation. These examples given by the White Buffalo Calf Woman are the essence of the Lakota personality.

The authors heard the sacred story in 1971 from the late Manuel Red Bear, a Hunkpapa/Itazipco, while he was living in Bear Creek, on the northern part of the Cheyenne River reservation in South Dakota.

Indigenous women today often turn to related traditional cultural and spiritual practices for strength and fulfillment:

...many of the women of the Pine Ridge reservation cling tenaciously to the traditions of the past. The women are not ardent feminists stressing female supremacy and competing with men; they are more concerned with family, community and tribal sovereignty. They have many choices, but the roles that are most important to them are the traditional ones of grandmother, mother, wife, homemaker and teacher. Their history, their old values, are incorporated into a unique adaptive strategy that allows them to cope, to make a meaningful life under sometimes the most difficult of circumstances.

Walking in a Sacred Manner, 1995

An Indigenous woman described where she received her strength and comfort in coping with a difficult time in her life:

The Spirits have helped me to deal with this in the sweat lodge, as well as in the ceremonies. I feel they are telling me it is a test of my strength to be a strong mother for my boys. My family respects my beliefs. They help me with cooking and giveaways when I want to do them. I would have to say that my belief in the Spirits and in our ceremonies, like the Inipi and the Sun Dance are what gives me inspiration and strength to face my problems today.

Lindy Trueblood

Cante ohitika Win, 1991

As described by the previous examples of Indigenous people in their own forms of expression, some of the traditional cultural and spiritual strengths of Indigenous women are clearly visible. However, Indigenous people also warn about the continued distortion of the cultural and spiritual strengths of women by persons from the non-Indigenous culture, and the misinterpretation that can result in harm for Indigenous women and Nations. One form of oppression takes the shape of descriptive writing about Indigenous women within the *perception and worldviews* of authors from the majority culture that causes damage to Indigenous people, Indigenous identity, and tribal sovereignty:

Notions of female inferiority have permeated and done great social damage to a system that was different from the dominant culture of America. Indian readers have come to rely on the accuracy of largely non-Indian writer who have, often unintentionally, filtered back through their own cultural perceptions what they thought they saw in the tribe they studied. In most nineteenth century writing, Indian women come out looking like prostitutes, hags, or slaves. In twentieth century writing, they are all but invisible

Walking in a Sacred Manner, 1995

Another form of oppression that is damaging to Indigenous identity and sovereignty that has emerged recently is found often within the “New Age” spiritual movement:

Not all distortions, however, have been written by white male missionaries, historians, and ethnographers. New Age books have only added to and perpetuated many stereotypes that hurt Indian women and obscure the actual strength of the cultures they purport to describe. Anglo women would bring us books on New Age, crystal clutching so-called holy women, and ask us to read them. It seem ironic for Anglo people to shove these silly books in my hands and tell me to read them when I am very aware of my Lakota religion. I had grandmothers and grandfathers who were powerful Medicine men and women. It is very frustrating for my husband and me when some of these people argue over the fact they believe these writers actually had these experiences. In my opinion, these books are wrong, very misleading.

Tilda Long Soldier, Walking in a Sacred Manner, 1995

These New Age people *demand* we give them our spirituality, or share it with them, or pay us money for it. They have lost their own, so they want ours. We have had everything else taken from us, now they want our spirituality, too. I tell them that this is what we have left to sustain and heal us; go back to your own heritage and find your spirituality that is in your history and traditions. I am not here to be used. I have white people that are my close friends, but they want to be with me because they enjoy me, they aren't here to try to get my Indian ways.

Tribal member, 2002

A new face of historical racism and cultural holocaust has been the political and personal phenomenon of people from the majority culture continuing to communicate in new ways “what is good for the Indian” or “what the Indian experience is like.” Often, this phenomenon is emerges among other groups resisting their own forms of oppression. This form of racism dictates or assumes “an unbelievable sense of rightness” about how oppression affects Indian people, what they should do about it, and how it came to be (White Hat, 1996).

This form of racism and cultural holocaust if found often in what many call “white feminism.” One tenet often found in “white feminism” is the belief and worldview that

patriarchy affects and exists in the world universally. This worldview, with its “unbelievable sense of rightness,” is generated from a racist belief that “white feminist” reality is applicable to Indigenous women and Indigenous Nations, and that the answers for Indigenous women and Nations lie in understanding how patriarchy has oppressed them within the “white feminist” perspective and belief. Often, cursory inclusions for women of color and Indigenous women are found in this worldview, but representation of Indigenous worldviews and value systems frequently are invisible. If Indigenous reality is referenced, it is often distorted and harmful to the self-identity of Indigenous women and Nations:

What Pte San, the White Buffalo Maiden, presented to the Lakota, including instructions about family, motherhood, the role of women in the sacred realm, and orderly Lakota society, is generally lost in the literary stretch and political manipulation of some feminist writers. No one has the corner on sacred truth. Indian religions are complete systems that must be seen and understood in the context of the culture they come, and borrowing isolated parts like the sweat bath, or the image of the White Buffalo Maiden can lead to confusion and misunderstanding.

Walking in a Sacred Manner, 1995

Another Indigenous woman states:

Once again, here white people are telling me what I have to believe, learn about and understand. These white feminists tell me we are all sisters living

under patriarchy. If they bring their racism to me in this form, how are they my sisters or how are they different from the racism in the patriarchy they say is in all of reality or in all of the world? They just bring a different kind of oppression. I say these things, and they tell me that I don't understand my own oppression in patriarchy. Who said they owned reality anyway? It is racism, pure and simple; them telling me they know better than I do. They say we are sisters and they know they are privileged, but we have more in common as women because we are all oppressed by patriarchy. I tell you, they have no idea how "privileged" they are, even though they say they do. If they did, they would get rid of their own racism inside themselves and not abuse me with it.

Despite the old and new faces of historical racism and cultural holocaust, traditional spiritual and strengths of Indigenous women are evident. Indigenous women continue to act as sustainers of the Nations through these inner cultural and spiritual strengths, giving life to the future of Indian peoples.

A Nation is never defeated until the hearts of its women are on the ground.

Cheyenne

A voice is coming

coming

A voice is coming

Here us, People!

A voice is coming

Speaking, Speaking

To the people

A voice is coming

From West

North

East

South

From Above

Below

From within

A voice is coming

Natural women

Mothers, Wives, Daughters, Sisters

The voice of WOMAN

The language of life, of love, of giving

From the four quarters of the Universe

From far

and near

The voice of woman

The language of open hearts, strong hearts, of loving arms ready

to embrace, to comfort, to shelter, to defend

The voice of happiness

Sorrow

Pleasure

pain

A voice is coming

coming

A voice is coming

Hear us, People!

A voice is coming

Debra Lynn White Plume,

Cante ohitika Win, 1991

Summary

The presence of Indigenous women in higher education historically has been virtually nonexistent, especially in mainstream institutions. Degree completion remains for many Indigenous women an insurmountable barrier to increased choice and well being for themselves and their families. However, there are some Indigenous women who do move through cultural discontinuity, difficult socioeconomic conditions, and daunting statistical odds to achieve their higher education goals. Several theoretical perspectives, as well as culturally meaningful resources and systems, may provide indicators of how these Indigenous women persist and complete their higher education experience. One thing is clear, however; Indigenous women, small in number as they may be, are increasing their

presence in higher education. They are making their dreams of a higher education degree a reality.

There is no doubt, though that Native American women continue to respond to the needs of the People; to dream powerful dreams.

Walking in a Sacred Manner, 1995

CHAPTER 3.

METHODOLOGY

Rationale for an Indigenous Research Paradigm

A number of Native peoples are calling for the employment of worldviews, paradigms, theories of knowledge, and methods Indigenous to Native cultures in intellectual endeavors (Simpson, 2001). Kuokkanen (1999), in *Towards an Indigenous Paradigm from a Sami Perspective*, discusses the need and significance of an “Indigenous paradigm” as a way of decolonizing Indigenous minds by “re-centering” Indigenous values and cultural practices within research practice. Kuokkanen (1999) cites the move toward an Indigenous paradigm as an essential piece of Indigenous peoples’ struggle for self-determination and psychological decolonization. As Kuokkanen (1999, p. 413) states:

If we acknowledge the importance of the decolonization process of Indigenous societies on the way to empowerment and full self-determination, it is also crucial we reconnect ourselves to our cultural concepts, values and knowledge systems in order to also be self-governing intellectually. Therefore, an Indigenous paradigm would be a culturally specific discourse based on Indigenous peoples’ premises, values and worldviews.

Native scholars assert that educational institutions have been central to the process of colonizing Indigenous people’s minds all over the world. One consequence of this psychocolonization practice has been the dissociation from Indigenous worldviews and cultural practices by many Indigenous scholars. Immersed into Western, non-Indigenous

models and paradigms of conducting research, some Indigenous research often follows and imitates prevailing Western paradigms and Eurocentered thinking (Kuokkanen, 1999).

Self-determination of Indigenous peoples deals with a range of various issues, one of them being the right to maintain and develop manifestations of cultural practices including the restitution of their spiritual and intellectual properties.

The creation of an Indigenous peoples' paradigm is part of the process of claiming these rights.

(Kuokkanen, 1999, p.#412)

Another significant reason for the design and use of an Indigenous research paradigm is connected to the on-going concerns and questions regarding who decides what research is relevant, and how it is relevant, to Indigenous people. In addition, concerns about the decision making process in research related to Indigenous peoples also center on the identification and interpretation of ways of knowing and theorizing. Often, non-Indigenous researchers within the utilization of Western approaches to research have usurped these questions and issues of relevance, understandings, and ways of knowing. Inherent in Western approaches and theories of research inquiry is the assumption and belief that these approaches can be used to describe and analyze Indigenous reality and experience. *This is an aspect of intellectual colonization* (Kuokkanen, 1999).

An Indigenous paradigm can introduce new perspectives to research by challenging and deconstructing dominant values, worldviews and knowledge

systems. An Indigenous paradigm can offer a new set of tools for analyzing non-Western cultures which, for its own part, may diminish the dangers of misinterpretations of our cultural expression.

(Kuokkanen, 1999, p. 415)

Indigenous Perspectives on Western “Alternative” Approaches to Research with Native Peoples

Since the end of the 1960s the Western academic world has experienced some radical shifts in terms of perceiving knowledge. Various theories related to post structuralism have seriously challenged previously held notions of Western definitions of universal knowledge, truth, subjectivity, and language. This criticism of Western philosophical and theoretical foundations can serve as a starting point for an Indigenous paradigm because its goals are similar to those of poststructuralist theories: anti-universalism, the decentering of the subject, the creation of alternative forms of writing, and the dismantling of empirical hierarchies and dichotomies (Kuokkanen, 1999).

According to Native scholars Yvonne Dion-Buffalo and Jon C. Mohawk, postmodernism can be seen as a movement, that announces the abandonment of Western utopian ideologies, and it should be seen as a consequence of the halt of five hundred years of European expansion (Dion-Buffalo et al., 1992, cited in Kuokkanen, 1999). Thereby, postmodernism may promote diversity by making possible the existence of various realities with certain local personal and community forms of truths (Rosenau, 1993, cited in Kuokkanen, 1999).

Kuokkanen (1999) asserts that for Indigenous people, there is a need to go further than poststructuralist or postmodern forms in research, because, first and foremost, Indigenous people cannot remain apolitical in their struggles. There is a criticism that can be leveled against poststructuralism and postmodernism; even if poststructuralists and postmodernists share similar aspirations, the ultimate objective of Indigenous peoples is, through the deconstructions of the consequences of colonialism, a true self-determination, where intellectual self-determination has a significant role.

Some feminist theories and practices related to research approaches also aim at social and political changes, yet their approaches often exclude notions of Indigenous collectivity, as well as land rights, which are central elements for Indigenous peoples. In addition, “poststructuralist theories, to a large extent, remain within the very framework and forms of knowledge they criticize, that is, they do not exceed some of the fundamental world views, value system of notions of the other” (Smith, 1999, cited in Kuokkanen, 1999, p. #415).

Kuokkanen (1999) asserts that, although limited commonalities exist within the “alternative” Western research paradigms and Indigenous approaches to research, certain foundational and essential elements are missing from the Western research paradigms relevant to Indigenous worldviews and peoples. One such commonality may be approaches used in qualitative research, such as participatory approaches and methodology, where the researcher does not consider him/herself apart from the observed, but rather part of the larger process. These approaches can add or enrich the research process by this subjective and participatory involvement. However, there are other forms of receiving knowledge which are ignored by

Western approaches to research, which could also be termed “intuitive” or, in other Indigenous Nations, sacred knowing. These forms of knowledge are received through spiritual experiences, including sudden understandings as “seeing.” These ways of knowledge acquisition largely are dismissed in Western research approaches. Indigenous acquisition of knowledge is reflected in an Indigenous cultural context, which is infused and founded upon a spiritual reality and experience of that spiritual reality (Kuokkanen, 1999).

Knowledge within traditional Aboriginal worldviews is perceived differently than it is in Western society. For a large part, knowledge ultimately originates in the spirit world, and is controlled in very specific and intricate ways in Aboriginal life ways. The process of learning, or of gaining new knowledge is focused around learning more about oneself in relation to the spirits, the land and all of our relations.

(Cajete, 1999; Graveline, 1998, cited in Simpson, 2001, p. #142)

This knowledge might come to us from relationships, experiences, story telling, dreams, participation in ceremonies, from the Elders, the oral tradition, experimentation or observation; from children or from teachers in the plant and animal worlds.

(Peat, 1994, cited in Simpson, 2001; Simpson, 1999, p. # 142)

Other Native scholars share similar views. Simpson (2001), in describing a statement by Maguire (1987), argues that reliance on Western approaches to research in regard to

Indigenous peoples only further strengthens intellectual colonialism.

The power of a paradigm is that it shapes, in nearly unconscious and thus unquestioned ways, perceptions and practices within disciplines. It shapes what we look at, how we look at things, what we label as problems, what problems we consider investigating and solving, and what methods are preferred for investigation and action. Likewise, a paradigm influences what we choose to not to attend to, what we do not see.

(Maguire, 1987, cited in Simpson, 2001, p. #141)

Back then, she was writing in reference to the conventional research paradigms of the past. Today, I think her words are equally important, but in reference to the alternative research paradigms that are employed in contemporary times. Specifically, participatory research operates from an alternative Western paradigm (as opposed to paradigms of the dominant society) but nonetheless, a fundamentally Western paradigm. Indigenous peoples have Indigenous paradigms and these paradigms perceive and understand knowledge and power fundamentally different than Western alternative paradigms. I think it is our own paradigms our own decision making processes, and ways of generating new knowledge that hold the greatest potential for finding solutions to our contemporary problems. We have our own philosophies, theories of knowledge, methodologies and methods. Instead of inserting fractions of our knowledge and our people into

processes developed outside of our communities, Aboriginal peoples are using their own paradigms as foundations for research.

(Simpson, 2001, p.141)

As Kuokkanen (1999, p. 415) states:

There is a need for Indigenous peoples to become independent from Western intellectual structures since a significant part of colonialism is being dependent on modes, ideas structures, epistemologies and approaches of the West.

This move toward intellectual self-determination in regards to research inquiry approaches has prompted many Indigenous communities to take political and legal action. Indigenous Nations in North America continually have experienced a range of researchers, scientists, and development professionals entering their communities to study, to develop, or to empower them. In the past few years, many Indigenous communities have said, “enough is enough.” The Inuit people in Nunavut now require outsiders to obtain a license before they are allowed to enter into Inuit communities to conduct their work, with one community initiating a moratorium on research altogether (Oakes & Riewe, 1996, cited in Simpson, 2001).

Even though many of the researchers have used “alternative” Western approaches to the research found in qualitative methodology and paradigms, the result is that many Indigenous peoples do not support these endeavors. As Simpson (2001, p. 140) states:

Many Aboriginal communities are uncomfortable with participatory or collaborative research. For many, participatory action research just represented the latest way to study us, or the best way for Euro-Canadian researchers to access our knowledge. I think it is extremely important to listen to these voices and explore why Participatory Action Research does not work for many Aboriginal peoples.

To conclude, Kuokkanen (1999) asserts that the main objectives of an Indigenous paradigm include continuation of the criticism of Western Eurocentrism and of biases privileging Western systems, approaches, and paradigms of research in regards to systems of knowledge.

Aboriginal peoples have our own work to do.

(Simpson, 2001, p. 145).

The present crisis [of Aboriginal communities] reflects our cultural loss, anger at the mainstreams' lack of respect for our rights, and disappointment in our own people who have turned their backs on tradition. And I believe it is heightened because the choices we make today will determine whether or not we survive as Indigenous peoples beyond the next generation. No one can deny that our cultures have been eroded and our languages lost, that most of our communities subsist in a state of abject economic dependency, that our governments are weak, and that white encroachment on our land continues.

We can, of course, choose to ignore these realities and simply accede to the

dissolution of our culture and our nations. Or we can commit ourselves to a different path; one that honors the memory of those who have sacrificed, fought, and died to preserve the integrity of our nations. This path, the opposite of the one we are now on, leads to a renewed political and social life based on our traditional values.

(Rotinohshonni, 1999, cited in Simpson, 2001, p.145)

Characteristics of an Indigenous Paradigm

- (1) An Indigenous Research Paradigm is based on a holistic approach to research and inquiry. Its foundational concepts are centered on Indigenous spirituality, which is reflective of Indigenous cultures and value systems.
- (2) It does not differentiate between the aspects of human experience into physical, social, spiritual, and psychological components, but rather seeks to approach research from an Indigenous worldview.
- (3) The holistic approach of an Indigenous paradigm also rejects dualistic splits between mind and body, according to which a person's intellectual capabilities have to be separated and consequently heightened above more physical aspects of life. Kuokkanen (1999) has referred to this phenomenon as the Eurocentered process of disassociating one's consciousness from the ongoing interaction with place, ancestry, animals, plants, spirits, community story, cycles of life and cycles of the seasons (Kremmer, 1997, cited in Kuokkanen (1999)).

(4) An Indigenous paradigm is a stand against the Western approaches to research (Kuokkanen, 1999).

(5) Within an Indigenous paradigm, research has a clear connection to the researcher's own culture. This means that cultural practices and forms of expressions are reflected in the ways of conducting research; in language, style, structure, and methods, as well as assumptions of knowledge (Kuokkanen, 1999).

Research Design

The research design for this study is housed within the Medicine Wheel Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model. The model is constructed on an Indigenous worldview of the universe, symbolized in part by the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel is a symbol of an Indigenous worldview of many Plains societies, but has been used by other Indigenous peoples as well. The sacred colors and directional affiliations are understood and constructed with variation among Native peoples, but the core view and frame of reference are similar.

The Model of the Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm is a work in progress. It is not the answer to Indigenous approaches to research in Indian County; merely an invitation for other Indigenous peoples to join and contribute to the effort of creating an Indigenous paradigm of research that could serve Indigenous peoples in their own best interests and invite reflection in a way that is not of Western approaches to research, nor a reaction against them, but a way to use our own Indigenous knowledge, experience, time, and energy in investing in our own thought, rather than in a foreign one.

The Model should not be seen as static, or all-encompassing. It is a picture in time and space, a point of reference for inquiring and understanding, within the very limited bounds of human thought, certain aspects of Indigenous truths in a culturally intrinsic and meaningful manner. The following description of the Model and its characteristics and affiliations are concepts, not a format or an “encapsulation” of all Indigenous thought and understanding. It is a living entity, in the Indigenous sense of life. In other words, the creation and use of this Model is dynamic and flexible. A significant part of this study is to incorporate spiritual knowledge, knowledge from the Elders, Medicine people, community members, and participants in this study in the evolution of the Model. It is my desire that the process of evolution for the Model will be continuous, never held within a strict confine of time and space, but transform continually to meet the needs of the Indigenous people that may choose to engage with it.

Aspects of the Medicine Wheel

As referenced earlier, the Medicine Wheel is a symbol connected to the sacred Four Directions of all existence and representing all knowledge of the universe (Conti, 2001). It is a symbol looked to by many, both past and present, who seek healing, wisdom, and direction (Conti, 2001). It is appropriate to look to the Medicine Wheel for answers concerning the suffering and lack experienced by many Indigenous people in their educational experience today, as well as for direction for the Seventh Generation: our children.

As referenced previously, the colors embodied in the Medicine Wheel are sacred. In association with the colors are the sacred Four Directions. These directions together

constitute the universe, and the center of the universe is where the Four Directions meet. As the *perception* of where the meeting place of the Four Directions is relative, each person can be said to be the center of the universe. This concept is illustrated in a prayer/song of the Dine' people: "As I walk, as I walk, the Universe walks with me."

The colors of the Medicine Wheel and the description of the Four Values or Virtues may vary according to different Medicine Persons' interpretations, and understandings of those Indian persons honoring the interpretations. The diversity among the interpretations is strength inherent in our traditional spiritual communities.

In addition, all of the Four Sacred Values or Virtues are included in each of the Four Directions and sacred colors of the Medicine Wheel. For example, within the color Yellow, associated with the East Power or East Direction, one finds all of the sacred virtues of bravery, fortitude, generosity and wisdom (as in the other sacred colors). As the sacred color Yellow is associated with new ideas (knowledge), an individual may use insight in offering compassion to another who may be in pain. This offering of oneself is an expression of "generosity of self," relying on wisdom of deciding how best to offer compassion, taking the risk of doing so (bravery) and being fully present or attentive in body, mind and spirit in order to deeply connect with another who is suffering, even when this is not a superficial or quick task (fortitude).

To further clarify the aspects of the Medicine Wheel, I will discuss each of the sacred colors and their associations with the Four Directions (Powers) and the Four Values or Virtues in

detail, with examples of how one may express the embodiment of these Values within the dimension of each Direction. It is important to state here that these examples I use are mainly drawn from my own experience and those of others in my life. By no means are they absolutely definitive or contain all the expressions of the Four Directions in human life. Each is only one example drawn from one life, my own. This caution is essential for the following discussion.

The color Yellow is often associated with the East Power; the direction of Woman and new birth, new life. This can be thought of not only as birth in the physical sense, but the birth of new knowledge, insight, and emotional and mental growth in the form of ideas, revelations, and understandings. It also can represent the dawn of a new day and the knowledge we can seek with each new day. Springtime is represented in the East Power, as the time when the plants begin to grow and the gathering process begins (Conti, 2001). The Knowledge component of the Model is associated with this direction. As previously illustrated, an individual who seeks to base his/her life on the Four Sacred Values can express this Direction utilizing all of the Four Values in an action of generosity, wisdom, bravery and fortitude in relationship to another who is suffering.

The color White (is often associated with the South Power, the direction that is most open between our World and the Spirit World) is the direction where our ancestors have gone before us. The South Power can be associated with the night, a time of bringing into oneself, healing and reflection; internalization of what we have experienced and learned. The component of community is associated with this direction, as we now can take our process of

earning and make it part of ourselves, relying on the resources and endurance of our ancestors, Medicine people, spiritual leaders, relatives, and others, (all inclusive elements of Indigenous community) for guidance and support.

An example of the expression of this Direction relying on the Four Values may be found in participation in the Sundance. From initial understanding and reflection on the part of the Sundancer as to the purposes and meanings involved with Sundancing itself (wisdom) an inner spiritual strength may arise in him/her that helps the Sundancer complete his/her sacred vows (fortitude). However, this inner spiritual strength usually does not exist for many Sundancers as a matter of predominantly self-will, or in isolation apart from the spiritual resources of others who offer their prayers and support, whether human or non-human entities. This community support and guidance usually encourages those Sundancing to be brave and to sacrifice for others in a sacred and compassionate way (generosity).

The color Blue or Black is often associated with the West Power, and the Wankiyas (the Thunder Beings). The Wankiyas are powerful and can affect the environment intensely. Heyokas, spiritual persons associated with the Wankiyas, frequently are consulted for identifying the animal spirits from the environment that will help Medicine People.

The component of the Model associated with the West Power is Experience. As the West Power and the Wankiyas affect the environment, so, too, does the West power affect the internal environment of individuals and groups. As Knowledge is acquired, often with assistance from the Community, the West power transforms this Knowledge into Experience

within the internal environment of individuals and groups. In other words, the West Power moves in such a way to encompass the knowledge and the process of connecting with aspects of community and transforms these things into the phenomenon of internal experience.

For example, an Indigenous person may have a spiritual dream, (acquisition of Knowledge). Upon waking, the dreamer may not realize the significance of the dream to his/her life journey. In some cases, aspects or perhaps the entire dream manifests itself in physical reality. (In some majority culture worldviews, this phenomenon may be described as a dream “coming true”). The dreamer *experiences* the spiritual dream in another way-within manifestation in a physical realm. Perhaps these experiences prompts the dreamer to ask a Medicine Person for assistance in understanding the dream (bravery) rather than ignoring it or “hiding” from the experiences of the dream. When the dreamer receives assistance in understanding the meaning of the dream and the experiences associated with it (wisdom) from the spiritual domains (community) an expectation may be introduced that this new understanding and experiences will be used in a “good way” to help the individual and Nation (generosity).

The color Red is often associated with the North Power; symbolizing the blood of our People, a force of Life itself, and the Life coursing through our own veins. strength, bravery, and courage, as well as aspects of the other Four Values or Virtues. It also is associated with fulfilling these gifts in ourselves from the Creator. It is with this in mind that the Expression aspect of the Model is associated with the strength, endurance, courage, and life blood we are given that we may express our individual gifts for the continued life of our Nations. Within

the Model, this aspect symbolizes the process of making visible our own Indigenous knowledge, through the process of connecting with our communities and solidifying the transforming experience within ourselves in ways that are relative to our Indigenous identity and sovereignty.

An example of these concepts in human action can be illustrated in the following way. With some Indigenous people that have suffered with the addiction/disease of alcoholism and its symptoms, they have often found reattachment to their traditional Indigenous Values and spirituality provides a path for recovering from the disease of alcoholism. With support from their tribal communities and others, they undertake an incredible healing journey that demands tremendous bravery. In seeking, receiving and understanding traditional Indigenous knowledge in a way that is personal and relevant to their lives (wisdom) and committing to living to the best of their ability by the Four Values or Virtues (fortitude), the people recovering from alcoholism can express this healing in positive ways in relationship to themselves and others (generosity).

Application of the Medicine Wheel in the Indigenous Research Process

As Knowledge is associated with the East power in the Model, so is the concept of Vision. Vision is the creativity and insight, the “seeing” of newness, existence and/or reality within the Indigenous worldview and value systems. It is also born out of intuition, sacred knowing, or teachings from human and non-human entities, among other ways of knowledge acquisition. It is the conceptualization of insight, which is revelation, within the individual knowledge acquisition.

In the culturally intrinsic research process, Vision provides an avenue in which individual and/or group knowledge can be made personally relevant to both the participants and the research process. For example, in discussing my topic area for research, several participants requested some questions I was interested in asking them several months before we are to be in each other's presence. The reason was similar. They expressed a desire to reflect, think about, feel about, and/or pray about and take time to be available to what may be revealed to them in the reflection and/or the "seeing" process (Knowledge). Time also was necessary, as expressed by some, in taking the insights they had received about the topic to "watch how they evolved" (Vision) for them before sharing their knowledge.

The South Power is also associated with Validity. It is a cultural practice to receive support and validation of one's knowledge that has been connected to Vision. In some Indigenous spiritual practices, the seeking of Vision is within the context of community, which includes human and non-human entities. This process of community context for the validation of Vision assists the one who has acquired the ability to understand the knowledge in ways that are appropriate, and thus receives clarity of Vision. For some, this may mean taking their knowledge to a Medicine person or spiritual leader for clarity; for others, it may include sharing with other community members, including spirit helpers or ancestors, for assistance in understanding the *truths* contained within their Vision of Knowledge.

Associated with the West Power is also Synergistic Participation, relative to Experience. Within the research process, those who have acquired knowledge, and made it part of themselves (Experience) with the support, guidance and validation available in Indigenous

cultural practices and value systems and worldviews, connect with others involved in the research process to create an additional and new experience of this Knowledge and Vision related to all of creation (an aspect of community). It is the *energy of the connection process* that gives rise to the ability to “discover” new “truths” or the ability to understand the *meaning* together of what new information is being made visible.

In other words, operating from the Indigenous view that all information or “truths” exist simultaneously and not limited by space or time, and then the Synergistic Participation process is a means by where these “truths” can be understood or “seen” by participants. The participants do not “create” these truths, and the “discovery” process is relative, the truths in actuality have existed all along. It is only the human limitations (limits of the human mind in particular) of the participants that have precluded the “discovery” of them. (As the most valuable and “highest” acquisition of knowledge comes through sacred knowing in many Indigenous cultures because the predominant human capacities for receiving knowledge are not predominantly intellectual, and therefore not limited by the constraints of the human mind, greater understandings of the meaning of “truths” can occur).

Furthermore, for the “discovery” process to take place, it must be the result of the synergy created by the participants (human and non-human entities together according to many Indigenous worldviews). As the concept of synergy is defined as “the effect of the combination of things together that is greater than the combined sum of individual parts” it would stand to reason that individuals acting alone would have less insight into the nature of “truths” than if individual entities joined together and expressed their insights in a holistic

manner, thereby adding depth and new dimensions to their experience of the “truths.”

An example of these concepts can be drawn from my own experience in developing the Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model. Through my basic understanding of the Medicine Wheel, I deepened my knowledge with the knowledge others shared with me about aspects of the Medicine Wheel. With this knowledge, I was encouraged to pray by others, such as spiritual leaders, for the correct understanding of how aspects of the Medicine Wheel could help me develop my Vision of the Research Paradigm Model. In this experience of receiving knowledge, validation, encouragement and guidance from Medicine people and others, I was able to progress in my work to develop the Model so it may be used in service of my People. If I had relied on my own limited human thinking and insight, or only been receptive to “bits of individual information” gained from others, I doubt whether the Model would have been developed into its present form. Only with all of us coming together with the same purpose (that of adding to something that could serve the People) did the synergistic experience occur. The intertwining of thought, spiritual experience, values and commitment to a larger purpose contributed to the connecting process that supported the resulting synergistic process.

This participation can be translated in a limited manner to encompass the Western idea of subjective-participation within a research approach and methodology. It differs in a fundamental aspect: **The joining together of participants in the research process encompasses a spiritual experience within Indigenous worldviews. Although one can understand the Medicine Wheel and its relationship to culturally intrinsic research**

processes intellectually, the spiritual dimension must be present also. If it is not, it is only an adaptation of cultural “replication” of qualitative research paradigms.

Synergistic participation is a holistic experience, where the participants in the research process transform their contributing parts of Knowledge, Vision and connectedness with the aspect of Community and Validation into a larger whole.

To further clarify, the following information presented illustrates how Synergistic Participation, through Experience, can be connected holistically to Knowledge and Community. (It is important to note this illustration is only one example of the process). Perhaps one or more of the participants previously received Knowledge through dreaming.

They may have sought guidance from the Community to discern aspects of the dream. Through this process the dreamer(s) may be expected to participate in certain spiritual practices. Following the guidance received from the Community, the dreamer(s) fulfill these expectations. The dream (Knowledge) through clarity of Vision, and assisted by the Community, is now Experienced fully (solidified and internalized within the dreamer) through fulfilling certain expected spiritual practices.

Having gone through this process, the dreamer(s) bring additional insights and understandings to every situation they encounter, including the Inipi. The dreamer(s), coming together in a sacred manner through the Inipi, all contribute his/her spiritual presence and individual spiritual development to the larger group. This concept is reflected often in the guidance (through oral tradition) sometimes given to those entering the Inipi: “be of one

heart and one mind.” This oral tradition reflects an aspect of Synergistic Participation. The contributing presence of all and the processes experienced in the Inipi, combined are greater than the individual parts.

To continue, the Expression aspect, associated with the North power, moves the internal world to the external, through the process of Interpretation. Interpretation is conceptualized within the context of Indigenous worldviews and tribal practices of interpretation of expression, such as storytelling, art, and the sharing of spiritual experiences (expression of the spiritual moving outside the individual). Moving the internal into the external world sustains our Nations. Others and ourselves in the Expression process can interpret our Knowledge, Vision, community Validity, Experience and participation within an Indigenous framework of understanding. Communication is key to the Interpretation aspect of the Medicine Wheel Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model. Communication takes a variety of avenues. It is not limited to verbal expression. Using the cleansing power of the North direction, Indigenous people can accurately interpret expressions of self and others.

For example, in the research process, when the participants express their Knowledge, Vision, and Validity (received by Community), and Experience, generated from Synergetic Participation with others, the interpretation of that information can be conducted within the focus of seeking clarity and further discernment. In differing from Western approaches to research, using this Indigenous worldview of Interpretation regards all information as important and significant. With the Interpretation experience, the focus on clarity provides understanding about what may be relevant in this time and space, or what may be most

necessary to augment or make highly visible within the purpose of supporting what needs to be known at the present.

In summary, The Medicine Wheel Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model is holistic and interconnected. It is multidimensional and multi-layered. As previously presented, the concepts and processes described above are not to be viewed as categories, or in rigid compartments. They are intertwined, and can occur separately, in combination or simultaneously. All aspects are related. For example, as the research process evolves according to the paradigm, the Interpretation aspect naturally would support new acquisition of Knowledge and Vision, which in turn would be housed within the reality and concept of Indigenous community, and so on.

Within the Model, the aspects of community, cultural values, Indigenous identity, and spirituality are encompassed. As previously discussed, many Indigenous scholars and community members believe these components are necessary for the development and well-being of Indigenous peoples, and, in turn, of Indigenous Nations. As the Model is Indigenous in substance and content, it relies on the foundation of spirituality throughout all aspects of its design. Spirituality is the life of Indigenous cultures and the breath of their continued existence despite genocide and colonization. It is the Power greater than all other power.

Assumptions of the Research Design

The assumptions of the research design are as follows:

- 1) The design has relevance to Indigenous people

- 2) The design is a non-Western approach to inquiry about the topic of study. It supports intellectual and experiential decolonization of Indigenous peoples.
- 3) The design encompasses the spiritual aspects that are infused throughout Indigenous culture.
- 4) The design strengthens Indigenous identity, sovereignty and self-determination.

“Participants” and Research Site(s)

The selection of the “participants” in the study has been conducted in a culturally appropriate manner, through spiritual venues and cultural practices, such as spiritual leaders and Elders referring the researcher to identified persons and/or community members volunteering and approaching the researcher.

At this time, the “participants” include (from a variety of tribes and backgrounds) Indigenous women who have completed their higher educational goals, Medicine persons and spiritual leaders, elders, tribal college presidents, Indigenous scholars, members of tribal councils and other Indigenous community members.

In keeping with the integrity and cultural congruence of the Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm, henceforth the term for “participants” will be Mitakuyapi (relatives) or “participant” as Mitakyuye (relative).

The research sites are chosen by the Mitakuyapi. They can include their homes, sweatlodges, locations for ceremonies, tribal colleges, or other settings. The amount, type, and frequency

of contact are determined by the Mitakuyapi.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher within a culturally intrinsic and meaningful research paradigm is one of recipient, artist, and storyteller. As recipient, the researcher moves into a flexible role of receiving the “gifts” of knowledge from the community, as defined in many Indigenous worldviews. With these gifts and synergistic participation on the part of the researcher, comes Vision. With the process of the research experience, the Vision becomes more defined and clarified. “Truths” emerge in the research process in spiral patterns, each providing new connections to other aspects of the original Vision. As the creation of the pattern of the new “truths” emerges, the researcher assumes the role of artist, in creating form and shape in ways others may understand the relevance of the information. Finally, the researcher as storyteller solidifies the information, the “truths” as visible manifestations of experiences of reality, that offer powerful symbolism of the human experience. Contained within the “story” or the research product, are meanings of “truths” that can be used by others.

It is important to state here that unlike some qualitative research paradigms, the emphasis of Indigenous research paradigms is not the observation and/or the description of events, motives, beliefs, etc., but **the meaning** of these things. To clarify, there exists an assumption within some majority culture qualitative research thought that non-Indigenous persons could assume a researcher role within Indigenous Nations as long as they can accurately observe, describe, and participate in activities, behaviors, values, and beliefs in consultation and/or collaboration with the research participants. These assumptions, which provide the

foundation for some qualitative research theoretical perspectives, are inherently Western in their substance and are not culturally congruent with Indigenous thought and experience of reality.

What allows me to engage in this research process and topic of inquiry is similar to the process outlined in the Medicine Wheel Model. Through acquiring knowledge and vision through different, culturally meaningful ways about focusing on the strengths of Indigenous women as they persisted and completed their higher education goals, I took these things to my community in formal and non-formal cultural practices. I was encouraged and honored by the validation I received from my community, and began to be aware of a transformative process of this experience in connection with others to express it externally. The interpretation of this process continues to evolve, as the Model does, and adds clarity to my role in the inquiry and research process as I move through it.

I believe that identity as an Indigenous person, and my responsibility and commitment as a Pipe Carrier and Sundancer for my People allows me to approach this study in a culturally meaningful manner. I believe that my experience living and working in several Indigenous communities and Nations for most of my life also adds to my ability to assist in facilitating this research, in the desire to offer my work for the use of the People. As an Indigenous person and Pipe Carrier, I believe I have developed certain capacities within myself to increase my effectiveness as a researcher (as defined as recipient, artist, and storyteller). Although I have a great deal to understand and do to embody even a small amount of the characteristics described in the following words of an Elder, I do believe his words illustrate

an important Indigenous perspective regarding qualities and ethics of an Indigenous researcher:

The Invitation

It doesn't interest me in what you do for a living.

I want to know what you ache for,

And if you dream of meeting your heart's longing.

It doesn't interest me how old you are.

I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love,

for your dreams, for the adventure of being alive.

It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon.

I want to know if you have touched the heart of your own sorrow;

If you have been opened by life's betrayals,

or have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain.

I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own,

Without moving

To hide it, or fade it or fix it.

I want to know if you can be with joy, mine or your own.

If you can dance with wildness, and let the ecstasy fill you

To the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us

to be careful.

It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me is true.

I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself;

if you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul.

I want to know if you can be faithful, and therefore trustworthy.

I want to know if you can see beauty,

even when it is not pretty everyday,

And if you can source your life from God's presence.

I want to know if you can live with failure, yours or mine,

And still stand on the edge of a lake and shout to the full moon "Yes!"

It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how money you have.

I want to know if you get up after the night of grief and despair,

Weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done

for the children.

It doesn't interest me who you are, how you came to be here.

I want to know if you will stand in the fire with me and not shrink back.

It doesn't interest me where or with whom you have studied.

I want to know what sustains you from the inside when all else falls away.

I want to know if you can be alone with yourself,

And if you truly like the company you keep in the empty moments.

Oriah Mountain Dreamer, Indian Elder

Data Collection Methods

The Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm lends itself to culturally appropriate and meaningful methods of data collection. Spiritual venues for gathering information, as well as

communicating with and interacting with others in the research process, were utilized. These communication venues took the form of conversation, prayer, sacred knowing, oral traditions, art, poetry, other writings, ceremony, visits (or interviews), and letters. Tape recorders were not used. Field notes were taken and written in a culturally appropriate manner. Field notes were written after the communication, or with the permission of the other Mitakuyapi in the study, during the communications/interactions in some situations.

Analysis of Data

The analysis of the data was within an Indigenous worldview, and utilized traditional cultural and spiritual practices in the process. In bringing the task of conceptualizing the process of data analysis before Indigenous spiritual leaders and elders, I was advised emphatically to rely predominantly on traditional spiritual resources within myself to enable me to understand what information needed to be “brought forward,” or made visible. I also was advised that I needed to adjust my thinking about the analysis process to reflect a truly Indigenous view of the process, based on my interpretation of aspects of the Four Directions relative to examining information. Through the advisement process, I engaged in reflection about the connection between aspects of the Four Directions and the concept of data analysis. I was challenged to study data through the “screen” of the following questions: What is analysis? How does it differ from “not analyzing”? What makes analyzing and “not analyzing” different from each other? What is the significance of the identified differences between these two concepts? What is the nature of the examining or studying process? How does this process differ and how is it the same between Indigenous worldviews and majority culture worldviews?

In engaging in these endeavors, I have created an initial framework for data analysis. (An important note is that I understood that the data analysis process as reflective of aspects of the Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm, but Indigenous in focus; therefore the framework is not static or applied in a sequential order but flexible in application).

The data analysis framework is an approach to studying and thereby “discovering” the structure inherent in the data through examination. It is a structure for “looking at in order to learn.” The framework provides references for the researcher’s experience of the data. Unlike some traditional Western forms of data analysis, “the parts of the whole” are not “broken down” in order to be closely examined, but the reference points found in the data analysis framework act as an “anchor,” or a method of grounding the focus of the researcher, in the examination and study process. The form of the analysis process takes on the following shape:

1. **Knowledge: substance of what is known.** Identification of the elements of that knowledge made visible in a cohesive form. Assumption is all knowledge made visible is contextual in substance and only exists in relationship to the rest of creation. It cannot be segmented or compartmentalized, but exists in an interdependent state.

2. **Vision: shape of the knowledge as interpreted by the knower.** Interpretation of knowledge as it comes into being through the knower. Within this process of shaping knowledge within the knower, the creation of form of the knowledge as filtered through the knower is present.

3. Experience: The process of **understanding** the meaning of the knowledge and vision.

Experience brings the clarity of knowledge and vision into full awareness. It contributes definition to the substance of knowledge and the interpretation of its shape (vision). It solidifies the known and its interpretation of it, so that the knower can make it “part of him/herself” and therefore internalize what is known.

4. Expression: the **external manifestations** of meaning related to knowledge, vision, and experience (what is known) combined into particular forms of reality for the knower.

In addition, it is important to state that within an Indigenous worldview of how information is studied, examined, and analyzed, that unlike some majority culture research methods, the assumption is that the researcher is the predominant instrument of data analysis. Within this framework or structure of reference in the examination process, the assumption is made that analysis already has occurred within the knower. As the knower receives knowledge, shapes it into form, internalizes it by experiencing these phenomena, and then manifests the knowledge or information, aspects of analysis (as defined by inquiry into the “truth”) occur. (In other words, if something is not “known,” it does not mean it does not exist, only that it is not within the knower according to Indigenous worldviews.) Therefore, if analysis has occurred with the knower to one extent, then the researcher adopts the role of artist in the research data analysis process, adding another dimension to the analysis process instead of dominating it.

Application of these processes to data analysis process includes the following:

- (1) Emerging themes or clusters are identified and clarified. Information that does not lend itself to the themes or clusters also is identified and clarified. The **relationship** between the themes/cluster information and the non-theme/cluster information is discussed. Patterns containing elements of the themes/clusters also are identified.
- (2) Information not “fitting” into the patterns is included to understand “the complete picture” and retain a balanced view.
- (3) Stories and art works are used to illustrate/clarify the clusters/themes.
- (4) Interpretation of the resulting analysis is written by the researcher in a holistic summary form, shaping it into an academic account.

Verification of Data

Several approaches are used to verify the data. Along with face validity, peer and member checking of the accuracy of the data are utilized. This will be done in a culturally appropriate manner. An example of culturally appropriate checking may be the behavior on the part of the researcher of asking an Elder to read the researcher’s description of what the Elder said, after the researcher has given sufficient time to reflect on the Elder’s words. To interrupt and ask questions of the Elder while he/she is speaking, or immediately afterwards, would be highly disrespectful and denote the researcher had not developed listening skills).

Another aspect of verification of the accuracy of understanding and interpretation of the data is catalytic validity (Agbo, 1987). Will the validity of the data be such that it will be catalysis for affect? In other words, the validity of the data is evidenced by serving a useful purpose to Indigenous communities **as determined by its members**. This point is essential is maintaining the continuity of cultural congruency of Indigenous worldviews and self-determination. Often, as through some majority culture qualitative methods, catalytic validity relies on the assumption that for the research endeavors to be valid, a resulting change or changes must take place to provide evidence of validity. Some Indigenous peoples view this assumption as reflective of a majority culture worldview that “change is evidence of success.” For some Indigenous people, this implies arrogance based on a worldview of control and domination. Therefore, catalytic validity will be used in this study as “useful purpose” of the information as defined by the Peoples it is intended to serve.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

As presented earlier in this study, volumes have been written about how American Indians have the highest dropout rates at all educational levels, that American Indians are the least represented population in higher education, and within the Native population itself, Indian women enroll and graduate less frequently than do Indian men in most higher education institutions. There are, however, American Indian women who **do** enroll and complete their higher education degrees. What enables them to achieve “against the odds”? What resources do they use to overcome the great barriers of historical trauma, cultural discontinuity, racism, gender bias, socioeconomic conditions, and personal challenges?

Historically, Indigenous women’s experience and stories have been virtually invisible relative to non-Indigenous societies. Very little, if any, validity has been given to Indian women’s voices or contributions to the world. In much of the educational literature and materials found in the majority culture, Indian women, if they were mentioned at all, usually are misrepresented and their traditional roles misunderstood (Almeida, 1997). The most significant Indian women “heroines” found in the non-Indigenous world are often Pocahontas and Sacajewa. These Indian women are known mostly for their contributions to members of the colonizing societies of their time, not for their contributions to their own Nations.

Education has been a key factor in making Native women invisible and silencing our [Native

women's] voices (Almeida, 1997). This study reduces the invisibility and misrepresentation of Indigenous women in higher education by giving voice to those who have been silenced, misrepresented or ignored in the past. Contained in this chapter are the voices of several women who tell their stories of their higher education experience and describe the strengths found in their cultures and the spirituality that enabled them to "beat the odds of failure" and achieve their goals in the face of tremendous obstacles. Their voices, their stories, answer the questions posed above from a strength-based perspective, rather than contributing to the volumes of literature that has pointed to a deficit perspective, or in other words, "what has gone wrong, and why Indians fail." These women and their community members tell what has gone right, how they succeeded, and, most importantly, *why*.

Data Analysis and Collection Process as Context for Results

In analyzing the data collected, within the context of the Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model, emerging clusters began to be visible to me as I conducted the analysis process. Through the Model, the analysis process was not linear or compartmentalized, but assumed a spiral shape that contained individual women's perspectives interwoven with stories and contributions by Elders, a Medicine man and spiritual leaders. As predicted in the methodology section of this study, what was *not said or shared* by the Mitakuyapi added depth to the responses, and helped to define the emerging clusters. Although the specific clusters will be discussed later in this chapter, certain aspects of the unique evolution of the data collection process will be introduced first to provide additional context for the presentation of results.

In the data collection process, responses by the Mitakuyapi were highly reflective. Reflective time on the part of the Mytakuyapi was considerable, and I was encouraged as the researcher to use the time simultaneously for my own reflection on the information shared up to a particular time by the Mytakuyapi. I found my reflection time invaluable to the analysis process, and as a result came to a better understanding and grew in my ability to interpret the subsequent responses that followed from the Mitakuyapi. As found in many Indigenous cultures, time for reflection is often seen as a spiritual practice to develop understanding. Consequently, I viewed the data differently than if I had taken it “at face value” and not spent considerable time employing my own spiritual practices in reflection to be able to “see” all facets of the information. In addition, member and peer checking occurred during the analysis process incrementally as part of the reflection process, as well as a cumulative review at the completion of the analysis and interpretation process.

Through this research process, I found the verbal, written, and pictorial responses from the Mitakuyapi often were brief in nature, but the depth of information within a cultural context was immense. To clarify, often within traditional Indigenous cultures, large amounts of verbage are not seen as appropriate when one is communicating. Consequently, within this perspective, what one communicates verbally has the intention of depth, directness and clarity, devoid of superfluous and unnecessary information. As outlined in the article, *Working With and Conducting Research Among American Indian Families* (Stubben, 2001), slower, softer speech, less interjection, the prizing of non-verbal communication, and allowing sufficient time for thought are communication patterns grounded in cultural values often found within Indigenous communities.

In addition, throughout the data collection process, the sharing of the responses by the Mitakuyapi were not limited to one communication or interview session. In most cases, several interactions or times of communication were necessary for the entire response on the part of the individual Mitakuyapi to unfold. This is not uncommon when conducting research with Indigenous people. Stubben (2001) states, in *Working With and Conducting Research Among American Indian Families*, that “the 109 American Indian families required several visits to complete the interviews” and only 7.3% completed the entire interview in one visit. Stubben (2001) also states “researchers must be both respectful and patient when working with American Indian families.”

In this study, I found that the time for reflection, brevity in question and response construction, as well as repeated interactions with the Mitakuyapi to complete the data collection, only served to confirm the integrity of my research process. In other words, the research process was culturally congruent with Indigenous value systems and norms, thus adding to the richness of results.

As presented earlier, several clusters of data emerged as a result of the analysis process. The clusters are not distinct and isolated forms of information, but rather their structure evidenced overlap and interconnection with aspects of other clusters. With respect to the identification of cultural and spiritual strengths, the overlap was considerable, as expected, because most Indigenous cultures are spiritually based and infused. To clarify using a culturally meaningful metaphor, I found that the structures of the emerging data likened themselves to the Round Dance, with each structure separate, but with flexible and blended boundaries that

connected with data from other “dancers.” In viewing the entire picture of information, it became clear that all the “dancers” or clusters existed in a spiral pattern, as mentioned previously, held together by one “universal motivating principle” that permeated all the information and provided a foundation for every response by the Mitakuyapi. This “universal motivating principle” will be discussed at the end of the chapter as an overview in bringing all the data together in a culturally meaningful manner.

In addition, I found interwoven within the clusters were themes that shared a commonality within individual tribal values and perspectives. Each cluster is discussed in detail, and individual quotes are used to illustrate the interpretations by the researcher and provide authentic voice in this document for the Mitakuyapi. When appropriate, connections between relevant literature and the study results will be included in the discussion.

Identified Clusters

Four clusters and internal related themes were found in the data analysis process. Each cluster and its related themes are presented individually.

Spirituality as the Main Strength for Indigenous Women Completing a Higher Education Experience

In communicating with the Mitakuyapi in seeking to inquire about the involvement of spirituality as a strength for Indigenous women to complete a higher education experience, in all cases, the identification and use of spirituality as a main strength was not limited to obtaining a college degree or completing educational goals. Spirituality was an entire way of

being; the way to experience reality and the world. Within this reality, the higher education experience was seen as **part** of life's journey, not the journey itself. Spirituality is the context for all of life, and all of life's events/unfoldings. As Indigenous women seek to sustain themselves throughout their lives in every way, connection and practice of their spirituality permeates all that they do. The higher education experience is seen as one aspect of their lives, and consequently, when faced with internal and external challenges, it is sought and drawn on as the primary strength to overcome any difficulty or challenge.

One theme that became visible in studying this cluster was the individualization of ways in which Indigenous women experience their spirituality. Individual women's ways of connecting with Powers or a Power greater than themselves varied, influenced by tribal and cultural affiliations and individual interpretations and practices. However, another theme found within this cluster was the consistent connection with spirituality as defined in context by relating to, or having conscious awareness of connecting to a Power or Powers greater than oneself. One way this was evidenced was in daily spiritual practices. Individual Mitakuyapi described this experience in the following ways when asked about their spirituality in relationship to their higher education experience:

As an Anishinabe (Ogiichidaakwe-warrior woman). I have been blessed with my spirituality as the backbone of my every move. There is nothing you cannot accomplish if you move forward with the Creator as your guide. I am an Ogiichidaakwe on our Chi Diwegan (Big Drum). I live each Day with the Creator's closeness and guidance. I often refer to my life as the Path described

to me on an Eagle Feather. I was told that this Feather—that I was blessed with through a dream, has my life on it. I pray each day and give thanks to the Creator by offering my tobacco and thanking him for yet another Day and my health, strength, and life.

The first time I went to a ceremony I saw what it can do. Every morning I give thanks; every evening I give thanks. I am a Lakota Wiyan so I do it because I want to do it; no one outside of me has me do it. Indian women use their spirituality as strength for themselves. When I Sundance, I receive help, and with the help I receive, I give thanks.

I pray to the Creator when I am happy, when I am lonely, when I am afraid, when things are stressful in my life. The Creator is so close and hears my prayers. My Elders always say, “be careful for what you ask for.” And by that they mean you might get it and then realize that it really wasn’t what you wanted or needed. Be patient, listen to your spirit helpers and they will guide you. I ask for help and answers and I am never misled or steered down the wrong path. Because the Creator will guide me as long as I am respectful, honest and living my life as a true Anishinabe Ogichidaakwe. I must accept the Creator’s guidance and always do what my heart tells me.

Relative to the Culturally Intrinsic Paradigm Model, the themes within this cluster have an affinity with all aspects of the Model. For example, the Mitakuyapi often cited that the

knowledge they received came from spiritual avenues, became “real” in terms of shaping itself into a vision, often aided by human and non-human entities (community). Through this process, validation of life directions through the aspect of community was experienced and internalized to promote inner strength:

I was trained as a child that God loves me and delights in giving me wisdom.

Prayer got me through. I draw all my strength from God, the Creator. My family members-those who have gone before me, came at my most difficult moments. I felt them in the room with me. My great aunt and my great-grandmother. I maintain my spiritual connection consistently. I cannot survive without it. It [getting a degree] is a spiritual battle, not about writing a paper. It is all on a spiritual level. It will bring out what you believe and who you are. I had many midwives as part of the process. Some foretold it that it was mine when I only had a vision.

As in higher education, as in every aspect of my life, when I have questions or problems I will ask a Spiritual Leader or utilize the Jiisikan to obtain guidance and answers. These answers come straight through the spirits to me.

Without my spiritual way of being I would not have finished this degree because I knew it was not an intellectual challenge per say, even though it was quite vigorous, but a spiritual challenge/battle. The hope and support I received from those who stood in the gap for me enabled me to finish. Daily I

drew on the strength that can only come from the inner place of one's being.

The Higher Education Experience is Perceived Through Traditional Cultural Stories, Images, and Metaphors

The Mitakuyapi often perceived their higher education experience within a spiritual context, and used various tribally-based metaphors, images and aspects of traditional stories as a cultural strength of inspiration and guidance. These metaphors were expressed in different ways, but all were connected to tribal cultural traditions. These metaphors served as an anchor or "grounding point" to access inner spiritual resources to retain identification with traditional Indigenous values and ways of being. An example of this is found in the following responses by two women:

Growing up, it was instilled in me and I don't know who told me but I always kept this phrase in my mind and it sustained me and helped me with obstacles in my life. It was said that Sitting Bull said it, "When you are traveling down the white man's road you will find good and bad things, pick up only the good things and leave the bad things alone."

When you feel like you are getting weary from the process, just stand to your feet and dance for thanksgiving. As we celebrate and give thanks to God the battle is won. I often play music in my home pick up my shawl and dance and feel renewed. Sometimes I just sing or just dance.

Another woman described how remembering a creation story from her tribe reminded her often about “balancing” aspects of her life to sustain her while completing a higher education degree:

One that sticks in my mind is part of our creation story. The youngest brother of four brothers who made the Four Directions is called Whirlwind. He is playful and brings happiness but also mischief. This has reminded me of self-discipline in reaching my goal. To balance the work with the fun and remember to not get carried away when playing and having fun. It causes an awareness of my behavior and current environment.

One theme that emerged within this cluster was the connection to Indigenous perceptions of community. As discussed earlier in this study, and contained within the Culturally Intrinsic Paradigm Model, the definition of community is not limited to human beings, but also includes non-human entities such as spirits. The spirits can come in the forms of ancestors, the animal Nations, or other forms. Spiritual strengths identified by the Mitakuyapi often were connected with tribal cultural traditions, images and metaphors related to receiving assistance and support from the spirits.

One woman responded to inquires regarding the use of traditional cultural images in sustaining her in attaining a college degree by sending a drawing of an Eagle Feather. At the base of the Eagle Feather were colors, representing “the Spirits that are present in my life.” The base of the Feather itself was described as her Family, and the quill stemming from the

base symbolized her journey or “road of sobriety.” The rough edges of the Feather were denoted in meaning to signify troublesome times in her life and the smooth edges, the “good times.” A “break” in the Feather’s layers meant that she had “strayed from the road and had made not so good or healthy a decision or choice. But they come together [the parts of the Feather] and I get on the right road and it is smooth again.”

A spiritual leader responded to this aspect of the study by relating her educational and spiritual experience to what she would tell other women in pursuing a higher education goal:

Be who you are. Look, don’t quit. Look, don’t quit. Look around you. Look at alternatives. If you cannot go over it [obstacles] can you go around it? When you encounter barriers and problems, pray and pray and you’ll get over it. There was a man who treated me bad at school. He was a teacher who gave all Indians a hard time. He condemned them. I prayed and prayed to Tunkasila [the Grandfathers]. I let it go and walked away [from the problem]. People helped me when I was scared and hurting. I return that by helping others. Like at the Sundance. You go in with a pure mind. You are not supposed to push anyone away. My camp is a free camp. I forgive them others who come into the camp and want to show their richness. They were materialistic. Like in school, when I encountered problems, I said a silent prayer; I kept silent unless they asked me a question. I helped others make it through the day. Then, know that whatever will happen, will happen.

Another woman shared several metaphors related to her sense of Indigenous community as she went through her graduate school experience and achieved a degree:

I considered the birds who are cared for by the Creator. Many times I considered the hawk that lives in the back of my home. There were many moments when I would see her flying or dream dreams about specific hawks. Strength would come. Peace would come. There were many times when I did not know as a single mother how I would fund yet another trip to the University of XXX from XXX or how I would pay tuition for yet another term. The money came, the trips were paid for and tuitions too. My Dad shared with me before he made his transition [passed away]. He told me to be more like a porcupine-stick them before they stick you. Mom gave me a porcupine necklace complete with beans. Lastly, turtles. Among my people we believe that the earth was founded on the back of a large turtle upon which Sky Woman descended to earth with the help of many. Turtles are hard on the outside and soft on the inside. They know how to take solace in their shells and at the same time support life. Porcupines are gentle until danger is near and the quills are presented.

Responses also included drawing inspiration from other Indigenous Nations other than one's own tribe. One member of the Mitakuyapi found strength in her higher education experience by looking to an aspect of the Lakota Nations history:

Although I am Ojibwe, I have always been strengthened by the Sioux people who have never signed a Treaty with the U.S. government and really never gave up the Black Hills, their “sacred ground.” I have always been strengthened by this knowledge that with all the power and force the U.S. government exerted over our people, these people held their sacred land as more valuable to them than the almighty \$. To me this says even the tiniest nation can stand strong and endure against all odds and in my education experiences I have faced many odds but I have always been strengthened by this historical fact and it motivated me in hard times.

Traditional Indigenous Roles of Women as Definition of Identity and Cultural Strength

Another cluster that emerged during the analysis process was the identification of a cultural strength by the Mitakuyapi found in the Indigenous traditional roles of women in their tribal cultures. The definitions of the roles varied by tribal perspective, but almost all the Mitakuyapi felt a tremendous sense of identity that was directly and completely linked to the Indigenous sense of womanhood.

In the Ojibwe culture, Ogitchidawque (warrior women) were considered the decision makers in the community. I believe that since we have been forced to become a part of the dominant culture we must integrate the use of “their” tools to remain strong decision makers and that tool is “education.”

Am Elder presented this information about the traditional roles of Indigenous women:

Our society is based on Unci. Grandmother is everything. Everything comes from Unci. Knowledge, skills, abilities, experience. There is not a word in mainstream society that describes this. The closest would be the matriarch system. Our leadership comes from our Grandmothers. Our educational process was done by women. Our food, knowledge and skills come from Mother Earth. The one person in any extended family who is dominant in making decisions is the woman; the grandmothers. Leadership has been the historical role of women. During the Reorganization Act, the men took it over. It wasn't their historical role in this way. Everything was done by the final consent of the women. Women ran the centers of the society. The men provided in other ways. Women were the ones that controlled, managed and budgeted the resources of the community.

A Medicine man explains other strengths found in the traditional roles of women:

As an Indian woman, you are strong for the People. People come to learn from you. People come to lean on you when they have problems. You educate them through wisdom-through storytelling. Indian women encourage everyone. They live by the Four Virtues. Generally, women are braver than men, they can stand more pain. They give life to the next generations. They can give health, help, wisdom, and encouragement in overcoming situations. As far as particular women things are concerned, you must talk to my wife. It is not my place. She knows about those things. It is her experience.

An Elder described how a tribal college recognized the strengths in the traditional roles of Indigenous women within the community and is embarking on an endeavor to implement them into curriculum and programming within the higher education setting:

We found a lot of women being involved with business management courses and human resource management programming. The correlation is there between the focus of these programs and the traditional roles of women. The integration of traditional leadership and business courses in XXX [reservation] is why the Masters courses are succeeding with Indian women.

A lot of Indian women have taken this program at XXX College. We need to put a lot of thought into how to institute across the curriculum these traditional strengths of the women's roles. A lot of Indian women are going into business now-this is going back to their traditional roles of resource management. This is a reason why Indian men don't go to tribal colleges as much as the women-historically, women were the leaders in this way.

One theme found in this cluster was that no Mitakuyapi shared that they drew strength from feminist perspectives of womanhood, or from majority culture perspectives on the roles of women in society and community. (This was an aspect of the Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm that was applied about what was NOT said). Some Mitakuyapi expressed offense and sadness that how majority culture feminist perspectives and behavior had served to destroy certain aspects of Indigenous self-determination in regards to traditional ways of experiencing and expressing womanhood in their tribal communities. Some Mitakuyapi

voiced concern that the recent adoption of feminist perspectives from the majority culture by some women was a new face of colonization and oppression, and eroded tribal sovereignty. One spiritual leader voiced her concern:

"By your hand the family moves." Yes. A long time ago the White Buffalo Calf Woman appeared to an elderly man. A lot of things that have been going on in the whole universe-it is a 100 percent different now. It has changed. In White society, women are priests and they parade themselves. I went to church and saw this. It didn't look so good. In the Real World, back then, no woman can go above the man. If you are to be a Medicine Man, the spirits choose you before you were born. They don't take everybody. In Lakota society, man is the man. Men do men things. Women do women things.

Another spiritual leader voiced the following perspective on this issue:

It is my personal observation that a lot of our young women are going through a lot of different evaluations of themselves about being a woman. They are looking on how to fit into society. They don't look at the traditional role of woman as positive. They see the traditional role as not strong enough for them. A long time ago, Lakota women defined their own roles in society-they had their own ethics. They were the foundation of our culture, the keepers of our history and our traditions. We have ceremonies that address this. For example, a man does not speak without the consent of the women.

The traditional roles have become distorted by white feminism. The whole mission of this is that men are no good. Indian men and Indian women do not trust each other now. Our young women need more examples of what it means to be a traditional woman. We have our elderly grandmothers who know, but the young women see no excitement in this. They don't realize they can do both-be who they are and be traditional.

Drawing on the strength found in their traditional definitions of their roles as Indigenous women provided the Mitakuyapi with a powerful sense of purpose and commitment to achieve their higher education goals. Another cluster was found as the foundation for this powerful sense of purpose. This was family loyalty. Overwhelmingly, the Mitakuyapi voiced that the commitment to achieving a higher education degree was for the benefit of their family, and tied directly to the traditional roles of women as wife, mother, grandmother, and keepers of the Nation. Unlike some majority culture perspectives, that family devotion needs to be reduced in order for one to complete a college degree, the Mitakuyapi viewed their family devotion as a source of strength. Two women share their views:

My children and now grandchildren are the center of my life. All of my decisions are based on where that may take me and if it is away from my family I choose not to pursue that.

In white society, they say number 1 is you. Your family should be number 1. I rather be me, in rags or riches as long as I am loved by my family. I set myself

a goal. I went to college to be an example for my children and grandchildren.

This cultural strength provided a resiliency factor when making difficult decisions in their academic experience. In addition, a theme of family loyalty was found in the context of decision-making regarding difficult choices in academic experience. If put in a position where one had to choose between the higher education requirements and devotion to family, family always came first, as expressed by some members of the Mitakuyapi who faced this dilemma. A powerful example of this theme is illustrated in a story told by a woman who was completed her doctoral degree while facing a difficult challenge:

My Dad [passed away] during a time when I was told by my committee “Complete the dissertation by December. You will not have another extension.” My contract said no PhD, no job. I had to place my family responsibilities first. I learned that family truly has to come first and it did. My Dad did not forget me and came to me in a dream. Long story short, at that critical moment I learned I am truly not my position or my degrees. I am XXX, the person the Creator intended me to be. I will continue with or without these things and life will be good. The more I let go the more I receive. There is a doctor in the house-as my Mother likes to share with folks who think that hope is not alive and we [Indian women] are not able to do anything but keep their children and clean their homes, and I remind her the best is yet to come. Rosemary, it has been good to relive this knowing that it might in some way help another.

Within the majority culture, often family loyalty is not seen as a strength to utilize in promoting efforts of recruiting and retaining Indigenous students. Sometimes it is misunderstood and seen as a “barrier” for Indigenous women to “overcome” in pursuing a higher education goal. Tribal college leaders, however, are looking at this cultural strength as a support in retention efforts. As one tribal college leader shared:

Since we are a small university, we really know our students. We try to help them with their disadvantages, and it is not always money. A lot of the time it is their home life-addiction there. Mostly it is single parents that come [to college] because they want a better life for their children, and they see education can do that. One strength that we are trying to use and develop for our university is that of family loyalty-it is very strong among people here. Whatever a situation a family member is in, the other family members help. We are trying to use family loyalty by getting one through school, and then others will follow.

Cumulative Experience of “Self-Discovery” Within a Spiritual Perspective

throughout the analysis process, I discovered that some of the Mitakuyapi came to a sense of self-discovery about their abilities and capacities in regards to completing a higher education experience. This phenomenon was congruent in some degree with the self-discovery of one’s Indigenous identity as described by Huffman (2001) in the Resistance Theory and Transculturation Hypothesis. Although Huffman’s study was not gender specific, and the Mitakuyapi did not voice experiencing the stages outlined by Huffman, certain aspects of the

self-discovery experience were similar. The similarities included the solidification of accessing one's inner resources as a "stronghold" for endurance and security, and a profound awareness that one did not have to assimilate to complete a higher education goal. For the Mitakuyapi, the process of self-discovery was "gentler" in a tribal college setting. Elements in the tribal college setting inherently supported the attachment to Indigenous identity and values as sources of inner strength and security. One member of the Mitakuyapi shared that she learned about her culture, spirituality, and strengths as a Native woman for the first time, as these things were not available to her or her parents as she grew up:

I should also add that a benefit of attending this tribal college is that I finally learned extensively about my history, culture and language. This was never taught in my early education, not from the boarding schools I resisted, not even from my family who was educated through the same process as me. Now that we are all adults, I am also learning my own family history, from my family too. Now I feel I have some positive tools to face my future. Just knowing where I came from, and knowing the path and the sacrifices my ancestors made so we may live. I feel I [have] a purpose in life and need to give back to my culture. So I am directing my career in that area.

The most striking augmentation of this phenomenon in this study was the experience of the Mitakuyapi in relying on a sense of community as a cultural strength in the self-discovery process. Receiving support from other Indigenous people, the spirits, ancestors, and other Native students provided additional validation and security for the Mitakuyapi to move

forward in their higher education experiences. Only the Mitakuyapi in tribal colleges shared that faculty were part of this community that they used in their self-discovery process. Often, faculty who were Native, teaching Native students, in tribal colleges provided the role modeling necessary for the Mitakuyapi to have the courage to discover their own inner strengths and security in their Indigenous identity. However, even for the Mitakuyapi who did not have these role models through faculty, other Indigenous community members provided support. One woman shared how the process of self-discovery was like “giving birth” to herself in a new way, and how community members helped her. This self-discovery was linked to traditional cultural aspects of womanhood within a spiritual experience:

I had many midwives as part of this process. Some held my hand. Some sang to me. Some talked tough love and responsibility for the gift. Some reminded me to laugh. Some let me cry my heart. Some hurt me. Some smiled. Some screamed, “Push!”

Conclusions

Interwoven through the results of this study was one universal principle that evidenced itself repeatedly through all communications and participation endeavors by the Mitakuyapi. As viewed through the Culturally Intrinsic Paradigm Model, it permeated all aspects of knowledge acquisition, vision, experience, expression, connection with community, and interpretation of the journey in higher education by the Mitakuyapi. This universal principle was one of love.

Love was defined within the cultural context of giving of oneself to others, of connecting with others and being part of a larger whole. This larger whole took the shape of a Nation, of a tribe. In all cases, the Mitakuyapi consented to participate in this study because of one motivating factor: that their experiences could help other Indigenous peoples, especially Native women. This love was not defined by majority culture views, but was culturally grounded in nature. It was simplistic and powerful in form. The Mitakuyapi voiced that in loving, one became more of oneself in the purpose of serving others. They saw the educational experience and achieving their higher education goals, usually in the form of degrees, as part of loving others, in that it could provide help to other Indigenous people, especially their children and other family members. Only by connecting with a Power or Powers greater than themselves, reliance on community and understanding their own inner resources, founded upon traditional Indigenous roles and strengths of womanhood, could one truly give to others.

One woman discussed the universal motivating principle of love found throughout the clusters and themes in the following way:

If you love a life of service and charity you will be led. If you live selfishly and not choose to be of service you won't be led because there isn't a connection to God in that way-you've cut off that connection and you are lost. If you look at our culture, it is all about service. People who love like this are blessed by God and their words are given wisdom. You will be given more if you are genuine, if you serve others. If you don't, what you have will be taken

from you. We are given choices all the time about good and bad. If you are on the Red Road, the responsibility for choosing service becomes greater. I knew that I could serve the People better with greater education.

The essential quality of love as a cultural and spiritual strength is also found in the words of a traditional leader:

Love is something you and I must have. We must have it because our spirit feeds upon it. We must have it because without it we become weak and faint. Without love our self-esteem weakens. Without it our courage fails. Without love we can no longer look confidently at the world. We turn inward and begin to feed upon our own personalities, and little by little we destroy it ourselves. With it we are creative. With it we march tirelessly. With it, and with it alone, we are able to sacrifice for others.

Chief Dan George

In summary, the results of this study showed that the cultural and spiritual strengths of Indigenous women completing a higher education experience were grounded in their sense of reliance on a Power or Powers greater than themselves. These strengths manifested themselves in forms that were tribally congruent with Indigenous value systems and definitions of reality. Utilization of these strengths was the core and primary means whereby the Mitakuyapi achieved their goals. Congruent with Huffman's (2001) theory, this sense of "Indianness" was not transferred into them by external sources, but was a result of self-

discovery within an Indigenous cultural context. Throughout the process of completing a higher education experience, the Mitakuyapi's sense of purpose was a commitment to their Nations, their people and their families. This sense of love for their people, for their families enabled them to move beyond the "odds" and make the impossible, possible.

CHAPTER FIVE
IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE
AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE INQUIRY

Implications for Educational Practice

The cultural and spiritual strengths that enabled Indigenous women in this study to complete a higher education experience were not found in institutional programming, support services, or academic assistance. They were found within the women themselves and their sense of community resources. Although support services, culturally congruent programming, and academic resources are vital in creating access and opportunity for Indigenous women in completing a higher education experience, the promotion and support for Indigenous women to rely on their spirituality, cultural traditions and identification with Indigenous traditional roles of womanhood were paramount for the Mitakuyapi in this study to achieve success in higher education. These cultural and spiritual strengths also served as resiliency factors for the Mitakuyapi against the external forces of personal challenges, historical trauma, psychological colonization, gender bias, and racism.

This study was significant in that it identified the cultural and spiritual strengths the Mitakuyapi used in completing a higher education experience. Most importantly, this research went beyond the identification and description process of inquiry, and presented the *meaning of what these strengths were to Indigenous people and their communities*. As discussed previously, one of the main tenants of oppression in regards to Indigenous women within mainstream educational settings is the invisibility of Native worldviews, of culturally

congruent curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and of accurate representations and significant presence of Indigenous women's experience and contributions to the world. This invisibility is generated from the lack of attention and effort in most educational institutions regarding American Indians, and Native women in particular. It is another "face" of institutional racism that contributes to the oppression and lack of access to higher education for Indigenous women. It is no wonder they are the least represented group in all levels of higher education within the United States.

However, this study was an effort to promote positive change by giving voice to those who have remained invisible in many educational settings. Through utilizing the Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model, the invisible was made visible. In much of the literature related to American Indians and education, inquiry for the "truths" relative to the Indigenous strengths and needs depended upon Western-based theoretical perspectives and methods of interpretation that were foreign to the Indigenous experience. Consequently, much of that experience remained invisible as it was measured and interpreted through foreign "lenses" that were not culturally congruent in structure, design or application. Herein lay an assumption that the Indigenous experience in education could be viewed best through Western ethos and practice related to research, and that the Indigenous worldviews related to research practice did not hold the same validity for inquiry, study and interpretation of meaning.

This is changing. As called for by Indigenous scholars internationally, it is time for Indigenous people to become self-determined in research and educational endeavors. For the

oppression of Indigenous peoples to be eradicated, intellectual property rights regarding all aspects of the Indigenous experience of being in the world must be recognized and upheld by all. Through the Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model and those paradigms like it, these intellectual property rights can be reclaimed. However, it is not the responsibility of Indigenous scholars alone to restore Native intellectual property rights, but of all those who are committed to equality and fundamental rights of all human beings.

As education historically has been used as a main vehicle of oppression for Indigenous people, it is paramount in the struggle for equality that all educators increase their commitment and efforts to be truly inclusive of all learners. For this inclusivity to take place for Indigenous people in education requires reform in many educational institutions. As some mainstream institutions develop missions to increase diversity in their environments, special attention must be paid to the processes whereby Indigenous people have an equitable presence. Otherwise, commitment by these institutions to diversity will remain exclusionary regarding Native people.

Information from this study can inform these educational reform efforts. With accurate understanding of the cultural and spiritual strengths found in Indigenous worldviews and experience, educators can infuse curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and institutional culture to reflect these strengths and utilize them in the educational experience for Native learners. However, educational reform to promote complete inclusivity must encompass more than teaching materials, strategies, evaluative methods, policy construction and programming. It must encompass commitment on the part of educational institutions to take responsibility at

all levels to stop practices that consciously or unconsciously promote oppression for Indigenous peoples, and replace them with practices that promote Indigenous identity and attachment to cultural and spiritual strengths.

Some say that this will never come to pass. As most educational institutions are founded on the worldviews and practices grounded in the historical colonization of Indigenous people, some believe that it is impossible for such environments to commit to this type of change. Perhaps these voices speak the truth. Perhaps they do not. As evidenced in this study, Native women and their communities provide an example to others how the “impossible” can be achieved. How and why the “impossible” was achieved by the Mitakuyapi is not a mystery, but may seem incongruent with dominant culture worldviews. Nonetheless, it did happen, and continues to happen, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of Native women enrolling in tribal colleges.

For most educational institutions to be truly inclusive, changes must be made on several levels. At the heart of these changes, however, one guiding force must be present. This force cannot be mandated, directed, or designed. This force is *caring*. It cannot be instituted, written into institutional policy, rewarded, or ensured through financial support. It is a commitment on the part of all involved with learners’ educational experience to take responsibility for educating themselves on the conscious and unconscious ways educational and personal practices contribute to the oppression of Indian people, and to make active efforts to promote respect for and inclusion of Indigenous worldviews, value systems and strengths in the educational experience.

Recommendations for Education Reform

The following recommendations are brought forth as a reference point for the beginning of institutional education reform relative to Native learners. It is by no means an entire list of recommendations, nor does it encompass all efforts in a reform movement of this type. These recommendations serve as an opportunity for others to begin their own thought processes around the issue, and are based on the research of this study.

(1) Regarding the recruitment and retention efforts directed toward Indigenous people in education, educators must examine their own biases and incongruities relative to Native value systems. Assumptions about the value of access to non-Indigenous education, the purposes for completing a degree, and strategies to sustain retention must be changed to be culturally congruent for Native people, especially Native women. The reasons for attaining a degree, and the ways an Indigenous woman or man persists in the educational experience may differ greatly from those of members of the dominant culture or other groups.

(2) Examination of the foundations of education, the relevance of education, and the substance of the education experience as related to Indigenous learners in teacher education programs must be reformed. Otherwise, the institutional racism perpetuated by training teachers only in the worldviews and value systems related to dominant society's purpose and construction of educational practice would continue to feed the oppression of Native peoples through psychological colonization and would negate any inclusion of Indigenous methods of knowledge acquisition, learning styles and reliance on cultural and spiritual strengths as a foundation for educational growth.

(3) Respect for, and inclusion of Indigenous conceptualizations, worldviews, value systems, and methodology in research must be held in high regard as are other research paradigms and methodologies. Self-determination relative to research in Indigenous communities, as well as motivating principles and relevance to tribal sovereignty must be examined in the context of promoting intellectual property rights among Indian Nations and peoples in the areas of research and scholarship.

If educators do take personal responsibility for examining their role in promoting complete inclusivity relative to Native peoples, an essential factor must be present in this process. Self-education to develop an accurate and informed understanding of Native worldviews and value systems, as well as the inherent cultural and spiritual strengths contained therein, must be paramount in efforts of education reform. As mentioned earlier, this responsibility on the part of educators must come from a desire and commitment to care for all learners they teach. The question arises: How does an institution mandate caring? As inferred earlier, I believe it cannot be done. However, institutions can provide opportunities for individual educators to be exposed to the commitment of caring by others devoted to complete inclusivity and the eradication of oppression. Linkages between Indigenous Nations and peoples, on one hand, and education institutions as well as caring educators from all disciplines and backgrounds, on the other hand, can be explored to ensure culturally meaningful education reform.

Successful models for these types of endeavors can be found in the ways some tribal communities connect with mainstream higher education institutions in developing innovative programs for Native teacher education certification. Relying on the historical cultural and

spiritual strengths, such as presented in this study, has enabled some tribal communities and mainstream institutions to begin to respond to the needs of Indigenous women relative to higher education. If true inclusivity is to be realized in education, as a right of Native peoples and as a benefit for all learners and educational environments, a commitment to innovative and culturally meaningful education experiences and environments must be implemented and acted upon. Only with caring about all learners will the face of oppression in education be transformed into a face of hope within the education experience for Native women and men.

Recommendations for Future Inquiry

This study is grounded in a strength based, rather than a deficit perspective. Additional research to build upon this perspective is needed in the following areas:

1. Development and implementation of additional research paradigms models that are tribal- specific and relevant to individual Indigenous Nations.
2. Inquiry regarding the education experience of Indigenous men in college, and the identification of cultural and spiritual strengths relative to their traditional roles, provides resiliency and retention factors that are relevant in completing education goals. In addition, inquiry needs to be conducted regarding the complementary aspects of the cultural and spiritual strengths of Indigenous men and women to strengthen Native families.
3. Further research needs to be conducted into the existing linkages between tribal communities and mainstream institutions in model programming efforts to increase

the retention of American Indian women.

4. Longitudinal studies need to be conducted relative to the influence of Indigenous women who have attained their education goals with respect to elementary, middle, and high school Native girls and women in the context of promoting excellent educational experiences for the coming generations.
5. As most traditional Indigenous cultures are spiritually based, research involving Native peoples needs to be conducted within a spiritual perspective.

It is equally important that research that is conducted about Native people needs to be done by Indigenous people. As Almeida (1997, p. 758) states:

As a Native American educator, I embrace the views expressed by other Indigenous scholars concerning ownership of our cultural research. As a Native American woman, I believe it is our responsibility and right to produce research that specifically relates to us as Native women. In their research, European Americans have continually portrayed Native Americans as a vanishing race. In addition, Native American women are virtually non-existent in their writings.

As Almeida (1997) explains, Native women scholars are beginning to create their own research, which is relevant for them and their Nations. This study is part of that effort. With others who are committed to “desilencing” and eliminating the historical invisibility of

Indigenous voices and worldviews of Native women, a new vibrancy will be felt in the world.

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APPENDIX A.

Original Letter From Human Subjects in Research Committee

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research Compliance
Vice Provost for Research and
Advanced Studies
2810 Beardshear Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2036
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-7288

TO: Rosemary White Shield
FROM: Janell Meldrem^{IRB} Administrator
RE: IRB ID # 03-265

DATE REVIEWED: December 10, 2002

The project, "IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL STRENGTHS IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCE OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN UTILIZING A CULTURALLY INTRINSIC RESEARCH PARADIGM" has been declared exempt from Federal regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

To be in compliance with ISU's Federal Wide Assurance through the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) all projects involving human subjects, must be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Only the IRB may determine if the project must follow the requirements of 45 CFR 46 or is exempt from the requirements specified in this law. Therefore, all human subject projects must be submitted and reviewed by the IRB.

Because this project is exempt it does not require further IRB review and is exempt from the Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human subjects.

We do, however, urge you to protect the rights of your participants in the same ways that you would if IRB approval were required. This includes providing relevant information about the research to the participants. Although this project is exempt, you must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application, including obtaining and documenting (signed) informed consent, if applicable to your project.

Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB on a Continuation and/or Modification form to determine if the project still meets the Federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

cc: Mack Shelley

HSRO/OCR 9/02

APPENDIX B.

Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model Graphic

