



Native American warriors in education : journeys of persistence, stories from the heart  
by Florence McGeshick Garcia

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education  
Montana State University

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Abstract:

This qualitative study examines experiences contributing to the academic success of 12 Native Americans in Montana who have completed a doctoral degree. Twelve Native Americans were personally and individually interviewed to determine the influences, support, and/or experiences contributing to their completion of a doctoral degree. A review of the literature indicates that Native Americans are drastically underrepresented at all levels of education and employment. Themes emerging from the stories of the 12 Native Americans with a doctoral degree included: the importance of family, the ability to function effectively in two worlds (biculturalism), the support of role models and mentors, a belief in giving back to their communities, a desire to achieve, and a foundation of spirituality. A difference in cultural values between mainstream society and Native American culture is evident as they struggled with racism and poverty. It is recommended that faculty mentor Native American students, that faculty recognize the importance of culture, family, and spirituality among Native Americans, and that further research be done by Native Americans to improve the voice they have in their own education.

NATIVE AMERICAN WARRIORS IN EDUCATION: JOURNEYS OF  
PERSISTENCE, STORIES FROM THE HEART

by

Florence McGeshick Garcia  
"Waste Henumpawe"  
Good Woman Comes Out

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree

of

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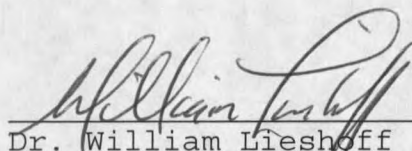
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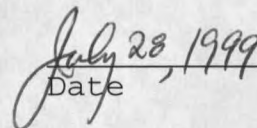
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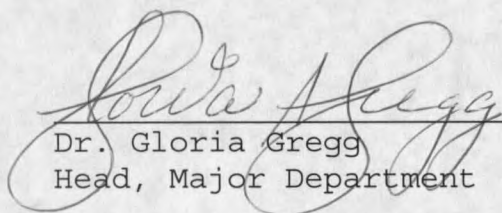
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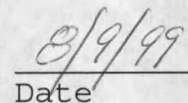
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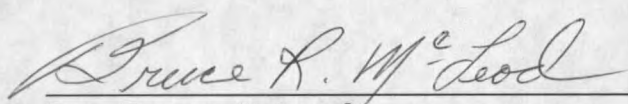
  
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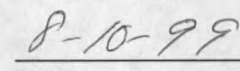
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## Abstract

This qualitative study examines experiences contributing to the academic success of 12 Native Americans in Montana who have completed a doctoral degree. Twelve Native Americans were personally and individually interviewed to determine the influences, support, and/or experiences contributing to their completion of a doctoral degree. A review of the literature indicates that Native Americans are drastically underrepresented at all levels of education and employment. Themes emerging from the stories of the 12 Native Americans with a doctoral degree included: the importance of family, the ability to function effectively in two worlds (biculturalism), the support of role models and mentors, a belief in giving back to their communities, a desire to achieve, and a foundation of spirituality. A difference in cultural values between mainstream society and Native American culture is evident as they struggled with racism and poverty. It is recommended that faculty mentor Native American students, that faculty recognize the importance of culture, family, and spirituality among Native Americans, and that further research be done by Native Americans to improve the voice they have in their own education.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Background

There lies in the "Great Society" a great void with regard to the minimal number of Native Americans who are represented in higher education both as students and as teachers. This historical pattern follows America into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has manifested itself as an enigma that is an embarrassment to modern education. Native Americans have been at the bottom of formal educational participation in terms of equality for decades. Despite monumental strides made to advance their formal education, Native Americans have consistently lagged behind mainstream society in the formal educational system. In fact, Native Americans have been so far behind for so long that no matter how quickly change occurs, it is not quickly enough.

History dispels and excuses the academic disparity between Native Americans and the dominant society with the philosophy proliferated by the superintendent of Carlisle

Indian School, Richard Henry Pratt: "Kill the Indian in him and save the man" (Adams, 1995, p. 52). American educators, missionaries, and lawmakers believed that Native Americans were uncivilized savages who must be annihilated, assimilated, or else saved through Christian education. This salvation began a process of oppression and cultural obliteration that lasted for centuries. To this day, "America's racial and ethnic minorities are grossly underrepresented in higher education and in almost all occupational fields that require a college education" (Astin, 1982, p. 1). Native Americans are the most severely underrepresented of any minority group in the educational system today. The disparity between Native Americans and Anglo-Americans continues, but allows for the hope that the situation in this country will improve in the new millennium.

Not until the passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (P.L.93-638) in 1975 (Bryan, 1985), were Native Americans given the opportunity to have a voice about policies and legislation affecting their lives. With the onset of this legislation came tribal institutions, such as tribally controlled community colleges (Stein, 1992). The concept that tribal languages,

cultures, beliefs, traditions, family, and elders play an integral part in the education of Native Americans (Rowland, 1994; Still Smoking, 1997) suddenly became significant in the perpetuation of the culture and in the lives of the people.

Retention is a significant problem in education, and it represents a bigger problem among Native Americans. There is a consistent pattern of high dropout rates for Native Americans in college and their perceived stress as they cope with and adapt to college life (Peregoy, 1991). News reports in Billings, Montana, conveyed the high number of Native American students who drop out of the Billings school district, a rate which is three times higher than the average U.S. dropout rate (Healy, 1998, p. 1A).

By comparison, the number of Native American teachers in the Billings school district is .03% while the Native student population is nearly 7%. This information has serious implications for attrition and retention within the Native American community, considering that only 2% of the teachers and administrators in the state are Native American, while 10% of elementary and secondary school children are Native American (Office of Public Instruction, 1998). It is evident that a most valued aspect of modern

society, such as education, has been limited to those in power. This denial of equality leads to oppression. But one way to overcome oppression is through education. The leaders in the fight against oppression must be those who suffer most. "The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption" (Freire, 1970, p. 39).

Montana is a small big state. The land area is massive and travel extensive, but the population is sparse. In this rural state, many people remain connected, are on a first name basis, and consider themselves neighbors, especially in the Native American community. There are seven reservations in Montana and Native Americans comprise six percent of the population.

Native Americans are part of a rapidly growing minority group, with demographers predicting that in the upcoming Census in Montana they will represent eight percent of the state's population. As the Native American population grows, however, the lack of role models in high school and college becomes more apparent. Less than 1% of Native Americans are faculty in the Montana University System (Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, 1998), and very few Native Americans are in administrative positions within the Montana University System.

When there are specific graduate academic programs designed for Native Americans--such as the Native American Graduate Psychology Program at Utah State University or the American Indian Graduate Psychology Program at the University of Montana--it is expected that increased numbers of Native Americans graduate. Generally, Native Americans take advantage of this opportunity since such institutions seem to have a commitment to educate Native Americans.

One example of institutions making an impact on the number of Native Americans in higher education is Penn State University. Over the past decade 104 Native American women received their doctorates in education and 9 were graduates of Penn State University (Napier, 1995). Montana State University-Bozeman is another institution which has demonstrated its interest in Native Americans. While the graduate program in Adult and Higher Education at Montana State University-Bozeman was not designed exclusively for Native Americans, approximately 10 Native Americans have completed doctoral degrees from MSU in the past decade (Dr. Nate St. Pierre, personal communication, October 9, 1998). Such programs make a positive impact by increasing the number of Native Americans with a doctorate in this country;

however, more work needs to be done with similar programs in universities across the United States.

Many Native Americans who are employed in higher education are in positions or departments where it would be most likely for the university to employ a minority, such as in Native American Studies, African American Studies, Hispanic programs, Multicultural programs, or certain grant funded programs. At Montana State University three of five Native Americans professionals are faculty in the Native American Studies Department, and at the University of Montana half of the Native American faculty are in the Native American Studies Department. Five out of seven (71%) of the presidents of tribal colleges in Montana have a doctoral degree and six out of seven (86%) of the tribal college presidents in Montana are Native American.

The disparity in the percentage of doctorates between the Euro-American population and minorities is so extreme that it clearly illustrates the lack of employment of Native Americans in higher education. In an egalitarian society, minorities would be receiving half of the doctoral degrees awarded in this country since they comprise fifty percent (50%) of the population.

### Statement of the Problem

The problem with education in America today is that there is a lack of representation of Native Americans in the formal educational system. This lack of Native Americans at all levels of education handicaps Native American communities by limiting their voice in the education of their people. While there are specific programs that make a positive impact on the number of Native Americans in higher education today, more work needs to be done to develop similar programs in universities across the United States. Native Americans must be included in the education of America's citizens.

As Native Americans are "left out" of the educational system, (as opposed to those who "drop out" or "stop out"), the poverty, health problems, racism, and oppression are perpetuated. Being "left out" is a concept that must be considered when discussing education for Native Americans. When people are omitted from the information and education loop, they are "left out." When people are "invisible" in terms of being considered for awards, opportunities, funding, jobs, or tenure, they are "left out." This entire process yields significant problems for all of society,

including abuse, increased crime, illiteracy, and high mortality rates.

The mainstream view of education is one that ensures economic and social status. Family in White American society means mother, father, brother, and sister. Fourth and fifth generation doctors, lawyers, professors, and politicians emerge from this society. An elite, well-bred, or wealthy person is groomed and indoctrinated from infancy to believe that education progresses from a high school diploma to a bachelor's degree to a graduate, professional, or doctoral degree. In this mainstream paradigm, there is no stopping out, no dropping out, and there are few alternatives to formal education. The concept of family and education is prevalent and structured in the dominant culture. While family is important, the student obtains the degree by him/herself. A person's identity in mainstream society means "American identity." Fourth and fifth generation doctors, lawyers, and professors have little issues with identity.

The American model of education is one-dimensional. When people in the dominant culture choose to pursue an education, the degree becomes their main focus. They may

not have the additional priorities of an extended family or a full-time job that Native Americans often do.

Traditional persistence models do not apply in the Native American culture. Identity is often a concern with Native American students, particularly with students whose first language is not English. Yet being bicultural is a definite asset to those who have learned to use their culture as a gift and those who are able to perceive it as such. If one's parents completed the eighth grade and the son or daughter graduates from high school, is there not persistence involved? If a son or daughter is the first in the family to attend college or to complete a bachelor's degree, is that not success? In Native American homes family means anyone who is considered as family, including aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and adopted family members. Family support is crucial to the college student. The family provides support, encouragement, prayers, and pride to the college student. Family relationships are important, and whatever happens in the family affects the student's education. It is common for Native Americans to continue their education while they are parents or single parents. One may even change careers several times before completing a degree. There is stopping out, dropping out,

hopping out, working, having a family, and participating in alternative types of education. Family obligations and family values are crucial in the pursuit of an advanced education. The result is that the family gets the degree, and the degree becomes a part of the family. This helps explain why it is such an achievement for a Native American to obtain an advanced degree.

Because education is the key to social renewal (Boyer, 1997), the very basis of societal change stems from our educational system. Society recognizes that "the less education one has, the greater are one's chances of being unemployed" (Astin, 1982, p. 9). Unemployment creates a plethora of economic and social problems. Therefore, when the educational system fails to acknowledge or address a problem, the problem increases or even prevails.

Sins of omission on college campuses are committed by not hiring minority faculty and women (Moody, 1997). Today inclusion and mentoring are doubly important for women and minority faculty. While the United States prides itself in educational leadership, it is also imperative that leaders work to diminish the omissions that exist in today's society. The time for action demonstrating the equality of minorities in higher education has long since past.

### Purpose of Study

The enrollment of minority students continues to increase at institutions of higher education and these minorities need a voice in their education. "As leaders of colleges and universities we need to learn how to educate minority students" (Ross, 1990, p. 12). It is important that educators and the public in general "take seriously higher education's obligation to serve" diverse students (Ross, p. 12). All Americans have a stake in the education of the citizens in this country.

Native Americans comprise a group of minority students with unique needs and cultures. Because of the nature of family values and the role of culture in the lifestyle of Native Americans, the traditional persistence model does not apply in their culture. "American Indians differ in persistence and educational attainment from most college students including other ethnic minorities" (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993, p. 26). Research must therefore examine the methods of persistence for this group. Examining the educational experiences of Native American doctorates provides a clearer understanding of the differences in culture and values in today's society.

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to examine the qualities and experiences that contribute to the completion of doctoral degrees among Native Americans, and 2) to determine if there are certain methods, strategies or circumstances that led to the academic success of these "warriors in education" and to continue those methods or strategies to ensure that Native Americans are encouraged to pursue advanced degrees.

"Warrior" refers to the Native American cultural connotation of the word. A warrior is a leader, one who has fought in battle, one who has counted coup, one who puts the good of the people before his/her own personal good, or one who has helped and defended the people, as explained by Ken Ryan, tribal elder and professor at a tribal college (personal communication, November 24, 1998). In contemporary terms, a warrior is someone who has achieved an education.

Unfortunately, the research regarding minorities in higher education provides little information on Native Americans who have received doctoral degrees and the factors that contributed to their academic success. Nor does it address the persistence that they maintained to achieve their doctorates. While there are problems with

the educational system, there are also positive aspects and success stories. Further study is required to address adequately the issues regarding Native Americans in education and to let their voice be heard.

### Research Questions

The research questions that were used to identify qualities that affect persistence and success among Native American doctorates were divided into several major question areas. The first area involved educational expectations, including early experiences in life, family influence, and achievement. The second area included influences in the educational careers of the individual, including family, environment, teachers and faculty, special programs, role models and mentors, and culture. The third area included obstacles or struggles in their persistence and success. The fourth area included what their plan was in regard to pursuing an advanced degree.

### Significance of the Study

This study is important because it addresses a topic that is paramount to Native American education. This study furthers the limited research regarding Native Americans by

a Native American. It also provides information to students in elementary schools, high schools, tribal colleges, and other institutions of postsecondary education to encourage them to persist in the ways that the doctorates did. It can be a source of role modeling for those students.

This study will also be important to counselors, advisors, teachers, staff, and administrators of schools and colleges who have Native American students. Faculty, staff, and administrators that work with Native Americans can utilize this information to assist students in their pursuit of a college or advanced degree. Finally, those with the power can have access to information that will encourage them to make decisions that will increase the employment of qualified Native Americans in administrative positions in all levels of education.

The small number of Native Americans with graduate degrees could explain why most studies of success in graduate programs have not provided separate data on this group (Harrison, 1997). There is also limited information on Native Americans researching Native Americans. It is important that Native Americans research their own people

to provide an insider's view to the interpretation of the results/conclusion.

Higher education is seen as a means for individual and social attainment, a way for people to improve their lives, a route to economic and political power (Astin, 1982). As Native Americans strive to improve their educational status, their lives will change. The dismal state of Native American affairs is by no means an insurmountable problem, and improving the situation through research and practice must be the charge of all educators.

#### Definitions

Family: More accurately used to mean "extended family" in the Native American culture. Native Americans define aunts and uncles as parents, cousins as brothers and sisters, and great aunts and uncles as grandparents. It is also common to have "adopted" relatives, though not in the legal sense. For example, one may have numerous adopted brothers or sisters who are not biologically related. Generally, the term is not used to describe the nuclear or immediate family. The value of family is described in the Sioux saying, "Mitakuye oyasin (we are all related)".

Giveaway: "A traditional custom of all Montana Indian tribes. It is derived from the Indian belief that people should share with relatives and friends who have done good deeds for them or whom they respect" (Bryan, 1985, p. 113).

Home: For the purposes of this study, home refers to the community or reservation where the participants feel a familial or cultural connection. Home is not necessarily where the participants live.

Native American: Persons indigenous to the Americans who are enrolled, who maintain cultural or tribal affiliation, or who identify themselves as Native American. Quotations in this study may refer to Native Americans as "Indian" or "American Indian" or "Native" peoples. The term Native American defines the racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics of the participants being interviewed. Native Americans are usually members of a particular tribal group, such as Sioux, Crow, or Cheyenne.

Potlatch: "A ritualized ceremony for the exchange of gifts and ...the establishment of social standing and honor. It is found among the various peoples of the northwest coast of North America" (Jary & Jary, 1991, p. 377).

Religion: For the purposes of this study, a unified set of beliefs about God. The practice of religion refers to a

particular faith that is common in the United States, such as Catholic, Mormon, Protestant, or Baptist.

Reservation: An area of land designated as a boundary for a specific tribe or tribes. To Native Americans reservations are not just tracts of land with physical boundaries, they are "home." They are home to family, culture, tradition, and values. They represent the last threads of a culture necessary for sovereignty. A reservation "Indian" is not defined by a physical boundary.

Spirituality: A value in Native American culture that is inherent in all aspects of tribal life. For the purposes of this study, spirituality refers to the belief in the Creator or Great Spirit. Spirituality involves the act of respecting and being thankful for what the Creator has provided. It refers to the idea that everything has life, including trees, rivers, and the wind. It also refers to the belief that we are all one, and that everything is part of the circle of life.

Success: For the purposes of this study, a term used to describe academic completion or high achievement. In the Native American society, academic success is defined differently from the mainstream definition. It can mean graduating from high school or being the first in one's

family to attend college, since that is a major accomplishment in some Native American families.

Tribal College: An institution of higher education serving Native Americans and other individuals. Tribal colleges have educational programs which reflect the needs of the community and have culture as their main mission.

Warrior: In the traditional Native American definition, one who has gone to war; one who has counted coups. In this study, "warrior" is a Native American who has completed a doctoral degree.

#### Limitations

This study was limited to 12 Native Americans who live or work in Montana who had earned a Ph.D. or an Ed.D. degree by 1999. The researcher interviewed at least one enrolled member from every reservation in Montana and included both men and women in the study. The interviews were limited to the first 12 Native Americans with a doctoral degree who agreed to be interviewed first in person and then by phone. The findings reflect only the 12 Native Americans with a doctorate interviewed, and their perceptions may not be the same as other Native Americans with a doctorate in this country.

## CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Background and Conditions InfluencingNative American Education

For thousands of generations, the American continents have been home to Native American peoples. According to Dr. Adrian Heidenreich (personal communication, March 12, 1999), Professor of Native American Studies at Montana State University-Billings, most anthropologists agree that Native peoples have inhabited this continent for more than ten thousand years, even before the erection of the Great Sphinx of Giza. Over time, Native Americans would occupy the Western Hemisphere, speaking more than 2000 languages, and numbering about 10 million. These Natives domesticated dozens of plant foods, hunted, fished, farmed, devised a calendar, developed the concept of "zero", and created architectural wonders in North, South, and Central America (Thomas, Miller, White, Nabokov, & Deloria, 1993, p. 26).

The original inhabitants of North America "had no conception of themselves as a single 'race', group, or people. The common label 'Indians' was in fact more informative about the visitors than it was about the natives" (Nagel, 1996, p. 3). In spite of the sociology and culture of Native Americans in this country for ten millennia, early American history shamefully omitted the existence of Native Americans. It was as if Native Americans did not exist prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, educators have continued to provide limited study of this diverse group of peoples. Textbooks today provide stereotypical and, at best, sketchy information about the Native peoples who inhabited this Hemisphere for centuries. Native peoples, however, know their history. Traditional Native American families know the stories and lives of their ancestors through Winter Counts, legends, and pictographs. They know from where, and from whom, they have come.

Society often fails to give Native Americans the place in history afforded other cultures and ethnic groups. For example, most educators have taken liberal arts courses and know more about ancient Eastern civilizations than they know about their own heritage or about the cultures of the land which they now inhabit. After America was "discovered" in

1492, Native Americans had to be at least mentioned in history books. Because Native Americans had been out of sight for so many years, it was easy for them to be kept out of mind for many years afterward.

When Native Americans were eventually accorded a place in history, they were lumped together as one cultural and ethnic group. This group was neatly packaged and referred to as either savagely pagan or stoically romantic. Indeed, Native Americans have been characterized as vanishing, invisible, and all but extinct, though certain tribes have met with extinction.

Over the course of 500 years, Native Americans have been discovered, annihilated, acculturated, assimilated, colonialized, paternalized, baptized, vocationalized, terminated, educated, relocated, reorganized, and all but empowered. They have been dealt with as sovereign nations, conquered nations, and quasi-sovereign nations. The federal government and Congress seem not to know what to do with this enigma of survivors. It is no surprise then, that Native Americans have wondered who they are and where they fit in a world that has been torn away. It is no wonder that Native Americans have experienced cultural dissonance and problems with success in the formal educational system.

Originally, the plan for educating Native Americans involved assimilating them by destroying their culture, language, and life. The fact that "Indians possessed the land, and whites wanted the land" (Adams, 1995, p. 5) was the basis for the ensuing governmental oppression. "The white threat to Indians came in many forms: smallpox, missionaries, Conestoga wagons, barbed wire, and smoking locomotives. And in the end, it came in the form of schools" (Adams, 1995, p. 5). As the settlement of the Midwest and West progressed, the need for education of the Native American became more apparent to the federal government. In the late 1700s the Continental Congress appropriated \$500 to educate Native Americans at Dartmouth. During the next century the Senate approved almost 400 treaties with the Native Americans. Over 100 of these treaties had some provision for education, such as teachers' salaries, supplies, and construction. The treaties authorized the government to provide "civilization among the aborigines" (Reyhner, 1988, p. 33). Boarding, trade, industrial, and mission schools became the vehicle to educate the Native American. The main mission of boarding schools was to take the "Indian-ness" out of students by depriving them of their culture and language and by

separating them from their families. The curriculum of trade and industrial schools focused on skills that were often irrelevant and meaningless on a reservation.

Mission schools sought only to increase the number of devout Catholics and Mormons, proselytizing religiosity rather than spirituality. Freedom of religion was the creed but not the practice. While formal education played a role in the damnation of Native American culture, it was also to play a part in its salvation. Native Americans began to realize that education on their terms was the key to revival of their culture.

Knowing one's enemies is the key to survival and even to thriving. Becoming educated in the Anglo-American ways became very important. In the words of the last Crow Chief Plenty Coups, "With education you are the white man's equal; without education you are his victim" (Cited in Bryan, 1985, p. 90).

After the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the population of Native Americans dwindled to about 250,000. This was followed by tremendous growth in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). But the ravages of war and the inconsistent governmental policies had left the Native American in a bleak state. Health conditions were terrible.

Infant mortality, tuberculosis, alcoholism, and diabetes were high. In 1979 accidents were the number one cause of death among Native Americans (U.S. Public Health Service, 1979). Today, two health problems that are preventable through education are major causes of death among Native Americans: heart disease and accidents. (U.S. Public Health Service, 1992). However, Indian Health Service is making progress in addressing the health needs of Native Americans.

Poverty is rampant on some reservations. "According to the 1990 U.S. census, American Indians are the most poverty-stricken group in the nation" (Bowker, 1993, p. 124). The average income for Native American families is about \$21,750 (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, p. 12). "Some of the worst poverty in the United States exists on Indian reservations, where unemployment sometimes approaches 80 percent" (Tierney, 1991, p. 37). Since poverty is associated with unemployment, it is not surprising that "Indian households have not only the highest poverty rate but also the highest unemployment rate" (Bowker, 1993, p. 124) of any racial group in the nation. Poverty and lack of employment affect the lives of Native Americans.

In Montana, "almost 16 percent of citizens live in poverty" (School-Age Children, 1999, p. 2B) and 1 in 5

school-age children are also entrenched in poverty. Furthermore, "the state's worst problem with children in poverty is in school districts serving largely Indian populations" (School-Age Children, p. 2B). In fact, "Indian-dominated districts have student poverty levels ranging from about 25 percent at Wolf Point to 61 percent at Lodge Grass High School" (School-Age Children, p. 2B). No jobs, poor wages, and limited economic development exacerbate the problems associated with poverty among Native Americans. "Research clearly shows that poor children are more likely to drop out of school than their advantaged peers" (Bowker, 1993, p. 124).

While poverty is a problem that can lead to more problems, economic development imposed by the majority culture is often in direct conflict with Native American values and visions. Years of strip mining, of timber harvesting, of farming, and of water development with little regard for the environment, have left not only pollution in Native American country, but a quandary created by deep mistrust of the great American way.

Education may be viewed as a means to end poverty. Generally, the higher the educational attainment, the higher the family income. Education is a way for Native Americans

to become empowered, but receiving a good education is not a simple process.

The Native American population is the second fastest growing population in the United States, second only to the Hispanic population (Campbell, 1995). In the last census the Native American population grew 12%, yet Native Americans make up only about 1% of the total population (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1997). Native Americans are a young population with a high poverty rate and educational attainment that lags behind the population at large. Data from the 1990 census listed the dropout rate for Native Americans was nearly 40 percent, compared to nearly 30 percent for all students. (O'Brien, 1992). In fact, in 1990, two-thirds of Native Americans had completed high school, compared to three-fourths of the total population. In addition, only 9 percent had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 20 percent of the total population; and 3 percent held graduate or professional degrees, compared to 7 percent of the total population" (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, p. 1-14).

"Despite federal efforts to assimilate Indians, to terminate their nations, and even to exterminate them, they have tenaciously and sometimes perilously held on to their

distinct ways of life" (Campbell, 1992, p. vii). Native Americans in this country have experienced failure in educational systems that are organized, administered, and controlled by members of a predominately Anglo-American society. Educational failure may be seen as inferiority by the dominant culture. This is an example of the difference in cultural values between mainstream Americans and Native Americans. Failure may not be defined for Native Americans the same as it is for whites and success may be defined differently too. There are many Native American students who work hard to obtain an education by leaving the reservation, supporting a family, and carrying a full-time credit load (Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996). Since real success is individually determined, each person must examine for him/herself the importance that is placed on education.

In spite of the marked progress of Native Americans in academia today, the truth is that they are underrepresented at all levels of educational attainment in this country. In 1992 many Native American college-bound high school graduates failed to meet criteria used to assess student success in college (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Native American high school graduates face a multitude of risk factors that threaten their enrollment in higher

education and degree completion programs (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Lack of financial resources, few role models, racism, a lack of institutional support, isolation, and identity problems are issues Native Americans face when considering a higher education. How, or if, these concerns are addressed greatly influences persistence. Struggle can become obstacles and obstacles can become barriers to their success.

### Identity, Family, and Culture

"If identity is the cognitive, cerebral component of ethnicity, culture is its heart and lifeblood" (Nagel, 1996, p. 43). Researchers sensitive to cultural diversity find that academic competence is associated with maintenance of Native American culture. "An ability to adopt new traits while maintaining a traditional perspective may be a characteristic of persisters" (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993, p. 37).

This nation's policy of governmental confusion, social negation, military obliteration and national oppression contributes to an identity crisis among some Native Americans. It is amazing that any Native Americans,

especially those who strive to maintain their cultural identity, succeed in a system dominated by the majority (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993). A Native American may know who he/she is in relation to family, community, and culture, but there is a challenge in knowing who one is in relation to a foreign culture into which one has been thrust. It is especially difficult in a society where success is defined in terms of money, power, prestige, and fame. It is particularly difficult in American higher education programs where learning is linear when one thinks in a circular manner. It is extremely difficult in a world where values are conflicting and discrimination is present.

The family is an integral component of the social structure of Native American culture. "Richly diverse and complex, American Indian extended-family networks are different from those of nonminority nuclear families" (Brown & Kurpius, 1997, p. 3). Family is considered second only to the Great Spirit, the Creator, Grandfather. "The family was not only the social unit, but the unit of government" (Eastman, 1910, p. 39) among Native Americans. Family was important because it was part of the clan, which was part of the tribe. In Native American cultures, wealth is measured by the number of relatives one has (Pease-Windy Boy, 1985).

Native Americans are taught to respect their elders and to cherish their children. Those values are sacred among the people. Among Native Americans there is always a relative who will be there to help. There is always a place to feel at home.

In the formal higher educational setting, it is expected that Native Americans take care of themselves without family and friends, and this often increases their feelings of isolation. Since cooperation is valued over competition, they are at a disadvantage in an environment where grades are awarded according to the bell curve (Brown & Kurpius, 1997). The importance of family cannot be overstated in the influence it has on the educational achievement of Native Americans. Family means life and the continuation of life.

Persistence is credited to strong family support, especially from mothers and grandmothers (Bowker, 1993). "Family obligations are paramount for most Indian students" (Tierney, 1991, p. 36). Psychosocial factors, such as family, greatly influence the academic persistence of Native American students.

The concept of biculturalism, being able to live in two worlds, is one factor that seems to be a common thread among

the success stories of Native Americans. What seems to work for many academically successful Native Americans is being bicultural, being able to make the easy transition from Native culture to White culture. A person who is able to walk in two worlds definitely has an advantage over a person with one cultural identity, particularly when the latter is thrust into a foreign world. Since Native Americans have found themselves in a foreign place that was once their home, they have had to make extreme social, cultural, and economic transitions. Sometimes the adjustment has been difficult and sometimes it has been nearly impossible. But being bicultural can be a tremendous advantage. Being fluent in two languages, knowing how to function in another culture, and having broad diverse life experiences are important life skills. The Anglo-American culture might benefit from this concept by learning more about Native Americans or other racial or ethnic groups.

One aspect associated with being bicultural is acculturation which has been defined as:

the cultural change that occurs when two or more cultures are in persistent contact. In this process, change may occur in each of the cultures in varying degrees... A particular kind of acculturation is assimilation, in which one culture changes significantly more than the other culture, and, as a result,

comes to resemble it. This process is often established deliberately through force to maintain control over conquered peoples, but it can occur voluntarily as well. [Garcia & Ahler, 1992, p. 24]. (Garrett, 1996, p. 3).

Levels of acculturation have been associated with educational achievement and other socially acceptable behavior. Four basic levels of acculturation that have been identified for Native Americans are adapted below:

1. Traditional--Generally speak and think in their native language; practice only traditional customs and beliefs.
2. Marginal--May speak both the native language and English; may not, however, fully accept the cultural heritage and practices of their tribal group nor full identify with mainstream cultural values and behaviors.
3. Bicultural--Generally accepted by dominant society; simultaneously able to know, accept, and practice both mainstream values and the traditional values and beliefs of their cultural heritage.
4. Assimilated--Generally accepted by dominant society; embrace only mainstream culture and values. [adapted from LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990. P. 638]. (Garrett, 1996, p. 3).

While being bicultural is generally seen as advantageous, the perceptions of how it affects education differ.

When academicians describe the difficult experiences of Native American students in higher education, the image of one trying to walk in two worlds is evoked. This implies that in order to survive and participate successfully in mainstream culture, Native American students must "learn an

alien way to walk, talk, think and act, behaving as themselves only when they are at home in the Indian world" (Garrod & Larimore, 1997, p. 4). This threatens one's identity and spirituality. Cultural identity and spirituality are interconnected to family, community, and reservation for many Native Americans. This web of relationships may push students toward higher learning, but at the same time, it tugs them back to their home community (Garrod & Larimore, p. 4). For Native students raised to think of themselves as parts of an interconnected whole, leaving home to attend college can cause intense feelings of loss and isolation. "To separate oneself from this intricate tapestry of interconnections is to leave behind the entire fabric of one's identity" (Garrod & Larimore, p. 4). Many Native American students do not have the same values, beliefs, and expectations as their peers in predominantly White universities. For example, "native beliefs about science... might conflict with what is taught in a biology class" (Tierney, 1991, p. 36). A student also fights with "the feeling that one must return home for specific ceremonies even it means a class must be missed or an exam skipped" (Tierney, p. 36).

The family is paramount. "Students are expected and-- to a large extent--encouraged by the institution and by the larger society to develop separate public and private personae and to pursue individual agendas" (Garrod & Larimore, 1997, p. 4). This may develop further personal conflict in students since commitment to the community is an extension of commitment to the family. "This value conflicts with the educational values of mainstream society, in that this Indian value requires a total life commitment to one's community" (Cross, 1991, p. 22).

The history of neglect and oppression of Native Americans in this country has manifested itself in a unique educational situation for this group. Some of the problems that Native Americans experience academically are linked to low academic achievement.

#### Problems Associated With Low Academic Achievement

Racism, a reality affecting social renewal, is pervasive in all aspects of education. Racism exists when one racial group denies access or equality to another racial group. One group may justify its actions by punishing, blaming, or ignoring the other color group. Racism is pervasive in society today and may be subtle or overt.

Education has been for the socially and economically elite for centuries. The fact that there is an issue of inequality in education today stems from racism. It is important to remember that Native Americans live in a system that makes them different. What other racial group carries an enrollment card which explicitly identifies their blood quantum? What other racial group is bound to a reservation in order to receive services limited to the boundaries of that reservation? What other racial group was not granted citizenship until 1924? What other racial group can boast a full-blood who is not eligible to be enrolled because he/she is not enough "Indian"? What other racial group has a family whose members must be enrolled in different tribes because some were born after 1960? To say that there is no racism in education is to deny the truth and thus prolong a negative lifestyle for all Americans.

"Racism on the part of a few teachers may be directly linked to American Indian females dropping out of school" (Bowker, 1993, p. 220). Nearly three fourths of the American Indian women Bowker interviewed in her study felt that they had at least one prejudiced teacher. Racism, or perceived racism, is evident in education. When Native Americans are treated unfairly, differently, or even

indifferently in school, the initial reaction is that it is because they are different. Because the obvious difference is race of the students, the perception is one of racism.

When students drop out, get left out, or pushed out of school due to racism, the racial crisis flows into higher education. In this country there is a "need for more African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, and Native American faculty and students on American campuses" (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991, p. 226). Efforts to improve diversity on college campuses have "focused solely on recruitment and enrollment, overlooking the importance of retention and success" (Altbach & Lomotey, p. 226). It has been the practice of some institutions to recruit minority students, but once they get to college, they are forgotten or lost. Native American students face this dilemma frequently and often experience isolation during their college years.

Even though Native American students earn higher SAT scores than either African American or Hispanic students, Native American attrition rates after high school are the largest for any minority. (Reddy, 1993). National surveys have listed the postsecondary dropout rates of Native Americans higher than the average high school dropout rate. "High attrition at the undergraduate level and low

attainment of advanced degrees severely restrict American Indian students' career opportunities" (Brown & Kurpius, 1997, p. 3). These effects are devastating to Native Americans.

Carol Juneau, Hidatsa and Montana legislator, states that the severe shortage of Native American teachers in Montana creates a serious lack of role models for Native American children. She commented, "of nearly 11,000 certified teachers in Montana, just 2 percent are American Indian and the majority of teachers at reservation schools are non-Indian" (McLaughlin, February 23, 1999, p. 2A). Over half (55%) of the public schools in Montana have Native American student enrollment, but Native American teachers and administrators are blatantly absent. In partial response to this dilemma, Juneau sponsored House Bill 529 to allow schools to give Indians preference in getting hired by reservation and some other schools, but the bill died in the House. Opponents of the bill felt that it reeked of reverse discrimination and affirmative action (McLaughlin, February 8, 1999, p. 2A). Carol Juneau says "It's a system from the outside imposing itself on Indian people. We have a long history of the government doing that." (McLaughlin, p. 2A).

Data on retention suggests that retention is a problem for most academic institutions in this country, and it is an even bigger issue for minorities. A recent report on minorities in higher education showed that American Indian and Alaskan Native graduates are less likely than white graduates to earn a bachelor's degree in four years or less (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

While lack of education may not be the cause of social, health, and economic ills, it certainly is related to problems in today's society. In this country today "the number of American Indians per capita confined in state and federal prisons is about 38 percent above the national average" (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999, p. 1). Native Americans are also the victims of violent crimes at more than double the rate of the general population (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999). Educating this country's citizens is one way to combat social problems. Education can be a proactive step for society, and an investment in education can result in a decrease in taxes, lower crime rate, and be a benefit all American society (Harrison, 1997, p. 6). Many Native Americans recognize that education is a means to equality and economic opportunity in this country.

The purpose of retention is "to insure that all students, not just some, have an opportunity to learn as much as possible while they are in college, regardless of whether they decide to stay or leave" (Tierney, 1992, p. 25). But retention must come from an organized integrated plan with the inclusion of student input. Tinto hypothesized, "when an individual is academically and socially integrated into a college or university, the result is a higher degree of commitment which in turn influences persistence" (Tierney, p. 24).

Retention is a concern for institutions of higher education because the retention rate for many universities is less than fifty percent. "The total rate of four-year institutional completion of entering cohorts can be expected to be approximately 44%" according to Tinto (1987). "Tinto's model maintains that the student is influenced by a wide range of experiences both prior to college and upon matriculation" (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993, p. 25). Retention also affects the cost of education. It is more cost effective to retain a student than it is to educate a new student. Retention becomes more critical as more students from varied backgrounds, including minority students, choose to attend college. Low-income students

are likely to be enrolled in institutions with open admissions policies and community colleges.

Personnel in higher education should not relate to students only on a cognitive level; they should also consider the student as a whole. Education does not take place in a vacuum, and neither does student development. (Perez, 1997). Knowing how to relate to students by considering what their background is, who they are, where they came from, and even who they want to be is of utmost importance. "One of the paradoxes of educational institutions is that they are assumed to be providers of opportunity, yet minorities do not always perceive of them in that manner" (Tierney, 1992, p. 79). At times, the mainstream notion of education is often at odds with minorities' perceptions and interpretations of educational institutions (Tierney, p. 79-80). Based on their perceptions and interpretations, minorities' response to education may not be positive.

Many efforts have been focused on helping the student become more integrated into the mainstream of the dominant culture and the mores of academia today. Tradition in conservative institutions has maintained the philosophy that a policy or system is appropriate simply because it has

"always been done that way." Many institutions consider certain methods of practice a rite of passage and enforce the bureaucracy because once upon a time their faculty had to do the same thing. One new concept might yield less work with more cooperation. "Instead of helping the student become integrated into the mainstream, we need to help our organizational participants--faculty, in particular--become oriented to their students" (Tierney, 1991, p. 38). This is not a radical concept, and in fact, it is a design that educators of adult learners and humanistic educators have been practicing for some time. "Rather than force the student to adapt to the organization, we need to develop ways in which the organization might adapt to the student" (Tierney, p. 38) by encouraging faculty to embrace the learning styles and lives of those they educate.

#### Positive Influences in Native American Education

One answer to the Native American dilemma in education is tribal colleges. Tribal colleges have been in existence for over thirty years. The renaissance of tribal colleges is one of the most significant phenomena to affect Native Americans in this century. The missions of tribal colleges

not only reflect, but demand culture in the curriculum. Tribal colleges were created to fill a void previously limiting the opportunities for Native Americans in the formal higher educational system. Navajo Community College was the first college founded by Native Americans for Native Americans in 1968 (Oppelt, 1990). Ten years later there were twenty tribally controlled colleges in this country (Stein, 1992, p. 150). The growth in the last few decades has been explosive. "Between 1989 and 1999, native enrollments nearly tripled" (Rave, July 7, 1999, p. 1A). Tribal colleges have made a monumental impact on higher education in the Native American community and in higher education. The tribally controlled colleges enroll over 10% of the Native student college population (Stein, p. 154). They form a national association known as the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) to impact legislation. "Tribal colleges are one source by which Native Americans exercise true self-determination to address the needs and problems of their communities" (St. Pierre, 1996, p. 26).

In Montana, tribal colleges provide valuable educational opportunities for all Montanans. There is a presently a bill before the legislature to help tribal

colleges educate non-Indian students (Billings, March 13, 1999, p. 2A). Tribal colleges recently achieved land grant status by Congress. Most tribal colleges are accredited and they continue to enroll an increasing number of non-Indian students. Several offer bachelor and even graduate level programs.

"Most instructors at tribal colleges are non-Indian" (Boyer, 1997, p. 32). While tribal colleges encourage the hiring of Native American instructors, the sad truth is that the "supply of qualified Native American faculty is still severely limited" (Boyer, p. 33), and the high faculty turnover rate is a great concern for tribal administrators. "One survey of tribal college faculty found that 60 percent of instructors have been teaching at the institution for just five years or less" (Boyer, 1997, p. 33). Because many tribal colleges face financial problems, they may not be able to pay as competitively as state institutions, and Native American faculty may be forced to take jobs with more financial security.

Tribal colleges are extremely successful in providing educational opportunities for Native American students in spite of severe financial difficulties (Becenti, 1995). This success has contributed to the steady growth of tribal

colleges over the past decade. It follows then that tribal college presidents have become the drive behind the success of tribal colleges. Presidents of the tribal colleges have been able to "articulate, plan, and establish educational programs which allow significant numbers of their graduates to continue in advanced studies or obtain employment after graduation" (Becenti, p. iv).

The success of tribal colleges is proof that Native Americans can and must be involved in their own education. Self-determination is a key to continued progress.

Other institutions are known for their support of, or at least interest in, Native American higher education. They promote recruitment or offer specific financial assistance for Native students. Some offer specific degrees in Native American cultural fields. Some conduct studies that further research in this area. Some seek grant funding that promotes the recruitment of Native American students.

Native Americans have persisted at Penn State. In fact, there have been nearly 200 Native American students in the graduate degree program over the past twenty-five years, including those who received master's and doctoral degrees. Penn State continues to recruit minority students and offers graduate assistantships to minority students.

A recent book, First Person, First Peoples, highlights the stories of persistence of 10 Native Americans who completed their doctorates at Dartmouth College. They saw themselves as coming full circle by using their bicultural ability to succeed in two worlds. Dartmouth College explored the crucial journey that many Native American college students face in becoming academically successful. Since Dartmouth has been somewhat successful in addressing the historical lack of educational opportunity for Native Americans, the college took a look at what it calls the "critical mass" of Native American students enrolled there (Garrod & Larimore, 1997, p. 10). Dartmouth demonstrated institutional commitment. Dartmouth has a successful Native American Studies Program which has a profound impact on the lives of Native American students. This program offers courses, research, and internship opportunities to students. At Dartmouth, and around the country, however, retaining Native students remains one of the biggest challenges facing college student support services. (Garrod & Larimore, 1997).

Dynneson (1983) examined the perceptions that Native American students have regarding counselor effectiveness at Montana State University. This research looked at variables such as sex, ethnicity, or place of work, to

determine if the variables affected perceptions by Native American students. Native American students expressed a preference for Native American counselors over non-Native American counselors in every variable pairing. Students perceived counselors of their own ethnicity as being more effective. While this has dramatic implications for the retention of Native American students, the truth is that the number of Native Americans employed in visible faculty, staff, or administrative positions is relatively low. This severely limits the persistence of diverse students in education.

TRIO projects, a group of federally funded programs designed to assist disadvantaged students, are another method of support for Native American students. What makes TRIO work for Native Americans is a relationship through personalized attention, follow-up, and a belief in the student's success (Donna Kennerly, personal communication, March 10, 1999). TRIO projects have an excellent track record in retaining and graduating disadvantaged students, many of whom are minority students. In Montana, there are TRIO projects serving students on every reservation. A goal of some Native American educators is to have TRIO projects at every tribal college in Montana.

Role models contribute significantly to the educational success of Native American students but studies attest to the small number of Native American role models from elementary school to college. One study on American Indian doctorates as role models examined various ways to increase access and retention of Native American students in higher education. "Several approaches are being tried: relevant course offerings, heightened cognizance of disparate learning/teaching styles, creation of American Indian Studies centers, and increases in scholarship or assistance funding" (Lintner, 1999, p. 46). In addition, Native American faculty can serve as role models and mentors for Native American students. But the number of Native American faculty is low and Native American students have few Native American academic role models (Lintner, p. 46).

Some studies regarding the success of specific minority groups note their clear sense of opportunity and obligation (Lintner, 1999, p. 48). Native American doctorates feel a need to give back to their families and their people. With the completion of the doctorate comes a powerful way in which to contribute to the Native American community. For Native Americans, "a steadfast tenet inherent in attaining degrees, at all levels of the academic pipeline, is the

belief in giving back" (Lintner, p. 48). The idea of starting cycles is very insightful here. Many respondents felt that it was their responsibility to facilitate an increase in Native American educators. "Their goal was creating an academic, communal, and personal environment in which other American Indians could pursue and attain their educational objectives" (Lintner, p. 48). An inherent obligation to "pass on" such an environment leads to the belief that one does for others what was done for you (Lintner, p. 48). Since role models are beneficial in academic success, increasing the number of Native American role models is crucial for Native American student success.

One program studied Native American role models. The Knight Scholars Program in Washington aimed to increase the number of Native American teachers through teacher preparation. Participants in this program saw themselves as role models and mentors for Native American youth. The participants were included in the process of planning and providing education, and students had an opportunity to see their people as role models (Whitfield & Klug, ERIC, 1998). Not surprising was the fact that Native American role models were instrumental in promoting the academic success of Native American students.

Similarly, American women of Mexican ancestry who had achieved a doctorate described themselves as role models for Hispanic students. Unfortunately, just when the playing field is leveling, "policymakers are implementing higher admissions standards for college and doing away with race-based financial aid and affirmative action" (Aragon, 1998, p. iii). These women succeeded against many odds. They discussed the importance of maintaining family ties, having high expectations, keeping cultural pride, identifying as a Chicana, being bilingual, and serving as an activist on behalf of Chicanos. These Chicanas were not defeated by racism, discrimination, or prejudice and were undoubtedly stronger for those experiences. "Each seized the opportunity to enter a doctoral program when it presented itself, and each expressed a determination to finish the doctorate" (Aragon, p. 77). These women appear to be risk takers who are empowered women with positive self-images. They also extend themselves to help other Chicanas follow the same path (Aragon, 1998).

It is difficult to replicate the experiences contributing to the achievement of the Chicanas. They involve personal backgrounds, individual experiences, personal choices, and high expectations. But society can

recognize that awareness and knowledge can improve human interaction among all people. Education can promote homogeneity, or it can teach people how to benefit from their diversity. While there are similarities among peoples, the differences can and do contribute to building a richer culture (Aragon, 1998).

A study at Montana State University-Bozeman indicated that role models are important in high academic achievement (Harrison, 1997). The impact of a lack of role models is greater in advanced degree programs since faculty are a major component in the educational process for students pursuing a doctoral degree. Lack of role models puts non-Native faculty in the difficult role of retention of Native American students.

Role models perpetuate themselves, and it is important for those who receive help to learn to give help. The employment of Native American faculty, administrators, and staff is critical in higher education to keep the cycle going. Native American role models provide encouragement and an experience of "having been there". They provide a relationship blending two cultures that helps foster an image of institutional support commitment to minority students.

Adult Learning and the Native Way of Knowing

Adult learning may be the link that connects formal education to Native American learning. Theories of adult learning include many of the practices of traditional Native culture and the ways individuals and groups function and thrive within a particular society. Mentoring, respect, collaboration, and facilitation are part of the values fostered both in Native life and in adult learning. Mutual respect, collaborative processing, and mutual trust are inherent in both worlds (Knowles, 1984). It is important to involve the learner in the learning process. This self-directed learning connotes autonomy and independence. The philosophy of lifelong learning and spirituality are key to a model Native community and those beliefs are reflected in the adult learning paradigm.

As in adult learning, Native philosophy teaches that learning takes place anywhere. One does not require a building to become educated and the "aha" moment is often never in a classroom. Native Americans have typically learned in a cultural environment that stems from nature. The roles of teacher and learner are interactive and learning is a process integral to the community.

In the Crow culture, "the knowledge, learning, and teaching that occur in the cultural practices of the Apsaalooke take place in informal settings where practices and customs such as the Apsaalooke clan system dynamics or social activities are learned. In this informal adult education setting learning associated with andragogy segues into pedagogy" (Real Bird, 1997, p. 79).

The adult learning process actively involves the learner in the learning process and learners are responsible for their own learning. "Adults have a vast reservoir of rich, emotional, and meaningful experiences that can be tied into the learning activities" (Conti & Fellenz, 1991, p. 18). Teacher and students often collaborate in the adult learning process. Also, "adult readiness to learn is stimulated by the social roles they have in society rather than the general requirements of a prescribed college catalog" (Conti & Fellenz, 1991, p. 19). The most important learning needs are among adults, including the decision-makers who will be shaping the information society of the future (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991).

While there are vast similarities in the foundational philosophies of these two educational models, there are some basic differences too. For example, mainstream adult

learning focuses on the individual, while Native American learning focuses on the good of the tribe, society, or clan. There is no real appointed leader in adult learning among the Anglo-American culture, but the Native American culture adheres to the definite principles of leadership. In fact, leaders in Native American culture are purposefully chosen and mentored. Leaders in the Native American culture do not practice a wealthy or elite lifestyle. "Native spiritual leaders just lived hard lives, and they died poor" (Jim Shanley, personal communication, December 25, 1998).

The similarities between adult learning and Native learning are striking, but their differences cannot be ignored. Both paradigms can be useful to educators.

### Summary

Empowerment leads individuals to an understanding of their relationship to the world (Tierney, 1991). It is a process by which individuals come to self-understanding of their place in society. (Tierney, 1991). One purpose of education is to help create empowerment of individuals through social renewal. Acquiring critical thinking skills is a method of growth and improvement.

A review of the literature suggests that additional research on the success and persistence of Native Americans in advanced degree programs must be conducted in order to provide a foundation for further studies. There is a need for a broad base of current research to help establish academic credibility in this subject area. It is true that Native Americans have been studied at length, but not necessarily by their own people.

Role models, mentors, family, the ability to walk in two worlds, spirituality, and a supportive institutional climate are components of academic success among Native Americans. Counselors, teachers, and administrators who are aware of this information can use it to promote education among Native American students at all levels.

Because Native Americans are such a small population, it is important that they not be lost or forgotten in the myriad of research conducted regarding other ethnic groups. Furthermore, "due to the small numbers of Indians in most institutions of higher education, they are an invisible minority" (Oppelt, 1989, p. 168). It is easy to neglect them, but the survival of this nation depends on the willingness of its citizens to cooperate and learn from each other's cultures.

## CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

Design

One definition of research is "the formal, systematic application of the scientific method to the study of problems" (Gay, 1996, p. 6). The goal of research is to explain, predict, and/or control phenomena. Two major paradigms in social science research today are the rationalistic or quantitative inquiry and naturalistic or qualitative inquiry. Each method has its disciples who preach that their particular method is the better. It is important that the researcher develop skill in using both methods and determine the purpose for, and intent of, the research so that the most appropriate method is used.

The major difference between educational research and other scientific research is the nature of the phenomena studied. Educational research often focuses on people, and,

therefore, it may be very appropriate to utilize a qualitative approach. However, most researchers agree that "it is considerably more difficult to explain, predict, and control situations involving human beings, by far the most complex of all organisms" (Gay, 1996, p. 7).

This study utilized a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research incorporates naturalistic inquiry to gain information, insight, and understanding that cannot easily be gained using other methods of research. Naturalistic inquiry comes from a paradigm of "multiple, constructed realities that can only be studied holistically" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). It concludes that inquiry is bound in values and operates on the assumption that inquiry will help the researcher achieve some level of understanding about a part of the world. This research is conducted in a natural setting since "realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, p. 39).

"Simplistically put, qualitative research is the collection and analysis of extensive narrative data in order to gain insights into a situation of interest not possible using other types of research" (Gay, 1996, p. 208).

"Qualitative research is much broader in scope and its

purpose is to promote greater understanding of not just the way things are, but also why" (Gay, p. 12). "Qualitative research involves intensive data collection, that is, the collection of extensive narrative data on many variables over an extended period of time, in a naturalistic setting" (Gay, p. 13). Qualitative research is necessary to gain insights into particular phenomena or areas of interest.

This study is also descriptive because "a descriptive study determines and reports the way things are. One common type of descriptive research involves assessing attitudes or opinions towards individuals, organizations, events, or procedures" (Gay, 1996, p. 12)..

Phenomena refers to events that are observable. The phenomenologist seeks understanding through qualitative methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and others that yield descriptive data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 2). "Qualitative methodology refers in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior" (Taylor & Bogdan, p. 5). The qualitative researcher "looks at settings and people holistically; people, settings, or groups are not reduced to variables, but are viewed as a whole." (Taylor & Bogdan, p. 6). While

all perspectives are valuable, the phenomenologist attempts to see and report things from the other person's point of view.

This study succeeded through qualitative inquiry because the experiences, stories, lives, and feelings of these 12 Native Americans with a doctorate could only be told through descriptive, living words. It is vital to see their stories through their eyes to gain their perspective about their success. Qualitative research uses descriptive data to narrate an event or the process involved in completing an event. It would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to attempt this study with other than a qualitative design.

"In general, the design of a study is basically the overall approach used to investigate the problem of interest" (Gay, 1996, p. 218). The design of this study included two unstructured, informal interviews utilizing general question areas to investigate the similarities or differences among Native Americans with a doctorate who live or work in the state of Montana.

A brief demographic form was used to gather basic family and educational information from the respondents (see appendix). The categories included tribal affiliation,

educational background, language spoken, age, family members who attended college, residence, and current employment. Details from this data were analyzed by the researcher to help ascertain similarities or unique aspects of attitudes, beliefs, values, and opinions.

### Sample

The sample in this qualitative study was selected purposefully. Since the sample is believed to be a "rich source of the data of interest" (Gay, 1996, pp. 213-214), there is a purpose for choosing the subjects in a sample. Purposeful sampling was employed to ensure that there was at least one person from every reservation in the state to minimize bias in the study. This sample was taken from a population of about 24 eligible Native Americans with a doctorate who are Montana natives. It was important to interview both males and females to determine if there might be significant differences caused by gender in their experiences. It was also important to have representatives who had received their doctorates out of state to determine if there were similarities or differences in their experiences.

While the quantitative researcher strives to maintain an objective, detached, scientific relationship with "subjects", the qualitative researcher is quite involved in the interview process. The researcher never refers to the participants in this study as "subjects", because of the relationship developed with them.

Unfortunately, one trend of research has treated Native Americans as mere "subjects," who rarely participated in the formulation of research inquiry. The approach often resulted in the members of a culture being regarded as "objects" of study (Guyette, 1983, pp.xiii-xiv). The necessity to develop a relationship with the participants enforced the need for a qualitative study.

"The intent of qualitative research is to select a small, not necessarily representative, sample in order to acquire in-depth understanding" (Gay, 1996, p. 213) of the sample. No researcher is brilliant enough to observe everything in a particular interview. "Whatever is observed represents a sample of what could have been observed" (Gay, p. 213). It represents what occurred on a particular day in a certain way. The researcher must listen, write, make thoughtful decisions, provide feedback when appropriate, and interpret nonverbal communication.

Every participant was an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe. The distribution reflected a wide representation since there was at least one member from every reservation in Montana.

- 2 Assiniboine
- 1 Blackfeet
- 1 Chippewa
- 1 Chippewa-Cree
- 2 Crow
- 1 Gros Ventre
- 1 Northern Cheyenne
- 2 Salish-Kootenai
- 1 Sioux

The various degrees conferred included both Ed.D. and Ph.D. Seven degrees were granted from institutions in Montana. The degrees received and the institution granting them are listed here.

- ♦ Adult and Higher Education from Montana State University-Bozeman, 4 persons with Ed.D.
- ♦ Educational Counseling from University of Montana, 1 person with Ed.D.
- ♦ Clinical Psychology from University of Montana, 1 person with Ph.D.
- ♦ Education from University of Montana, 1 person with Ed.D.
- ♦ Curriculum & Instruction from Penn State University, 1 person with Ph.D.
- ♦ American Studies from Washington State University, 1 person with Ph.D.
- ♦ Education from Harvard University, 1 person with Ed.D.
- ♦ Professional Scientific Research and Psychology from Utah State University, 1 person with Ph.D.

Demographic data yielded information about their age and gender. The participants ranged in age from 33 to 65. The average age was 46; 4 participants were female and 8 were male. Although 4 persons said they were bilingual or somewhat bilingual, only 2 of those persons indicated that English was not their primary language while growing up. Five respondents indicated that they are presently somewhat fluent in their Native language. Participants are identified with pseudonyms to respect their privacy.

#### Profiles of the Participants

Susan is a 33 year-old female from the Blackfeet reservation. She completed a doctorate in Adult and Higher Education from Montana State University-Bozeman in 1997. She considers herself a "reservation Indian," and does not speak her native language. She has a daughter. Susan has family members who have degrees and advanced degrees. She funded her doctorate through fellowships, the McNair Program, assistantships, contracts, and grants.

Marilyn is a 47 year-old female from the Flathead reservation. She received a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Montana in 1997. She considers

herself a "reservation Indian" and does not speak her native language. She has family members with degrees, including her two daughters and a sister. She financed her degree through employment, an assistantship, and funding from the Office of Indian Education.

Shane is a 52 year-old male from the Fort Peck reservation. He is Assiniboiné and is somewhat fluent in his language. He considers himself a "reservation Indian." He has a doctorate in Educational Administration from the University of North Dakota which he completed in 1980. All of his brothers and sisters attended college and several have terminal degrees. He has five children. He financed his education through the G.I. Bill, scholarships, and employment.

Robert is a 38 year-old male from the Fort Peck reservation, but is an enrolled member of the Sokaogon Chippewa tribe in Wisconsin. He is not a native speaker, but he has limited use of his language now. He received a Ph.D. in American Studies from Washington State University in 1998. He funded his education through scholarships and grants. He has daughter in college and a son in high school. He has brothers and sisters who attended and graduated from college.

Joe is a 44 year-old male from the Northern Cheyenne reservation. He considers himself a "reservation Indian" and is not bilingual. He has a wife and three children. He has several family members who attended college and who have advanced degrees. He completed a doctorate in Adult and Higher Education from Montana State University-Bozeman in 1994. He funded his education through a Kellogg Fellowship and the Native Americans in Higher Education Program at Montana State University-Bozeman.

James is a 65 year-old Salish male from the Flathead reservation. He is not bilingual and considers himself a "reservation Indian." He has a wife and four children. All his children have bachelor's degrees and one has a master's. He received a doctorate in Education from the University of Montana in 1981. He financed his degree through employment, a one-year residency, a fellowship, and loans.

Rick is a 48 year-old male Gros Ventre from the Fort Belknap reservation. He has a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Penn State University completed in 1992. He describes himself as a limited Native speaker. He has several family members who attended college, including his mother and sisters. He has five children. He financed his

degree through being a teaching assistant, lecturer, a research assistant, and employment.

Elisabeth is a 46 year-old Sioux female from the Fort Peck reservation. She has one daughter. She has family members who attended college and completed advanced degrees. She understands some of her language. She considers herself both a "reservation and urban Indian." She completed a Ph.D. in Professional Scientific Research and Psychology from Utah State University in 1999.

Caleb is a 36 year-old Chippewa-Cree from Rocky Boy's reservation. He has two daughters. He has family members who have degrees. He considers himself an "urban Indian" now. He completed a doctorate in Adult and Higher Education from Montana State University in Bozeman in 1996. He financed his education through a Ford Foundation Fellowship and loans.

Fred is a 52 year-old male from the Crow reservation. He completed a doctorate in Education from Harvard University in 1977. He is not a native speaker and considers himself both reservation and urban. He has one sister. His brother and sister both attended college and his brother had a professional degree. He financed his degree through a Ford Foundation Fellowship.

Patty is a 47 year-old Assiniboiné from the Fort Peck reservation. She has an Ed.D. in Educational Counseling from the University of Montana which she earned in 1992. She has four children who have all attended college, and two have advanced degrees. She considers herself both reservation and urban. She financed her degree through fellowships, employment, and tribal support.

John is a 40 year-old male from the Crow reservation. He speaks his language and considers himself a "reservation Indian." He completed an Ed.D. in Adult and Higher Education from Montana State University-Bozeman in 1997. He has two sons and two daughters. He financed his degree through the Ford Foundation, loans, and retirement.

One common characteristic which surfaced in the interviews was that half of the participants had family members who attended college or who earned bachelor's or advanced degrees. The family members were older brothers or sisters, a parent, an aunt or uncle, or someone who influenced them during their early years. For example, Shane has an older sister who is a medical doctor and another sister with a Ph.D. Caleb's father has a bachelor's degree, and Susan's aunt has a master's degree. Joe's brother has a master's and

Ann's uncle has a master's degree. Robert has an older sister with a master's degree. These participants remarked that having someone in their family with a higher education served as a role model for them. They admired their achievement and looked to these family members for guidance and for establishing higher goals. Having educated family members influenced the participants' success in higher education.

### Procedure

In a qualitative study the researcher is the tool used to collect the research. The researcher used forms to help gather information, including a consent form, demographic data form, interview questions, and follow-up questions.

The nature of the questions was open-ended to allow flexibility in pursuing the information. The questions were not leading and were asked in a conversational manner that allowed the participants to respond naturally.

The interviews were limited to those persons who had voluntarily given their consent to be interviewed. Three individuals with a doctorate who were initially contacted declined to be interviewed due to time, illness, or personal reasons. Therefore, the first 12 Native Americans with a

doctorate who agreed were selected for an interview. The names of doctorates were gathered through personal contacts, referrals, and phone calls to educational institutions and tribal departments.

Extensive and detailed field notes were taken during the interviews. The interviews were taped with a cassette recorder and the tapes then transcribed to ensure that the notes were accurate. This also helped determine common themes that emerged from the interviews.

The initial interviews were done in person. Two were held in homes, one in a restaurant, one in a hotel lobby, three in an office, and the remaining five at tribal colleges. There were physical reminders of cultural pride in each of the settings. Native American culture was reflected in the surroundings or personal presence of the participants. All participants displayed their identity and pride in their culture through Native American artwork, home or office furnishings, clothing, pictures, food, music, or literature. The physical evidence of being Native American was always present.

The researcher traveled to five reservations in Montana to conduct the initial interviews: Fort Belknap, Fort Peck, Blackfeet, Flathead, and Crow (where two interviews were

conducted). Physically visiting the reservations was an important part of the research. Anyone who is learning about the Native American culture must experience life on the reservation. The researcher toured several tribal college campuses while conducting the research. The surroundings were familiar to her.

The initial interviews were in-depth and each lasted from an hour and a half to over two hours. Only one interview was not taped due to its location and the lack of access to an electrical outlet.

The participants were comfortable since the interviews were conducted in their offices, home, or restaurant in their area. The researcher knew 6 of the participants previously, and had been acquainted with 2. This was the first time meeting 4 of the individuals. Because they were experienced, articulate, and highly educated individuals, the participants appeared to answer the questions openly, confidently, and frankly.

It is necessary to consider that there were answers that were avoided or statements that were not made during the interview process. Although as a Native American the researcher had the privilege of being a part of the culture, there is obviously a part of every individual that no one

can see or be a part of. Perhaps a participant was so traditional that he/she believed that the researcher was a tribal enemy of the participant. (Certain tribes are considered traditional enemies and were often at war with each other in olden days.) Perhaps a participant thought that Native American women should be at home raising a family and not pursuing a career or education and that created mistrust. Although these scenarios are highly unlikely, the possibility exists that these cultural differences may have created bias. Since there is bias in any type of research, the researcher acknowledges that biases may exist in this study. The biases in this study are derived from the fact that the researcher is Native American. The researcher knew half of the participants on a personal level and may have had assumptions about their experiences or responses, but the researcher did try to be aware of that in the interview process. The researcher solicited feedback from dissertation committee members regarding the ways to limit bias in the study.

"One dominant culture position regarding bias in research holds that only outsiders to a culture are free from the bias that could prevent an objective study" (Guyette, 1983, p. 15). In qualitative research, however,

there are advantages to being purposeful and reporting phenomena as naturally as possible. Being aware of the threat of bias is one of the best methods to minimize it.

### Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher continually makes thoughtful, informed decisions about the appropriateness of procedures and the relationship between the interviewer and the participant(s). It is not the role of a qualitative researcher to practice intervention in a given situation. "They want to know the way things are, in their natural context, and they make every effort to minimize the effect of their presence in the environment of interest" (Gay, 1996, p. 219).

Typical in Native American culture is generosity. Although the researcher was seeking information from the participants, the researcher was given gifts. These gifts were also done in respect as symbols of recognition in the culture. One woman gave a bag of sweet pine in Native American design cloth. One person bought the researcher lunch. Another offered a can of soda pop. At another reservation the researcher was given a coffee mug and a

watch with the tribal logo on it. The researcher felt as if she was coming home and was made to feel like family. The researcher thanked each person with a follow-up card and offered to share the results of the study with them.

It is important here to discuss the idea of *entrée*. Researchers may be looked at as strangers, intruders, or foreigners by Native Americans. Not everyone is invited to be a part of the culture. Since the Native American doctorates are an elite group, though not in the material sense, access to them may be selective. The researcher, being a Native American from Montana, had the privilege of being accepted into the lives of the participants. Because of this, it was easy to quickly establish a relationship with the participants and gain their trust.

The researcher is Native American, and there are certain advantages and disadvantages to being a member of the ethnic group studied. Being of the same or similar culture as the participants has both benefits and barriers. For example, the researcher knew the jargon that was used to describe terminology such as reservation, tribe, tribal council, sovereignty, and so on. This saved time and did not disrupt the flow of the interviews by having to stop and ask for clarification.

Since the researcher had been to every reservation in Montana many times, she was familiar with the culture and environment on each reservation. The researcher, being raised on a reservation herself, knew the nuances and subtleties that are part of Native American culture in the Plains area and even knew the brief histories of each reservation. She had parallel experiences to many of the participants and could relate to their stories. She also had common interests in culture and family and the common goal of wanting to help Native Americans. She felt accepted and not treated as a stranger by any of the participants, even the ones she had just met. But she expected that was how it would be in the generous culture into which she was born and raised. She was sensitive to socio-cultural issues and knew when to have a sense of humor and when to be polite. She knew always to be respectful. Since the researcher had common values and similar life and cultural experiences as many of the participants, she had a vested interest in the study. It was important to the researcher as a person, as a Native American, and as a professional educator.

There were some disadvantages too. Since this study was not a random sample, it may have excluded someone with

entirely different experiences from those interviewed. The researcher had assumptions about responses and had to be very cognizant of letting the participants give their own responses to the questions. Conversely, participants may have had assumptions about the researcher's prior knowledge based on the fact that she is Native American. The persons who were initially contacted were contacted because the researcher knew them or knew of them. There was only one participant who the researcher had not heard of or met, so perhaps the researcher could have made an effort to interview a few more strangers. Because there is not an equal representation of male and females with doctorates in the population, this disparity is reflected in the sample.

What was recorded was not objective. Because the Native American community is small, it is difficult to establish an amount of social distance. The confidentiality must also be considered.

Analysis began with recording and listening. The tapes were transcribed and the transcription compared with field notes. One of the committee members reviewed some of the tapes for accuracy. The information was sorted, examined for common themes, and conclusions drawn to summarize the data and information.

## CHAPTER 4

## FINDINGS

Introduction

"White people speak to tell the truth,  
Indian people speak to find it."  
Joe, participant

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the early and adult life experiences which contributed to the academic success of 12 Native Americans with doctorate degrees in Montana. By examining key life experiences and the major influences of this elite group, this study extricates the values, attributes, and attitudes aiding in the development of their academic careers.

Just a few decades ago the typical student in higher education was white, from a financially secure background, from an urban area, and was often a third or fourth generation college student. This academic situation has evolved in the last few decades and the typical college student today fits a very different profile. Part of the reason is that "more students from varied backgrounds, that

is low-income, student parents, first-generation, adult learners, immigrants, and students with disabilities are choosing to attend college" (Perales, 1997, p. 1). This change in society helps mold the future of adult and higher education. Some Native Americans fit this new profile of college students. As this study bears out, Native Americans are as capable as other ethnic/racial groups of completing advanced degrees. But in Montana, they graduate in fewer numbers and are not as likely to be hired as teachers, faculty, or administrators in public institutions. While there are academic role models in Montana, there remains a low number of Native American teachers in many Montana schools and an even lower representation of Native American faculty and administrators in the Montana University System.

Research has documented the phenomenon of minority underrepresentation in education for years. Data by Astin (1982), Lintner (1996), and Smith (1997) attest to the lack of representation by Native Americans at every level of the academy. The Native American value system, while placing a high value on education, does not value the monetary or material ideals typically associated with completion of a doctoral degree. For example, some Native Americans with a doctoral degree are in positions where their pay is less

than that of their White colleagues. Some Native Americans with a doctoral degree have chosen to live in rural or reservation areas where they are not a part of the daily hectic routine of an urban area with shopping malls, traffic, restaurants, and theaters. They choose to live among the people, helping the people. It is surprising that any Native Americans do earn a doctorate, not only because of the expense, but also because the process for completion of a doctoral degree conflicts with many Native American values, such as time, patience, respect, family, harmony with nature, and circular (not linear) thinking. This conflict of values creates an internal struggle that overshadows the external challenges associated with completing a terminal degree.

Native Americans comprise a whole dimension of learners in Montana with unique characteristics. Not only are they part of a minority group, they are a group that is extremely diverse in itself. Different tribes live different cultures. Some Native Americans speak their own language, but many do not. Some are full-bloods, most are mixed bloods. Some live on the reservation, about half live in urban areas. Some are enrolled in a tribe, some are landless, meaning they have no land base and are not a

federally recognized tribe. Some live their culture and tradition, other live pieces of it. Some are formally educated, others practice traditional Native American ways.

Education among Native Americans is seen as a lifelong process, a two-way process in which the roles of the teacher and learner are dynamic and interchangeable. There are significant commonalities in andragogy and Native learning, including the idea that learning takes place anywhere and everywhere, anytime, and whether we plan it that way or not.

Education is a catalyst of change--the tool by which society may diminish poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, and crime. Education is a way to self-actualization and thus, collectively, a way to a better society. Conversely, education can be a weapon. If misapplied or withheld, education can be the weapon used to continue oppression. Higher education can become the means by which those with superior or elite information and knowledge remain in power and keep power from the oppressed.

In this study, the journey that the 12 Native Americans with a doctoral degree embarked upon took an average of 20 years after high school. This lengthy journey required time, persistence, and commitment. No one in this study initially chose to begin a doctoral program. Patty

expressed disbelief in achieving her academic goals: "as an undergraduate I only saw until the end of each semester. I didn't have anything to compare it to. Even a master's degree wasn't in the plan." No one in this study embarked upon the journey because his/her father or mother had a doctoral degree, but they had a vision of completing something in life that was worthwhile and of helping their tribe and their people.

The interviews unearthed deeply held feelings not capable of being communicated through dry testimony or statistical data. There is more than information generated here. What was said and how it was said was important in this study. It is necessary to note the emotion conveyed by the respondents. Their passion, purpose, persistence, and power are brought forth through these stories. The interviews convey powerful messages regarding the life experiences and educational journeys of the Native Americans with a doctoral degree.

It is extremely difficult to separate every theme emerging from this study and very difficult to determine whether one theme is more important than another. The themes presented are so interconnected and imbedded in the culture that they cannot be neatly boxed and described. As

one bilingual educator describes culture, "we are born into a culture. As educators, we must consider the whole cultural fabric" (Barrera, March 19, 1999). Some aspects of culture flow into others and some aspects are part of another. There are no lines that delineate spirituality from family or biculturalism from reciprocity, but to understand them, they are presented in several categories.

Emotions and experiences are described through the very words of the participants. Associated with the challenge of completing a doctorate were a full range of emotions. Joy, pain, anger, pride, despair, sincerity, excitement, and love were communicated through the interviews. The participants appeared thoughtful about their responses and sometimes hesitated or rephrased answers. Two participants disclosed some very personal information during the interview process and asked that it not be presented in the study. The participants relived their stories through the interview.

It is important to remember that while words are sometimes not enough, they do help describe the quality of the experiences undertaken by the participants. The journeys of the 12 Native American "warriors in education" in this study take us into their stories, their lives, and their vision for a better life for their people. Their

words help us see the spirit of a unique and complete culture which began in this country over ten thousand years ago. These and other "warriors in education" help ensure that the future of the Native American culture is not lost. The themes gather into two major areas: cultural identity and influences for the participants completing a doctorate.

### Cultural Identity

Cultural identity was a vital aspect in the lives of the Native American participants in this study. Who they are, where they came from, and why they chose to attempt such a monumental academic feat are clues not only to their individual identity, but also to their cultural identity. Cultural identity is the essence of the ways that the participants see themselves and the ways that others see them. It is the internal and external basis for their existence, and the bond of their daily lives with their past, present, and future.

The participants were part of a strong Native American cultural network. Even if they were not born into a traditional Native American family, they clearly identified with being Native American. Even if they did not speak

their native language from birth, they continued to harvest the seeds of a culture sewn generations ago. The Native American culture was innate, the essence of their being.

In addition to their Native culture, the participants exhibited behavior and values learned through mainstream American culture. They learned early on that there was a part of their lives that was dependent upon another value system. They learned that navigating the mainstream American culture was necessary, not only for survival, but also for success.

The key to the participants' success stems from a strong cultural identity that holistically encompasses both the mainstream American culture and the Native American culture. The participants were able to transcend the realm of living in one world and learned that thriving meant living in both cultures adeptly. Living in one culture successfully made it easier to succeed in another culture.

#### Biculturalism: "Walking Two Paths"

Having a bicultural identity was a common indicator of academic success among the participants. The ability to function well in two cultures was a skill learned early in the lives of most of the participants and it served them

well in their educational journey. In order to understand adequately the significance of their success, it is necessary to examine some of the differences between the Native American culture and the mainstream American culture. The differences were described by the participants who often experienced cultural dissonance and who struggled through difficult emotional decisions in their journeys. Some of the differences were due to conflicting value systems as conveyed in the chart that follows.

| Concepts     | Native American values                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spirituality | Belief in Great Spirit/Creator. All things have a spirit, including animals, trees, and water. Spirituality is the most important aspect of life. Everything in life is cyclical. |
| Thinking     | Circular, not linear thinking. Holistic; the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional are connected.                                                                            |
| Sociality    | Family/tribal/community-focused. Diversity among tribes, but "we are all related".                                                                                                |
| Education    | Lifelong learning. Facilitated learning. Stopping out is common. Multidimensional, having a family, career, and cultural lifestyle.                                               |
| Family       | Extended family includes aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. Contact throughout the years. Family involved in decisions.                                                    |
| Money        | Money is not highly valued. Earn only what is needed.                                                                                                                             |
| Time         | Focus on the present. Things will occur when they are meant to happen.                                                                                                            |

The researcher is attempting to describe two very different worlds: the world of the predominantly Anglo-American, mainstream society and the world of the diversely complex Native American society. In these two worlds, the values of money, time, fame, and community are at the opposite ends of the spectrum. In these two worlds, values regarding family, success, spirituality, and reciprocity clash harshly amid the backdrop of American education. Because the Native American culture was of utmost importance to them, the 12 Native Americans with a doctoral degree were not willing to totally assimilate. They did, however, learn to acculturate. They learned the skill to transfer back and forth between two cultures and acquired the ability to live in two worlds. By straddling two cultures they overcame the challenges presented to them and took advantage of the opportunities available to them.

The participants agreed that a major advantage regarding their education stems from their Native American culture. The ability to see things from several dimensions and be bicultural was an asset in their academic endeavor. Not only did they have the benefit of transcending two cultures, they also experienced other tribal cultures. One participant recognized the power in this ability and said,

"Even though we're all Indians, we have different cultures and languages." The participants became fluent in several cultures. They recognized that maintaining their Native American identity in mainstream America is a complex process. Because they did not want to give up the Native American culture, their choice was to be multi-cultural.

Learning to adapt to another culture is a skill and, at times, a challenge. Their Native American identity is vital to their success. But insensitivity to culture, especially among their own people, is frustrating for them. "Native Americans don't realize that their culture is an educational system", said a participant. Patty struggled with values taught in higher education when in reality some educators teach one concept but practice another. She defined cultural encapsulation, "when rhetoric is given to diversity", referring to an incongruence in values.

As one progresses through the educational pipeline, the number of brown-skinned faces becomes fewer and fewer. It is a stark reality that there may be no other Native Americans in the classes or programs at the doctoral level on many campuses. Completing a doctoral degree can be a lonely process for some Native Americans who then experience learning in a cultural vacuum. The doctoral degree is

important to the participants, but most have a realistic attitude about how they use it. Shane explained what his degree means to him.

My doctoral degree is a green card. It lets you in the door. It's very important to have self-confidence, to be able to communicate on an equal level with people. You have to meet the standards others have set. If you are not prepared, there is a level of a condescending attitude.

The contrast of living in a white world and going back to the Native American world hit the heart of participants. Experiencing a new world led participants to value and appreciate their own world more. Robert reflected: "You learn to assimilate. It makes your cultural identity stronger by forcing you to address the differences in cultures. You have to develop your personality to be successful in both worlds". Susan saw herself "walking two paths" and living in two worlds as she progressed on her educational journey.

Being bicultural brought forth a dual responsibility for the participants. They harbor an allegiance to their community which enables them to perpetuate their Native American culture. No matter where they live, they feel a commitment to carry on their culture. Their ability to see both cultures encourages them to be cultural facilitators in

the broadest sense. Some participants initially thought that their formal academic life might force them to give up the Native American culture. But they found a way to have it both ways. They made the choice to be bicultural.

The impact of culture on the lives of the participants led to a strong feeling of cultural pride. This finding was so blatant that the researcher did almost not note it. Pride in Native American heritage was exhibited throughout the interview process. Perhaps it was almost overlooked because the researcher exhibits the same characteristic and it is such a part of Native American life. The participants spoke about being proud of their Native American heritage, but it was also apparent in their manners and environment. Pride in being Native American and proud of being a part of the Native American culture was extremely important to the participants.

Elisabeth described how proud she felt about being Native American even as a young girl. "I was proud to be Indian. When I got my Indian name, I was able to emerge as a child who felt very special about being Indian." Several of the participants commented that this pride gave them a real sense of who they are, which contributed to a positive self-concept and gave them confidence in their abilities.

James gave this example as he spoke in a loud voice. "I am proud of my culture. My parents said, 'when they ask you who you are, you tell them you're Indian and proud of it'!"

Some participants came from mixed Native American cultures, but generally identified with one particular tribe. It was meaningful to know ancestral heritage, including heritage that was not totally Native American. Marilyn gave this example. "My father is proud of his Indian and Scotch heritage...I have always known who I am. I am very grateful for my family members who celebrated who they were." This sense of pride in their culture was important in maintaining their identity and contributed to their academic success. They had a mission to carry on their culture and one way to do that was to demonstrate it through their pride.

Spirituality: "On the Right Path"

Spirituality is a value intrinsic to the Native Americans in this study. Spirituality is giving credit and honor to the Great Spirit, the Creator, the Grandfather of all Native American people. Spirituality means living the life that the Great Spirit has blessed the people with. It means being respectful of all things, especially the elders

and the children. It means taking care of Mother Earth and not abusing any of the gifts that She has provided. It means acknowledging the Creator in every aspect of one's life. Spirituality is sometimes demonstrated through prayer. The first Native American medical doctor, Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa), reflected on his early Sioux teachings and the ultimate importance of prayer and recognition of the Creator. "In the life of the Indian there was only one inevitable duty,--the duty of prayer--the daily recognition of the Unseen and Eternal. His daily devotions were more necessary to him than daily food" (Eastman, 1910, p. 45-46). Spirituality means being grateful and humble. The tradition of prayer and spirituality is still carried on today. One of the participants, Shane, described how he learned to pray in his culture.

You are directed to pray and we pray in concentric circles. The first thing you pray for is wisdom and strength and courage. Then pray for your immediate family, extended family, and your people. Then all the other things you are related to. It very much strengthens the idea of being related.

Spirituality is an inextricable value among traditional Native American people. It is the core of the culture, like

water, air, or other daily necessities of life. The 12 participants, no matter how bicultural or assimilated they became, continued to speak about the value of spirituality. At times, the experience of living in a foreign world gave them the desire to further explore their Native American culture. Susan said, "going away to college has made me start looking for my spirituality, traditions and culture. I didn't sacrifice my heritage; it (college) brought me back to search for it". Having to experience a foreign lifestyle reinforced their choice to value Native American spirituality.

Some participants saw spirituality as a purely Native American concept because they had experienced spirituality through their culture from birth. They were the more traditional Native American participants. Elisabeth stated, "It was difficult being away. Yet having evolved enough spiritually to trust that I would find support. You are on the right path when everything comes together for you even spiritually." That kind of belief comes from having spirituality inherent in the culture.

Spirituality surfaced sometimes in people's lives as religion. Joe spoke about going to a Catholic boarding school and said he always "believed in God." He expressed

that he felt provided for even though his family was poor. Robert remembers being an altar boy and learned "rules for life." Now he continues his spiritual belief in the Native American way.

Marilyn acknowledged that spirituality was a reason for her success.

Spirituality is a big focus in my life from birth. I have a good sense of being here for a short time. I was taught to use the gifts that the world gives us. That was instrumental in my success.

Joe worked on his dissertation while becoming educated about his Cheyenne culture. As he interviewed the elders for his qualitative case study, the elders in his tribe became his traditional teachers and mentors. The Cheyenne tradition and culture was his curriculum. His "grade" is measured every day in how he lives his life. Joe spoke about his dissertation with intensity and feeling from his heart.

I visited with the Sacred Hat Keeper. He blessed what I was going to do. The Cheyenne educational philosophy is just as viable and has profound ways that are not even acknowledged. I was spiritual. I always believed in God. The more I became involved in the Cheyenne way, the more I wanted to know. It is gentle, based on love.

The concept of learning and lifelong learning emerged as part of spirituality. Although the participants chose to be

formally educated, they also appreciated the learning that comes from and with life itself. They learned how to learn. Elisabeth remarked, "learning is the most important aspect of education and not just academically--about self, effect on others. They all factor in as I evolved in terms of my degree." Learning was part of their education.

Robert reflected on his learning in this way. "I think learning is an ongoing thing--like a fiction novel. You know it's not real, but it stimulates the mind. You can learn more from a novel than you can from a textbook." The participants agreed that they learned more than just content or curriculum during their educational journeys.

There is also the aspect of learning in a non-formal setting. Learning occurs in many ways. Learning about a traditional past and culture that was not possible in one's youth is as complex and fruitful as formal education, according to one participant. Shane commented that, "I thought it (learning about my culture) was highly educational, probably just as educational as college."

Joe discussed learning about Native American culture during his dissertation and was thoughtful as he carefully chose his words.

Lessons that are important are transacted in a certain way, a certain manner, in a certain disposition [in the Cheyenne educational philosophy]. Knowledge takes sacrifice and time, such as a vision quest. It is not a body of facts. If one succumbs to the world with sincerity and dedication, the world will teach you. All living things have profound knowledge. Knowledge is a spiritual thing. The first part of education is in books, then it must be from the heart and mind, spiritually.

Spirituality is the most important value in the lives of the participants and the center of their lives. Spirituality is the reason that they were able to live their Native American culture in a modern mainstream American world. The participants continue to feel, think, and be spiritual in their daily lives.

Reciprocity: "Giving Back"

Innate in spirituality is the value of giving back or practicing reciprocity. Generosity and giving are inherent in Native American culture. Plains tribes have giveaways as a traditional aspect of their culture to recognize personal achievements. Northwestern Native Americans hold a ritual called a potlatch where they give goods and foods to mark significant events (Jary & Jary, 1991). An extension of the value of giving involves giving back. From birth, Native

Americans are taught that what one gives, one receives in return. "It will come back to you" is a mantra the researcher remembered from her childhood and the researcher knew that "it" could be good or bad.

In giving back, an individual increases the chances of the entire group or tribe flourishing. Giving back is an altruistic concept. When one person has been helped, it is an obligation, a responsibility, and a way of life, for that person to help others. It is part of the cycle, the circle of life.

Giving back became a motivator and a reason for the Native Americans with a doctoral degree to persist. They felt an obligation to give back to their family, tribe, or community. It completely reinforces the idea that one does not achieve something alone. John described wanting to give back to his community.

I want to help other Indian people. This is just not for me. It is for my family and my people and community. My people made me accomplish higher education. I did it for them. If I did it for me, I would probably be rich at some \$100,000 job, prostituting my culture without respect.

Robert spoke of completing his doctorate as a way to give back to his tribe. He reflected on his academic persistence as a means to give back to those who had supported him.

My degree compelled me to think about what I wanted to do for my tribe. I never expected education to get me a job but to put me on an equal footing, not me personally, but my tribe. I felt compelled to do something meaningful. I did it for my tribe.

Some participants looked at their Native Americans with a doctoral degree as a way to implement change in their home communities. Fred commented, "I had an obligation to go back. Maybe I could help change things. I fought as hard as I could for Indian people." He continues to fight by using his degree. Patty's intent in pursuing her doctorate was to cause change for American Indian students. Her desire for a doctorate was to "secure a position to implement change, such as a Dean or at the administrative level in education."

The participants referred to the reservation as home even if they had not lived there for years. Home is where the family still live. Home is where the children and elders still live. Home is where they had learned to be Native American, but home must be protected. Patty added, "I cannot be what I am today without them. I want to use my knowledge to make the path easier for them. My role allows them to exist. This serves to protect our ways, our ties." Giving back allows the participants to practice a circular

pattern of values, while ensuring the perpetuation of their culture. Giving back makes their success meaningful.

It is worth noting that all 12 participants who were interviewed are working among, with, and for Native American tribes. They followed the practice that they had learned as part of their culture. Their obligation to give back dictates that they bring their knowledge, skills, and resources back to Native American people. Giving back was important enough for them to pursue their careers on or near the reservations. While this limits their ability to secure a lucrative job or to attain a position desirable in mainstream society, they have set their standards about what is important to them. Since giving back is important, they live and work in areas that allows them to contribute to their people and their communities.

#### Racism and Poverty: "Hurdles"

The participants had struggles along the way of their educational journey. The obstacles they encountered did not prevent them from achieving their goal. Two obstacles were characteristic of the participants in this study. Racism and poverty are discussed here from their point of view.

Racism, or perceived racism, was a problem mentioned by a majority of the participants. Racism is a behavior that is defined as treating a particular group a certain way based on their color or race. This treatment is unequal, unfair, or illegal depending on the circumstance. Racism may be termed prejudice or discrimination, but racism is defined only in terms of color or race. Certain incidents of racism made a severe enough impact on some participants' lives to be brought forth here. Racism, or perceived racism, and prejudice were at times a negative motivator for educational attainment. The turning point in Rick's education occurred was when he was teaching. He recognized that the Native American students in his school were not doing well academically and conveyed that to the principal. The principal replied, "this is normal for Indians." The principal's attitude aggravated Rick and he became angry, but it motivated him to return to college. He eventually completed his doctorate and continues his passion working with Native American students.

Another participant experienced secondary racism, or racism affecting someone so close that it was felt by the participant many years later. John explained that he was steered toward higher education by his parents so that he

wouldn't have to endure the hardships and discrimination that his father did. His father only completed seventh grade and "he was stoned out of school...He was called a "dirty, stinkin' little Indian kid. He showed me the scars on his head from being stoned."

It is important to recognize that mainstream America does not always recognize certain behaviors as racist or prejudiced, but they can be perceived that way to a racial or ethnic minority. Regarding Susan's academic ability, it was assumed by her peers or colleagues that she was not able to achieve on her own merit. Their perception was that she got special treatment because of her race. She interpreted that to mean that she was not capable of succeeding academically. She emotionally described it this way:

For most of my schooling the obstacle was that I was Indian... I got some funding, but it wasn't on my abilities, it was because I was Indian... I was told during my bachelor's, "You won't have a problem with funding, or finding a job, cause you're Indian". There was institutional racism. They were talking diversity, but not walking it. It got very exhausting trying to educate the educators.

Marilyn had a similar experience.

If I wouldn't have been a tribal member, I wouldn't have been accepted to the Clinical Psychology program. For the first year I waited for someone to tap me on the shoulder and say, "We don't know how you were admitted. We made a

mistake." I believe that I was accepted because of my culture.

Robert spoke of his experience regarding racism with some bitterness. He was not initially prepared for the icon of higher education to be a field of discriminatory actions.

I tried law school. I was one of two Indians in the school. One professor asked what I was doing for the summer. I said I was going to school. He said "That's good. You Indians have to stay on the payroll". It depressed me. It was pure racism. Racism was a hurdle I didn't totally make it over.

Racism was definitely an obstacle that affected the academic experiences of the participants. But in some cases it was used as a motivation to persist.

One participant stated that "being able to dispel historic myths about Indians being uneducable" was important. Another participant recognized that being Native American gave an appreciation and understanding for all people who are struggling.

Another struggle had to do with financial difficulties. While many students in higher education experience lack of funding, the participants in this study spoke of limited financial resources from a different dimension. Several had lived in poverty from childhood.

Poor people have a higher attrition rate than the general population, have a higher crime rate than the general population, and have a higher mortality rate than the general population. While several of the participants in this study stated that they came from poor economic backgrounds, they managed to beat the odds associated with poverty. They grew up in families that were financially poor, and they matter-of-factly acknowledged living poor. Several of them beat the odds associated with poverty by continuing to remember the poverty in their youth. Marilyn communicated her feelings about being poor as she was growing up. "We were very poor. We were on welfare. I remember being cold, and not having enough to eat. Part of that is what prompted me (to pursue an education). I hated being poor!" Such feelings can become a great motivator for either positive or negative behavior.

Robert lived in a one-bedroom house with eight brothers and sisters until he was 7 years old. His family did not have running water until he started first grade. Life was hard in some ways for him and he remembers growing up poor. A little better lifestyle followed him through his college years but he remembers, with resentment, working late in a campus kitchen for little money to help support his family.

Shane had a more accepting view about his lack of money. He stated that while he always has money problems he can always live without money. He can also live with whatever money he has. This philosophy helps him see what he feels is really important about life. It is not likely that he will make lots of money on the reservation.

While the Native Americans in this study were able to surmount the obstacle of lack of funding and limited financial resources, they did struggle. Several participants could have finished their degrees earlier, but they had to take time out to work to support themselves and/or their families. Some are still paying their student loans, some drew out their retirement, and some worked full-time jobs to survive. James had a family to feed and commented that he did not know "where the groceries were coming from" at times. Financial assistance is necessary to pursue minimal education and it becomes increasingly more important as the education accrues. The financial burden of earning a doctoral degree was always present for the participants in this study.

What must be considered here is the little value placed on material and financial resources in the Native American community. Money is not valued the same in Native American

culture as it is in the American world. More money was not a motivation for these individuals to pursue college, but not wanting to be poor may have had an influence on their choices about a particular lifestyle.

The Native Americans with a doctoral degree continue to put money lower on their list of goals and purpose in life. Most have jobs that do not pay what they might earn in California or New York. When the people around are poor, when family is poor, when one's lifestyle is simple, money doesn't mean as much. Many of the Native Americans with a doctoral degree came from a poor economic background and worked hard to feel secure in life. Now they do not have to worry that their children will be cold or hungry or homeless. The value of money is in the ways they perceive it can help their families. The participants learned to be strong in hard times and to work hard for what is important to them.

Lack of adequate funding is not the most significant obstacle facing Native Americans in higher education, but it is the most common. The duration of pursuing a doctoral degree while supporting a family was a major concern for a majority of the participants. Not being able to provide adequate family support was an added strain.

Despite racism, struggles with identity, and economic hardships, the participants chose to persist in their pursuit of a goal that was remarkable. They accomplished a tremendous achievement despite the odds against doing so.

### Influences in Attaining the Doctorate

There are attributes shared by the 12 Native Americans in this study from Montana who have earned a doctoral degree. Most of these participants shared the same type of experiences and had similar cultural orientations, which undoubtedly influenced their decisions in life. As a result, they developed common qualities which surfaced through the interviews in this study. They are presented here to help paint a picture and tell a story about their lives. This serves to describe the process involved in their completion of a doctoral degree.

### Achievement and Access

The desire to achieve is a quality that connotes exceeding or surpassing others. A desire to achieve is an attribute that distinguishes the Native Americans with a doctoral degree in Montana from other Native Americans.

This attribute was common of participants in this study. One participant described feeling "different" and talked about liking school. The ability to learn, to do well academically, and to enjoy learning is a part of achievement and excellence. This desire to excel made an impact on their decision to pursue an education and in lives that they now lead.

Several participants described liking school at an early age. Some were in honor society in high school and on the honor roll. A few participants held offices in student government or clubs. Others were involved in activities or were cheerleaders. Some described wanting to go to college and thinking that higher education was important. They talked about excelling in school.

Not every participant had family members who attended college. In fact, one participant was the first in his family to attend college. "I was very proud to have achieved a certain amount of success by graduating. It was the first college degree on either side of my family." Two participants had a parent who did not even graduate from high school. Having an older family member with an education was indicative of academic orientation and valuing formal education. Because the family valued education, the

participants learned to value education. James liked school and said, "coursework was never an obstacle. I didn't have a hard time in school. I was elected president of the student body in college." He added that before he got married he was never on the honor roll. But after he got married, he was always on the honor roll. That exemplifies the responsibility that was characteristic of him. It also gives a clue to the importance of family, which will be addressed in the next section.

Although the concept of the achievement and the desire to excel emerged from the stories of several participants, not every participant had the experience of seeing education as something that was to be attained. This exception indicates hidden potential and extreme persistence in one participant who achieved his doctoral degree. As Joe explained:

I graduated about in the middle of my class. I flunked second grade because I was left-handed and I was forced to use my right hand. I endured school. I didn't have any intention of achieving what I have.

Access, or having experiences associated with higher education or in higher education settings, seems to be another factor in the success of the participants. Several

participants had the opportunity to work in higher education, in universities or tribal colleges in Montana. Working in that environment enforced the idea that they could pursue advanced degrees. They had access to faculty or administrators who could mentor them and access to information about the process of higher education. They were able to make connections with other highly educated Native Americans and form collegial relationships with them. They also had experiences mentoring other Native American students and learned what works and what hinders them. They were able to use those decision-making and problem-solving skills themselves. They became familiar with the system of higher education and comfortable with the process. Access and being comfortable with the process opened the doors for them to pursue a doctoral degree.

Location was not identified as an obstacle, but it was a factor in the participants' decisions about where they would attend college. Three participants said they were admitted to Dartmouth, the University of California at Los Angeles, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Being far away from home meant also being away from family and culture. Most participants chose to remain closer to their roots, to their homes, to their families, and to their

culture. They were willing to experience a foreign world, but not at the expense of losing themselves in the process.

### Family as Influence

Family is considered an important influence in the value system of most Americans. Family typically has a significant influence on an individual's success or career choices in life. What differentiates the influence of family in the Native American world from the Anglo-American world is the belief and practice associated with extended family. This value cannot be overstated as an influence in the completion of a doctorate among Native Americans. Family beats in the heart of every achiever and it is a priority value among Native Americans.

Family in the Native American value system means extended family, and includes aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and even adopted relatives. In the Native American world, the influence of an aunt or uncle has the same weight as the influence of a parent in making daily decisions or in life choices. Shane explained, "Going back to traditional religion and philosophy, the center point of most Sioux and Assiniboine philosophy is the family." The family is an integral link to Native American culture. One

must have relatives to be a part of the culture. Often times, a grandparent will raise the first grandchild and this relationship has profound effects on the family. As an example, Elisabeth vividly recounted her grandfather's words of nearly forty years ago.

I think of my grandfather's words when I was just entering grade school. I think of them just as if they were said yesterday. They are that clear in my mind. He always walked me to school right across the street. He told me I had to do well. He said, "my girl, you have to do well in school." I believed everything my grandfather said. It still stands out in my mind today that he gave me that.

Caleb recalled his experiences from childhood and reflected on the impact that his grandparents had on his decision to attend college.

My paternal grandfather and grandmother were educated through the boarding school system. I remember him telling me that if an Indian made it through to the eighth grade then, that Indian was a very lucky person. He told his children and grandchildren that having an education is very important.

At times, having to choose between the demands of academia and family was a big struggle for the participants. It must have been like having to choose between a son and a daughter. Making a choice that goes against prevailing cultural values was not easy. Patty relived this incident from college. "In my graduate program my stepfather had a

heart attack. It was my choice not to go home. That flies in the face of what we're taught. I would have paid a penalty if he had not recovered."

Family provided support that was meaningful. Patty spoke of the help that was given for her to stay in college.

We often spent Christmas and Thanksgiving with my mom. Mom pitched in and watched the kids, freed up my time for finals. When I was in my junior year in college, and about to have a child, two sisters showed up at my door to pick up my youngest child and take her home.

Robert commented that family was so important that it cannot adequately be explained in mainstream American culture or in the English language.

Family is always there to help you. Family is the main impetus for my persistence. It drives me. The reciprocity that is a part of the Native American family would shock most people. Indian people have the most support from their families.

Susan had similar help and told how her parents would meet her in a particular town halfway between the university and her reservation hometown. They would then take her daughter for a week while she worked on a paper or had finals. She appreciated that support and said she couldn't have finished college without it.

John had a different view about family influence linked to his Crow culture. He described it in this manner:

I started out following orders, doing what I was told. I was told to get a master's and a doctorate. [My father] wanted me to go to medical school. My father left me years ago, but he gave me to my uncle to raise me. It is primary custom. I looked at it as following orders. To not follow orders would be disrespectful to a person whom I held in high esteem. I just did what I was told.

Family was a major influence in the success of every Native American participant with a doctorate degree who was interviewed. Every participant brought up the influence of family without the researcher asking. The influence of family unearthed such deep emotional responses that two participants cried when discussing their families and how they remembered their support and help. Several participants stated that they completed their degree for their family. They credited family for their success and expressed appreciation for their families, which included parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, in-laws, and adopted relatives. The Native American extended family system was a definitely factor in their academic success and a reason for their persistence and academic achievement.

#### Role Models and Mentors

At least half of the participants identified role models and/or mentors who were instrumental in their

success. Role models and mentors were themes that were difficult to separate in the interviews. While they both seem to have had an impact on the participants, they were sometimes referred to collectively. Some participants did not separate one from another.

Role models may or may not recognize that they have an impact on the person. A role model may be personal friends with an individual or the role model may be a total stranger. A role model does not necessarily deliberately choose to be a role model. A role model may be a person living or dead. A role model may even be a legend or a spirit. Susan reflected on her role model.

In college I worked in a program that looked at girls using their grandmother as mentors. I was very excited because I realized that this is what had happened to me. Now I am a role model for my daughter.

Patty remembered her first experience with a role model who was Native American.

While I was young and married, I worked for a woman who had a bachelor's in Social Work. She was an Indian working in the field and I got to know her. I thought I could learn what she knew. I could do what she did.

In contrast to the influence of role models for some Native Americans with a doctoral degree, a lack of role models was a problem brought forth by two

participants. They saw a need for Native American role models. Joe said, "there was a lack of role models. There was someone with a doctorate from our tribe, but he wasn't around." Caleb agreed that, "it was challenging because we didn't have any Indian role models. At that time there were only two people from my tribe who had earned a doctorate of any kind." These two individuals who persisted obviously relied on other support and influences.

A mentor, on the other hand, has a deep personal relationship with an individual. A mentor purposefully, and by design, chooses to guide, foster, protect, and ensure the progress, success, or personal growth of an individual. Mentoring involves teaching and unselfish service. Those touched by a mentor's caring enjoy self-esteem and personal growth. The mentor gains insight, purpose, and vision in the relationship. Fred described his mentor.

He was a spiritual mentor. He wanted me to find funding for a school. He had a dream of building a school. I took a personal vow to help make his dream come true. I had other mentors too, elders from the tribe.

Joe gave a specific example of his mentor providing assistance and encouragement.

Jerry helped me. He opened doors. He has integrity. He stood up to the university, and he worked with me. He said, "you can stay at my house." He stayed up with me working until 3:00 in the morning at times. Jerry embodied what I believed it (getting a doctorate) could be: either quick and dirty or meaningful.

Teachers and faculty were also mentioned as influences in the lives of the participants. Some mentors were described as helpful and some interesting. They took a real interest in the participant and some developed lasting friendships with them. Robert talked about the faculty in the Native American Studies department who helped him, and his committee member who went to great lengths to help. Patty commented, "there was no way I would have survived without close strong colleagues. My dissertation chair was very open with me. We became lifelong friends". Another spoke of the high school teacher who encouraged him and the supportive faculty member at a university. Apparently it was not the quantity of mentors, but the quality that made the difference in their success.

With the support and despite the struggles in their journey, the 12 Native Americans in this study prevailed and completed their doctoral degree. Their persistence, determination, stamina, commitment, and desire are

noteworthy. These 12 Native American warriors in education must be commended for their achievement. Completing all the requirements for a doctoral degree is an outstanding accomplishment in any culture.

Three participants spoke of the influence of the TRIO Projects in their lives. One specifically gave credit to the Upward Bound Program for getting her on the right track in higher education. Another participant credited part of her funding to the McNair Program, another TRIO project. One participant spoke of the support and encouragement she received from the Student Support Services Project while she was pursuing her graduate degree. TRIO was referred to with appreciation and respect.

Shane's words capture the essence of this study, and the impact of having the ability to determine one's future.

We don't have enough Indian teachers in Montana, which has been forever. We keep working on it. We need to continue to do so much more than we have. Also, in the last few years a large number of Indian school administrators retired. There hasn't been any young people to take their place. Although we have a public educational system, we don't have a stake in it as a people. We can't teach our own children, if we don't run the organizations that direct their learning.

There is not one recipe for Native Americans who are successful at achieving a doctoral degree. This study

indicates that a combination of factors influences their success, in spite of the incredible odds of their accomplishing such a feat. Marilyn explained the impact that her achievement had on her physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

I had this dream in graduate school. There was this fiery furnace and I was on this slab. The heat was just burning my flesh off me. It was excruciating pain, but underneath I knew that if I could just make it through, I would be a better person.

The influences of family, spirituality, role models and mentors, a desire to achieve, biculturalism, a belief in giving back, and pride in their heritage contributed to the success of these 12 Native Americans. Their persistence and commitment provides the Native American community with resources that cannot be measured.

## CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The findings of this study concur with previous research stating that there is a severe underrepresentation of Native Americans at all levels of the educational system in this country today. Native Americans comprise a minority group that lags behind mainstream American society in the receipt of baccalaureate, graduate, and doctoral level degrees. While Native Americans have made significant strides in improving this situation, the gap can be narrowed further through positive action and through research conducted by Native Americans themselves.

This qualitative study investigated the academic and life experiences of 12 Native Americans in Montana with a doctoral degree to examine what influenced their success. Themes emerging from the interviews conducted were the influences of spirituality, role models and mentors, the

extended family, biculturalism, achievement and access, and a belief in giving back to their communities. The effects of poverty and racism did not deter their success.

Each of the following conclusions and recommendations addresses the findings in this study regarding Native Americans in higher education, specifically those at the doctoral level. The conclusions brought forth are based solely on the 12 Native Americans with a doctorate who participated in this study. Recommendations are made to initiate action that will improve the educational success of Native Americans. Educators must determine how to utilize this information to improve education in this country, particularly the education of Native Americans.

### Conclusions

1. Native Americans value education but often stop out of the academic pipeline in their pursuit of higher education.
2. A desire to do well academically and a commitment to persist are factors in the success of the Native Americans with a doctorate who participated in this study.

Recommendations

Native Americans view education more holistically than mainstream American society does. Usually they have families, jobs, and cultural concerns that coincide with their educational careers. They have been taught by their grandparents, parents, and other family members that education is important. Due in part to their holistic view and extended family values that place priority on the group rather than on the individual, they often stop out of college, but may return at a later date. While education is important in the Native American value system, educational policies or procedures sometimes violate Native American values. Observing an attendance policy at the institution may be secondary to allegiance to important family events. Educators must exhibit an understanding of that value system. Given the difference in value systems of Native Americans and the mainstream society, it is amazing that any Native Americans say that they like school. Yet, some enjoy it immensely. Individuals who do well and who desire to do well seem to have an advantage in achieving academically. Teachers, staff, and counselors who recognize this quality

in elementary or high school students have an opportunity to nurture and mentor Native American students.

Since excellence breeds success, this quality can be fostered to enable Native Americans to reach the pinnacle of academic achievement. Native Americans must be included in every phase of the educational system at every level, from parent, to teacher or administrator, to school board member. It is important to seek their input in the curriculum and to encourage them to incorporate their Native American culture whenever possible. Educators must remember to include Native Americans in America's destiny toward a diverse educational system.

### Conclusions

1. Spirituality is inherent in the Native Americans who participated in this study.
2. Many Native Americans in higher education exhibit pride in their Native American culture and heritage.

### Recommendations

Educators must realize that Native Americans live their spirituality. It emerges from every aspect of their lives and is reflected in their life decisions. Most Native

Americans are proud of who they are and many may not wish to assimilate into the mainstream culture. By accepting and encouraging spirituality, educators can facilitate academic success in Native Americans. Educators must encourage opportunities that include Native American culture in specific content areas. For example, since several Montana universities are located near reservations, it would not be difficult to incorporate history, sociology, education, or a science class in a trip to learn about Native Americans. It is amazing how many college students, even Montana students, have never had that opportunity. We can learn more about ourselves by learning about others.

It is recommended that educators recognize and utilize the wealth of education and cultural resources at tribal colleges. Four-year institutions should collaborate with tribal colleges in academic endeavors and draw from the human resources and rich cultural knowledge at tribal colleges. Tribal colleges are experiencing a tremendous surge of growth right now and more students at tribal colleges may soon be ready to pursue a four-year degree. Higher education must be ready for those students.

Tribal colleges incorporate Native American culture and values into their missions. This leads to the cultural

perpetuation of Native Americans and solidifies their existence. If Native Americans exist spiritually, then they can continue to exist physically.

### Conclusions

1. Family is an important influence for support and motivation in the persistence and success of Native Americans in higher education in this study.
2. Family is an inextricable and vital part of Native American culture.

### Recommendations

Educators must be aware of the unique and central role that family plays in the lives of Native American students. Knowing that aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins are regarded as immediate relatives in Native American culture is important. What affects them, affects the student. That social view compounds the relationships that Native Americans are involved in. Native Americans do not want educational standards lowered; they want to be as skilled and qualified as necessary to perform a job well. But flexibility in applying policies and guidelines to

educational rituals or bureaucracy would be helpful in working with Native American students. The importance of family must be taken into consideration when developing curriculum to make learning meaningful for Native American students.

Faculty, administrators, and student services personnel must find creative ways to involve the Native American family in the educational process. Family events will likely include more than one additional family member, and children are likely not to be excluded from activities in the Native American culture. Accepting Native American students with extended families makes a difference in their success. Native Americans may occasionally bump their heads on the glass ceiling of the American higher educational system, but they have the ability to persist and succeed when met with understanding and encouragement.

### Conclusions

1. A belief in the obligation of giving back to their communities and tribe is often a goal and a reason for the persistence of Native American students in higher education.

2. Recognizing the importance of giving back in Native American culture is one way to develop the potential for educational success among Native American students.

### Recommendations

It is necessary to recognize the obligation that many Native Americans feel about their academic success. They see education as a way to give back to their families, their communities, and their tribe. Role models and mentors are perpetuated through the process of giving back to their communities and to where they are most needed. Educators who recognize the value of giving back in the Native American culture can use this concept to motivate and encourage more students to pursue higher education.

As more Native Americans become highly educated, there are more opportunities to give back to their communities. It is recommended that institutions of higher education employ graduates in a more prominent role to emphasize the concept of giving back and to increase the recruitment of Native American students. This will develop a larger pool of human resources in Native American communities.

### Conclusion

1. Functioning biculturally and the acceptance of being bicultural are important for Native American students to navigate the academic pipeline effectively.

### Recommendations

It is beneficial to give Native Americans a cultural experience that allows them to immerse in the mainstream culture. This experience helps teach them the values and skills they need to succeed academically and to gain the bicultural expertise necessary to complete college. However, Native Americans also have the advantage of developing a bicultural lifestyle that will enable them to function effectively in the two worlds and benefit from the best of those worlds. By maintaining close cultural ties and family bonds, Native Americans can preserve their culture while living a mainstream majority lifestyle. Learning skills and values that are appropriate in each culture and becoming adept at navigating within each culture is a skill important to their success. Having the knowledge and expertise of several cultures can be an asset. Being

bicultural gives an individual the choice whether or not to assimilate into another culture.

### Conclusions

1. More Native American role models are needed to facilitate the enrollment, retention, and graduation rate of Native American students in higher education.
2. Faculty must serve as mentors for Native American students who choose to pursue advanced degrees.

### Recommendations

Higher education must recognize the need for employing more Native Americans, including as faculty, administrators, and staff, especially in institutions with Native American enrollment. There are qualified Native Americans in Montana for jobs at all levels of education and employing them in high profile positions can increase Native American student success. In this age of technology, it is easy to connect to people or groups in this country who will know an interested and qualified candidate.

Mainstream educators can assist students by mentoring them through the academic process. Providing guidance,

information, and a supportive environment are key to their success. Being "kindly intrusive" shows caring and concern about the individual as a person. Including students in social activities or in a support or study group can help alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation. Faculty can be mentors who improve the retention and graduation rate of Native American students in higher education.

Studies and research dealing with Native Americans in higher education should be made available throughout the state. Such information could be sent to all TRIO programs in the state so that Native American students will have access to encouragement of the role models presented. Given the difficulty finding research on Native Americans in this state and the state's implied commitment to Native American education, this particular study will be submitted for publication in journals that are likely to be read by persons who provide support to Native American students.

### Conclusions

1. Racism is perceived as an obstacle to educational success among Native American students in Montana.
2. Racism may be a negative motivator for Native Americans in their educational endeavors.

Recommendations

Awareness and knowledge of other cultures is the key to minimizing racism in this country. Practicing tolerance and acceptance of other cultures are ways to promote diversity. Eliminating the fears and prejudices that accompany racism benefits all of society.

It is imperative to foster an institutional climate that is supportive of the success of Native American students. Institutions can implement activities that promote diversity and develop flexible, attractive, and relevant degree programs for Native Americans that are integral to the campus and that last longer than a few years. Educators must realize that learning is a two way process and be open to learning from students of a different culture.

Universities must develop educational programs that will recruit and retain Native American students. TRIO programs and Native American Studies centers are models of what works for Native American students. Universities must make a commitment to have relevant curricula, adequate funding, and support services for Native American students. They must encourage faculty, staff, and administrators to

learn more about Native Americans and their culture, as well as hire Native American faculty, staff, and administrators.

### Summary

This study recommends that further research be done in Native American higher education by Native Americans to establish a broad base of research in this field. Common sense dictates that Native Americans have a voice in their own education. Native Americans contribute insight and vital information that increases the broad base of research needed to improve their academic status in this country. Since they comprise a group that lags behind other racial groups educationally, they must conduct educational research, particularly when it impacts them in such a crucial manner.

It is necessary in life to educate and re-educate people. Informing mainstream America about the need to provide equal educational opportunity to the often-invisible Native American population is a continuous task. Native Americans and the educational community at large cannot rest assuming that the job is being done. There will always be a need for making people aware of the necessity to be

inclusive in higher education. It is important to give Native Americans a voice regarding the policies that affect the future of their people.

The recommendations included here are positive steps toward building bridges that will lead a better America into the next millennium. Action based on these conclusions and recommendations will greatly enhance the educational and life success of Native Americans. As demonstrated in this study, Native Americans have proven that they are able to rise to the challenge of opportunities created for them.

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APPENDICES

## Appendix A

Consent Form for interview for dissertation for Florence M. Garcia

My signature on this form certifies that I give my consent to voluntarily participate in this personal interview by Florence M. Garcia for her dissertation. I am aware that this is a qualitative study titled "Native American Warriors in Education: Journeys of Persistence, Stories from the Heart." I have been informed that this interview is taped but that my name will not be used and that the data will be used for dissertation purposes.

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Date

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Signature

## Appendix B

Demographic data for Native American Warriors in Education

Name:

Address:

Age:

Gender:

Doctoral Degree:

Year granted:

Institution:

Master's Degree:

Year granted:

Institution:

Undergraduate Degree:

Year granted:

Institution:

Current Employment:

Bilingual:

Reservation/Urban:

Tribe:

Family members:

Family members who attended college:

How did you finance your education:

## Appendix C

Question Areas

1. Educational expectations: influences
1. Influences in the education of the individual
2. Obstacle to persistence and success
3. Perception of success; plans for the degree

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