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Biculturalism among Indigenous College Students

Colton D. Miller

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Biculturalism among Indigenous College Students

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Doctor of Philosophy

*Indigenous** college students in both Canada and the United States have the lowest rates of obtaining postsecondary degrees, and their postsecondary dropout rates are higher than for any other minority (Freeman & Fox, 2005; Mendelson, 2004; Reddy, 1993). There has been very little research done to uncover possible reasons for such low academic achievement and high dropout rates for Indigenous students. Some of the research that has been done indicates that one challenge for Indigenous students is the difficulty in navigating the cultural differences between higher education and their Indigenous cultures. Biculturalism is the ability of an individual to navigate two different cultures (Bell, 1990; Das & Kemp, 1997). Several scholars have suggested that biculturalism is an important construct in understanding academic persistence among Indigenous students (Jackson, Smith & Hill, 2003; Schiller, 1987). This study explored biculturalism among Indigenous college students and how it impacts their higher education experience. Indigenous college students (n=26) from the southwestern United States and central Canada participated in qualitative interviews for the study. The interviews were transcribed and interpreted using a synthesis of qualitative methods. Several themes related to the participants' experience of biculturalism emerged from the qualitative analysis: institutional support for transition to college, racism, types of relationships to native culture, career issues, and family issues. The findings suggested that more needs to be done in terms of providing Indigenous students centers at universities, implementing mentor programs for incoming students, and educating future Indigenous college students, families, and communities about biculturalism and the culture of higher education.

*Author's note: The term *Indigenous* will be used to describe Native American/American Indian, First Nation and Métis student participants. Interviews were collected both in the United States and Canada. The terminology used to describe these populations differs across cultures; therefore, Indigenous will be used as a more general term, to describe the participants. The terminology used by cited authors was retained.

Keywords: indigenous, bicultural, cultural identity, Native American, American Indian, First Nation, postsecondary education

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Introduction

It is well documented that many Native American college students experience difficulties while attending institutions of higher education, which leads to high rates of attrition (Ah Nee-Benham & Stein, 2003; Steward, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Enrollment numbers of Native American students in postsecondary institutions have more than doubled in the last 25 years. However, rates of obtaining a bachelor's degree for Native American students are lower than the general population (Freeman & Fox, 2005). Despite evidence of academic ability, Native American students have the lowest academic achievement and highest postsecondary dropout rates of any minority (Reddy, 1993; Ah Nee-Benham & Stein, 2003; Bowker, 1993; Lin, 1990; Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988; Ortiz and HeavyRunner, 2003). In the United States, only 9.3% of Native Americans hold a bachelors degree or higher, as opposed to 20.3% of the general population (Jackson & Turner, 2004). Therefore, Native Americans consistently have lower levels of educational attainment than any other ethnic minorities (Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). These findings indicate that even though Indigenous students enter college at rates similar to other minorities, the attrition rate is highest among Indigenous populations.

Persistence difficulties in postsecondary education for Indigenous populations are similar in Canada. According to the 2001 Canadian Census, 59% of on-reserve Indigenous people and 44% of off-reserve Indigenous people have not graduated from high school, compared to 31% of the population as a whole (Educational, 2008). Four percent of the Indigenous population in Canada has a university degree, compared with 15.4% of all Canadians (Mendelson, 2004).

Native Americans are also underrepresented in graduate programs (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). In 2006, there were 2.1 million students enrolled in a masters or doctoral

degree program. Of those 2.1 million graduate students only 9,197 were Native Americans making up .4% of the graduate student population. The enrollment numbers for Native American graduate students are lower than any other minority population (CGS, 2006). These academic trends highlight the need for exploration of possible reasons behind the struggles of Indigenous college students in postsecondary education.

One way to understand the lack of postsecondary persistence among Indigenous students is to consider the demand placed on these students to adapt to a different culture when they pursue postsecondary education (Jackson, Smith & Hill, 2003). Benjamin, Chambers, and Reiterman (1993) concluded that the lack of academic persistence was due to colleges' failure to accommodate Native American culture. Cultural differences experienced in postsecondary education require Indigenous students to integrate their cultural identity with the Euro-American culture of higher education (Jackson & Smith, 2001). Biculturalism is the ability of an individual to navigate in two cultures they are experiencing at the same time (Bell, 1990; Das & Kemp, 1997). A bicultural identity involves the identification with two cultures at the same time, not the integration of one culture at the expense of the other.

Several studies have found a connection between cultural identity and school performance (Jackson & Smith, 2001; Jackson, et al., 2003; Hill, 2003). Additionally, results from various studies have suggested that a clearer sense of cultural identity may lead to better academic performance (Lamborn, et al., 1997; Lin, 1990; Ward, 1998). Jackson and Smith (2001) found that students attending high school on a reservation reported strong connections to their culture and homeland. They reported experiencing a shift while they were in college. Jackson, et al. (2003) found that successful Native American college students raised on reservations reported that getting through college required them to make adaptation from their

native culture to a different culture. This seems to indicate the development of a bicultural identity.

The results of the existing studies raise questions regarding what is required of Indigenous students as they enter postsecondary education. Unlike students from the majority culture, it appears that they must develop different cultural paradigms and must learn to live in two different worlds. This may be particularly true of students who are raised and attend school on reservations. However, Indigenous students who are not raised strictly on reservations may also experience a strong identification with their traditional culture and experience difficulty when attending a higher education institution. This study was an attempt to understand the development and necessity of bicultural identity and skills among Indigenous students enrolled in postsecondary education in both Canada and the United States.

Literature Review

Attending a higher education institution can be a challenging experience for any individual. During this time college students are exploring and developing their identity. Often, one's native culture becomes the main aspect of their identity. Identifying with one's culture is crucial to positive social, academic, and mental health outcomes.

Cultural Identity

To identify with one's group or culture, is known as cultural identity (Adler, 1974). Cultural identity extends into the domains of gender, religion, race, sexual orientation and ethnicity. Many studies have shown cultural identity to play a major role in mental health (Garza & Lipton, 1984; Rowe, Behrens, & Leach, 1995) and in academic achievement among ethnically diverse individuals (Bass & Coleman, 1997; Hill, 2004). Cultural identity plays an important positive role in many ethnic minorities' lives. However, relatively few studies have explored the effect cultural identity plays in the mental health and academic achievement among Indigenous populations.

Some studies have explored the relationship and importance that cultural identity played in the mental well-being among Navajo high school students, with particular regard to depression. Two studies found a positive correlation between higher levels of Navajo cultural identity and reducing depressive symptoms. The more a Navajo student identified with his or her culture, the fewer depressive symptoms that individual experienced (Reichman, Wadsworth, & Deyhle, 2004; White, 1999). Also, Reichman et al. (2004) concluded that increasing a Navajo youth's sense of cultural awareness and identity may decrease isolation and increase skills and factors associated with resiliency and overall mental well-being. These studies indicated that a strong cultural identity leads to better mental health in Native American youth.

Other studies lend support to the importance of cultural identity and functionality within one's culture. According to Deyhle (1995), Navajo youth who maintained strong Navajo cultural ties were more successful among their own society as well as in the Anglo world. She suggested that Indigenous college students could benefit, both while attending school and at home, by maintaining their native cultural ties. These studies lend support the hypothesis that a stronger culture identity among Indigenous peoples leads to better mental health, overall well-being and functionality in one's own culture.

There are contradictory findings among studies that examine academic achievement and cultural identity. Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben and LaFramboise (2001) studied the academic success of 196 fifth to eighth grade American Indian children in relation to cultural identity. They concluded that a strong cultural identity positively affected academic performance of their participants. Similarly, Vadas (1995) explored the relationship between strong Navajo cultural identity and achievement levels on standardized tests among 185 Navajo students attending middle school. His results suggested that a stronger identification with traditional Navajo cultural aspects improved academic success on standardized tests.

Additionally, Hill (2004) investigated how different cultural identities played a major role in academic achievement for Indigenous high school students. The researchers gave three measures of cultural identity to students on a rural high school in the Navajo Reservation. Hill completed canonical correlations between these measures and measures of academic achievement (GPA and school attendance). Results show that these students' cultural identity was related to academic achievement. The students fell into three groups: biculturally identified, single cultural identified (traditional or European American), and culturally marginal. Academic achievement was highest among the bicultural identified group, next highest among the single

cultural identified group, and lowest for the culturally marginal students. Biculturally identified students were better able to perform academically than those students who fell into the other groups.

However, another study found no relationship between cultural identity and academic achievement (Whitesell, Mitchell & Spicer, 2009). This study explored the effects that self-esteem and cultural identity had among American Indian high school students and academic performance. They concluded that self-esteem was clearly related to academic success, while cultural identity was not. In a similar study of First Nations high school students, Root (2008) also concluded that a strong cultural identity does not predict academic achievement.

With these contradictory findings it is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion about the correlation between cultural identity and academic achievement with Indigenous students. More research needs to examine this relationship. However, the study by Hill (2004) brings to light another dimension of cultural identity, biculturalism.

Biculturalism

As mentioned previously, biculturalism is the ability for an individual to navigate and identify with two different cultures at the same time. The idea of biculturalism has become more prominent as the racial and ethnic diversity in the United States has continued to increase. A large percentage of Americans could be considered bicultural (US Census Bureau, 2005). According to Ngyuen and Benet-Martinez (2007) the idea of biculturalism arose from an acculturation model. The acculturation model identifies four ways individuals adapt to a new culture: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (Sam & Berry, 2006). They defined integration as involvement and identification with both cultures, also known as

biculturalism. Of the four modes, Berry (1997) has argued that biculturalism is the most adaptive acculturation strategy.

Several studies of biculturalism have concluded that members of ethnic/racial minority groups who have a bicultural identity have better psychological outcomes e.g., higher self-esteem, better school adjustment, etc. (Ford, 2006; Berry, 2005). One study of female Mexican American college students found that those who were comfortable with White cultural values reported lower levels of psychological distress (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004). In a study of young Puerto Rican mothers, Lopez and Contreras (2005) found those who had a high involvement with both Puerto Rican and American culture had better psychological adjustment including lower levels of depression, anxiety, hostility, and somatization. A survey of Cuban Americans showed those who identified as bicultural had a higher positive self-concept and better perceived social competence (Alfaro-Chilelli, 2004).

Rodriguez (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 84 studies that examined the relationship between acculturative factors and mental health among Latinos. This met-analytic review indicated that individuals who identified as bicultural tend to have better mental health outcomes relative to individuals who follow other acculturative paths. The previously mentioned studies show that ethnic minorities who identify as bicultural have higher positive outcomes with mental health and social adjustment. There have been many studies of biculturalism with many ethnic minorities, but very little research has been done regarding Indigenous students and biculturalism.

One study by Schiller (1987) did explore biculturalism among 92 Native American college students. This study concluded that those students who identified as bicultural were better adjusted to university life, particularly in the academic and cultural domains. They had

higher grade point averages and participated more in Native American cultural activities. This study showed that academic performance improves among Native American students when they are able to identify with both their traditional and the European/American culture of higher education.

The literature on biculturalism, as well as studies on cultural identity, indicates that members of ethnic minorities benefit when they are able to identify both with their own culture and the dominant culture. One would assume from these studies that Indigenous college students would also benefit in many ways if they too were able to identify as bicultural. Both, the United States and Canada, have adopted a Euro-American educational system. Therefore, ethnic minorities are forced into adapting to this Euro-American culture if they want to participate in higher education. To obtain a higher education degree, one must be able to understand and navigate the rigors and culture of a postsecondary institution.

As previously shown, Indigenous students are struggling with the demands of the current higher education system. This struggle could be attributed to the major differences between Indigenous cultures and the Euro-American culture of postsecondary education. No qualitative study has been done in both the United States and Canada with Indigenous college students exploring these cultural intersections and their experiences of higher education. The purpose of this study was to explore biculturalism among Indigenous college students in both the United States and Canada. Exploring the higher education experience of current Indigenous college students may shed some light on how the process and development of biculturalism occurs and hopefully benefit future Indigenous college students.

Method

This study used a qualitative research strategy. Qualitative interviewing was employed to understand participants' ideas, views, perceptions, attitudes, opinions and experiences. In this method the researcher attempts to understand these aspects in depth and organize the information received in a meaningful way in order to address the research questions. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) stated, "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3).

Assumptions of Qualitative Research

The principal objective of this study was to gain deep insight into the views and experiences of the participants. Qualitative research is a method that facilitates this purpose by allowing for a more in-depth examination than could be obtained through quantitative methods, which are based on positivistic assumptions. Especially relevant to the stated purpose of this study, a qualitative method aims to describe and understand the phenomenon under investigation in ways perhaps previously not understood by the researcher, participants and readers (Kazdin, 1998).

The philosophical foundation for the method of the study is based in a relational ontology (Jackson, Smith, Beecher, & Hoffman, 2009; Schwandt, 2000). That is, the fundamental assumption is that relationships are primary and necessary to understanding human experiences. Accordingly, the epistemological foundation for this method is hermeneutic and dialectic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, Chapter 1). Kvale (1996) describes hermeneutics as the process of understanding human activity as texts and interpreting them to find out the intended or expressed meaning. Doing so establishes a co-understanding and deepens dialogue. A key tenet of this epistemology is that "understanding is something that is *produced* in [that] dialogue, not

something *reproduced* by an interpreter through an analysis [italics in original] (Schwandt, 2000). In keeping with this philosophy, the researchers incorporated Kvale's approach to interviewing. This approach includes the following aspects adapted from Kvale (1996):

1. Attention to the everyday "life world" of the participants.
2. Efforts to understand the meaning of the themes in the dialogue.
3. Dialogue aimed at qualitative rather than quantitative knowledge.
4. Encouragement of in-depth descriptions of the participants' experience.
5. Encouragement of descriptions of specific experiences.
6. A deliberate openness to novel and unexpected perspectives.
7. Focus on the phenomena of interest without using restrictive questions.
8. Acknowledgement of possible ambiguities and contradictions in the dialogue.
9. Awareness of new insights that may come to interviewer and participant in the interview.
10. Knowledge that each interviewer brings varying degrees of sensitivity to different aspects of the participants' experiences and perspectives (pp. 30-31).

Participants

Interviews were conducted and used as the data for this study (n = 26). The participants in this study were Indigenous college students at the time of the interviews. Participants were recruited and selected by staff of the Native American student centers or by faculty members at the various sites on a volunteer basis. Recruiters were instructed by the researchers to select individuals who were currently enrolled in higher education courses and identified as an Indigenous person. Individuals approached by recruiters were invited to be part of a study and interviewed about their college experience.

Nineteen of the participants were enrolled at a large private university in the southwestern United States and seven participants were enrolled at a large public university in central Canada. Participants included undergraduate students coming from several different tribal affiliations: 17 Navajo, 1 Apache, 1 Zuni, and 7 Cree. Each participant lived on a reservation/reserve during their childhood years or was raised in a traditional Indigenous setting. All participants, whether raised on or off the reservation/reserve, identified with their native culture and practiced their traditional beliefs and customs. The range of the number of years participants had lived on the reservation was 1-20 years, with a mean of 12 years. All participants had been enrolled as an undergraduate student in a postsecondary institution for at least 12 months. Participants included 14 males and 12 females with an age range of 18-40 years, with a mean age of 23.5 years.

Procedure

A semi-structured interview format was used to collect the data for this study. The principal researcher conducted 11 of the interviews. Three other members of the research team conducted the other interviews. All of the interviewers were trained and had previous experience in qualitative interviewing. All of the interviews were done one-on-one and in person. A list of interview topics and sample questions (see Appendix A) were used to help interviewers avoid leading questions and to maximize the depth and breadth of interviewee responses (Patton, 1990). Interviews ranged from 20-60 minutes in length.

Data Collection

According to Kvale (1996) a semi-structured interview utilizes guiding questions for the interviewer and covers a sequence of themes, but at the same time allows for openness to changes in the sequence and types of questions asked in order to follow up with the participants'

responses. At the beginning of each interview, each participant completed a brief demographic questionnaire and an informed consent form. The purpose of the study was explained and consent was obtained and discussed. Additionally, potential risks and benefits of participation were outlined. When consent was obtained, the interviewer proceeded with the interview, recording the conversation using a digital recorder.

The principal researcher transcribed all recorded interviews in order to keep consistency in formatting and accuracy of the interviews. There were a total of 256 pages of transcribed material. After the interviews were transcribed the researchers analyzed the data using hermeneutic interpretive methods, as explained in the *Data Analysis* section below (Gadamer, 2004; Kvale, 1996, 1987; Packer, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1984, 1991).

Interviews were conducted utilizing a variety of different types of questions. Kvale (1996) outlined eight main types of interview questions for use in semi-structured interview situations:

1. *Introducing questions* begin conversation of a topic by soliciting rich, spontaneous descriptions of the phenomenon. E.g. “Can you tell me about...?”
2. Building from these, *follow-up questions* extend given answers, and facilitate further exploration and elaboration.
3. *Probing questions* ask for deeper description, further examples, and depth of content. E.g. “Could you say something more about that...?”
4. Further operationalizing of responses is accomplished by use of *specifying questions*. E.g. “What did you think then?”

5. *Direct questions* directly introduce topics or dimensions, and usually come after the interviewees have given their spontaneous responses and indicated what they believe to be the central aspects of the phenomenon. E.g. “How have you experienced racism?”
6. Conversely, *indirect questions* may query in a projective way about other people or objects outside the interviewee with respect to the same phenomenon. E.g. “How do you believe others understand racism?”
7. *Structuring questions* aid the flow of the interview. E.g. “I would like to introduce another topic...”
8. Lastly, *interpreting questions* attempt to clarify meaning, understanding of content, and the interviewee’s interpretations. E.g. “You then mean that...?” (pp. 133-135).

In addition to these, Kvale (1996) also includes *silence*—a non-question, but a critical part of the interview conversation. He further suggests shorter questions, longer subject answers and a continual process of the interviewer attempting to verify his or her interpretations of the interviewee’s responses.

Data Analysis

The interpretation of the transcribed interviews subscribed to the same philosophical and theoretical assumptions as were used in conducting the interviews. The post-interview interpretive process is described below (adapted from Jackson & Smith, 2001):

1. An unfocused overview of the text. This is an attempt to study the text with as few presuppositions as possible and to approximate the meanings articulated in the dialogue with the participants (Jackson & Patton, 1992; Kvale, 1996).
2. Interpretations through successive readings of the material. This process, sometimes referred to as the hermeneutic circle, has been described as a spiral or reflexive

process, in which, the investigators seek to uncover progressively deeper levels of meaning in the text (Hoshmand, 1989; Kvale, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1984).

3. Finding language that accurately conveys the findings. Once valid interpretations have been made (Kvale, 1996, 1987), the research team works to effectively communicate the findings.

Three researchers conducted several successive reviews of the transcripts, using the process described above, to identify an initial set of themes. All three researchers, two faculty members and the principal investigator, had previous training and experience in qualitative analysis. Themes that continued to be supported in successive readings of the transcripts were retained. Themes that did not have broad support in successive readings of the transcripts were removed. Once the investigators concluded the initial independent analysis, they brought their findings together for comparison and additional analysis. Similar themes found by the researchers were retained. All the researchers evaluated the remaining themes not initially included. They used the procedure described above to determine whether or not there was sufficient evidence to warrant inclusion of those themes. Themes were retained only if the researchers were able to come to consensus about their validity. To strengthen the validity of the retained themes an external auditor was brought in to examine the themes. Hill et al. (1997) suggests that the auditor's role is to check whether the raw material is in the correct domain, that all important material has been faithfully represented in the themes, that the wording of the core ideas succinctly captures the essence of the raw data, and that the analysis elegantly and faithfully represents the data.

Once the researchers in this study articulated themes, an external auditor was brought in to perform a cross-analysis. Hill et al. (2005) recommends at least one external auditor be used

to check the work of the primary team of researchers and to minimize the effects of groupthink in the primary team of researchers. The external auditor (i.e. someone who is not involved on the primary research team) was used as an extra precaution against bias and misinterpretation of the participant's responses.

Jones and Jenkins (2008) recommend that researchers using an indigenous-colonizer model, need to work with Indigenous peoples to better understand and help bridge the gap of differences between the two peoples. The external auditor for this used for this study was an Indigenous person who was raised on a reservation in Canada. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in human development, a master's degree in counseling and school psychology, and currently is a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology. She had received extensive training in qualitative research methods. Utilizing an Indigenous person as an auditor contributed to the authenticity and accuracy of the interpretations (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008). After the auditor finished with the cross-analysis of the themes, she concluded, "all of the themes seem to fit the experiences recorded in the interviews and are appropriate" (Q. Adolpho, personal communication, December 22, 2010).

The auditor did raise a question about the theme of *racism*. She wondered if racism was experienced only on the respective campuses or if racism was a common experience off campuses as well. After reviewing the transcripts again, the researchers concluded that racism was experienced in both areas. We concluded that the culture of higher education is not limited to the campuses, but also includes the surrounding community.

Results

Analysis of the transcripts revealed five general themes related to biculturalism. Two themes were simple and straightforward and three of the five themes were more complex or had sub-themes. The simple themes were Institutional Support for Transition to College and Racism. Complex themes were Types of Relationships to Native Culture, Career Issues, and Family Issues.

Theme 1: Institutional Support for Transition to College

Adapting to a new culture while retaining one's native culture can be a challenging transition. The institutions of higher education in this study had an impact on the participant's process of adopting a bicultural identity. When participants were asked what was helpful in making the transition from their home community setting to the setting of higher education easier, they expressed that the institutions or individuals within the institutions were supportive in a variety of ways.

Responses supporting the idea that the institutions were helpful indicated that the institution had programs or centers in place specifically designed for the Indigenous student population. With regards to the institution being supportive and helpful, participants said the following:

Interviewer: What has been your experience coming here to [university]?

Participant #2: It's just a transition like from normal school to high school. It is tough because they don't really have a way of preparing you for it. It's kind of tough for me because there's a lot more people here. And when you go back home everybody knows

each other, but then when you come here you have to try and find people. It kind of feels awkward at times, but you get used to it.

Interviewer: So now you feel like you're pretty well adjusted and everything?

Participant #2: Oh yeah. I get along with everybody here at the ASC [Aboriginal Student Center].

Interviewer: The Aboriginal Center, has it helped with the transition?

Participant #2: Yeah, they help you out as much as possible. If you're having troubles they try and get you tutors and stuff. So they try to do a lot of that, as much as they can.

Interviewer: Do you feel comfortable being here at [university]?

Participant #6: I do. Especially with these kinds of places, like the Aboriginal Student Center, it brings everyone together. Some days I'll meet someone new. At my other college it was different, because it was way out in the bush. That college is way up north and there are a lot of aboriginal people up there too, but it was mostly about money and not really about school. So it was really hard to really connect with people who were going through the same stuff I was. Here, everyone's from around [place], so we all have the same background. And all are from the reserve here and we pretty much have the same interests around here, so I find it easier to get along with people here.

Interviewer: What has been helpful with your transition here?

Participant #6: What has been helpful? It's mostly sports and things like the Aboriginal Student Center, which helps. The fact that [university] has more aboriginals than any

university in [country], I think that helps too, because I'm always seeing an aboriginal person around, so it makes me feel more comfortable.

Interviewer: What has been helpful being here at [university]?

Participant #9: I think a lot of good. Free tutoring is something I like and they even have a Native American program here. And scholarships, they can even help you with that, so I think I like it here.

Interviewer: Did you expect things to be different when you came here?

Participant #12: Not really, because in the summer I went to one of those summer programs that they run up here, like those high school college courses blended together. It was a program called Tech. Through the high school we could take two classes like machinery, welding, cosmetology, and automotive. So it was a lot easier to adjust with that program that I took. I experienced a little bit more.

With regards to the individuals within the institution being supportive and helpful, several participants mentioned faculty as being key to their transition.

Interviewer: So what's it been like coming to college?

Participant #9: It has been pretty good. I like it so far. I had couple up and downs, but so far I like it.

Interviewer: What were the ups?

Participant #9: I got into the carpentry program I liked and the downs were that I missed quite a few weeks. My instructor let me slide and said as long as I showed him that I can

do what he wants me to do he'll keep me. So far he's been working with me pretty good, so I like it.

Interviewer: That's nice, someone cutting you a break a little bit.

Participant #9: Oh yeah, he cut me a break. I was in jail for almost three weeks, so he let me slide on that and he took care of everything I had to take care of. I'm glad he let me stay around.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's always nice.

Participant #9: Yeah, I'm really glad, glad he understood why and what not. I really like him, and he's pretty cool. Most instructors would say, "you either drop my class or you fail". He said, "I'll give you one more chance". Since then, I've been doing whatever I could do like keeping myself busy and showing him that I can do what he wants me to do.

Interviewer: So have there been some things that have surprised you about coming here that you didn't expect?

Participant #9: Yeah, like carpentry. That's something I didn't know they had here. The professor accepted me mid-term and I was an intermediate student in his class, so I was like right on. He took me because I have a lot of experience in carpentry, he said, "all right let's see what you can do". I showed him and he liked it.

Interviewer: So you weren't really expecting to find a match when you got here?

Participant #9: Yeah, I was expecting to do all my basic classes that I needed to do then go from there, but he let me slide and told me, "go ahead, I'll take you and see what you got". He likes me. He said, "I'm one of his top students in his class for being an intermediate student" and "I'm glad you're here." and what not. That's pretty good.

Interviewer: So what's it been like for you here at school?

Participant #10: It's going ok. I need a lot of help sometimes. Teachers are very understanding, so I like this college. It's small, but I get more attention than I would if I went to a bigger university.

Theme 2: Racism

When participants were asked about what made the transition to higher education culture difficult, dealing with racism was identified as a common experience they encountered. Participants attempting to identify with the new culture of higher education often experienced resistance, in the form of prejudice or racism, from individuals who were part of that new culture. Participants were aware that their experiences with racism were not unique to the transition to higher education, but recognized it made their transition more difficult. Several participants expressed frustration with racism, which made it more difficult for them to identify with the new culture. Others had developed a tolerance and acceptance of the racism. The participants' comments supporting this theme follow:

Interviewer: Have you come across racism or anything like that here at school?

Participant #3: Oh, all the time (laughing). I experience it on a, not on a daily basis, but quite often. I experience stereotyping that's racism; it's everywhere I go. I walk into a store and I'll be pointed out by one of the employees. They'll follow me around in the store, probably just because of my appearance and quite possibly because of my skin color. Or I'll be walking down the street and somebody will drive by, or will walk by

and they will say something like, “[expletive] ” or “you [expletive] Indians”. These are all different types of things I’ve experienced.

Interviewer: Out of pure ignorance.

Participant #3: Out of pure ignorance and that’s something that a lot of aboriginal people have to go through everyday, just very ignorant things. It’s a sad reality that we have to face and either we let it get to us and get the best of us or we just ignore it and keep doing our thing and not let it get to us, but it’s pretty hard not to.

Interviewer: Have you experienced any negativity or stereotyping because you are a native student here?

Participant #4: Yeah, sometimes. The way some of the students look at me, just because of the way I’m dressed. They think I’m a thug, or I’m going to steal something. But they don’t really know me and I grew up with all the virtues: respect, kinship, everything. I don’t know, just the way people look at me, it’s just they don’t know me. I mean I’m in dentistry, I was raised right.

Interviewer: That’s got to be frustrating.

Participant #4: Especially when I go shopping, yes.

Interviewer: What happens when you go shopping?

Participant #4: I’m always getting followed. They think I’m going to steal something and it just sucks. They just don’t even know me.

Interviewer: What difficulties have you encountered here?

Participant #5: I've discovered difficulties with housing for sure. I've moved four times in the last three years.

Interviewer: And why is that?

Participant #5: One of the first things was they sold the house we were living in, so we had to move out because they were selling it to somebody else. The second time we only rented the place, because that's all we could find. It was a four-month a lease; just during the summer. We lived there for four months and then we had to move out because somebody else was coming in. Then I lived about six months with this couple and I think it was maybe due to my lifestyle or who I was that I had to move again. Now I'm presently living just off campus here.

Interviewer: So that third place you lived with a couple and you felt like because of cultural differences or racism that they kicked you out, is that what happened?

Participant #5: Yeah, and the people I was hanging out with.

Interviewer: Can you talk more about that?

Participant #5: Well it seemed like they felt uncomfortable when there was a couple of Indians that would come over to my place and we would hang out. It seemed like they made some rules for me to feel uncomfortable, so I left.

Interviewer: Do you run into racism here?

Participant #8: Yeah, I do from the police. This is a really racist town, to be honest; especially because it is a border town. I have been part of police brutality and stuff. There is nothing I can do about it. People see other people and what their views are. Racism is everywhere. It is not just one particular place or culture it is everywhere.

Participant #9: When I first came to [university] it was kind of racist. I almost got into a few fights a couple of times, just because of racism. I just let it go in one ear and out the other and walked away. Instead of having something really bad happen.

Interviewer: So what type of things would happen when you were first here?

Participant #9: A lot of different racist things, a lot of white people would say things to me, or something about my family. And I'm not the quiet type. I end up snapping back or want to do something bad. It got me in trouble with the police. But now I just leave it alone and walk away or something. My wife is trying to keep me from fighting, because I used to be really mean, or whatever. Now I have calmed down and I try not to be like that anymore. I try to set a positive example and not a negative one. When I first came here my cousins used to come up here a lot. One of them got into one or two fights because of racism.

Interviewer: Were police involved then as well?

Participant #9: No, some of them pretty much will harass you and pull you over for the slightest little thing you do just because you're Native, but I try not to let that bother me.

Interviewer: That says a lot about you to be able to keep your eye on your goals and still put up with all that.

Participant #9: To tell you the truth it's hard and it gets to me. It bothers the [expletive] out of me, but there's nothing I can do. I have to set a positive example for my daughter, but fortunately we won't be here for that much longer.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the culture here, how would you describe it?

Participant #24: Here? Honestly, people have been prejudiced.

Interviewer: And how do you experience that?

Participant #24: I think maybe the first week I came here to [university], it was two weeks before classes were to start and I came down here to look for an apartment. I found one, but it was difficult to get an appointment with some of the landlords. It took me over a week and I never got an apartment. Finally, I came to school and let my advisor know that I probably wasn't coming to school because I was having a hard time getting an apartment. The problem was I told people that I'm not going to be working and I'm only going to be going to school. I told them I can offer the money up front, but they wouldn't accept it. The people did that to me and I couldn't figure out what was going on. A couple of those times my brother and his girlfriend were with me. After one time, we went out to eat and I asked them if I was just seeing it wrong. My brother said, "I feel it too." And his girlfriend, she's a Navajo, said, "Oh, it's just like that."

Interviewer: How was that experience talking to your brother and realizing that he confirmed your perceptions?

Participant #24: He just asked, "are you going to be able to handle this?" And I said, "I am going to be angry for as long as I'm up here." Later on in the afternoon I got into an argument with a guy in a parking lot over something stupid. So when I came to the school to talk to my advisor about it, he sent me down to the student advisory and I started calling people for housing. One lady said, "Oh yes come look at my place, I need someone here. I need help." I went over and looked at her place. She was very nice and said, "I'd love to have you." It was within walking distance, so I lucked out and I stayed. But I was moving in with someone with one room, so my son went back home with my

brother, my son was glad to go back home. Initially things were fine with the lady, but after a while when I would come home it was different. I would walk in and she and her daughter would get up and go to their room. When I actually started wanting to eat she told me, “This is your cupboard and this is your place in the refrigerator, but don’t ever ask me to take you anywhere, because I can’t and I don’t want to charge you for any gas or anything like that.”

Interviewer: How did that feel?

Participant #24: It was awful and it felt really bad. The first two months I was calling home and crying because I felt really bad. I got to the point where I’d just go to my room and when they weren’t there I’d go and cook. I didn’t want to be around and it was like that a lot. I just continued living that way. She ended up selling her house, so I had to find another place to live.

Theme 3: Types of Relationships to Native Culture

Types of relationships to native culture is a complex theme, which includes two sub-themes. The researchers found two different types of relationships to native culture which were (a) engagement and loyalty to native culture and (b) cultural loss. Each sub-theme will be presented separately and lends support to the general theme of relating to the native culture.

Engagement and Loyalty to Native Culture. Participants in this group expressed a great deal of loyalty and connection to their native culture. They were familiar with the language, beliefs, traditions, and customs of their respective cultures. These participants continued to practice and/or participate in those cultural aspects. The following quotes support this sub-theme:

Interviewer: Do you feel cultural differences being here at [university] rather than back on the reservation?

Participant #2: Yeah, back home we practice our traditions a lot, but when you come here you don't as much. We have the elders come here every Wednesday, so that's kind of good. But I don't think there is enough of it.

Interviewer: So you would like more?

Participant #2: Yeah, I'd like to see more of it.

Interviewer: How close do you feel to your culture and your traditions?

Participant #2: I'm strong with my culture. I'd like to pass it on to younger kids or to my children in the future. That's why I always wanted to learn.

Interviewer: So being here at [university], has been difficult for you to hang onto your traditions and your culture?

Participant #2: It's so-so, I guess. Last year was tough for me to hang onto traditions. I was more focused on how to deal with school, because school was new to me. But this year it's kind of easier, because I know what's going to happen in school. I know how to do it and I can go home more often now, because I don't have to worry about school as much.

Interviewer: Are you afraid that you're going to lose your traditional culture?

Participant #2: I think about it. I think about it a lot. Yeah, we're losing it. I guess pretty fast. Many young people don't know any of their language, or any of their culture. That kind of scares me. That's what motivates me to go learn it more, so I can pass it on.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about your culture?

Participant #4: Like Cree? We're the Plains Cree. Up north, like the Northern Cree, they have the dialect like the Plains Cree. Back home most of the young people are starting to lose the culture. I am trying to keep that. My brothers and I speak Cree to each other whenever we're together. Most of the time we never speak any English. Back home we're somewhat traditional, but most of the people are starting to lose the culture.

Interviewer: Why do you feel it's important for people to hold onto their culture?

Participant #4: Because now, like at the university here, there's maybe two or three of us that speak it fluently. But the rest, they're either too shy or they have obviously lost it. I don't know, it just sucks.

Interviewer: Does it make you sad that everyone's losing their culture?

Participant #4: Yeah it does, yeah.

Interviewer: How do you hang onto your culture being here at [university]?

Participant #4: I pretty much can't lose it because it's embedded in there. I can practice, like right after my mid-term today I'm going back home. My grandma, my Kokum, she knows I'm fluent in English and we always talk to her in Cree. Most of the elders are like that; we're starting to lose the elders back home.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you're losing your culture being here?

Participant #4: No, no way.

Interviewer: How close do you feel to your traditional culture?

Participant #6: I'm pretty close to my traditions back home, so yeah very close.

Interviewer: What does that mean to you?

Participant #6: I don't feel lost. I feel like I'm still connected with the traditional beliefs back home and everything. I guess you can say I believe and practice it, as in praying and all that stuff.

Interviewer: How closely tied to your culture would you say you are?

Participant #8: I am very close to my traditional beliefs and everything. I can do them all. I can speak some Navajo and I understand it pretty well. I can speak it, not fluently, but enough so I can communicate with my grandmother and my grandfather.

Interviewer: So when you come here, do you feel like you can keep that?

Participant #8: Yeah, nobody can take that away from me. It's just something that I know. I am willing to pass it along to my kids and everybody else.

Interviewer: It sounds like to you have been saying that being open has been helpful? Being open to new people and experiences has helped you fit in.

Participant #8: Well, I don't really hide who I am. I just be as real as I can. I don't try to be somebody that I am not.

Interviewer: Do you feel like that there are some people that come from the reservation and try to be something that their not?

Participant #8: Well, like I said I don't really stereotype or judge an individual. But some people were raised in a white culture. They dress like them and stuff like that. I don't look down on them or anything.

Interviewer: How close do you feel to your culture and your background?

Participant #11: I feel pretty close with it, because I have been around it since I was born.

Interviewer: So it is comfortable for you. And is your Native American history important to you?

Participant #11: Yeah, it's important to me. My grandparents call it life.

Interviewer: Your culture? Tell me a little more about that.

Participant #11: It's like... I think it is like being traditional and going by your culture that makes you what you are or something like that.

Interviewer: How important is the Navajo culture to you?

Participant #13: Very important from a spiritual point, because without it I wouldn't really be serious about school or myself. So I didn't turn out to be a junkie, someone who did drugs, or something sad like that. Because of the culture, I stabilized my mind. It is a religious thing.

Interviewer: I always want to find out how kind of connected people feel to their culture and what are their roots. It seems like there are varying degrees of how connected people are connect. So how about you?

Participant #20: Right now I'm completely traditional. My dad is really traditional and my mom's partially traditional. I guess I picked up a lot of my dad's mannerisms with the traditional ways. I pretty much grew up with that. Everything that I do goes by how it is and all those little things. Like little things, you're not supposed to whistle at night

little things like that. I get really pissed off at my friends if they do that, because it brings bad news and things like that.

Cultural Loss. A second type of relationship to the culture was the sense of loss of culture that several participants felt as they came to college and left their native homes. Some of the cultural loss stemmed from feelings of being rejected by their native peers when they returned home. Participants described the difficulty in keeping with their cultures in the following ways:

Interviewer: What was that like going back to the reservation?

Participant #1: Going back there? Well my tires got slashed. I don't know why. I got to see family and besides the funeral, it was good seeing them.

Interviewer: Do you get a sense that sometimes when you go back to the reservation that people are upset with you?

Participant #1: Yeah, because they are still there. Obviously, they never went anywhere in their life. So yeah I get the sense that they're like, "oh she has a vehicle la-dee-dah and thinks she's better."

Interviewer: How close do you feel to your traditional culture?

Participant #3: I feel very close to it. Being raised in my mom's community, I was exposed to being able to have traditional ways of living off the earth. Through my father, I've been raised traditionally through our spiritual rituals. I've been benefited both ways, so I do feel very close to my traditions. Except for the language part. I've been living as

an urban Indian for most of my life now, and because of that I've I'm around English every day of my life.

Interviewer: Language kind of fades, doesn't it?

Participant #3: Yeah, it did fade a lot growing up. I was bilingual as a child and not so much anymore. But I do take part in a lot of my customs and spiritual rituals today.

Interviewer: How do people back home feel about you coming to this big university?

Participant #3: Aboriginal people have been oppressed and suppressed. There's a mentality on reserves that you go to university to further your education and leave the reserve. There's that subconscious thought that you're better than the rest of them. So at times you will be maybe excluded from certain things that might come up in the community or with your friends and family. A lot of times others will feel intimidated by your furthering of education. Most often many people don't want to leave the reserve because that's what they know and that's what they're comfortable with. They feel very intimidated once they go into an urban setting.

Several participants expressed feelings of distance from and longing for their native cultures. After leaving their native communities, these participants described the difficulty of keeping with their traditions and belief systems. They made the following comments about the loss of their native culture:

Interviewer: Do you feel a need to go back to the reservation?

Participant #6: When I go back I feel like I'm at home again. When I'm out here it feels like some people can get lost. I guess you can say they can lose their culture, their teachings and when they go back they can feel those things come back because it's so

familiar. That's kind of how I feel sometimes. Like if I'm away too long I'll go back and everything's just familiar to me again. The knowledge is back in my head sometimes, kind of like a slap in the face. It's like what've you been doing this whole time? Not really practicing your teachings and everything, like those kinds of things.

Interviewer: So at times you feel like you're losing it, losing the culture and the traditions?

Participant #6: Yeah.

Interviewer: What about culture-wise, how would you...

Participant #10: I lost it. I mean, my mom had some stuff going on in our tradition and sometimes I can't make it out there because it's like gas prices are going up and I have school. So yeah, I kind have lost out on that.

Interviewer: So how does that play here at college, have you been able to keep your culture or have you felt like you've had to be a different person?

Participant #10: No, I mean I carry it with me, it's just that I can't participate in it as much as I used to. I have to work around schedules of everything.

Interviewer: What has that been like for you not being able to participate?

Participant #10: Sometimes it is difficult, because I want to do it. I really want to, it's just hard to go back that way.

Interviewer: Would you consider yourself to be close to your culture still?

Participant #15: Somewhat, at times. Before I came back to school, it took me about three to four years to actually come back to college, I had been working throughout the

U.S. in California, New York City, Washington, and into Canada. I've been pretty much everywhere, so I am used to it. When I go somewhere I set my priorities, go there, do whatever I need to get done and get taken care of.

Interviewer: So when you say you're used to it, what would you say you're used to?

Participant #15: My culture. I can adapt to not being around long periods of time. I adapt to it, to today's society then when I go back to the reservation it's like a totally different story again and I have to change myself.

Interviewer: What do you have to change when you go back to the reservation?

Participant #15: My personality and how I talk to my mom and dad. Because my parents, they're old right, so I got to speak my own Navajo language. When I leave the reservation again and I come here to college I have my books, I have my homework, I have my priorities set. You know, living two lives at the same time.

Interviewer: So how does that feel for you?

Participant #15: I don't know. It's common. I get so used to it, it's just like normal. Yeah, it's just normal to me. I never really thought of it.

Interviewer: Some people find that coming from the reservation to college that they have to navigate two different cultures, I was wondering if that was your experience or what that was like for you?

Participant #21: Absolutely, when you are on the reservation there are certain things you do and you don't do. Then when you go back to the city there's that expectation that if there's something going on you have to participate, or there are things that are taboo that you have to live with.

Interviewer: What are some of those things that stand out in your mind?

Participant #21: Well, I know for example we have a four-day ceremony that I have to be there to help. That means going home, getting away from what I was doing here, and then participating in that ceremony. The four days after that you have to keep sacred or holy and not to do this or that. I'm trying to think, just like being there for the family when it's needed. It's just a way of life I guess, a little bit different. It's hard for me to think of it.

Interviewer: So sometimes it sounds like what the school expects is kind of a selfish thing, you're expected to be here and they expect you to study?

Participant #21: Well that's true, because I now remember one time they expected me to start my internship on a Monday, but my mom had just passed away and we had four days that I cannot be in school. I had to stay home until the person passes into the spirit world. I remember I told the director of the internship and she told me, "Either get over your grief and come back to school or just don't think about coming back." So I chose not to go back to school and I didn't start my internship. That really, really, really upset me.

Interviewer: That sounds like it must have been very difficult to have somebody give you an ultimatum like that?

Participant #21: It did, I just let it go. I said, "You know what, I don't think I'm ready yet so I'm just going to let it go and I'm not going to do it, just drop it".

Interviewer: Not pursue the internship?

Participant #21: Not pursue the internship. I just gave it up and didn't do my internship.

Interviewer: Can you talk more about your culture and growing up on the reservation?

Participant #25: I used to be really traditional. I would go to ceremonies and everything I was supposed to do traditional, I did. My parents used to wake us up really early in the morning to go running and say the prayer in the morning. As I got older I would go through the ceremonies and I learned the songs, stuff like that. So I used to be really traditional. That is the way I was raised, strictly traditional. Which is fine I did not mind. Then some things happened, then I went away from that and started going to church.

Interviewer: Started going to church?

Participant #25: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay so that kind of took you away from your traditional roots?

Participant #25: Yeah.

Theme 4: Career Issues

Career issues is another complex theme. This general theme includes a couple of sub-themes, (a) vague career constructs and (b) duty to give back to their tribe or family. Each of these sub-themes presented a dilemma for the participants in reference to their future career choices. Participants had limited experience and exposure to the variety of careers presented at their respective higher education institutions. Identifying with these new career paths played a role in developing their bicultural identity.

Vague Career Constructs. Participants' career selection appeared to reflect the difficulty in transitioning to a new culture. Some careers paths were familiar to participants due to their upbringing on the reservation. However, those paths were very different than the careers paths they were exposed to in college. Several participants' areas of study did not seem to be

congruent with their career goals, which could have been a result of the new exposure to majors/career that were not available on the reservation. This may have led to confusion about career paths and how one might navigate their higher education experience. Developing a bicultural identity in college involves choosing a major to career path that could fit both cultures. Participants recounted their experience in the following ways:

Interviewer: So what are your career plans?

Participant #8: Welding, I am going into welding and after that I want to go into music, become a studio engineer. I want to help local artists record albums. That is what I wanted to do. Start a garage too. I am kind of multi-talented. I'm into everything music, cars, welding, family and stuff.

Interviewer: Tell me about your plans for college.

Participant #25: I'm going to finish here and then go to [university] to finish and get my bachelor's in electrical engineering. Then from there I have three choices. I'm either going to get a job, go directly to get my master's, or go to culinary school.

Interviewer: You like to cook?

Participant #25: Yeah, I love to cook. It has always been a passion of mine. I've always wanted to become a chef. It is expensive. I figured I would get my engineering degree, so I could pay for culinary school.

Interviewer: You seem very motivated to pursue a degree and go to college. Where does that come from?

Participant #25: I guess growing up; it was hard. We never really had a whole lot of money. I mean we got by, we did fine, but at times it was hard. I just don't want to get

stuck in that where I have to worry about money. Electrical engineering pays well and it is something I always wanted to do, not just for the money.

Duty to Tribe and Family. Some participants expressed the importance of giving back to their tribe or family through their careers. Their career choices are greatly influenced by their desire to return and help on the reservation and stay connected to their culture. In order to do this, they had to learn to navigate the culture of higher education and retain roots on the reservation and/or with their family. The two different cultures seemed to be placing opposing demands upon the participants. Several participants were able to find a balance between the demands; thus, contributing to their development of a bicultural identity. Participants made the following comments expressing this idea:

Interviewer: What do you plan on doing, what are your goals?

Participant #1: I want to get a psychology degree, at least four years in psychology, and from there I'm going to the [branch of law enforcement].

Interviewer: Oh yeah?

Participant #1: I've always wanted to be a cop. I've always been fascinated by how they learn things and I've never hated cops. You meet people and they do hate cops. I'm like, "alright, well follow the rules and you're fine." That's how I feel, but yeah I just want to be a cop.

Interviewer: Okay and do you feel any ties back to the reservation like want to go back and help or anything?

Participant #1: Yeah that would be awesome, because usually if a white cop ends up doing something they say, “oh you’re just racist you’re doing this.” But if they see me, one of them, it would probably make a bit of a difference.

Interviewer: You’re going into education, right?

Participant #3: Yeah.

Interviewer: I kind of feel like you’re setting yourself up for an opportunity to make changes, do you have any idea what you would do differently?

Participant #3: Definitely, that’s the exact reason why I’m in education. I would like to teach for several years and then go for my master’s. In order for me to go for my master’s it is mandatory you have two years of teaching, so that’s my plan. But I would like to further my education after this and enter in a higher position within the education system, so I can make my have an influence on the curriculum.

Interviewer: Do you kind of view that you can change the curriculum and that’s one way you can help change the system?

Participant #3: Yeah exactly and that’s exactly what needs to be done in order for something like that to happen. Though I have to embrace my culture and my beliefs and not conform or give into the mainstream subcultures. That’s one thing that many aboriginal students need to do and need to remember is that they know where they come from and hold onto that while they further their education in this mainstream. It’s hard for a lot of young adults and youth to not give in to the whole mainstream scene, the media and all that.

Interviewer: Do you plan on teaching in more of an urban setting, or do you want to go back to the reservation and teach for a while?

Participant #3: Oh I would like to teach in the urban setting. I would like to enter into a more middleclass school and teach native studies there, because a lot of the students and people that live in middleclass communities and they are... they don't know, well I shouldn't say they don't know, but I don't know how to put this.

Interviewer: They don't know? They don't pay much attention?

Participant #3: Yeah, they might be able to acknowledge it, but they don't fully understand it. Because they're not fully taught it and I would like to go into these schools and teach the harsh reality of [country] history.

Interviewer: So why dentistry?

Participant #4: At first I was thinking about going to astronomy, because the night skies always fascinated me. Then after astronomy, I wanted to do something with medicine. I wanted to be a physician, but my little brother is going to be that, so I didn't want to. So I just chose dentistry, because I had braces for four years and that fascinated me. Because my teeth were all messed up and after braces it was pretty cool, a big transformation.

Interviewer: And would you like to go back and help people on the reservation with that?

Participant #4: Yeah that's my plan. Setting up a practice back home, one in [place] here, and a few up north.

Interviewer: So you're pursuing a degree in aboriginal public administration?

Participant #5: That's right.

Interviewer: What do you plan on doing with that?

Participant #5: One of my goals is to finish my degree. Right now I'm gaining some experience with the aboriginal student center here, so I'm an ambassador. I was a summer student for them, so gaining some experience with that. I'm presently on a youth committee for aboriginal, for urban aboriginals, so just right now I'm growing my resume. Eventually, I would like to maybe work for a [tribal] organization.

Interviewer: So what do you hope to do then when you're done here?

Participant #9: Oh I'm planning to go and find a job at a daycare, or help a teacher.

Then probably go to school part-time to get my nursing degree.

Interviewer: Ok, so eventually you want to be a nurse?

Participant #9: Yeah. I actually want to be a pediatrician.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Participant #9: I'm just working my way up kind of.

Interviewer: Well good for you, do you plan on going back to the reservation at all when you're done with your schooling?

Participant #9: Yeah I would, I would definitely go back. There's a clinic in [list of towns]. Also, there's a little clinic at [town], so yeah I'll probably go back and help out.

Interviewer: I want to go back to your grandparents. They seem like amazing people just by listening to you and it seems like you really respect them. You said that your

major was a choice in order to help them with their house one day. So their influence has been very great on you, do you want to talk a little about that?

Participant #11: Maybe I was bored at my grandparent's house sometimes without watching TV, or listening to the radio without electricity and sitting in the dark with a small lantern. And that is what got me thinking in junior high that I wanted to go to college to get an electrical degree and come back and fill my grandma's house with electricity.

Interviewer: Have you expressed that to them?

Participant #11: No, not yet.

Interviewer: Do you plan on saying something?

Participant #11: Yeah. They want me to do well with it, but they don't know that I want to go back and put electricity in their house.

Interviewer: So you are looking forward to the day...?

Participant #11: Yeah.

Interviewer: What are your plans to do that?

Participant #11: I want to do it after I finish my electrical engineering and then go back and tell them, "this is what I got and I want to do this for you guys. This is how it influenced me being in the house and not having electricity."

Interviewer: So you are viewing this as something that you can give back to them for all the years they helped you and raised you?

Participant #11: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where do you think you'll end up five years down the road?

Participant #12: Well, after I get my get my welding degree I actually have found some interests in machinery.

Interviewer: And eventually work as a machinist?

Participant #12: Yeah, a machinist and my welding degree.

Interviewer: Put together that is a pretty good combination?

Participant #12: Yeah.

Interviewer: And where would you find work?

Participant #12: Probably I would find work close to here. It would probably have to be at the power plant and they are supposed to be building another power plant too.

Everybody in my family tells me that by the time I get my degree the power plant should be done and I could work over there, which is a lot closer to home.

Interviewer: Do you hope to go back to the reservation when you're done with school and stuff or what would you see yourself doing then?

Participant #15: It's a possibility. It's really hard to say, like I said you know once I find myself doing something I always find myself there's a lot of things in the world that I like to do, so it's hard to say.

Interviewer: Do you find typically that it's hard for folks to go back after they've left for a while?

Participant #15: Yeah, because they know when they go back to the reservation way down deep inside in the back of their head it's like, "ok why am I returning back to something where I started from the beginning?" It's like going back to step one. That's the response, a lot of students, fellow classmates, just people in general when I talk to

them say. I ask, “would you guys like to go back to the reservation after you guys graduate?” They’re like “no”. I ask them “why?” “Well because you know it feels like, why’d I go to school you know if I end up back here?”

Interviewer: Does it feel like there’s not a lot to do with your education when you get back down there?

Participant #15: I guess in a way, because there’s not a lot. So I don’t know.

Interviewer: So when you get all done and you go to medical school and you finish your stuff, is there any expectation that you might come back to the reservation and use your education to benefit there?

Participant #20: Actually, yes. There is a great lot. There is this one scholarship that I’m applying for called the Indian Health Service Scholarship—they help you out a lot. The way you pay them back is you work for other Indian Health Services in the U.S. and I thought that’s nice because my mom told me about that. There are reservations like in Washington, California, Tennessee, New York, and New England States. I can work in any Indian Health Service as long as I work there.

Interviewer: Was there any intention when you went away to school that you’d come back to the reservation afterwards to help out?

Participant #21: Well I think, because we were raised there, that we are so connected to the area to where we live and the land that we live on. We never moved anywhere else. This is where we grew up in childhood and this is where I just felt like I was going to build a house. This is where I belong; I don’t belong in the city.

Interviewer: So you feel like the reservation is where you belong?

Participant #21: Yeah, that's where I belong, so the expectation my mother always stressed was go work and go to school. "Don't think about us. Don't think about things here, everything will be fine, nothing is going to happen." So she always stressed to go out, explore and discover and stuff like that. My father was little bit different. He was like, "you need to be here and think about home and you need to think about the [spiritual home]. You need to think about water, you need to think about your tradition and you need to think about stuff like that."

Interviewer: I guess our last question would just kind of be in your perspective, what would it mean for you to kind of live a good life or what would that look like?

Participant #21: Well, my good life would be if I could finish my goal of obtaining my licensure for the state of [place] and work on the reservation in substance abuse. Finish my house and just live happily on the reservation.

Interviewer: And when you say you wanted to go into business, what are you thinking of doing?

Participant #24: Actually, I want to work with the ranchers on my nation. Because I know from experience living with solar power that I have, I know this type of technology is available now. And it can actually work, because I live with it and I want it to be able to on our nation. Our nation is so large that a lot of the ranchers have to drive miles just to put gas in a generator for their wells. And there are mills that have been here for so long it's hard to find, so I wanted to take this back.

Interviewer: Is there any motivation for you to come back to this area with your degree?

Participant #26: Oh yeah, most definitely.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about that.

Participant #26: I want to learn the Navajo language, because my dad actually has land in [place] and he grows alfalfa. So I am starting to get into the environment and agriculture. Do you know what I mean? That is kind of what I want to come back for; to help clean up a little bit and just help with the environment on the reservation, because it is not the greatest.

Interviewer: So as we were talking I get the sense that you really want to reconnect with your heritage and the way you can do that is to go to college get a degree and come back and help.

Participant #26: Yeah. I have not really thought of it like that, but I guess the more I apply myself and put myself out there by learning the language and the whole history of the Navajo that makes sense. That is another way that I could connect. So yeah, I agree.

Theme 5: Family Issues

The final theme that emerged from the analysis is *family issues*. Embedded within the general theme of family issues lie two paradoxical sub-themes (a) family support for college and (b) lack of family support for college. The decision to attend college away from their native communities appeared to effect some participants' identification with their culture. Participants felt either support for their transitions to the new culture of higher education, or felt pressure to stay with the family and native culture on the reservation. This pull in two directions required participants to adopt a bicultural identity.

Family Support for College. Some participants felt a great deal of support going to college, because some family members had preceded them. Others, who were first generation college students, also felt support from their families. Family support was often expressed verbally or financially. Following are some examples of participants' experiences of receiving family support:

Interviewer: When you go back home to the reservation, do you feel like you're supported in your decision to come to college?

Participant #2: Oh yeah, my parent's always say, "you're doing something good to better yourself." I don't know how I would I say it, but the stereotypes that natives can't go to school or something like that, I'm proving them wrong, so I like that.

Interviewer: Do you have any brothers, sisters, or maybe cousins that kind of feel like they kind of resent your decision to come here?

Participant #2: No. None of them resent that I came to college, because I think they know it's a good thing. Some of my cousins haven't been given that opportunity to come, so they wish that upon themselves. I don't think they think it's a bad thing for me to come.

Participant #4: When I go back they always ask, "How is university going?" I always tell them, "It's going alright." My family members are really proud of me especially because I am in the dentistry assistant program.

Interviewer: So a lot of support from back home?

Participant #4: Yeah, a lot of support.

Interviewer: I imagine it was probably pretty difficult being that far away from your family. Was your family supportive of you coming here?

Participant #6: They were, but they were still lonesome for me and stuff. But they knew I was doing my own thing and what I wanted to do. They supported it, so yeah it was good.

Interviewer: Okay so when you go back, what do they think of you being in at [university]?

Participant #7: They're proud of me because most of them didn't go to university. Most of them still haven't graduated high school, so they're very proud that I'm still trying to get an education.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Participant #7: They're very happy that I'm trying to do something with my life instead of staying on the reserve, like most of my cousins.

Interviewer: So does your family live back on the reservation?

Participant #8: Yeah my mom does, my dad lives in [place], but he is moving up north. He works for [company].

Interviewer: So how do they feel about you coming to college?

Participant #8: They like it. It is kind of surprising to them, because I was one that grew up in a broken home. I grew up with a lot of alcohol drugs and I sold drugs. Actually, I graduated from a high school in [place]. I was locked up there for about two years. I had my ups and downs, but where I am at right now is kind of surprising to me. I thought I

would be like most my friends: dead, incarcerated, or in a gang. But right now I am just taking it easy.

Interviewer: Are there any pressures or anything you noticed from family or anybody for coming to school, is anybody giving you a hard time?

Participant #10: No they're not. They're like, "you go to school to get an education." So they are behind me and what I'm doing now is going to school.

Interviewer: Has your family been supportive of you coming to college?

Participant #12: Yeah, my mom kind of pushes me through college to keep my grades up and she will always check on me.

Interviewer: What has been the most difficult thing about being here?

Participant #12: The most difficult thing about being here is basically that I have to sacrifice my whole time of not being with my family. My sister, she already has 2 kids, sometimes she will need babysitters now and then. One of the sacrifices that I have to make is I can't be there to help her and I have to be in class.

Interviewer: So that is kind of a difficulty in not being able to spend time with family and having to be in class?

Participant #12: Yeah, be in class. My mom says to me, "don't worry about it, that we will find a way around it or something." She always tells me that I need to go to class.

Interviewer: So mom is still pushing, she is saying that family is important, but for you right now...?

Participant #12: My education is more important, to have that degree.

Participant #17: Well what's made college easy and enjoyable would be the fact that everyone in my family has a college degree. They have all graduated from college. They, my mother and father, both went through certain hardships to be able to do that.

Interviewer: Are you a first generation college student?

Participant #21: Absolutely. My parents, my dad stressed like sheep, cows, horses, corn, and that those are a way of life. But my mother said, "nope, not any more. It's now education, you have to go to school to obtain some type of college degree." My mom said she was in school for a little while, but she was yanked out of school, because she was needed at home for chores and stuff they needed to do around the house.

Interviewer: Was that elementary school or secondary education that she went to?

Participant #21: Probably elementary. She probably only attended the first year when she was five or six. She vaguely remembers her school days, so it wasn't probably even a year. My father, I don't think he has any memory of school.

Interviewer: Are you parents still living?

Participant #21: No, they are both deceased.

Interviewer: So it sounds like your father grew up in a generation where he felt more like the agriculture and the livestock were . . . ?

Participant #21: Yes, those were more important to him. Those are how he saw our way of life.

Interviewer: But your mother, it sounded like she had a little different perspective, she wanted to you to go out and get an education?

Participant #21: Yes.

Participant #22: My family always pushed me and my other younger brother to keep going to school, because they never got the chance to go to school. They were raising everybody else, so we're like the results of what they could do. Pushing us to high school and then going to college. We're both in college now. It's a matter of fact that we're going to graduate and earn a degree.

Lack of Family Support. Individuals who experienced a lack of family support appeared to be fighting against a lack of understanding about postsecondary education. The lack of support from family experienced by these participants made adopting a bicultural identity more difficult. They were often the first persons in their families to attend college. Such families were often caught in the dilemma of wondering how a child going to college would change the culture in the family. Participants would feel everything from hesitancy to outright opposition from family members. They reported their experiences accordingly.

Interviewer: Do you feel any resentment from anybody on the reservation because you're kind of immersed in this?

Participant #7: Just from one or two cousins that haven't graduated high school. I guess they're jealous, because I'm living here in the big city. I'm trying to do something with my life and they all have kids and stuff. They usually make snide comments when I go home.

Interviewer: Are you the first to come to college?

Participant #9: Yeah, of my family I'm still the first one. I'm the first one to graduate and the first one to go to college, but they don't really see it that way. They're just like, "you should be at work and not at school."

Interviewer: So they view it as a waste?

Participant #9: Yeah, like it's a waste of time and what not. But they don't know that I work up here and still go to school. None of them ever graduated.

Interviewer: How do they view it? Do they just think you're wasting time?

Participant #9: A waste of time. I should be out there working instead of going to school. They just see it as a waste of time. When I was first telling my mom I wanted to go to school she was like, "well you don't need to go to school, you should be at work." I said, "I needed to go to school, so I can get a better job. I don't want to work in the grocery store forever like you." I make about three dollars more than they do and they've been working there all their life and I'm not even really at a set job. I just work more and they get kind of mad. Yeah, it doesn't bother me; it's their loss.

Interviewer: How did you end up deciding to come to college?

Participant #18: I liked high school, but I didn't get along with my family. They still don't accept me, so when I'm down there they treat me like I'm [expletive]. When I was living with them for a year, I felt like my whole life was just taking care of the kids, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of my grandma. I had to be there when she came home and the next day doing the same thing over again. I saw my life going nowhere. So since I was 18, I had been out on my own in school, work, and living with different people.

Discussion

There are many reasons for the high drop out rate of Indigenous college students. Previous studies suggest that one difficulty these students may have is navigating the culture in higher education (Jackson & Smith, 2001; Jackson et al., 2003; Hill, 2004). This study used a qualitative method to examine some of the issues raised for Indigenous college students trying to navigate two cultures. The themes that emerged provided some valuable insight into the experiences of the Indigenous college students. The themes that stood out were (a) institutional support for transition to college, (b) racism, (c) types of relationships to native culture, (d) career issues, and (e) family issues. Each of these themes represents struggles and experiences that Indigenous college students face due to the demand of living in two cultures.

Persons of the majority culture are routinely exposed to the culture of higher education. Indigenous persons attending schools on the reservation or in border towns have far less exposure to this culture. The participants' lack of exposure to and experience with higher education can make the transition more difficult. In addition to overcoming the difficult transition to cities and towns where colleges and universities are typically located, these students' tribal cultures can make demands that conflict with educational demands (Jackson & Smith, 2001; Jackson et al., 2003).

Additionally, it appears that almost all first generation college students have to adapt to the culture of higher education (Stephens, 2010). Many participants represented in this study were the first in their families to seek higher education. Previous studies have shown that American Indian students may take a circuitous route to graduation due to this lack of experience (Jackson et al., 2003). This seemed to be congruent with the participants' experience in this study as well.

The participants' abilities to adapt to the new culture of higher education, while holding on to their native culture posed a unique challenge. They expressed concern and worry that they would not be able to find an appropriate balance between the two cultures. In some cases, the fear of losing one's culture kept participants from fully engaging in their university, while others gained a new appreciation for their native culture by attending a university.

The primary finding of this study dealt with the importance of a developing a bicultural identity. For Indigenous students the transition to the culture of higher education carries with it the potential of loss of their native culture. Going to college frequently requires leaving the reservation or home environment where native culture is the strongest. Additionally, most higher education is based on European ideals and traditions that do not always mix well with native cultures. Transitioning to the culture of higher education and subsequent transitions into the workplace may lead to a loss of connection with native culture. Many participants attempted to adapt to this new culture, while maintaining their native culture. These participants expressed feelings of academic confidence and motivation to graduate. There is some evidence that students with a bicultural identity have better academic achievement than students who identify with only one culture or with no culture (Hill, 2004). Other participants struggled to develop a bicultural identity and experienced opposition, both internally and externally. Those participants experienced difficulty integrating into the culture of higher education. At times the opposition from the new culture kept some participants from pursuing a higher educational degree.

Another important finding in the present study is that participants have benefited from going to college at institutions that support their transition to a new culture. Many administrators and professors from these institutions appeared to understand the unique difficulties Indigenous students faced when they go to college. These administrators and professors offered support,

appropriate help to those students who were struggling, and were willing to work with the students towards success, not against them. The administrators and professors understood that these students are capable, but they may need additional help to transition to the culture of higher education.

In addition to support from specific persons in the higher education institutions, the participants in this study benefitted from the institutional support during their transition to college. One way to facilitate their transition process was through a center or program such as a Native American Center or Aboriginal Student Center. The institutions represented in this study had established these types of centers due to their understanding of the unique challenges Indigenous students face. These centers provide mentors, tutors, advisors, social support, and a safe place for the students to gather and share their experiences. They often sponsor native cultural events on campus and work with the administration to address the needs of their students. Many participants expressed gratitude for these centers and found them to be supportive of their academic goals. Based on the results of this study it is recommended that in order for Indigenous college students to succeed, institutions need to have these types of centers and programs in place to help students develop a bicultural identity.

Another concern participants faced while making the transition to the culture of higher education was that the extended family system would also need to change. The present study suggests that students who receive family support for their transition to higher education make this transition more easily. It appears that some of these families may have already incorporated biculturalism into their family systems. These families likely have someone who has attended or graduated from a postsecondary institution. Participants, who came from a family without a lot

of experience with higher education, alluded to changes made by parents, grandparents, siblings, and other family members to support their decision to go to college.

The participants who experienced resistance or opposition to their pursuit of higher education from family or friends had a more difficult time at college. They felt rejected by their families and friends back home. Often, misunderstandings and jealousy would cause emotional, social, and financial difficulty for these participants. It is understandable that these family members and friends viewed a transition to the culture of higher education with suspicion, especially when it appears to lead an individual away from their native culture.

Many participants' college experience is complicated by racism. Racism is not unique to this group of participants or to higher education. However, racism experienced during college years complicated the participant's journey. Results from the current study suggest that due to the participants' unique cultural backgrounds, they often encountered prejudice, stereotypes, and racism that students of Euro-American descent do not. The demands of higher education are difficult enough without the added pressures and stress caused by racism. It seems that participants who had a more developed bicultural identity were better able to address situations that involved racism. Higher education institutions that have a population of Indigenous students could develop an educational outreach program for both the institution and community concerning racism and prejudice.

Finally, some of the participants' career and major choices seemed to be limited by their experience growing up on the reservation. Minimal exposure to vocational opportunities had a significant influence on the participants' areas of study and selection of career paths. Participants who had been exposed to a variety of careers both on and off the reservation seemed to have a wider-range of educational goals and career aspirations. Based on the results of this

study it is suggested that high schools that have an Indigenous student population could create more opportunities and/or programs to expand student's knowledge of careers and higher education. High school counselors and administrators could work together with former graduates who went onto college to create job shadowing opportunities and/or mentor programs for current Indigenous high school students.

Limitations of the Study

The researchers acknowledge that this study had some limitations. Findings are limited to this group of Indigenous students and are not necessarily generalizable to other groups. However, the consistency found across the interviews and the agreement between the researchers and the auditor regarding the themes suggested that the findings are valid. Another limitation may be due to the procedure used for conducting interviews. Using a semi-structured interview allows for flexibility and adaptability during the interviews; however, it may be argued that by not approaching each interview with the same structure could have influenced time spent on certain topics and coverage of relevant areas.

Additionally, it should be noted that the researchers had several assumptions coming into the study. First, it was assumed that higher education is important and there are factors that facilitate or detract individuals from accomplishing their higher educational goals. Second, the researchers assumed that biculturalism is a legitimate construct. However, there is a significant amount of research that lends support to the legitimacy of the construct of biculturalism. Lastly, the researchers assumed that the participants might not have extensive experience and exposure to the culture of higher education; therefore, developing biculturalism would be novel and important to their success with higher education.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study was an initial attempt to understand the viewpoint and experience of biculturalism among Indigenous college students, and could serve as a springboard for further research. The experience of living in two cultural worlds at one time could not be covered by one study. Future research could examine Indigenous students who specifically identify as bicultural and the affect it has had on their academic success in higher education. Continued exploration of biculturalism among Indigenous college students and the practical application of the findings in this study and future studies could potentially benefit future generations of Indigenous college students.

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Appendix A

Guiding Questions

- 1) How do you feel about your traditional culture?
- 2) What has the transition been like coming from the reservation to college?
- 3) What difficulties have you encountered in trying to come to college?
- 4) What has been helpful in your transition to college?
- 5) Tell me about your college experience up to now?
- 6) How does your family feel about you at college?
- 7) How would you compare your traditional culture and the culture of college?
- 8) What advice would you give someone who wanted to attend college?

Appendix B

Consent To Be A Research Subject

Introduction

This research project investigates Biculturalism among Indigenous College Students enrolled in post secondary education. This study is being conducted by Colton Miller, Dr. Steve Smith, and Dr. Aaron Jackson, (faculty and students at Brigham Young University). You were selected to participate because you are a Native American student currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution.

Procedures

You will be asked to do an interview with a qualified researcher. This interview will last about 30-60 minutes.

Risks/Discomforts

Participating in this study will only pose minimal risk to you, although you may experience some emotional discomfort or embarrassment when confronted with culturally sensitive measures. The investigators will be sensitive to those who may become uncomfortable.

Benefits

There are no known direct benefits to you. However, it is hoped that through your participation, further understanding of bicultural skills will facilitate further success of Native American students enrolled in post secondary education.

Confidentiality

All information provided will remain confidential. All data will be kept in a locked case available only to those directly involved in the study. At the conclusion of the study, all study material will be destroyed.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to discontinue your participation at any time. There will be no repercussions to you should you decide not to participate or to withdraw prior to completion.

Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Dr. Steve Smith at (801) 422-3035, or steve_smith@byu.edu.

Questions about your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact Dr. Renea Beckstrand, IRB Chair, at 422-3873 or renea_beckstrand@byu.edu.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will and volition to participate in this study.

Name (Please Print): _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____