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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

Constructed to Deconstruct You: The System Was Designed to Get Rid of Us
Native American Experiences with Racism in Early Childhood Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Kiana Maillet

Committee in charge:

California State University, San Marcos
Manuel Vargas, Chair

University of California San Diego
Carolyn Hofstetter
Mica Pollock

2023

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University of California San Diego
California State University San Marcos

2023

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my children, grandchildren, and all of our Native children.
May your worlds become safe and secure, and my research no longer needed.

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My educational journey has been nothing short of a long, bumpy, windy road with ups, downs, getting lost, and sometimes even getting stuck in the mud. It has often pulled me away from my family and community, who, even in my absence, have continuously been there to cheer me on. To my children, I want to thank you for joining me along this journey and being the motivation that I needed. You have all sacrificed with me and I love and appreciate you so much. To our community, from the youth who have shown me your excitement when I talk about college, to the elders who have continued to check in on me, listening to my struggles, providing wisdom, and pushing me forward – thank you for keeping me going when I was struggling.

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Finally, I would like to thank my Chair, Dr. Vargas whose kindness, encouragement, and gentle guidance helped push me through to the end.

Manahobü

VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Constructed to Deconstruct You: The System Was Designed to Get Rid of Us

Native American Experiences with Racism in Early Childhood Education

by

Kiana Maillet

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2023
California State University San Marcos, 2023

Professor Manuel Vargas, Chair

In Native American communities, the idea of “school” often has negative connotations because of the overt and covert use, by current and past school systems, of forced assimilation practices intended to eradicate Native American cultures. Native Americans, historically and currently, have experienced longstanding micro-aggressions and attempts by the United States government and religious groups to exterminate their culture and their own people. From the very beginning of *formal* education, Native children were forcibly removed from their homes and taken to boarding schools where the intent was not only to separate the children from their families, but also to separate them from their entire cultures. This attempt of forced assimilation, under the guise of *education* included emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, thus forming a

traumatic foundation of Native American experiences in the United States education system. Fast forward to present times: Native American students continue to navigate an education system which is based on Eurocentric ideologies that creates racially charged environments at schools daily. In spite of these conditions, Native American students are expected to achieve at the same level of success as those who do not share the same negative experiences. While research has documented these experiences in middle school, high school, and higher education, it is important to expand that focus to the foundation of the educational journey, starting with early childhood education. Delving deeper into the experiences of Native American people, this study will provide insight into the occurrences of micro-aggressions and racism that start at the very beginning of the educational journey.

Keywords: Native American, Native American Education, Indian Education, Indigenous, Indigenous Education, Early Childhood, Early Childhood Education, Racism, Microaggression

Chapter 1: Introduction

In Native American communities, the idea of “school” often has negative connotations because, historically, school systems have been used to force assimilation and to attempt to destroy Native American cultures (Fish et al., 2017). According to Ambo (2018) “systems of education, whether missionary, colonial colleges, federal Indian boarding schools or the like, have been and continue to be a critical part of the settler colonial efforts to ‘eliminate the Native’” (p. 216). Native American people “have had extensive experience with the long-term effects of colonization” (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2017, p. 3) and attempts by the United States government and religious groups to eradicate their culture and their people. One of the most detrimental attempts occurred when Native children were forced to attend boarding schools where they were torn from their culture, traditional ceremonies, and language. Traditional ceremonies were forbidden and, when students practiced them, they were often beaten as punishment (Lajimodiere, 2011; Tom, 2016). For Native people these historical traumas have had devastating impacts and continue to be felt across generations (Walls, et al., 2014). Although these traumas fall under the guise of *historical*, the ongoing colonized practices, policies of oppression, and cultural genocide of Native people continue today (Walls, et al., 2014). This is evident when students are expected to bounce back unaffected from racism, traumas, and continuous cultural assaults (Thomas et al., 2016); they continue to have some of the lowest rates of program completion (Field, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Native American students struggle to navigate a Eurocentric-education system (Harrington & CHiXapkaid, 2013) in the United States. Such system creates stressful, racially charged environments at school on a regular basis, where Native American students are expected

to achieve the same academic success as those who do not go through the same negative experiences. These acts of racism and aggressions make it difficult to succeed for Native American students who are expected to learn in a colonized system. Furthermore, this system portrays Native American cultural values as less important, or unfitting to modern society, and, within historical perspectives, Native people are often seen and depicted in dehumanizing contexts. School systems reinforce practices of modern-day assimilation by de-emphasizing Native American culture and promoting European-American values—a practice which creates a continuous conflict between Native American ways and the mainstream education system (Fish, et al., 2017). This practice creates great difficulty for Native American students who frequently find themselves trying to maintain their own cultural values, personal sense of self, and hold onto their cultural traditions, while at the same time, meeting the mainstream society's definition of success—often recognized through good grades and graduation. Native American students struggle to survive and thrive in Eurocentric ways and viewpoints, while staying true to themselves and remaining culturally grounded. Much of the existing research documenting these challenges tends to focus on middle school, high school, and college, leaving out the early years. Consequently, in order to get to the foundation of the problem, it is important to find out where these challenges begin. Since Native American experiences with racism and micro-aggressions in early childhood education are not widely researched, this qualitative study aimed to fill this gap and add to existing literature by documenting personal experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into Native American experiences with racism in early childhood education and thus raise awareness and gain a better understanding of these experiences. Although there is a growing body of research regarding the experiences of Native

Americans in higher education, (Brayboy, 2005; Collins, 2013, Fish & Syed, 2018, Huffman, 2013; Pavel, 1999), the research on Native American experiences with racism in early childhood education is nearly non-existent. Of particular interest for this study is to find out how multiple generations have experienced racism in early childhood experiences. These experiences were viewed through the dual, interwoven lens of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and Maslow's Theory of Motivation including the Hierarchy of Needs. With thorough research and problem identification, change recommendations can be presented to increase positive educational outcomes and experiences for Native American people. Although change can be slow, it can bring significant impact once it happens.

Research Questions

The overarching focus of this study was to explore Native American people's experiences with racism, including micro-aggressions, in early childhood education. The following questions facilitated this research effort:

1. In what ways do Native American parents describe their experiences with racism in their own early childhood education?
2. In what ways do Native American parents describe their children's experiences with racism in early childhood education?

Definition of Terms

Over time, Native American people have been identified with different terms; and while it is most appropriate to identify Native American people in reference to their specific Tribal nations, the more commonly used terms "Native," "Native American," "Indigenous," "Indian," and "American Indian" are used interchangeably in this study. Although, for the purposes of this

paper, and in general, these terms are often used interchangeably, “it is acknowledged that there are differences in meaning and use” (Grande, 2015, p. 41).

Theoretical Framework

In order to connect existing literature with the exploration of Native American parents’ experiences with racism and micro-aggressions in early childhood education, the historical and cultural aspects as well as the early childhood piece need to be considered. Generally, theories from multiple disciplines regarding racism have historically remained separate; however, we are seeing a need to merge disciplines in order to understand the bigger picture. According to Cabrera (2019), contemporary developments in both education and sociology “... have led to a timely need for more of a merger. This is especially relevant for the current expansion of ethnic studies, in particular in K-12 education” (p. 50). Although there are many theoretical frameworks that may be fitting for this research, there are two, in particular, that bring these pieces together and provide the dual lens to view and analyze data: Maslow’s (1947) Theory of Motivation, including the Hierarchy of Needs, and Brayboy’s (2005) Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit).

Maslow’s Theory of Motivation: Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow’s Theory of Motivation describes a hierarchy of needs in which a person prioritizes such needs; simply stated, a next level need will emerge once the prior, more dominant need, is met (Maslow, 1943). Although this theory is portrayed as a hierarchy, a person’s motivation may be driven by the need to satisfy multiple basic needs; thus, one need does not need to be completely satisfied in order for the for next need to emerge as a focus. “No need or drive can be treated as if it were isolated or discrete; every drive is related to the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of other drives” (Maslow, 1943, p. 370). Maslow also

acknowledges the interconnectedness of the world stating, "... while behavior is almost always motivated, it is also almost always biologically, culturally and situationally determined as well" (p. 371). Furthermore, this author also acknowledges the cultural component and the many paths a person can take to reach similar goals.

In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the basic needs include physiological needs such as food, water, and sleep. According to Maslow (1943), unsatisfied physiological needs will dominate, and all other needs will not be priority. This means that a person's focus will remain in meeting physiological needs before they are able to completely focus on any other needs. If a need is met, it becomes less important to the current state of the person; however, if these needs go unmet, a person's behavior will once again focus on meeting these needs.

The next level of basic needs is "safety." According to Maslow (1943) children generally prefer "a safe, orderly, predictable, organized world" (p. 378) and a child who is faced with situations that may feel dangerous, or unmanageable, may react in a way to seek protection. This author explains that if a child's world which once felt safe suddenly doesn't feel safe anymore, the child may "develop fear, nightmares, and a need for protection and reassurance" (p. 377). According to Maslow, "injustice, unfairness, or inconsistency in the parents seems to make a child feel anxious and unsafe" (p. 377) and, since children spend a large portion of their day with teachers in schools, it is likely that this would be true there as well.

Once people's basic physiological and safety needs are met, they may begin to focus on love, affection, and belongingness. People will seek relationships with those around them where they can; for example, to give and to receive love. They may also seek to find their place within a group. Applying the above description of Maslow's needs to school environments, a Native student may feel the need to fit in, to belong, and to have close friendships with peers and adults

in the schools. Next comes the need for “esteem.” “Satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world” (Maslow, 1943, p. 382). If this need is not met, a person may have feelings of weakness, helplessness, and inferiority. The final need in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is that of “self-actualization” or “the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially” as well as “to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (Maslow, 1943, p. 382). In other words, people reach their fullest potential, thinking beyond themselves.

Although Maslow “visited the Blood/Blackfeet Indians in Canada and learned about Indigenous teachings that explain human development from the most basic needs upward toward the spiritual” (BigFoot & Funderburk, 2011, p. 310), his Theory of Motivation seems to be more individualistic, rather than collectivistic; however, the idea of self-actualization seems to be more aligned with collectivism, which Maslow gained insight about through the observation and studying of the people of the Siksika Nation. “He studied their – their biographies. Tried to learn about their lives and what did they all have in common. What did – what’s lead them, um, to get to where they are. Uh, the – to get to that place that he later calls self-actualization” (Blood & Heavy Head, 2011, 1:07:25). In his 1972 article, Maslow states that “a fully developed (and very fortunate) human being, working under the best conditions tends to be motivated by values which transcend his self. They are not selfish anymore...” (p. 2). With this in mind, and being that Tribal communities are collectivistic, the basic needs will need to be viewed from a Tribal perspective, bringing us to include the TribalCrit lens.

It is important to note that there are criticisms of Maslow’s theory. Some may have an “assumption that self-actualization theory ignores sociocultural factors such as racism, sexism,

homophobia, religious bigotry, and poverty” (Compton, 2018, p. 10). According to Compton (2018), Maslow’s writings found evidence of self-actualization in both men and women and people from a variety of cultures, religions, and income levels. However, “Maslow did not write very much about how a sociocultural context tainted by sexism, racism, homophobia, or poverty might impede a person’s search for of self-actualization and wellbeing” (Compton, 2018, p. 10). Due to complications of colonization and racism, people of color may not move through the hierarchy of needs in the same way as somebody who does not suffer from these experiences (Hall, 2011). With this in mind, there is further need for the interweaving Maslow’s and Brayboy’s theories in order to identify the experiences, while viewing them through the Native lens.

Before proceeding with the TribalCrit discussion, there are some freedoms that need to be considered here as well, including the “freedom to speak, freedom to do what one wishes so long as no harm is done to others, freedom to express one’s self, freedom to investigate and seek for information, freedom to defend one’s self, justice, fairness, honesty, orderliness in the group are examples of such preconditions for basic need satisfaction” (Maslow, 1943, p. 383). Maslow argues that although these freedoms may not be seen as basic needs, they are preconditions of basic needs and, when there is danger of losing these freedoms, people may react to them as though they are losing basic needs and will be “react[ed] to with a threat or emergency response” (p. 383).

Tribal Critical Race Theory

According to Brayboy (2005), TribalCrit, which emerged from Critical Race Theory (CRT), is a “community-oriented theoretical lens (p. 427),” which addresses the intersectionality of Native American people and the federal government, with special consideration taken on

Native Americans not only as individuals, but as political and racial groups too. According to this author, although TribalCrit appears to be focused on intersectionality on a macro scale, it also funnels down to microlevels. Through the TribalCrit lens, the perceptions of the colonized education system and policies often clash with many Native American ideas of appropriateness, success, and achievement. Brayboy (2005) outlines the nine **tenets** of TribalCrit as follows:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.
8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change (pp. 429-430).

Weaving Maslow's Theory of Motivation and Brayboy's TribalCrit

Like traditional baskets and rugs, the weaving together of materials creates a strength that the materials would not have when standing on their own. This is also true of this theoretical framework. Maslow's Theory of Motivation and Hierarchy of Needs provides an important focus when inquiring on early childhood experiences with racism, while Brayboy's TribalCrit brings in the important cultural understanding. Since this research is focused on Native American parents and students, the weaving in of several TribalCrit tenants will expand and deepen this theoretical lens, making for a stronger conceptual framework. On Figure 1 below,

the reader will see that the dark strips show the general Hierarchy of Needs in the first column and the rows across with more specificity. The light strips represent the weaving of TribalCrit, from top to bottom. Each dark section lists pieces of many of the tenants of TribalCrit, creating a design similar to one we may see in traditional baskets and rugs. Although the pieces of TribalCrit flow over and under the Hierarchy of Needs, the sections that flow behind are just as powerful as those that are in front. Like micro-aggressions and racism, sometimes it is apparent and obvious, while other times it is hidden in the background, but still just as powerful.

Hierarchy Of Needs	TribalCrit					
Physiological Needs	Colonization Is Endemic	Food	Political Identities	Water	Indigenous Lens	Rest
Safety	Justice	Policies Rooted in Imperialism	Fairness	Tribal Sovereignty	Consistency	Order
Love	Racism	Friendship	Belonging	Connection	Indigenous Culture	Affection
Esteem	Worth	White Supremacy	Strength	Self-Determination	Capability	Adequacy
Self Actualization	Micro-aggressions	Thinking Beyond Oneself	Racialized Identities	Safety	Indigenous Knowledge & Power	Reaching Fullest Potential

Figure 1: Weaving of Maslow’s and Brayboy’s Theories

Research Methodology

For the purposes of this study, the main focus from Maslow’s theory was safety, love, and esteem. While all tenets of Brayboy’s (2005) theory were touched upon, the following were combined with Maslow’s needs to make up the dual lens:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are

central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.

8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being (p. 429-430).

This study addressed Native Americans' experiences with racism in early childhood education through the eyes and stories of Native parents. An exploratory, narrative design was used to gather data through one-on-one interviews. First, participants were asked to respond to screening questions to ensure they met the criteria for the study, which included being a parent, over 18 years old in the United States, and self-identified as Native American. Interviews took place via Zoom, which was a password-protected platform and were audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviews included a set of demographic questions, followed by open-ended questions to explore in-depth experiences with racism (see Appendix D). Participants were provided with the interview guide beforehand to help them gather their thoughts. Once interviews were transcribed and reviewed, they were analyzed and coded to identify common themes.

Significance of the Study

Native American students in the United States have some of the poorest outcomes in education, including low graduation rates (Field, 2016) and high suspension and expulsion rates (SNAHEC, 2019). Through the growing body of research, it has been found that Native American students struggle with instances of racism, including micro-aggressions at multiple levels of education, making it difficult to make it through successfully and unfold their full potential. Although the research documents these experiences, the focus is generally on middle school, high school, and college level education, leaving out early childhood education. In order to understand fully the depth of experiences with racism, it is important to document and recognize the experiences that occur at the very beginning of Native people's educational

journeys. Consequently, to improve the trajectory of success for Native students, we need to recognize these experiences as early as possible and use them as a guide to make changes, beginning with early childhood education. This will ensure their needs, such as safety and sense of belonging, are met thus providing for a better environment to reach educational attainment and improve educational outcomes.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Through this discussion of the literature regarding racism and micro-aggressions experienced by Native American people in the education system, the review will show the challenges Native American students face on a regular basis at multiple levels of the education system and the impact these challenges and experiences have on them. Sue et al. (2007) described racial micro-aggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (p. 271). Examples of micro-aggressions and racism experienced by Native American students include dehumanizing portrayals of Native Americans, hostile racial environments, the use of sacred objects as insignificant, and the exclusion of the Native American voice and viewpoint within the curriculum (Dasai & Abeita, 2017). To include a variety of angles, the literature discussed here includes face-to-face as well as social-media aggressions. In order to be inclusive of all aspects of education, research findings will focus on students’ experiences from Pre-K, elementary, middle school, high school, and higher education, as well as experiences of Native American people in educational leadership positions. Also included in the discussion is the exploration of the negative effects of aggressions and micro-aggressions and the impact these have on Native American students. The theoretical framework described below interweaves Maslow’s Theory of Motivation, including the Hierarchy of Needs, and Brayboy’s Tribal Critical Race Theory.

Racism

Racial microaggressions are “subtle everyday experiences of racism (Wong et al., 2014, p. 1). They are subtle insults or attacks that can be both verbal and non-verbal and are generally

made automatically or unconsciously (Sue et al., 2007). Often times, the impact of these micro-aggressions is not fully realized, and by themselves, they may not seem to have much effect. However, increases in occurrences as well as repetition can have a long-lasting negative impact on people and communities (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). For example, the media often portray Native American people in a historical context, which alludes to the idea that they are no longer in existence. Native Americans are often shown in a stereotypical fashion similar to the “Hollywood Indian” or left out of the story completely, thus minimizing their importance. Therefore, this invisibility “undermines self-understanding by homogenizing Native American identity, creating narrow and limiting identity prototypes for Native Americans, and evoking deindividuation and self-stereotyping among contemporary Native Americans” (Leavitt et al., 2015, p. 39).

One common perpetuation of Native American stereotypes is through the use of Native American mascots, symbols, and derogatory names in schools as well as in professional sports. Using Native American people, images, and symbols such as mascots marginalizes and demeans who they are as a people. Even though there have been decades of advocacy efforts to remove offensive Native American imagery from sports, dating back to at least 1967 (Hofmann, 2005) and repeatedly expressed to the public that these portrayals are offensive, they continue to be supported by the broader culture (Lundberg, 2014). Native people are often faced with overt racism and called names such as “redskin,” “injun,” and “squaw” (Robertson, 2015) which are all derogatory in nature. Schools find covert ways of hiding prejudice through modern day assimilation practices, forcing youth to struggle with the expectation of fitting into the dominant societal construct of what it is to be a student in the education system (Cerecer, 2013).

Culturally Responsive Education

At the heart of these experiences is the lack of culturally responsive education. Academics have brought forth the continued discrimination and oppression in education and the failure to recognize traditional knowledge and values, the marginalization of Native American culture, and the consequences all these factors bring such as poverty, poor health, violence, and suicide. Pedagogical practices of racism and the connection with Manifest Destiny and Social Darwinism are of particular interest (Lovern, 2012). Lovern discusses the use of Native American practices and sacred objects in schools as well as Native American resistance to these practices. This author states, “The fact that another culture’s sacred objects and events are used as toys for children teaches these things are not to be respected and that those who value them are not fully civilized or are not to be held with the same high regard as those within the hegemony” (p. 871). This author also focuses on Critical Academic Theory and how academics have worked to contribute to filling in the gaps of Indigenous knowledge and work towards elimination of racial discrimination.

Curriculum

A large part of pedagogical practices of racism are woven throughout the educational system, specifically through the use of textbooks and curriculum. Of particular interest for some researchers is how Native Americans are portrayed in textbooks, as evidenced by a study conducted on texts selection considerations in Hillsborough County, Florida (Padgett, 2015). Padgett focused on using Tribal Critical Race Theory as an amplifier to bring forth the colonized viewpoint used to portray American Indians in textbooks and assist in ending the settler mindset. The researcher analyzed five textbooks that were being considered for use, as well as the themes and values identified from a Native American perspective. The researcher found that although

awareness and portrayal of minorities in textbooks are improving, the institutionalization of cultural genocide is overt. It was found that the strength and leadership of Indigenous women continues to be minimized; furthermore, a false narrative describing Native American men's lives continues to show in those textbooks. In addition, the textbooks only portray western political and economic systems and capitalistic values, even excluding a feminist perspective. By allowing these practices in the education system, modern day assimilation continues (Tom, 2016). Students may be oversensitive and preoccupied because of these practices (Simi & Matusitz, 2015), thus affecting their overall education experience and success.

Campus and Classroom Culture

Oftentimes, the norm of campus and classroom culture is to avoid the realization that racism and micro-aggressions are intersectional throughout education. With a focus on countering the idea of colorblindness in the classroom, Boutte et al. (2011) discuss and challenge the widely accepted idea that children cannot understand the complexity of racism. There are still uncertainties about having these open conversations, and the authors share that teachers who are silent in these areas are contributing to the problem and need to feel comfortable having these conversations. It is important to understand there are multi-levels of racism including both institutional and individual racism. These researchers also contend institutional racism is created by social structure that creates race-based inequalities, while individual racism happens when prejudice and ignorance specific to people of color reflects in an individual's attitudes and actions. This literature review provides a solid argument as to the importance, and lack of, conversations about race and social justice issues in early childhood programs. One of the above authors shared experiences in having discussions and specific focused activities about race in

their second-grade classroom with 15 children. It was found that students are aware of race and racism in their lives, and, in this case, children were able to share when provided the space.

Even when teachers have good intentions, their actions may subconsciously include instances of racism and micro-aggressions which are not immediately recognized but are undoubtedly impactful, as was shown in an analysis of a teacher's interactions in a 3rd grade classroom (Beaulieu, 2016). The teacher was said to be "outstanding" and "culturally responsive," for which researchers found evidence to substantiate. The researchers analyzed the teacher's interactions in a set of videos that were already being used as a tool to show modeling of effective practices in a teacher-certification program. In the analysis, a particular focus was given to a literature activity in which the teacher treated two boys of different races differently. The teacher reacted to similar behaviors more sternly with Juan who was identified as Hispanic/Latino, than she did with Mark, who was identified as White. With these interactions, the teacher unintentionally communicated that Juan's identity had less value and relevance than Mark's. There was also an interaction analyzed in which the teacher favored White male students over females and other students of color. The class had five White male students, and the rest were female or students of color. When handing out a card to each table for the activity, she unconsciously gave them to each of the White males. Here was a teacher who was known to be a culturally responsive role model for other teachers, yet in this one lesson she carried out several micro-aggressions. Beaulieu states, "Even award-winning and highly respected teachers who are recognized as being sensitive to diversity can make serious mistakes" (p. 17). Unfortunately, these serious mistakes can cause detrimental harm.

There seems to be a scarcity of literature specifically addressing racism, including micro-aggressions in the early years of Native American students' education. At times, even the few

existing research pieces and those reviewed for guidance are not accurate nor culturally responsive. Researchers have focused on whether or not the National Indian Education Study (NIES) reflects culturally responsive schooling (CRS) and how cultural experiences relate to American Indian academic achievement (Lopez et al., 2013). Through a multilevel analysis of the NIES, researchers looked at American Indian students in 4th and 8th grades. The authors found that the inclusion of culture did not have much of an impact on academic achievements; however, the teachers who led these lessons reported having only a workshop or a college class on American Indian culture. With this, the authors questioned whether or not this is truly culturally responsive schooling, and the impact of such token had on the National Indian Education Study results. The authors suggest providing questions in the NIES that inquire about the level of preparedness teachers had to provide appropriate, culturally responsive education to Native American students in order to analyze the true effectiveness the inclusion of culture. By adding these questions, a clearer understanding may be gained about the impact CRS may, or may not, have on Native American students as well as the preparedness of the teachers.

Educating teachers from the very beginning of their formal education, rather than just providing a workshop or two, is of critical importance. Many Native American educators recognize the need for culturally relevant education as well as the role schools can hold in helping preserve and strengthen tribal culture (Huffman, 2013). Convertino (2016) contends that through the use of the critical and dialogical model (CDM) for multi-cultural social justice education, learning opportunities for pre-service teachers can be created. All too often, teachers focus on “ethnic tidbits” rather than true multi-cultural social justice education. This author believes that the focus of the CDM teaching is to disrupt the typical model and challenge what has been previously taught. Examples of “threshold concepts” such as institutional oppression

are used and explain how these concepts create deeper thinking and the ability to connect to the bigger picture. Additionally, the author shares about her experience teaching preservice teachers (mostly White) and the different understandings of the content between many of these students and the five Latina students. One technique was the use of storytelling to “counter hegemonic metanarratives of race, power, identity and unequal social relations” (Convertino, 2016, p. 133). Finally, the author stresses the importance of scaffolding in which students find deeper ways of understanding the threshold concepts as described in the previous examples.

Survival, Persistence, and Resiliency

Although there are many negative outcomes from historical traumas and daily racial aggressions, Indigenous cultures continue to persist and survive (Thomas et al., 2016). Even with these stressors that strongly impact Native American people, these students hold pride in their culture and continue to find value in who they are (Chee et al., 2018). This strong cultural connection can help them make transitions throughout the education system (Sime & Matusitz, 2015) and Native American students can rise through it with strength and resiliency as Cerecer’s (2013) study found. It was discovered that many of the youth in Cerecer’s study reported that they speak up, advocate, and become change agents within the system. A qualitative study by Drywater-Whitekiller (2017) found four themes that emerged through semi-structured interviews regarding coping mechanisms. The theme of alienation on their own land was apparent, and so was their cultural resiliency in identifying the land as home. Participants shared stories of home as they talked about their identity and even having reminders, such as pictures of the land where they are from, as a comfort while being away. Several of the participants discussed their own resiliency when faced with racism, micro-aggressions, and stereotyping, as well as refocusing to overcome the oppression.

Even though they are riddled with the persistent trauma of dismissive and oppressive systems, Native American people continue to carry the strength in survival persistence and resiliency. A large part of this comes from parents who play a strong role in starting conversations about racism in education early on. Through the use of counterstorytelling, DePouw and Matias (2016) discuss parenting in relation to critical race theory. The authors state that “teaching resilience and resistance in a racial realism context requires ongoing reflection, learning, relationships, and responsibility on the part of critical race parents and their communities” (p. 247). They discuss the need for people of color to teach their children about institutional racism and racial realism. According to the same authors, through a critical analysis of oppressive systems and institutional racism, it was found that “to literally survive racism and the violence brought about by White supremacy, communities of color have long recognized the need for instilling in their/our children a critical understanding of institutional racism, as well as the strategies and identities essential to collective and individual health, safety, and endurance” (p. 237).

This strong resiliency of Native American cultures is a protective factor for all generations (Thomas et al., 2016), which has led some Native American students to reach leadership roles within the education system at varying levels. While instances of racial aggressions continue, resiliency guides them. For example, when Native students recognized the isolation felt and the need for a support system, the first Native American sorority was created at University of North Carolina by four Native American women in 1994; it continues to thrive today (Peters, 2018).

In a study of the experiences of American Indian school leaders, Henderson et al. (2015) explored how these leaders merged their own cultural ways with western educational practices

and compared these practices with anti-racist educational leadership. The authors discuss how, even though American Indian leaders face a wide range of racist practices and behaviors and actions, they “embrace their indigeneity in unique ways and use their identity to lead their schools with integrity and authenticity while confronting racism in their schools” (p. 212). Each participant was interviewed and asked questions about identity, leadership, and the congruency of these concepts. Participants discussed how they work to meet both the expectations of the schools as well as the tribal communities. Through discussion around identity, their experiences of racism emerged. Through these interviews, the researchers learned how these leaders find strength in their identity and how this helps them to navigate culture clashes and re-normed practices. These leaders confronted racism head on, carried a value of relationality, and were able to intertwine it with western school cultures. Discussions by the authors indicate that the resiliency of these Native American leaders are catalysts for culturally responsive pedagogy to become an actuality. These leaders describe experiences in their own lives, which mirror those of the Native American youth in their schools and diminish their identities and sense of self. Native American find that there is strength and resiliency in identity and work hard to change this conflicting perception in western school systems. Many Native American educators recognize the need for strong cultural identity in Native American students, as well as being grounded in their culture as a protective factor that can lead to education achievement (Huffman, 2016). Not only is Indigenous identity a part of resiliency, but traditional teachings were as well and have been identified as a foundation for hope and strength (Walls et al., 2014).

Native American Experiences

For the purposes of this study, it is important to understand the available research regarding Native American experiences with racism and micro-aggressions at every level of

education. Typically, the flow of the research review would begin with early childhood education and progress to university faculty and leadership levels, in the same way that matriculation happens. However, since the majority of available research focuses on higher education, this review began at this level and flowed down to early childhood education, showing the decline in available research, thus also showing the critical need for this relevant and necessary research.

Native American Educators

Native American students need to have educators who are authentically representatives of their own culture and for schools to make genuine efforts to not only recruit and hire Native faculty, but to retain and promote them as well. Once in these positions, it can be difficult for Native American professionals to persist when support systems on campuses are minimal. With limited Native Americans in formal educator positions, the burden placed on Native educators can be overwhelming as they are expected to create Native American courses and content, be experts in all things Native American, and often seen as representatives for all Native people (Kidwell, 1990). In addition, Mackey and Shannon (2014) discussed the difficulties minority educators may have while trying to “navigate the institutional and departmental bureaucracy that must be attended to while completing the scholarly tasks” (p. 344). This can be especially challenging when mentorship becomes so crucial, given the limited number of mentors of the same minority backgrounds. One of the participants shared the difficulties of being an American Indian woman without prior experience as a formal educator, thus adding the extra challenge of not only handling all of her faculty responsibilities, but also learning how to navigate these challenging systems.

Native American Students in Higher Education

Native American students are riddled with racial aggressions as they attempt to navigate a system that was originally used as a weapon to destroy their own culture. Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgensen (2012) found that “postsecondary institutional settings are fraught with both covert and overt racism, limited multicultural information among faculty and advisers, poor American Indian peer mentoring, and a lack of support in understanding financial resources” (p. 446). The environment can feel isolating and hostile (Fish & Syed, 2018) and students often feel disconnected and struggle with being separated from their traditional cultures (Tachine et al., 2016). In addition, Native American college students have higher levels of stress due to incongruencies in values and beliefs (Chee et al., 2018). Critical Race Theory is once again used to address issues of racism and structural barriers built into colleges and universities (Fish & Livingston, 2017). Fish and Livingston’s exploratory study was done to examine rates and types of victimization Native American college students face, their rates of substance use, and whether or not these factors have an impact on academic performance. The researchers conducted a secondary analysis of data and ultimately analyzed a sample of approximately 2000 students. Chi-square analyses were completed with the various measures such as the rates of victimization amongst Native American college students in comparison with other ethnic groups. Two regression analyses were completed to explore if substance use predicted college grade-point average (GPA). The results showed Native Americans had the highest rates of being verbally threatened, stalked, and physically assaulted. The research also found that the high rates of victimization were reported to have an adverse effect on Native American student academics. It is suggested that poorer academic functioning and higher rates of substance use may be an effect of high rates of victimization.

Racial aggressions not only happen on campus, including physical ones, but through technological platforms as well, as shown in a study done on an online discussion that ensued about a “Cowboys and Indians” party thrown on a college campus (Aragon & Kaminski, 2012). The authors analyzed two threaded discussions from 32 students in an introductory social justice course at the university regarding the party and the implications that it had. Students were asked about the ethical issues they may be aware of in relation to social networking as well as how it exacerbates unethical behavior. The two threads were analyzed, coded, and common themes emerged. Emerging themes came from key words recognized such as “hidden offenses” and “lack of accountability.” Respondents felt people posted personal thoughts they believed would only be seen by their friends and for which they didn’t have to be accountable. Participants shared that before taking the social justice course, they would have viewed the party as something that was fun; whereas now, they see it as full of racially charged prejudice, and even oppressive stereotyping.

As Native American students make their way through their undergraduate education, the racial aggressions continue to follow them into graduate school. The experiences of ethnic minorities in school psychology graduate programs were a point of focus in a study by Clark et al. (2012) which addressed academic, social, and emotional experiences. Although this study was not specific to Native American students, it shows ethnic minority experiences of micro-aggressions which also include Native American students. The results showed participants went through more levels of negative race-related experiences, higher emotional distress, and lower levels of belonging than those who identified with the ethnic majority students. Participants included 400 graduate students in school psychology programs. Micro-aggressions experienced were measured through the use of the Inventory of Microaggressions against Black Individuals

(IMABI). The experiences measured could be from within the program directly, or throughout the campus and surrounding community. The results showed that ethnic minorities reported higher rates of micro-aggressions than ethnic majorities. The research also indicated students felt less social support, the more they had negative experiences related to race (Clark et al., 2012). This research is important because it shows how the span of micro-aggressions reaches as far as doctoral programs and continues to affect ethnic minority students and their academic achievement.

Native American Youth Experiences

It has been shown that other than African Americans, Native American youth receive the highest rates of disciplinary action in the United States education system (Whitford & Levine-Donnerstein, 2014; Clarren, 2017); are more likely to receive referrals than any other group; and, in particular Native American males, have had higher odds of receiving referrals than anyone else (Whitford & Levine-Donnerstein, 2014). Whitford and Levine-Donnerstein contend that levels of administrative action, including suspension and expulsion, have been shown to be different for Native American students than those received by Caucasian and Hispanic/Latino students—Native American students were 4.02 times more likely to receive a referral at the elementary schools and 2.33 times more likely at the middle school level. These authors also found that approximately 90% of the referrals made were for disrespect, defiance, and non-compliance. The authors discuss how the values the Native students were taught at home may have been different from those taught in the classroom, thus affecting their behaviors which may be perceived negatively in the United States education system.

The incongruity of cultural values between institutions and families was recognized in a study focused on Native youth suicide (Walls et al., 2014). An example of this incongruity is

when Native students are asked to present in front of their peers. For some Native students, it may not be culturally acceptable to practice new skills in public until they have been completely mastered; however, teachers in mainstream educational environments often ask students to do things publicly, causing both internal and sometimes external conflicts within the student (Whitford & Levine-Donnerstein, 2014). Forcing these public displays can have a negative effect on Native American students' grades, relationships with school personnel, as well as the potential of perceived behavioral issues which may carry negative consequences. To navigate these negative consequences, some Native students participate in acts of accommodation in which they make efforts to fit in with the mainstream population in order to avoid negative consequences (Masta, 2018), thus affecting their true sense of self and strengthening the already existing internal conflicts they have.

The scope of cultural values misalignment with policy and practices is vast and has even greater consequences than just academics. Through the use of Tribal Critical Race Theory as a framework, Cerecer (2013) explored the perspective of Native American youth in relation to hostile school policies and leadership practices. Cerecer used a qualitative study that was conducted over five years through semi-structured, focus-group interviews. Participants were Native American, Pueblo youth at Hilltop High School where the principal, the counselor, and the majority of the teachers were White. The authors found how Native American youth saw Indigenous knowledge being dismissed by a multitude of authority figures and by other students. The authors found the youth shared the perspectives that their Indigenous knowledge was dismissed by a multitude of authority figures in the schools as well as by other students. Common themes emerged from the research identified a curriculum and an entire system that dismiss Native views and experiences; an intersectionality of race and colonialism with

education; and difficulty for students to engage in the education system. Overall, Cerecer's study shows the racially charged aggressions encountered by Native American youth affect not only their academics, but their identities and mental health as well.

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education, as defined by National Association for the Education of Young Children (1993), refers to education for children birth to age 8, which is generally up to 2nd or 3rd grade, depending on the school system. Although there is a lack of research on Native American experiences with racism and micro-aggressions in early childhood education, we can look to research on other cultural groups' experience to offer a parallel insight. In a study conducted by Essien & Wood (2020), the researchers "explore[d] the experiences and perceptions of Black girls as conveyed through the narratives of their parents" (p. 1). The authors discussed the significance of Black hair types, styles, and implications when they don't "adhere to socially constructed perceptions of beauty" (p. 1). The researchers found themes of micro-aggressions experienced by Black girls in early childhood education including *second-class hair* and *presumption of defilement* with a minor theme of *assumption of criminality*. The theme of *second-class hair* included participants describing insults "that Black girls' hair was perceived as lesser than by peers and educators alike" (Essien & Wood, 2020, p. 7). The presumption of defilement theme indicated that both students and educators engaged in insults, put downs, and negative comments about their hair in regard to perceived lack of cleanliness. Participants also shared the experience of being ignored when addressing these issues with the school and the administrations passive dismissal of their concerns. Similar to how these researchers discussed the micro-aggressions experienced by Black girls in regard to their hair, many Native American youth have similar experiences in which the males with long braids are often teased, called

names, and constantly dealt with micro-aggressions, thus affecting their experiences in education and with their peers.

In another study by Essien (2019), the researcher studied micro-aggressions experienced in early childhood education by Black children. The three themes that emerged from this study included *assumption of being low-income*, *presumptions of fatherless homes*, and *ascriptions of unstructured home environments*. The participants shared stories of verbal micro-aggressions, including comments that pathologize Black culture as being low income, living in poor neighborhoods, and having single parents. Although the messages may not have always been overt, they had a notable impact on the participants.

These studies affirm micro-aggressions and racism happen at the early childhood level and can have an impact on both children and parents. Not only do these occurrences happen, but they are understood by children in early childhood education. As noted in a study conducted by Marcelo and Yates (2019), these researchers found that “young children perceive and process experiences of discrimination on the basis of their ethnic-racial phenotype from both peer and adult social partners” (p. 258) indicating it is important we learn more about these experiences and make changes to early childhood educational environments. Research shows that racially charged aggressions happen at all levels of education, in a variety of formats, including ongoing colonial practices and policies of oppression (Walls et al., 2014), micro-aggressions (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2017), conflict between Native ways and schools engrossed in European-American values (Fish, et al, 2017), the stereotyping and homogenization of Native culture (Leavitt, Covarrubias et al., 2015), the use of Native mascots, symbols and derogatory names (Hofmann, 2005; Robertson, 2015), and practices of modern-day assimilation (Cerecer, 2013).

These racial aggressions create additional challenges of educational success for Native American students and can lead to negative behaviors, ultimately impacting their futures. A cultural shift is needed throughout the educational systems in order for these students to succeed educationally, improve mental health outcomes, and increase quality of life. Students need to feel visible, respected, and supported. They need to be in an educational system which reflects their true histories, respects their cultural values, and offers a safe environment in which they can thrive. Each of these factors lead to increased engagement and perseverance (Lundberg, 2014) which can ultimately lead to more successful Native students. In addition, this cultural shift needs to alter the perception that only the colonized definition of success is meaningful or correct. It is time to open the lens to other cultural customs and behaviors and recognize that success has multiple layers and definitions. Through strong leadership, social justice advocacy and resiliency, this shift can become a reality.

Current Study

Efforts need to be made to further an understanding of Native American experiences within the United States education system at all levels and to work to improve equity, understanding, and respect in education (Tachine et al., 2016). Although there is some research on Native American student experiences, the information is minimal, and for the most part, it focuses on students in high school and higher education, leaving room for additional exploration. The research base needs continuous development on these topics as well as a focus on Native Americans in educational leadership positions and middle school experiences. What is clearly absent in the literature are the experiences of Native American students in early childhood education, which is recognized by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as education for ages birth-8 years old, which generally includes preschool through

early elementary (1993). There seems to be some understanding as to the roots of racism and historically negative educational practices, but where do these actual instances of current racism, micro-aggressions, and aggressions in general begin to manifest in Native American educational experiences? How do every-day experiences of racism and micro-aggressions in education affect our youngest students at the foundational level of their education, and shape their future experiences? In addition, how are Native American students' experiences perceived by their parents and how do these affect them as well? What are parents' experiences with the education system, especially in early childhood? In order to understand the whole story of the struggles of what Native American people go through within the education system, it is important to learn about experiences from multiple generations. This will help mitigate necessary changes to make education for Native American students safe, equitable, and culturally relevant.

Theoretical Framework: Tribal Critical Race Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The theoretical framework, which guided this study comes from an interwoven dual lens inclusive of Maslow's Theory of Motivation: Hierarchy of Needs, and Brayboy's Tribal Critical Race Theory. Maslow's Theory of Motivation and Hierarchy of Needs provides an important focus when inquiring on early childhood experiences with racism, while Brayboy's TribalCrit brings in the necessary cultural understanding. Since the research is focused on Native American parents and students, the weaving in of several TribalCrit tenants expands and deepens this theoretical lens, making for a stronger conceptual framework.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative, exploratory research study focused on Native American experiences with racism and micro-aggressions in early childhood education. In order to gain a deeper understanding of these experiences, the research was focused on both Native American parents' own experiences when they were in early childhood education, as well as on how they described their children's experiences. This provided insight from multiple points for the same family, within the same educational time frame, and included similarities and differences. In addition, I gained further insight into the participants' parenting experiences while they navigated school systems during their own children's early childhood education years. The research process began with a literature review in order to understand what existing research had to offer. Topics explored included studies focused on Native American multiple levels of education, as well as resiliency and culturally relevant pedagogy. This research study gathered specific examples of Native American experiences with racism; and through the interview protocol, such examples were used to help study participants elicit instances of racism in their own lives, and their children's lives, during the early childhood education years.

This study began in April 2021 when I received IRB approval. Individual interviews were conducted with study participants and data gathered were analyzed to identify emerging themes. Interviews were semi-structured in order to allow for flexibility, including open-ended questions, and in-depth conversations. A qualitative research design was chosen to seek a better understanding of Native American experiences and to gain a deeper meaning of these experiences. As Lietz & Zayas (2010) state, this type of research "seeks to elucidate the nature of social practices, relationships, and beliefs along with the meaning of human experiences from

the participants' point of view" (p. 190). Through a collaborative effort, an interview guide was created and tested with a pilot interview prior to conducting the actual interviews with participants. The pilot interview was completed to ensure clarity, flow, the quality of the interview protocol and to allow an opportunity to make any changes prior to beginning interviews with participants.

Participants and Setting

Criteria for this study included individuals who self-identified as Native American parents of any gender, ages 18 and older, who have attended early childhood education in the state of California. This population was chosen to eliminate underage participants and to include Native American people of multiple tribal nations. Because of the many harmful actions and policies used by the United States to assimilate or terminate Native American people and nations, there are many Native people who are not enrolled in any specific tribe and may not have documentation to prove Native ancestry. Every Native experience was valued, thus the need to allow for self-identification was used. This inclusive approach allowed for Native American voices to be documented regardless of being tribally enrolled, living on the reservation, or living in the city. In order to understand the experiences across generations and time, and to understand the bigger picture, it was important to include different age groups. This study intentionally included participants from young adults to elders.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to maintain physical distance, all interviews were completed remotely via Zoom. The remote-meeting room was password-protected with the waiting-room feature enabled to ensure privacy and to keep the integrity and confidentiality of the space. The expectation was to complete ten to fifteen interviews following IRB approval for the Protection of Human Subjects by California State University, San Marcos

and with a final total of 11 interviews. This small sample size was chosen to ensure that the researcher gathered a manageable amount of data and provided an in-depth picture as this can diminish “with the addition of each new individual or site” (Creswell, 2011, p. 207).

Recruitment Procedures

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the recruitment was done through email and social media. As the researcher, I created a flyer which included information about the study to help recruit participants. The flyer was distributed to Native American serving organizations via email and was posted on social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram. Within these social media platforms are groups, also seen as communities, in which Native people gather virtually. For example, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a *Social Distance Pow Wow* group was created on Facebook, where both Native and non-Native people from throughout the United States, as well as abroad, shared space to continue enjoying *pow wow* and traditional gathering activities virtually. Over the short time this group has been around, over 20,000 people have joined it. The flyer was posted in groups such as this to recruit participants. Since Native American communities are very integrated and connected with each other, this study also relied on snowball referral sampling (Creswell, 2011). Once potential participants contacted me as the researcher, a set of screening questions were asked to ensure qualifications were met. If a potential participant met these qualifications, an interview date and time were set followed by an email invitation to a Zoom meeting.

Data Collection

Through a narrative research approach, participants had an opportunity to use their voice and share their stories that they may not have typically been able to do (Creswell, 2011) and share their experiences with racism in early childhood education. For the purposes of this study,

early childhood education followed the definition given by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The NAEYC's (1993) definition is as follows: "NAEYC defines early childhood education to include any part- or full-day group program in a center, school, or home that serves children from birth through age eight, including children with special developmental and learning needs. This definition includes programs in childcare center, both for profit and nonprofit; private and public prekindergarten programs; Head Start programs; family childcare; and kindergartens, primary grades, and before- and after-school programs in elementary schools" (p. 2). To align with this definition, participants were asked to share experiences in any early childhood education program from birth through age eight.

Through the TribalCrit perspective, the use of storytelling is the traditional data sharing of many Native people, which "values narrative and stories as important sources of data" (Brayboy, 2006, p. 428). This is directly aligned with the narrative approach, making it the most culturally appropriate approach to use. A guide (Appendix D) was used to conduct semi-structured interviews which began with specific demographic questions, followed by a set of open-ended questions to guide the overall interview (Creswell, 2011) and encourage the storytelling process. The questions were general and open-ended to avoid leading the participant. This loose structure and emergent design allowed flexibility for inquiry by the researcher, as needed, and also allowed participants to tell their stories in their own way (Patton, 2002). Interviews were conducted in a private virtual setting of the participants choice with flexible time allowed (Patton, 2002). With participants written permission, interviews were voice-recorded and transcribed via Otter.ai software.

An inductive, qualitative analysis was performed on the transcribed interviews. Transcripts were read several times for familiarity, coding, and analysis of contextual

relationships, common themes, and narrative structure (Maxwell, 2013). To ensure trustworthiness, this researcher collaborated and debriefed study participants and utilized member-checking to ensure accuracy of data collection and interpretation (Shenton, 2004).

Data Analysis

With participants' consent, each interview was audio-recorded and, once interviews were completed, recordings were transcribed via Otter.ai. The researcher listened and reviewed audio-recordings and written transcripts multiple times for familiarity and error-corrections such as misspellings, misinterpretations, or incorrect transcription. Study participants' identifying information was removed prior to data analysis and names changed for anonymity. Transcripts and researcher interview notes were read multiple times in order for this researcher to become familiar with the data which was managed using Microsoft word and Excel software. An inductive analysis of the qualitative data was performed on transcriptions of individual interviews, which was coded and reviewed for common themes. To ensure data trustworthiness, several strategies were used including collaborative sessions and frequent debriefings with study participants (Shenton, 2004). The researcher also utilized member-checking by providing the results to participants and requesting a response to confirm accurate representation.

Ethical Considerations

It is important to maintain high ethical standards when conducting research with Native American people. Participants shared their stories and experiences, which brought up strong feelings and emotions. The pace of the interviews was set by participants and the researcher allowed the time and space needed to complete the narratives. The researcher also provided a list of resources that could be utilized if participants needed further support, including available counseling centers. Another consideration was that Native American people can often be

identified in their communities with minimal details provided. With this in mind, the researcher took extra precautions to ensure confidentiality such as the use of general, broad demographic data, and changing names, thus avoiding the use of any real names in the writing.

Limitations

As with all exploratory research, there are limitations to this study and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have created several. For example, in the recruitment process, the researcher was not able to attend gatherings and other social events to recruit participants as there were social distance restrictions in place and the majority of gatherings and community events had been cancelled. The pandemic had also created limitations for the interview process and interviews were challenging for those who did not have familiarity with technology or who had limited internet availability; however, as the researcher, I was able to walk them through using the technology and provided flexibility for internet connection availability. Because of the small sample size, some important voices and perspectives may have been left out, and the study may not be generalizable. However, the study can serve as a foundation for a larger sample in future qualitative studies and surveys. The use of qualitative methods provided an opportunity to gather detailed information and flexibility in the research process (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). As a result, it is possible this study will add to current literature, become the basis for future research, and aid in early childhood education change and program implementation

Positionality

It is important to note my positionality. I am a member of a California Tribe and I also have personal experiences of my own, as well as those of my children in the education system, including the early childhood years. There is a significance to Native research being conducted and analyzed by Native researchers, as Brayboy (2005) recognizes “The concepts of culture,

knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens” (p. 429). Research in Indigenous communities can come with some contention as Smith (2012) put it, “it stirs up silence, it conjures bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful” (p. 1). Being part of the Native American community provided me a stronger level of trust with participants and my cultural lens offered personal knowledge and insight into what the participants discussed. Consequently, this allowed me to guide the interviews in a careful and culturally respectful way. Additionally, the sense of objectivity in data collection and analysis was an ongoing consideration.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study attempted to gain insight into Native American experiences with racism, including microaggressions, in early childhood education. Through a qualitative, narrative approach, I interviewed 11 Native American adults who attended early childhood education in California and whose children also attended early childhood education in California.

Historically, the U.S. has utilized its education system as one of several strategies to force assimilation and destruction of Native American students' cultures (Fish et al., 2017). Some would argue that this strategy continues to this day. Native American students continue to struggle within the modern education system and, although they make up the smallest student population, they have some of the worst drop-out rates in the country, as well as the 2nd highest suspension rate by ethnicity in California schools (California Department of Education, 2022). Furthermore, in the 2020-2021 school year, Native American students had the lowest graduation rate of any ethnicity—at 72%, which represented a 2.8% decline from the previous year (California Department of Education, 2022). Research shows Native American students have negative experiences in middle school, high school, and college; however, there is minimal documentation of Native American experiences in early childhood education. Consequently, given the incidences of racism documented in later educational years, this study aimed to fill that gap and to explore Native American experiences with racism in early childhood education.

Research Questions

With an overarching focus on experiences with racism, including micro-aggressions in early childhood education, this study explored Native people's experiences through the following research questions:

3. In what ways do Native American parents describe their experiences with racism in their own early childhood education?
4. In what ways do Native American parents describe their children's experiences with racism in early childhood education?

Maslow's (1947) Theory of Motivation, including the Hierarchy of Needs, and Brayboy's (2005) Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), provided the theoretical guiding principles for research data-gathering and analysis. Since Maslow's theory of motivation appears to be more individualistic, Brayboy's TribalCrit collectivist approach, which is more fittingly aligned with Native culture, complemented this study's theoretical framework.

Data-Gathering

Individual interviews represented the main data-gathering source for this study. Each interview began by ensuring each participant met participation criteria, which included the following:

- Be 18 years old or older
- Identified as Native American
- Be a parent
- Have attended early childhood education in California between the ages of 0-8.
- Have child(ren) who attended or are currently attending early childhood education in California between the ages of 0-8.

Following participation criteria check, I reviewed with study participants the purpose of the study and informed consent document, reminding them they could withdraw and stop the interview at any time, without any adverse consequences. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, I provided each participant a list of free to low-cost resources they could use if extra

support became necessary after the interview. As the researcher, I also reminded participants they could reach out to me at any time if they needed additional resources. I made an intentional effort to create a trusting space which began with rapport-building to ensure participants felt comfortable, free from stress, and in a safe space to share their stories. Interviews were semi-structured and allowed as much time as needed, so study participants could share their stories. The actual time for interviews ranged from 31 to 160 minutes. Although a semi-structured interview protocol was planned to guide the interviews, I honored traditional Native storytelling ways and participants were given the time and space to follow the natural flow of their stories.

Study Participants' Profile

To have a genuine understanding of the lived experiences shared by study participants, it is important to begin with an overview of each person (Creswell, 2011). Thus, this section of Chapter Four will introduce the 11 study participants who will, in turn and indirectly, introduce their children. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used and details which may have appeared too revealing have been generalized. As the reader moves through the participants' profiles, as well as under emerging themes, it is important to understand the vulnerability, depth, and emotion that came with each interview. Study participants trusted me as the researcher with their stories, expressing the importance and hope that these stories will bring to light the struggles Native American students face from the very beginning of their formal education.

There were 11 participants in this study, and while the recruitment was open for all genders, the 11 participants all identified as female. Their ages ranged from 32 to 66 years of age, with their children's ages ranging from 20 months to 48 years of age. The age ranges for study participants, as well as their children, provided an opportunity to gather data directly

connected to early childhood experiences at different points in time, thus providing an opportunity for a far-reaching narrative. In addition to the above information, study participants' descriptions below provide additional information about each one of them, including age, geographical location, Tribal affiliation, educational level, and quotes unique to them. In addition to these initial quotes, more will be included as supporting evidence under emerging themes. The following introductions begin with the two eldest and end with the youngest participants.

Huviya

Huviya was 66 years old at the time of the interview and comes from a Pacific Region Tribe. She worked for her Tribe and held a master's degree in science. Her early childhood education started at five years of age in a public kindergarten since her family did not have any choice about the type of school she could have attended. In Kindergarten and 1st grade, she attended the school closest to her reservation, along with other Native relatives and friends. The school included student from both the reservation and the adjacent town. Once she moved out of her hometown "that Summer, between first and second grade," to a larger city, she remembers, "I was in a classroom with mostly white kids" and "there was no other Native kids." Huviya talked about how "I realized I wasn't like them" and that "I didn't really have any relationship with them." She did become friends with a young Black girl, who lived in her neighborhood and with whom she played in the orchards but didn't go to her school. Huviya's memories include driving to school with her father who often had interactions with the police. "He was always getting pulled over. I remember because he was brown. You know, they wouldn't pull over white people, but they'd pull him over all the time."

Huviya had two sons, Sawabu and Pida. Pida passed away several years ago; however, he would have been 42 years old at the time of this interview while Sawabu was 43 years old at the

time of the interview. At five years of age, Sawabu attended Kindergarten, while Pida attended preschool at four years of age. This was the beginning of Huviya's sons' early childhood education. They attended a public school, which was in the town adjacent to the reservation, with other Native peers and relatives. While Huviya does not remember "a big deal being made out of anything," regarding racism at the time, she remembers Sawabu, later in his adult years, telling her how "they were bullied" in early childhood years and, she said, "I think it did affect him. He said he never told me because he didn't want me to go make a big deal out of it." Reflecting on her sons' experiences, Huviya noted how resilient they were and how hopeless it felt at the time "knowing them, they just did it and got it over with." When talking about the schools, she added, "they're harmful, but it's like, that's something that's always been done. How do you change something? Especially in a town like this. It's always been done that way."

As her sons grew into adulthood, Huviya expresses that she felt more empowered and that she advocates for local Native children in the schools "because I care, because this is wrong. A lot of parents are afraid to say something, because their kids will get punished for it in school, so that's why I can go in and say no, this is wrong." Huviya also acknowledges her ability to gather information from the internet to back-up her advocacy in the school where she has made a big difference as well.

Wunupu

Wunupu was 66 years old and retired at the time of the interview. She had some college education and was from a Pacific Region Tribe. However, she grew up and went to school in a large city, several hours from her reservation. She began her early childhood education in kindergarten at the age of six at a public school since she did not have any other choice of schools. When discussing her experiences in early childhood education, Wunupu also reflected

on peer relationships outside of school. Wunupu reflects “I grew up with 13 little White girls on the street, and some of the parents didn’t like me. I didn’t know I was a different color, and they would kind of, you know, say ‘oh no she can’t come in the house.’”

Wunupu was raised by her mother, father, and grandmother and feels they kept their Native identity concealed. “I didn’t know I was Native until I was 12” years old. When telling this part of the story, Wunupu reflects on why she didn’t know and said that she thinks her family didn’t tell her because “they didn’t want me to get hurt.” Wunupu also reflected on her lack of advocacy as a mother: “I didn’t feel it was my place to say anything because I was just a mother,” and how her advocacy has developed as a grandmother. She stated: “I got older and I ain’t gonna take that crap no more.” She also felt during her parenting years it was difficult to advocate as “I don’t think it was the time, you know, to do something like that because people were unaware and they, you know, weren’t accepting.” Now, as a grandmother, she feels that “people are much more accepting” and “it’s okay to be an Indian.” She also talked about how she got her grandchildren involved in “culture classes” and now she brings them into various settings to exhibit their traditional dances to help educate the public.

Wunupu had two daughters, Maria and Berta. Maria began her early childhood education in kindergarten at the age of five and Berta in preschool at the age of three. Both attended public school and did not have other options. Wunupu also has several grandchildren; however, when interviewing, she specifically reflected on the experiences of her grandson Miguel, as his personal experiences have also greatly impacted her as a grandmother. He had long braided hair that would often get pulled in school. At one point, Miguel became frustrated with the constant bullying and fought back, ending up being disciplined by the school.

Kiya

Kiya was 54 years old at the time of the interview and came from a Pacific Region Tribe. She held a bachelor's degree and worked full time in property management. Her early childhood education started when she was four years old when she attended a public preschool, as she did not have any other options. Although she did technically grow up on her traditional Tribal homelands, the lands were historically taken from her people and became the major city which she currently lives. She identifies her younger self as "too quiet and I kept to myself to not have any real problems." She also identifies as "a smart kid, I did well in school." In her interview, she remembers going to a school with many of her own cousins and that her mom also worked as a teacher's aide in her school "so I always had my mom kind of around," she said. Kiya acknowledges her fair skin and that she felt this was the reason she "didn't have any real problems." Kiya also discusses how she witnessed issues with students with darker skin, "you see it, how they're treated differently" and how her daughter, who has darker skin as well, also had negative experiences.

Kiya had one daughter, Nakomi, who was 15 years old at the time of the interview. Nakomi is Native from both her mom's and her dad's tribes. She grew up and went to school on the traditional homelands, turned large city, of her mother's Tribe. She began her early childhood education at the age three when she attended a private school, which she continues to attend to this day. Kiya described Nakomi as "fidgety" and tells stories of teachers becoming frustrated with her due to this ... "for whatever reason, they just didn't like this." Kiya remembers how Nakomi didn't have a lot of friends in school because, she stated, "she's an individual, she doesn't conform" and that "she was always different." "It was because she did her own thing

and didn't care." Kiya revealed the impact from Nakomi being "the only Native in her school" and the fact that "she always brings that up."

Tsanapi

Tsanapi was 47 years old at the time of the interview, and a member of a Pacific Region Tribe. She grew up in a large city several hours from her reservation and reported a strong connection with other Native people who also grew up in the city. She had taken some college courses and worked in retail. She was raised by her grandmother and began her early childhood education at five years of age, in a kindergarten environment. "I was quiet, and I was a good kid." During the interview, she also stated, "I was quiet, and I didn't want to draw attention to myself. So, the less people knew about me, the less attention I was drawing on myself." She went to public school in the large city where she grew up as this was her only option, and where she was the only Native student that she knew of.

Tsanapi had five children: Tosa, Huna, Toya, Koda, and Egwu. Her first born, Tosa, was 26 years old at the time of the interview and began his early childhood education at the age of four in a public preschool, which was his only option. Tsanapi describes Tosa as a child who always got in trouble, "even when he wasn't in trouble, he was in trouble." She acknowledges that "it wasn't his fault, he got blamed for stuff. I often think it was because he was the brown kid" and thus "he got labeled as the bad kid and that followed him all the way through school."

Huna is Tsanapi's second oldest child and first-born daughter. She began her early childhood education at the age of two in a public preschool which was the only choice of school setting. Tsanapi described Huna as "quiet and shy" and how "she was the kid that worked the hardest." In reflecting about Huna, Tsanapi comes to realize that she isn't sure if Huna has had experiences with racism in early childhood education or, as she put it, "if she ever experienced

anything; she never spoke up about it because she was so quiet.” Tsanapi’s other daughter, Toya, the third oldest was 21 years old at the time of the interview. She began going to daycare at six weeks old and continued her early childhood education at a public school, her only option. Tsanapi describes her as “small in size” and talked about the fact that “everybody just babied her.” Although Tsanapi does not remember Toya having negative experiences in early childhood, she does talk about how Toya “had trouble later on.”

Tsanapi’s second oldest son, Koda, and fourth oldest of all her children, was 17 years old at the time of the interview. Tsanapi became very emotional when she spoke of Koda’s experiences because they seemed to be the most violent ones and the most frequently dismissed of all her children. Specifically, Tsanapi spoke of Koda often getting his hair pulled, and how, when he fought back, he would get into trouble. As Tsanapi shared “when he did get picked on, it was major things that really bothered him. Because we had put so much emphasis on his hair, learning to take care of it, and learning what it meant. It hurt him extra. That continued, probably until seventh grade.” Koda, shed many tears in his early childhood experiences and would often “crawl under a table and cry” or stop talking, especially when he thought he was in trouble. During the interview, Tsanapi explored how the many conflicts with peers may have impacted Koda’s personal relationships. For example, “I think he was very picky about who his friends were.” Tsanapi tried to protect and advocate for Koda during his entire early childhood years and beyond, often without success.

Tsanapi’s son, Egwu, who was also her youngest child, was 11 years old at the time of the interview and began his early childhood education in a public kindergarten as this was his only choice. Tsanapi explained how she was able to be proactive and organize presentations with Egwu for Native American Heritage Month. She said, “we had a chance to talk about his hair

then, and how special his hair was to him and how nobody should ever touch his hair except for his mother.” She also expressed guilt for not having been proactive with her other children. She added: “I think maybe if I had done that for the other kids, things might have been a little different.” She also recognizes that “it’s not my job.” In her reflection, she shared how, with her other children, “I was in fight or flight mode with the relationship I was in, and then being a single mom, I was in survival mode.” Once she stabilized hers and her children’s living situation, she said, “I was able to do more culturally with the kids and be more worried about that aspect of their life than I was when I was younger.”

Trina

Trina was a 47-year-old mother of two sons, who were young adults at the time of the interview. They came from a Tribe in the Southern Plains area, as described in Chapter 1 and shown on the BIA Regional Map (Appendix D); however, they all attended early childhood education in California. Trina holds a master’s degree and works in a professional role. She began her early childhood education at the age of four in a public school as this was her only option. She told a story of intergenerational trauma in her family, going back to, as she put it, “my grandmother who was part of the relocation and part of the boarding schools. She was taken away from her family” and how “my grandmother grew up believing that her own mother did not want her; that nobody wanted them.” Trina’s grandmother “lived to be 98 years old” and even in her final years before passing, she spoke of the memories of the abuse from the boarding schools. These experiences affected Trina’s father as well as herself. When telling her story, Trina talked about “growing up where there were signs that said ‘no injuns or niggers after dark, or they will be hung.’” Also, how “my grandmother cried when [she realized] we had brown eyes, and she’s like ‘oh my god, they’re gonna find out you’re Native.’” Trina’s family struggled with this fear.

She stated, “it comes from self-preservation of, am I going to die or am I going to be Indigenous?” When talking about education specifically, Trina shared that “I feel like the system was designed to get rid of us.”

Trina’s sons, Sai and Alex, were both young adults at the time of the interview. Sai began his early childhood education at the age of five, while Alex began his at four. Both attended public schools; however, Trina notes the difference in their experiences as Alex went to a public Head Start program, which “was specifically for minority children”.

Monotsibi

Monotsibi was 47 years old and came from a Western Region Tribe. She held an associate’s degree and worked in Human Resources. She grew up away from her Tribal homelands, and attended early childhood education in California, starting at four years old. She attended a public preschool since that was the only choice of school settings. She remembers there were “a few” Native children with whom she was often segregated. She said, “I was always going away with the Indian kids, like kind of being scooped up in groups with Indian kids.” She befriended one of the Native kids in her school, stating, “because she lived right across the street from the school and becoming friends with her was the most comfortable friendship that I ever had.”

Monotsibi had one son, Nick, who was 17 years old at the time of the interview and began his early childhood education at age five. He attended a public kindergarten and beginning in second grade, he attended a Tribal Charter School. While raising Nick, Monotsibi felt like she was very protective, saying, “I was like a helicopter mom.” She talked about how in the public school “he was always in trouble” and how the school would often call her, which affected her work life. She stated: “I remember being sick of being called because I was always

getting called out of work.” When she moved Nick to the Tribal Charter School, he got into much less trouble and grew strong connections with the staff and his peers.

Ongavi

Ongavi was 47 years old at the time of the interview, and a member of a Pacific Region Tribe. She had a bachelor’s degree and worked in a Tribal leadership position, in addition to volunteering in multiple roles in her community. She was raised on her reservation and attended a Tribal preschool, beginning at the age of three. She then went to a public school beginning in kindergarten. She remembers good experiences in the Tribal preschool, stating, “the preschool was really awesome: I wish they’d have that right now again.” She stated that she attended the preschool with “all of our cousins,” which made the experience better for them. She added: “there wasn’t any anxiety going to school because my best friends were there with me.” When she went to the public kindergarten, which was her only option, she found comfort in relatives working at the school. For example, she said, “my dad worked at the school and so did my grandma.”

Ongavi’s son, Ben, was 15 years old at the time of the interview and began his early childhood education at age three in a public school, since there was no other choice of school settings. Ongavi described him as “super shy” and shared that “he doesn’t really like school; he kind of just deals with it.” She describes him as “a kid who doesn’t really get into trouble” and she also ensures he has a strong connection with his culture.

Kiini

Kiini was a 43-year-old mother of two at the time of the interview, who grew up on her Tribal reservation in the Pacific Region. She held a master’s degree and worked for the government. She began her early childhood education at the age of four when she attended a

Tribal preschool and subsequently moved to a public school for kindergarten. While telling her story of attending the Tribal preschool, Kiini speaks endearingly about her relationship with the other students, "...they were all my cousins. Every single one of them." When she went to kindergarten, it was at a public school adjacent to her reservation, as this was the only option. She remembers feeling supported because her cousins also went to that school, and her auntie, as well as one of her "grandma's best friends" were teacher's aides. It is important to note that Kiini is fair skinned, which brought up strong feelings during the interview.

Kiini has a daughter, Amy, and a son, Jax, who were also both fair skinned Natives. Amy was three and Jax two, respectively, when they began their early childhood education. They both had a choice between public and private school, however, their parents decided to send them to private Montessori school where they are the only Native students. Kiini explained that she had concerns about sending her children to the public school due to the school utilizing a local museum that appropriates and mis-appropriates Native culture as their source of information for the students to learn: "I would rather spend \$20,000 dollars a year to send them to private school than to have them deal with that kind of untruth." Kiini also explained that she felt the Montessori approach was "the closest to the way Tribal society raises kids. It's doing, seeing, touching, and feeling, versus public education, which isn't that way."

Kiini describes Amy as "very outgoing" and that "she has a whole lot of friends." Kiini was proactive in her children's early childhood education regarding culture. She talked to the school ahead of time and began doing cultural presentations during Native American Heritage Month, which she feels had a positive impact on her children's education and the school overall. Prior to her presentations, the school did not include Native culture in their curriculum. Kiini

stated that the school was open to her bringing in Native education to the school, however there was not Native representation or education beyond what Kiini provided.

Punidgi

Punidgi was a 39-year-old mother of three and a college student working on her master's degree, with a social services background. She was from a Tribe in the Pacific Region; however, she was raised away from her traditional homelands and on the land of another Pacific Region Tribe, which her family was very involved with culturally. She couldn't remember the exact age when she began her early childhood education; however, she did remember that it was preschool and that it was a public school, as this was the only option for her. Her three children were Atsa, Paata, and Sam. Atsa was a young adult, attending a university at the time of the interview.

When Atsa first began her early childhood education, her family lived on the reservation where her mother, Punidgi, grew up and where she attended a Tribal preschool. Punidgi worked in the Tribal preschool, and both had a close relationship with the teachers and staff. Atsa then went to kindergarten at a public school in the town closest to the reservation, where she and her family lived, and then moved to a different public school for second and third grades. She was a fair skinned Native with light colored hair, which is an important observation, as her mother noted during the interview. Due to this, Atsa has had experiences of teacher's telling her that she is not Native and that they know more than her about being Native. As Punidgi explained, it's "because she's light skin and I think that has affected her identity to this day. It affects her self-esteem and her identity even more because of the treatment and the verbiage and the microaggressions and racism that she experienced because of the education system and within the education system."

Punidgi's son, Sam, was nine years old and began his early childhood education at three years of age in a public preschool. Sam has long dark hair which he wears pulled back into a

braid. This is important to note, as he was bullied and often had his hair pulled by peers. Paata, six, is the youngest. She began her early childhood education at the age of two in a public preschool classroom. Punidgi notes that both Paata and Sam continue to attend public school because they have not had any other options.

Tabuha

Tabuha, was a 35-year-old member of a Tribe from the Pacific Region. She held a bachelor's degree and was working for her Tribe as a culture and language teacher. She was born and raised on her traditional Tribal homelands. Tabuha's early childhood education story began at the age of one. She attended a Tribal Head Start program during the first two years and then went to a public school on Tribal land. As she told her story, memories came up of the experiences of some of her relatives as well.

She has five children, Shane, Kamu, Suwia, Sugina, and Leah, who range in age from toddlers to teens. Tabuha's youngest child, Leah, does not currently attend early childhood education and her second and third youngest, Suwia and Sugina go to a Tribal Head Start. Unlike most study participants' children, this early childhood setting, which is a Tribal school, has produced stories of connection and strength, rather than experiences with racism. However, her two oldest sons spent several years of their early childhood education in public schools in a metropolitan area, which generated much different experiences shared in the interview. As Tabuha told her story, through tear filled eyes and body language, I, as the researcher, could see the sadness and pain in the heart-felt memories she shared. It was evident that her own experiences, as well as those of her children, continue to affect her today.

Towanu

Towanu, at 32 years old, was the youngest of all study participants. She was enrolled in college courses and working in social services at the time of the interview. She began her early childhood education at age three in a public preschool. Like most other study participants, this was the only school choice. The school she attended was in the town adjacent to her reservation where she lived with her grandparents who raised her. She describes herself as a “quiet and shy” child who “wouldn’t do anything wrong. I would follow the rules.” Yet still, she got in trouble, often being compared to her brother. In telling her story, she included experiences she saw her brother go through, who is close in age to her. As an adult, Towanu has had experiences working in early childhood education; experiences she brought into her story.

Her two daughters, Callie and Julia, were 13 and 10 years old at the time of the interview, started their early childhood education in public preschool at the age of three. Like their mother, they lived on their reservation and attended a public school in the town adjacent to the reservation, as this was only the only option they had. Also like their mother’s experience, there were a few other Native students who attended their school, who also lived on the reservation. Towanu shared that her daughters had some positive relationships in early childhood education “only because me and my husband were very active in their education” and that “it makes a huge difference because when things arose, someone was there.” Towanu and her husband made sure that one of them was always available to be active in their education. Although Towanu’s daughters had a mostly positive peer relationships in early childhood, Towanu talked about how problems arose in middle school with racist comments being said to them. Towanu reflected on how this was their first experience, in middle school, which is an improvement from how, as Towanu states, “I had to experience it my whole life.” Towanu also spoke of both her daughters

having some teachers who were open to learning and welcoming of Native culture being brought into the classrooms; however, prior to Towanu bringing cultural items in, there was not Native representation.

Emerging Themes

Through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Brayboy's Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) interwoven lens, this study examined Native American experiences with racism in early childhood education. Through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, one can see an evident impact on Native children when their basic needs are and are not met. Brayboy's TribalCrit brought forth the importance of the Indigenous lens, lived realities, and lived experiences in an education system rooted in and continually attempting assimilation of Native students. Data for this research were gathered through one-on-one interviews with the participants. The interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy. I read and re-read the transcriptions and listened to the interviews multiple times for familiarity. Data were coded and analyzed for common themes in relation to the conceptual frameworks. Three main themes emerged from data-gathering and analysis: Safety, Belonginess and Connection, and Support and Empowerment. Under each main theme, there appeared multiple sub-themes, which further described and supported the research study main findings.

Theme #1: Safety

According to the California Department of Education (2022), the "California Education Code (EC) Section 32281(a) requires every kindergarten through grade twelve school, public and public charter, including community and court schools, to develop and maintain a CSSP (Comprehensive Safe School Plan), designed to address campus risks, prepare for emergencies, and create a safe, secure learning environment for students and school personnel." Safety is a

need that one focuses on once basic physiological needs are met. A child needs to feel and be safe to grow towards being a “fully developed human being” (Maslow, 1943, p. 2). This research study shows, as evidenced by study participants’ accounts below, Native students’ need for safety, especially during early childhood education, as not being met. The following sub-themes will further describe how Safety was left unattended.

Bullying: “That’s the first time that I ever heard the word ‘savage.’” Bullying “is commonly thought of as the assertion of power through aggression that involves a bully repeatedly and intentionally targeting a weaker victim through social, emotional, or physical means” (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010, p. 315). It can have serious lasting effects including somatic and psychosomatic problems, anxiety and depressive disorders, and thoughts of suicidal ideation in adolescence (Wolk & Lereya, 2015). In interviews with study participants, just about everyone’s story included bullying in early childhood education. Huviya spoke of her son’s experience, stating, “Sawabu said he was bullied quite a bit and it did affect him. He said he never told me because he didn’t want me to go make a big deal out of it.” Monotsibi also felt the impact of bullying when she shared a memory of “crying a lot when I would get teased. I was being made fun of it was always a verbal attack.” To this day, she still feels the impact of being called “a dirty Indian.” These extremely harsh verbal attacks brought strong feelings in study participants during the interviews. For example, Tabuha remembers, “A white boy who used to chase us around and pull our hair or just make comments about us. I think that’s the first time that I ever heard the word ‘savage.’ I remember him chanting, covering his mouth and making lulu noises, and running around.”

A common theme in the bullying stories, study participants shared, involved Native students being verbally or physically attacked because of their long hair. Punidgi shared about

the importance of hair, stating, “long hair is part of our ways, our culture, our traditions, that's our way of life.” She also spoke of her son Sam’s experience, saying, “Sam has a braid that is long, and he has been bullied over it. Kids have pulled it. Kids have made fun of him. To this day, Sam is still called a girl, he's still acknowledged as ‘she.’” As kids navigate the schools protecting themselves, they are torn between holding onto their cultural values and meeting their need for safety. Tabuha took a deep breath and shared how when her son Kamu got into kindergarten, he started expressing the desire to cut his hair. Tabuha said:

He started changing a little bit. He has always been such a respectful, responsible, just intelligent, fun little creator. He was always very creative and engaging. And he started being a little bit more mellow, you know. And one day, I took him to school, and I had to use the restroom, so we went into the restroom together. And he was asking me to cut his hair again. And he was really sad when he asked me. I realized in his tone that there was more to this. And so, I asked him, ‘Why are you asking to cut your hair?’ And he was like, ‘I just don't want long hair’ and he put his head down. So, I asked him again, ‘Why are you feeling that?’ He said, he's getting tired of being called a girl. He's getting tired of everyone calling him a girl. He said, ‘you know, they know I'm a boy. And I tell them, I'm a boy, but they call me a girl because I have long hair, so I want to cut my hair.’ And that was infuriating to me. You know, it's like, you little twerps are hurting my child because of your idea of what a boy is supposed to be. You know, and that's not like, it just felt so unfair to me. And it just broke my heart. You know, my boy is so sweet. And he's a really good little human being, and you are making him feel bad about himself. There were comments and the pulling of his hair and being called a girl. I can still hear his sweet little voice saying that he just wanted to cut his hair, so he doesn't have to endure that. Like that's wrong.

Study participants, referring to cross-generational memories, spoke about being bullied and getting their hair pulled in early childhood education. Sam’s experience, the most recent one, happened within the past year. As the first tenet of TribalCrit states, “colonization is endemic to society” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). Native children were forced to defy their cultural ways and cut their hair during the Boarding School Era, and albeit more covert, these attempts at colonization continue to this day.

Physical Violence: “He slapped me across the face.” Study participants shared accounts of physical violence experienced by themselves as well as their children in early childhood education. These experiences included, as mentioned before, hair being pulled, being slapped, pushed, and being punished for defending oneself. Monotsibi shared about her experiences of being threatened and looking for safety. She said, “It was the second grade. I was told that I was gonna get beat up and jumped by some girls. I just remember it was a group of girls and they were Caucasian. I remember running home because I remember not really having any actual place to go to feel comfortable and safe at school.” Trina reflected on a time when she was assaulted because she had different beliefs. She stated “I remember being at school, and I was really little, I mean, like, sad, like, first grade. And I remember some of the kids were talking about religion. I remember them doing the sign of the cross, with their fingers like this [making a cross] and putting it on my skin and acting like they were burning me. And one little boy actually slapped me! He slapped me across the face, when I said that I didn't believe the way that they believe.” As she reflected on this experience, Trina realized the impact this still has on her today. She added: “I think I just found that I don't talk about religion with people, that aren't safe.”

Wunupu also talked about being physically hurt by other children in school. She said: “They were always mean to me, always socking me and pushing me.” As she shared her story, her narrative flowed to her grandson Miguel's story, since he was teased and often had his hair pulled by other children. In one instance, Wunupu explained, Miguel's hair was being pulled by multiple children. He fought back, which resulted in Miguel getting punished. She added: “A little boy pulled his hair, and then a second kid pulled his hair. Miguel turned around socked him in the face and pushed him, and Miguel was the one who got in trouble.” A Native child being

punished in early childhood education, after trying to protect himself was not an uncommon experience shared during the interviews.

Adults Failure to Protect: “They didn’t do anything.” Harm, both physical and psychological, to Native students has not only been carried out by other students, but by teachers, administrators, and other parents. Parents were aggressors when dropping off and picking up their children, at school events, and when they were volunteers in the classrooms. Indirectly, non-Native parents impacted Native children’s experiences when their children would have play days and birthday parties, which were talked about at school, and to which Native children would not be invited. Parents would often not allow their children to attend Native children’s birthday parties either, because, as Ongavi discovered, the parents’ perception was that “it’s the reservation, it’s dangerous, and scary there.” Through their presence on campus, non-Native parents also had a negative impact on Native children. Huviya remembers when “We’d be playing and then somebody else’s parents would say, you guys could act like a bunch of wild Indians, you know. Things like that. And those used to really bother me. What the heck is that supposed to mean?” Punidgi spoke of her oldest daughter, Atsa’s experience, and said “A lot of these parents that volunteered in the classroom, they didn’t like Atsa. They showed a lot of microaggressions towards her, and their kids did too. Atsa had to sit in the office for an entire week during lunch and she lost out on her lunch time recess and her social time because these White parents kept complaining about Atsa.”

A common narrative shared by study participants was that teachers did not step in to protect the Native students. Additionally, most participants expressed fear of teachers. As Tsanapi said “I was afraid of teachers. They were mean. The teachers were really mean.” A similar sentiment was shared by Huviya regarding Sawabu’s Kindergarten teacher. She stated:

“She was mean. So, mean!” Out of fear, Punidgi hid her Native identity. She said, “I was actually, in fact afraid to say I was Native throughout all of school, because I always knew there was a negative outcome. I was either disregarded, I was not supported in the classroom, or I was shut down.” Tabuha reflected on the non-Native teachers who came to teach on the reservation. She said: “It felt like they always had this perception of like, you know, these dirty little Indians who needed saving, that's kind of what I felt a lot.” Towanu also felt the adversity from teachers by saying, “I didn't have a good support with the teachers, because even some of the teachers treated us the same way the kids did. They wouldn't say anything obvious because they can lose their job, but it was all their nonverbals toward us; the looks they gave us. They just didn't really want to interact with us very well.” At the tender of age of two, a preschool threatened to segregate Tabuha’s son Shane from the rest of the class. She stated:

The teachers were talking to me about how he was basically like in trouble. They didn't understand him. And he was in trouble. They would say things about him. They brought me in and they were proposing this idea to gate him off at play time. And he could be inside of this gate while the kids are outside. So, he could still be outside, but he's going to be isolated. They said that one of the issues that they had was that he would always go off on his own. Even though the whole play area was gated, and he would only go off on the side. There were these big rocks. It was a circle of rocks with this one rock in the center. He would go over in that area, and he would sit there and he would just beat on this rock. So, they were seeing that as him being aggressive. I was like, he does that at home. And that's him singing on the drum, like singing, you know. And he goes over to this same area that he has claimed and he's just sitting there singing on this rock. That's amazing. But they didn't see it like that. They didn't see it like that, you know, and so I actually just removed him from that school. They had me feeling. I swear to God, my concern when Shane was little was like, Oh my God! He's gonna go to prison. He's gonna go to prison. They didn't like him. And they basically had him labeled as a troubled kid, because he didn't sit where they wanted him to sit.

Additionally, Punidgi also shared a story of segregation after White parents complained about Atsa, “In order for the principal to, quote unquote, ‘solve the problem,’ Atsa was basically segregated and put in the office so that all the White kids could go enjoy themselves. I remember

bringing a tote bag of books, so that I could go spend time with her because Atsa technically wasn't in trouble. She just wasn't wanted. And so Atsa was segregated a lot in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. This was extreme and really unnecessary. It really made her feel devalued.”

When Native children did get the courage to reach out for help, their pleas for safety and protection were dismissed or ignored. Wunupu tried to get help and was quickly let down. She said, “I told the teacher a couple of times about the bullying, and they didn't do anything.” Not only did teachers fail to protect Native students, but they were also the aggressors. Participants shared Native students were often labeled and targeted by teachers. Kiya talked about a time in which a teacher made a harmful assumption. She said, “This will always stand out. They were making stuff for their dads in Nakomi’s class and the teacher said, ‘why are you making something?’ She made an assumption that dad wasn't around. Because that must be how we, you know how, it worked out for us? Because we're Native.”

Monotsibi remembers her own experience, “I was always being addressed because I did something wrong” and that she noticed that it was common for the Native children to be targeted. Speaking about her son, she said: “Nick was always in trouble with the other Native kids.” Tabuha shared a tearful story in which her young cousin, who had witnessed extreme violence at a very young age, was “labeled the troubled kid.” Her cousin had the opportunity for cultural connection, described below, which the school took away from him. She remembers that “Native Day” as follows:

We had activities going where the men came and they were cooking traditional foods outside. The boys were able to play the traditional games, and there were different tribal people that came and shared things. It was a fun time in school to have our Native stuff around us. My cousin was in a special class for troubled kids and he wanted to go out and join in with his cousins, his brothers, and everyone out there. His teacher told him that he wasn't allowed to, and he didn't

understand why, so he just walked out to join. He was really young. They called the principal, and I don't know the exchange because I was way over across the playground, but I remember seeing him getting ripped off the field. He was little and he was hurting, and he ended up getting in trouble and was locked in the principal's office. He wanted out and so he pushed the principal who was blocking the door. He got suspended and transferred to a different foster home. All I could think was that, you are so cruel! I just imagine his little Native spirit was seeing his Native stuff, and this is a moment in school where he could have felt good about himself and that was taken from him because his White teacher saw him as a troubled child. Because his principal saw him as disobeying the rules.

Ongavi remembered how, as she put it, “teachers used to hit kids back when I was little.”

When it came to the Native boys, she remembers that “they were the first to get hit. I know that.”

Although Ongavi’s experience was several years ago, Punidgi shared an experience which happened more recently and in which her son Sam was left with a bruise from a teacher. She stated, “One time Sam climbed under the parachute at school, and Sam’s PE teacher dragged him out by his leg. And he had a bruise on his leg. And when I reported it to the school, of course, it didn't even go anywhere. I know the school system can be very one-sided and biased. It has a lot of control and power.” When practices are entrenched in the prevailing school culture, it is hard for Native children and their parents to find safety. Thus, even when Native students speak up or attempt to assert themselves, they get further punished.

Punished for Protecting Themselves: “That still stays on his record.” When one’s safety is at risk, it triggers a survival mechanism often known as the fight, flight, or freeze response, causing the person to react in one of these three ways. “The carefully orchestrated yet near-instantaneous sequence of hormonal changes and physiological responses helps someone to fight the threat off or flee to safety” (Harvard Medical School, 2020, para. 2). Many of the participants shared stories of fighting back when they were unsafe, which, in-turn led to them getting punished while the original, non-Native aggressors received no punishment. Punidgi, in

addition to what she shared during the interview, which is also included under her profile about bullying, shared the following, about her son Sam's experiences, "He has hit back; being hit in kindergarten, first grade, and second. He had hit back and pushed kids and physically responded back to them. and that still stays on his record. I have to remind the administrators that he was being bullied for his long hair. He is a Native American boy and long hair is part of who he is. And that's how he responded to being bullied." Fighting back is what a person would do, especially in the face of repeated aggressions. As the following sub-theme describes, finding safety may take on different responses.

Safety in Silence: "I never spoke up." It was common to also hear stories of Native children staying silent as a self-preservation defense mechanism. Many tried to keep from getting attention from others. Kiya said: "I was too quiet and kept to myself to have any real problems. No one really questioned anything, no one ever knew what I really was." Wunupu said how she remembers, "My grandma said, 'you got to know your place.' And so, it wasn't our place to say anything in the White man's world." Monotsibi also felt that way, stating, "It was always best to just be quiet. It was hard to have to deal with all of the compounded racism and not really understanding why, and not really having resources, or like, even having the ability to have the tongue to fight back and say, 'well this isn't appropriate.'"

Towanu and her grandparents had a genuine fear that she and her brother could be removed from their grandparents' home if they pushed back. Towanu said: "I didn't feel safe speaking up because in the back of my mind, I'd hear my grandparents' voices say, 'don't say anything they don't understand, or you'll be taken away from us.'" Towanu felt she wanted to speak up, but out of respect and protection of her grandparents, as well as the fear of being taken away, she couldn't. She reflected on how she felt about not being able to speak up, "I felt that,

no, I don't want to be quiet, but then I understood that when you're getting raised by your elders, they're tired, they don't have great health. You don't know how long they'll actually be around for you, and that you just want to take that into consideration, so I was always the calm one, the quiet one.”

For some study participants it was lack of confidence rooted in fear. Monotsibi stated, “I never spoke up, because I didn't have the confidence, even then, because I was afraid that someone was gonna make fun of me if I raised my hand in class.” Trina felt she wanted to speak up about concerns she had, however, she said, “I couldn't put it into words at that age, and really express myself what it was I believed in.” The narratives also focused on adults finding safety for their children’s lives in the same silent way; thus, not feeling safe to advocate on behalf of their children. Speaking about her dad, Huviya said, he “went to a boarding school and didn't really want to think of or have anything to do with my school.” This was also an experience shared by Towanu’s grandparents. Ongavi also shared the following about teachers: “I know there's a lot of Native parents that are afraid of schools and teachers and it’s best to just get it done, and do it? And they don't question.” Huviya felt that parents staying silent was a way to protect their children from further harm. She said: “a lot of parents are afraid to say something, because their kids will get punished for it in school.”

Punidgi reflected on her grandparents who raised her and how, as she said, they “let whatever happened happen because it's school and you just have to do whatever you have to do. The school tells you to do something, you put your head down, and you follow the rules.” As a child she remembers, as she put it, being “quiet and reserved. I didn't feel safe speaking up. I felt scared, for myself, I always felt scared. I never felt comfortable advocating for myself.” Tsanapi shared a similar sentiment. She said: “I was quiet, and I didn't want to draw attention to myself.

So, the less people knew about me, the less attention I was drawing to myself.” Punidgi, who currently has her child Paata in early childhood education and Sam who was recently in early childhood education, talks about the continued current struggles. She stated, “It's still hard to advocate and fight because there is still so much negativity about Native people when it comes to the school system. So, it's like, do you want your children to be retaliated against? You know, it's always something that you have to face when it comes to advocating about appropriate culture and your children being who they are.”

Theme #2: Belongingness and Connection

Based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, as safety needs are met, one moves through the psychosocial needs of belonging, friendships, love, and a sense of connection (Maslow, 1968). A person is intrinsically motivated to be socially accepted and connected with others (Schneider & Kwan, 2013) and belongingness impacts a person’s emotional patterns, as well as cognitive processes. When those needs are not met, adverse consequences follow. Thus, the “lack of attachments is linked to a variety of ill effects on health, adjustment, and well-being” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.1). Through the narratives, study participants shared stories of feeling disconnected when in public schools, and a strong sense of belonging and connectedness in Tribal schools. Huviya expressed that the lack of belongingness played a large part in keeping parents from advocating for their kids at school. The following sub-themes provide further evidence to support Theme 2.

Disconnect: “I remember always feeling like an outsider.” Study participants and their children who went to public schools often did not have any Native teachers or school personnel; consequently, they were the only Native people on school grounds. They felt disconnected from both peers and teachers. Monotsibi said, “I always remember feeling different around teachers. I

remember always feeling like an outsider and having to always advocate for myself at a really young age.” Punidgi reported, “always feeling alone and always feeling like I didn’t fit in; like an odd child out.” Similarly, referring to her son Kamu’s experience, she added: “He wasn’t connecting with his peers, and he was feeling isolated for being Native.” Trina also shared her experience “I just never felt like a part of the classroom and part of the class or empowered to even speak up and ask questions. I was just really feeling out of place.”

Throughout the interviews, study participants spoke how teacher comments and classroom activities left them disconnected and confused. Kiya remembers how teachers would comment on her hair, bringing extra attention to her and making her feel uncomfortable. According to Kiya, since she wore braids every day and teachers would say “‘I love your braids.’” Then, once in a while we would have Kiya’s hair down, and we would leave it long for a special occasion, and she would get compliments on her hair. They just always made a big deal about her hair. Which wasn’t bad. It was a good thing. However, the fact they focused on it a lot made it uncomfortable. We often talked about that.”

Tabuha also shared about her own feelings of disconnect, with two specific memories that stood out to her. She said:

I remember our music teacher coming in when I was little, and I loved the song time, but I remember him coming in and teaching us ‘This Land is Your Land.’ I didn’t have like a natural inclination that it was wrong. I just was singing and happy. But somebody else had heard it, an older person at the school, I don’t even know who it was, and they threw a fit about it. And, and I remember feeling that extension of pain. I didn’t understand, but I remember feeling passion in that. And so just knowing that, that was wrong. That really stood out.

Tabuha remembers not feeling comfortable at all looking at the American flag and looking around at all her cousins, who were majority Native, and standing up by the desk with their

hands on their chest. She said, “It's something I'm kind of still grappling with.” Finally, she added:

One thing there that still really resonates with me is that the teacher would have us stand up and put our hands over our hearts and look at the flag and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. I was little and I was always pretty gentle and shy, but I guess I was already pretty strong in my connections with myself because it felt really, really wrong. I did not like it. I didn't have anybody telling me anything about the Pledge of Allegiance. I didn't have anybody telling me anything about the American flag. But I remember feeling very uncomfortable. I feel like it's a lot of that lie of looking at the flag and raising the flag and just the song. You know that song, that was on the blood and the backs of our people. It doesn't sit right. I felt some disgust and even some shame.

One of Trina's memories was being little and being told to sit 'Indian style' on the floor during reading time. She said:

I always thought that was weird. Like, what did that mean? I knew the position, but I didn't understand why they called it Indian style. I was confused. I remember looking around like, what does that mean? Oh, it's Indian style. And then it's like, wait, am I always supposed to sit like this? I also remember a teacher; she wanted us to get in a circle to play with the parachute in PE and she would say to 'circle the wagon'. But when you're little you don't know why it's wrong, you're just exposed to it.

Even when there was strong peer connection at her school on the reservation, Tabuha shared the strong impact of how she felt disconnected and looked down upon by non-Native teachers who came to the reservation to teach. She said:

I didn't have any long term anything with all of the other teachers because they were all traveling in. They were commuting in from the cities nearby the other towns, and they were there to try to do a job. But I don't think there was ever an ability to really understand the cultural differences without looking down on us. These outsiders come in like they're saving Indians, but have no idea, you know, of our beauty and our strength, because they can just see things that are different from them.

When the school did have other Native students, study participant found this to help them get through school. Towanu said, “it was hard sometimes, and you had other kids going through the same thing and so we kind of clicked together.” When Tabuha moved her son Kamu to a school

near a reservation, which other Native kids attended, she said, “There were other Natives, so he was able to feel more in place.”

Lack of Representation and Misrepresentation: “I don’t look like that.” In public schools, the classroom environment and curriculum either did not represent Native people at all, misrepresented them, or generalized them, which made it difficult for study participants and their children to have a sense of belongingness and connection in the schools. Punidgi said, “When it comes to Native stuff, a lot of times it was made fun of. All my schools were predominantly White.” She contends it was very uncomfortable when the curriculum focused on Native people. These experiences had a lasting impact on her. She added:

I just wanted to crawl into a hole when we started talking about Natives because it was very minimal, and it was always negative. And me knowing that I was Native, it made me feel like I'm that bad Indian. I'm that bad person that we're learning about in school. So, it made me feel belittled insecure, it made me feel uncomfortable, and disconnected and unwanted. Really, it kind of made me feel not okay with myself. And I remember that to this day, like wanting to just close up every time we'd start reading about Indians in school.

Monotsibi remembers her son Nick’s frustration, saying, "I remember him telling me about school, and he said his teacher spoke of us as though we were in the past, like we were dead. And that really upset both of us." The erasure, as the act of erasing something or someone, was a common experience amongst study participants, their children, and their families. Huviya reflected about talking to her father about a school assignment, as follows: “I had to write a report and the teacher said to write about your tribe. And they had the typical questions. Where did they live? What did they live in? What did they eat? And so, I'm sitting there. And I was trying to write this. So, I asked my dad, what to do? And he said, we eat the same thing everybody else eats. You know, he got all disgusted.”

Holidays as Halloween and Thanksgiving were especially hard for Native students in early childhood education and widened the disconnect. Many reflected on making crafts such as faux leather vests, and headbands and being forced to dress as a pilgrim or, what the school decided, was an Indian. The misrepresentation and dehumanizing depictions confused Native children and evoked strong feelings that continue to impact them into adulthood. Like many of the participants, Tabuha shared about confusion and mixed feelings, “Thanksgiving always made me feel a certain way. Like I love the food and eating together, but I hated the, you know, the feathers and we had worksheets about Pilgrims and Indians. And yeah, I remember feeling really distant from that and not being comfortable because I knew that I am Native, you know, I'm Native and these people on this coloring page are supposed to be Native and I remember feeling uncomfortable.” Ongavi remembers confusion when comparing the crafts and costumes to her real life “I remember sitting there looking at the, it was like feather masks and also a pilgrim hat that we had to choose from, and I remember being little thinking that this doesn't make any sense. I didn't know what pilgrims were, but I knew what Indians were, and my mom definitely wasn't looking like that. And all of us were like ‘what's going on?’ I just remember just looking at this stuff and going, oh, this doesn't make any sense to me.”

Trina remembers feeling confused when, “We were supposed to dress up for Thanksgiving and I remember this one pink dress I had, and my little barrette that I had, and I'd actually brushed my hair, and then they were like, what are you dressed as? And I was like, I 'm Native. And then they were like, ‘you're not Native’, and I'm like, ‘wait, why am I not’? I'm wearing my best clothes and it was very confusing. having them make fun of me, telling me I'm Not Native and it's like, what? No, I know I am.”

Tabuha had a devastating experience with Kamu's kindergarten. They both still continue to try to process today. When the preschool held a "Native American Heritage Day," Tabuha said:

They posted stuff on the door, a list of activities, and they [students] had to choose an 'Indian name.' So, I went to drop him off one day, and the teacher was at the door, and I saw that five or eight or so people had written their chosen 'Indian name.' They were 'Laughing Giraffe' and 'Talking Zebra,' 'Dancing Butterfly,' and 'Pocahontas' of course. I was reading that, and I just was like, what in the world? So, she [teacher] opens the door and tells Kamu he needs to choose his Indian name, and his whole class were choosing these random, insulting things. She said, 'oh, that's our list and all the kids need to choose their Indian name.' I said, 'no, I see that, but what are you doing? Like, what is this? Why?' and she says, 'oh, this is our way of honoring the Native Americans.' So, Kamu just used his own name. And I'm like, 'honoring?' I said, 'actually, this is insulting. I'm Native and this is insulting.'

With her growing concern, Tabuha volunteered for the "Native American Heritage Day" to offer some protection for her son as she anticipated what was about to happen:

They had these paper fish taped to the wall and these fake spears and they were spearing fish on the wall. They had the paper bag vests, the paper headdresses, headbands; they had teepees, they had a fake fire, they had music going, they were dancing and making hooping sound all around the fire, and they were painting bread. And there were all these stations. So, you'd be at a station for you know, eight minutes or something and then switch to the next station. They had hay bales; they had the worst caricatures of chubby Native people in headdresses.

At such a young age, Kamu saw the other kids participating and joined in because it looked like fun, which was a struggle for Tabuha. She said, "I did not get through the day. Kamu started to get kind of happy and he was starting to dance around with the kids, and I was like, this is ... this is not happening. This is crazy! I said, 'we need to go.' And I took him, and we left."

This incident left Kamu feeling confused, "As we're driving away, he says, 'Mom, it's so weird. I'm Native, but I don't act like one.'" This also left Tabuha in a difficult predicament to clear up the confusion while processing her own strong feelings from the experience. She added:

I was so mad. I said, ‘Kamu, what does a Native act like?’ And he says, ‘you know, dancing around.’ And he started doing all that shit. And I just asked him, ‘do your uncles do that? Do you see your cousins doing these things? Do we do any of that at home? Do you see anyone else doing these things? He was like, ‘No.’ And I explained that this is not how Natives are. That is not a Native person. And I mean, poor kid, you know, I was so mad, and I pulled over and I had tears in my eyes; like I do now.

Tabuha shared about her challenge of explaining how it was wrong, even though it came from his school. She continued “I just said, ‘No son, because it's horrible. I don't want to say those people are wrong, that your school is all wrong. I don't like to do that, but that is wrong. That is wrong. You are a Native boy, and your family are Native people. You live on your land from the beginning of time. That is what Native is, you know, that is who you are. Don't allow their Google searches to make you feel like you are not Native.” When telling this story, Tabuha shed tears and reflected on how big the impact really was. She added “These stereotypes, this perpetuation. There are 150 students who were getting this information, how many of them are ever going to have a relationship with a Native person? Every one of these kids are going to remember this because it was exciting. And it was fun. They're dancing, singing, smiling, and laughing, making a mockery of our people.”

Referring to these early ages, study participants and their children at times, felt that these experiences were wrong even if they didn't understand why. For example, Punidgi stated, “I don't think I knew how to articulate what I was experiencing and what it was at school.”

Connection in Authentic Representation: “He brought in pieces of our community, and it just made a world of a difference inside of me.”

With authentic representation came connection. Even what some might see as small gestures, these were meaningful in the children's lives. Ongavi remembered how, in Ben's public preschool, a Native teacher from another tribe “would buy authentic Native books and bring

them in.” Tabuha also shared about the efforts of one teacher she felt the most connected to stating:

When I reflect back on the times where I got my strength, it was in the second and third grade. The teacher always brought elders in. And that's probably, now that I'm saying this out loud, that's probably a part of why I felt so comfortable. He brought in pieces of our community, and it just made a world of a difference inside of me. We'd sit on the floor, and they'd come and sit down, and they would share stories with us, and they would talk about, it was always crazy, because there was always this joy, just like this pride.

Trina spoke about a project that Alex worked in 2nd grade and how he still remembers it as an adult. Trina stated “He actually got to pick what his report was on, and he chose our tribe. He was excited and I was excited watching him get excited, because he was explaining the different long houses that our peoples made. And then he wanted to make a little model of a longhouse. And I remember when he was at college, he did another project on making a hall, and he was like, ‘remember my longhouse?’ And I was like, oh, my gosh, I do!” Tabuha explains how cultural connection was key to school connection “I don't even remember the spelling tests or the math tests, or a lot of curriculum. I don't remember a lot of assignments, unless it was connected to culture, like when I was able to interview an elder or, you know, when I was like studying about our village sites, in summer school.” During the summer she would attend summer school cultural programs, which she remembers more than regular school “In summer school, it's like, we would build our houses, our villages, we made dance sticks, we would sing our songs, and learn our language, When I reflect back, I remember all of the activities I did in summer school, all of them. I could recreate them today. And when it goes to, you know, kindergarten through eighth grade, I can't say the same thing.”

When a school did not provide authentic representation, many of the participants volunteered in the classrooms. Towanu stated that she “would volunteer and we'd sing songs

and I would bring my great grandma's grinding stone and rock so they could feel it and to mash up some pine nuts and just give a really brief history of what California Indian Day was."

Parents would be proactive as a protective measure. Towanu shared that in the beginning of the year, I'll talk to their teacher, and I'll ask them what they're doing for California Indian Day?

What are you doing for Thanksgiving? Then I'll bring up what I think should be talked about and then I offer services and I'll volunteer and come and do a presentation." Although it took from their time and energy without compensation, Kiini stated "I'd rather have the information and reality be out there, than people thinking that there's a separation between, you know, modern Natives and prehistoric. It's all one group of people, and we can prove that over and over, and over again."

Tsanapi also shared her experience of bringing culture in the early childhood classroom "When it was coming up to Native American Heritage Month, I had an elder come into class, and Egwu brought all of his regalia in, and we laid it out on the table. The kids could touch it, we allowed them to touch it and feel and, and ask questions about it. And he got to answer the questions because he knew everything about his regalia. And the elder gave a talk about Natives and dancing and the tribes that are located here."

Theme #3: Support and Empowerment

"Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups" (Brayboy, 2005, p.13). With the many struggles shared by study participants, it was the validation and support that helped them get through.

When there was a presence of protective and supportive adults, Native children were able to cope better. Tsanapi would reach out to her grandmother for support; she said "it was enough for me

to come home and listen to my grandma talk. I'd come home and tell her about whatever happened, and she always had some great piece of knowledge to tell me and so that was enough for me.”

Punidgi remembers her non-Native grandmother, stating: “Fighting for us on why they were treating us that way. Grandma was a fighter.” Towanu remembers how her grandparents, who raised her, were not able to advocate for her, so she makes it a point to advocate for her own children. She said: “Me and my husband were very active in their education versus me with being raised by grandparents. It makes a huge difference because when things arose someone was there.”

Empowerment and Advocacy: “There's no time to be tired.”

Many of the study participants, whose caregivers were unable to advocate for them when they were young children, became advocates themselves when they became parents and grandparents. Punidgi stated:

I do everything I can to involve culture, or teachings, or history, or the importance of land and teaching them to love who we are as native people, so that they can have that sense of belonging in this Western society, this concrete world. Sam was getting bullied a lot about his hair and being called a girl I know that affected him. So, I tried to keep us attending as many traditional gatherings and pow wows as much as possible. And I would point out every single man and every single boy who had long hair, so that he would see that as a norm for us. I would point it out so much to where I think he started observing it on his own, so that he can know and feel comfortable and love how he looks and who he is as an Indian boy.

Some parents also became stronger advocates with their younger children or grandchildren.

Wunupu stated: “I got older and I ain't gonna take that crap no more.” When reflecting on why she can advocate better now, Tsanapi shared the following:

I think when I was younger, I had a different set of priorities. I was in survival mode. So, it was more about getting them there and getting them home and making sure they did their homework than worrying about what the content was. I think as I've gotten older, I've gotten a little bit more ballsy when it comes to

standing up and talking about it. When you're younger, you're not so secure in your knowledge of things. And so you don't want to speak up in fear of being wrong. And as you get older, I think you become more knowledgeable.

Study participants recognized the importance of advocacy and also the struggles and burden that come with them. Trina expressed feeling very uncomfortable, stating, “that feeling of uncomfortable, you know, like, oh my gosh, I'm gonna have to be the one to stand up right now and question this or stand up against it. I don't think we were taught to do that. We weren't taught to stand up for ourselves. We're not taught to be outspoken and to be aggressive, or assertive.” Towanu said, “sometimes I have a good cry. Sometimes I'll just turn off all media and read all day. And then I'm ready to fight some more. I was that Native kid left behind, and getting labeled with these nasty labels that I, of course, fight for my own kids, but I fight for all the Native kids here on the reservation.” Tsanapi also felt this struggle and explained the importance through the following:

Advocacy takes a toll on you, and it is also empowering because you're that lady that went to school and yelled, but at the same time, something good came out of it. So, you know, you embarrassed your kid, you feel kind of bad for doing that. But you know that it was the best possible thing you could have done for him? But, why do I have to go in and advocate? Why do I have to go in and, and push a dance group on somebody? And offer up speakers that I don't even have, but I'll get them if they need them? You know, just so that the right thing is done?

Huviya also shared a similar sentiment:

You definitely get tired of advocating, but there's no time to be tired. Because I'm still an advocate for all kinds of things. I was always at the school they'd see me coming in. Sometimes I just walk into school and the other parents would say ‘get them, Huviya’. It's my life, you know, and I don't have time to get tired of it. And if I do get frustrated, I usually just go to bed that night and wake up better. It takes a lot of patience, and that's the biggest problem I see with parents, you know, they're trying to be parents and they got a lot going on and trying to raise their families and make money to raise their families, and they don't have time. They just get frustrated because there's all these roadblocks. They just get frustrated trying to fight the system.

Some study participants made it a point to get themselves in positions in which they could make a greater difference. Ongavi talked about how her father got on the school board and how she followed in his footsteps, empowering other Native parents. She said: “It opened the floodgates. And I was nervous as I thought about the oppression on us, like you guys aren't good enough to serve on the school board. And I think when I got on, I think that changed a lot of people's perspective.” Along these same lines, Tabuha was empowered to go to school to help create change. She said “We have to beat them at their own game. We have to learn their tools. This is always going to be a fight. So, you go out and get your education and you come back and help. And that was a responsibility that was ingrained inside of me before I even knew what I was going to school for. I just knew I was going to sharpen those tools in their ways so that I can beat them at their own game for us, for my elders who were so powerful and so amazing.”

Navigating the Rules and Policies: “Our kids can't just get over someone in just one day.” Many times, this advocacy involves learning how to navigate policy. As Brayboy (2005) states in the second tenant of TribalCrit, “U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy and a desire for material gain” (p. 429). Schools were unforgiving when it came to getting time off for Tribal customs such as bereavement and ceremony. Towanu shared her experience trying to learn how to navigate the policies “It takes a lot to learn all that and understand it and it sometimes makes you feel stupid. It's not easy to read. And you have to actually ask someone out of your comfort zone and be like, what does this mean, I don't understand it, and no one likes to be like, I don't understand this explain this to me. It takes a lot of effort and energy to do that.”

Punidgi reflects on the struggle as well:

There have been a lot of times where I have had to kind of really debate, what do I do? Because you know, ceremony being such a priority versus okay, these are

the school's policies. I know there were times when I would put ceremony first and I remember having to approach the school and I remember things being challenging and the outcomes not being supportive of us putting ceremony as a priority. And then just having to accept the consequences from the school, they were unsupportive.

Tabuha also remembers feeling torn between school attendance rules and expectations and attending ceremony. She stated:

I was able to go to ceremony with my Auntie's, and I was able to feel complete but then being in the school, where it's like, if you're good enough, you get to go to the waterslides. But you have to be there every day. So it was like, do I go and do ceremony now and feel good right now? Am I going to be okay, with everybody else going on that trip to the water slides and I'm not getting to go because I went to my ceremonies? I think that stings the most. If you go to school, and have perfect attendance, then you get to go to the water slides. But if you want perfect attendance, then you can't go to your ceremonies. And that sucked.

Ongavi also struggled with the attendance policies in Ben's school when it came to funerals and ceremony, so she advocated to change it as demonstrated in the following quote:

They have such a strict policy where I think you get one day off for the funeral; I think that's it and it has to be your mom or your dad who died. We were losing so many tribal members and, you know, they had kids that were in school, and our kids can't just get over someone in just one day. They need to be able to take however much time they need. We have to do the clothes burning after so many days, and then we have some families do the wakes and then some families do the funerals. It's a huge ordeal, and it takes a lot out of you. I can't even imagine doing that when I was a kid.

Monotsibi remembers the impact the strict policies had on her as a child "I remember being upset more than once when I was young because my mom left us when a relative had passed because we couldn't have any more absences. She told us she was sorry, and she would leave. Then we were kind of like latchkey kids. We'd have to like take care of ourselves at that point. So it would always be kind of scary, the fact that my mom left us, but just also by idea that we couldn't mourn with her. So that really was a big thing I remember when I was younger."

In navigating these policies, many study participants learned to use the language in the policy to advocate for the needs of their children. They would often have to use the term

“religion,” as Towanu explained when taking her kids out of school for ceremony. She said:

That was kind of an issue with the girls missing school, I had to look it up in the handbook and bring it up as a religious belief, so it should be excused. I know we don't use the word ‘religious’ but I said the term ‘religion’ because in a white man's world that is what they understand, they understand that term religious. I did learn the policies. I just decided one day that I am not going to be like that. I said no this is what's going to happen, and it has to be excused because of our religious beliefs. I said it's in that handbook right there. This section on this page because I brought a copy of it. This is it, and it has to be excused.

Safety in Our Communities. “I felt safer in my community, because I felt a part of it.” Participants shared feeling safer and more connected when attending Tribal schools or just being in their own tribal communities. Punidgi shared the struggle of moving between her tribal and western worlds in the following way, “When it came to the school, it was like, I was living two different lives and basically had to be two different people. I was closed off quiet and reserved in the school system. But when I was around, you know, my community we played, I was equal, I fit in, you know, I was more comfortable, so I was not as closed off. When Nick changed to a tribal school, he got into A lot less trouble. Everybody was always included. I remember the kids always being happy.” Tabuha endearingly reflected on her own Tribal preschool. She said:

Man, we'd eat together, like we would always eat together, we would sing together, we would laugh together, we told scary stories, we share good stories, you know, we would go gathering. There's routine, and there's structure, but it is not, like, in a box. If it's storming too hard, we're not going to go gather today, you know, but typically around this time we go and gather but you know, so you're not like, on Wednesday, we're doing this. The structure just felt very different, like, an ebb and flow, you know, like, the ebb and flow is through connections of environment.

Tabuha also reflected on Kamu's experience when he changed to a tribal school. She said "When he went back to school on the reservation, one of the first things that he said was 'Mom, everyone has long hair' in an excited way. Everyone doesn't have long hair, but there's enough people around him that people don't really notice, you know. They're not like, oh, you have long hair, you know. They just wear their braids." Tabuha explained, how he finally felt a sense of place.

Kiini remembers how at her tribal preschool, she said, "we had the pictures of baskets we had. We actually had an elder teaching us in preschool." Punidgi also shared that "I felt safer in my community, because I felt a part of it." She remembers working in a tribal preschool, she said "It was more culturally relevant and there was more connection The children were treated equal, and we always found ways to involve the Native way, whether it was teaching them and showing them artifacts, utilizing the language, teaching them things out in on the land, ethnobotany: there was always inclusion, and it was comfortable."

Punidgi remembers how her daughter, Atsa, was when she was in her Native community, she said: "She fit right in. She always fit right in. She wasn't that odd, odd child who behaved differently like the school made her feel." This strong connection in community made parents feel better as well. Ongavi shared "there wasn't any kind of anxiety going to the Tribal school. My mom wasn't worried about us, because you know, my best friends were there with me." She also explained how she felt a close connection to the Tribal preschool due to the authentic culture implemented throughout, "I just remember in preschool people came in and told us traditional stories and I remember they would make traditional food like, at least once a week."

Summary of Findings

The findings from this study show the extent to which Native American students have experienced racism in early childhood education. Through the multi-generational perspectives and experiences shared, the findings have shown that these experiences with racism are first felt in a child's youngest years in the education system and that there is a continuous perpetuation of a system rooted in racism, that began with the boarding schools and lasts to this day. Participants shared experiences with verbal aggressions including those who identify as male being called "a girl", being teased about their hair overall, being called names such as "dirty Indian" or "savage" and experiencing teachers using phrases such as "circle the wagon" or asking them to sit "Indian style". They experienced physical violence including hair pulling and being assaulted by their peers. At times they attempted to defend themselves, they were punished, while the original, non-Native aggressors were not. When Native students did reach out for help, they rarely received it and often felt dismissed, leading them to stop reaching out. Many of the participants identified themselves or their children as shy and quiet students, however, upon further reflection, it was often noted that this was a strategy to stay safe and avoid conflict in school. Conforming to school expectations was identified as a safety mechanism and created internal conflict that participants continue to struggle with as adults. With frustration and confusion, Native students participated in activities such as creating and wearing stereotypical "Native" costumes, participating in inaccurate, glamorized Thanksgiving plays, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, and singing songs such as "This Land is Your Land". Even in the very young early childhood years, these things felt inherently wrong, even when they didn't completely understand why. In their own community, amongst their own people, they felt safe and secure and were able to be their authentic selves.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter Five provides a summary of the overall study, including study design, research questions, research findings, implications, and a discussion with recommendations and potential future studies.

Revisiting the Purpose of the Study, Conceptual Framework, Research Questions, Methodology, and Research Findings

As shown in the literature review, Native American students experience racism through multi-levels of education: an education system that began with the intention of eradicating Native cultural practices, breaking up Native families, and ultimately the assimilation of Native peoples—A system, which was one piece of a larger, multilayered practice of cultural genocide throughout the continent. Although there is research focused on the boarding schools, as well as historical and more recent educational experiences in middle school, high school and college, there is scarcity of research on experiences specific to early childhood education. Through a qualitative, narrative approach, this study aimed to fill that gap in this research and explored Native American experiences with racism in early childhood education with a focus on the following research questions:

1. In what ways do Native American parents describe their experiences with racism in their own early childhood education?
2. In what ways do Native American parents describe their children's experiences with racism in early childhood education?

This study was intentionally designed to include multigenerational voices and learn of these experiences across time, creating a more complete picture of early childhood education experiences, in a system that began with the traumatic boarding school experiences. Due to the

COVID-19 pandemic and the need for social distancing, the interviews were all completed via Zoom at a time that was convenient for study participants. Although a protocol was used for the semi-structured interviews, the narrative approach allowed for a natural flow for participants to share their stories in a culturally relevant way. Data were analyzed using the dual lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Brayboy's TribalCrit. Through an analysis of the research, it became clear that Native children's basic needs, as shown through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, were not met, specifically the needs for Safety and Belonging. Through the lens of TribalCrit, the assimilation practices and policies that continue to attempt to disconnect Native people from their cultural ways, shows the prevalence of ongoing attempt to colonize and assimilate Native people. Through the interviews, and consistent with TribalCrit, we also see and honor the importance of Native stories, the desire for self-determination, and the need for social change.

Research Findings and Discussion

This research found how Native American students face experiences of racism in their earliest years of education and how the education system has failed to meet their basic need to be and feel safe. As the literature showed in Chapters 1 and 2, these experiences continue all the way through college. Native students are struggling to have their basic safety needs met while attending school, starting with the earliest years. Most study participants identified themselves and/or their children as "quiet" and not wanting to bring attention to themselves as a protective mechanism. Each interviewee shared stories of unsafety in their schools with experiences such as name calling, hair pulling, bullying, and physical violence. Time and time again, adults who were responsible for their wellbeing failed to protect Native students, and in multiple cases, the

Native students were punished for trying to protect themselves when the adults refused or failed to do so.

Early childhood is a time of social-emotional development in which young children are learning, “forming language, identifying cultural and social norms, and learning to distinguish right from wrong...” (Rushton et al., 2009). Belongingness and connection were important to study participants who shared about experiences in which they felt different and disconnected in public schools. On the other hand, students who went to Tribal schools felt connected to other students, staff, and teachers, especially those who were also Native, and these were places where they felt that sense of belonging. The Tribal schools had authentic representation in the curriculum, the environment, and even the food. They integrated leaders and elders from the community, helped the children build a relationship with the traditional lands, many did not use behavior charts and reward systems, and did not force a strict regimen; instead, they allowed for ebb and flow throughout the day. The connection in these schools was also attributed to students and staff who shared similar values, experiences, and familial relationships which gave them a positive experience overall. Study participants felt that there was less harsh, target discipline toward the Native students at Tribal schools and that they felt confident and safe to be their authentic selves in these settings.

In the classrooms of public schools outside of the reservations, Native culture was either misrepresented, which confused the children and made some of them question their own identity and experiences, or completely lacking, unless one of the Native families advocated and provided it themselves. The few stories that did include teachers who were intentional and brought in authentic representation into their early childhood classrooms, were powerful and made Native students feel seen and supported. When Native parents were able to be proactive

and offer to educate the schools and students, it did make a difference and they shared the importance of it; however, there was also resentment due to Native parents having to take time out of work and their daily lives, use their resources without compensation, and feeling that this wasn't their job—their claim was that the schools needed to be making these efforts. In many narratives, the parents felt that they were often in survival mode and didn't have the ability to advocate like they wanted and needed to, or they were in fear of the repercussions that could happen to their children and themselves if they challenged the rules and the system.

Based on study participants' accounts, public school policies were identified by participants as not culturally appropriate or affirming and oftentimes, families had to choose between following cultural practices and traditions, at the risk of the children getting in trouble, or following school policies creating disconnect in culture. A common fear was that their children would be taken from them by Child Protective Services, which is not entirely unfounded as there has historically been, and continues to be, disproportionate amounts of Native children removed from their homes (NICWA, 2021). With extra efforts, many parents and grandparents did learn how to navigate the school policies and advocate for their children to get their children's and family's needs met; however, these efforts were exhausting and took a toll on them. Once they were more stable in their lives and felt more empowered to speak up to the schools, parents and grandparents did advocate, and although there were repercussions at times, they felt they were in a better position to handle them. At times, the ability to advocate for change came after their children and grandchildren were out of the schools due to the power dynamics changing. Once the children were out of the schools, they were no longer in fear of repercussions or having their children and grandchildren taken away from them. Parents and grandparents returned to advocate for other Native students and families, as the schools and staff

were no longer in positions of power over them or their own children and grandchildren. They continue to advocate because they know the damage that is caused, and they want all Native children to be free to follow cultural traditions, and to also be safe in this education system that they are forced to be part of.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

This research study showed how Native American experiences with racism begin in the early childhood education years, which impact not only the child, but also the families and Tribal communities overall. When Native youth struggle with having their basic needs for safety, belonging, and esteem met from the beginning of their educational journeys and throughout, it is no surprise that their retention and completion rates continue to be low. Spending a large percentage of their time in schools, Native students need to have safety at all levels of education. When Native students need to focus on basic needs and survival in the system, how can we expect them to also be able to focus on academic learning? This research showed Native students felt the safest in Tribal schools and, second to that, where schools had Native staff and other Native students; all of which also directly connected to belongingness and esteem.

The first recommendation is to increase funding for Tribal early childhood programs, without cumbersome, culturally inappropriate expectations. As Smith (2021) states, “There is a clear need to invest in and expand early care and education programs that serve Native American children and families” (para. 2). Tribal early childhood education programs are either non-existent or extremely underfunded, and the funding streams that are actually available often come with intrusive data collection and expectations that are not in alignment with cultural ways, once again creating the struggle between conforming to colonial expectations or maintaining cultural values and safety—a choice that programs should not have to make. Whether Tribal or

non-Tribal schools, study participants shared the importance of representation, not only in the students, but within the staff. It is recommended that extra funding and support be provided to support Native early childhood teachers and other staff so that they can meet qualifications to be employed within the early childhood education systems. It is also important to help develop these Native teachers and other staff to be able to hold leadership roles, not in the way that has always been, but rather in culturally relevant, safe, and appropriate ways—by listening to the Native voices and letting them design the programs.

With public, non-Tribal early childhood education programs being identified as the most unsafe environments for Native students, the second recommendation is to increase authentic, culturally relevant, and ongoing training for all staff at these schools. Training needs should be direct and intentional, provided through an authentic Native lens, preferably from the local Native community, and should be ongoing. A one-time training does little more than check a box. Trainings need to go beyond the one-day lecture. If one wants to be truly inclusive, it is recommended that a Native early childhood consultant, with expertise in inclusivity, microaggressions, and racism, assess classrooms and programs overall. In addition, education on authentic Native cultures, as well as microaggressions and racism overall, need to be intentionally and authentically woven into all parts of early childhood education classes in higher education. This would also include early childhood educators attending Indian Education Conferences and Indian Education Conferences having a focus on early childhood.

Teachers in early childhood programs might mean well, but oftentimes they don't realize the harm they are doing and don't know where to turn to when they have questions. It is recommended that a Native American early childhood professional development program be developed that provides outreach, training, and a safe place to ask questions and get guidance for

Native American early childhood professionals. This needs to include how to set up an authentic, culturally inclusive program, identifying and alleviating microaggressions, trainings, and continuous support. In addition, there needs to be supports provided to the parents and the students. This can include advocacy trainings, support groups, and a safe place to reach out to when extra support is needed. This would include trainers, advocates, and peer support.

Although the advancements in technology can allow for services such as these to be provided virtually, there also needs to be on the ground supports since many Native families live in areas where access to internet services may be scarce.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

This research showed how Native Americans experience racism in early childhood education, which opens the door to several other connected topics for future research. Being that the participants in this study all identified as female, the Native male perspective would also be valuable to explore. In alignment with the theme of “Safety,” we already know that Native youth have high rates of suicide, but we don’t have a complete understanding of how these experiences with racism in the education system may relate to this tragic reality and would be an area of further research. In relation to this topic, participants shared about their struggles with conforming to fit in school, as well as struggling with choosing between cultural ways and punishment at school. It would be beneficial to research and gain a better understanding of the mental health impact of choosing between conforming to culturally harmful policies or not being able to follow cultural ways, such as ceremonies and mourning. In the theme of “Belongingness and Connection,” study participants expressed the harm that lack of authentic representation and misrepresentation can do. Consequently, further research needs to be done on assessing early childhood education classroom for harmful misrepresentation of Native cultures or lack of

authentic representation. In addition, research focused on the experiences of Native students in culturally authentic, relevant, and inclusive early childhood classrooms would also be insightful. Research specifically focused on the psychological impact this cultural perspective has on Native people is also important. In connection with the theme of “Support and Empowerment,” relevant future research should include exploring Native experiences with retaliatory practices in early childhood education when advocating for their children, institutional barriers to cultural advocacy, as well as the experiences and impact of belonging and cultural safety in Tribal early childhood programs.

Final Thoughts

There is an intersection between the Indigenous and academic worlds and just as Smith (2012) articulates, “I was born into one and educated into the other” (p. ix). Dancing within and between these worlds is something that Indigenous academics do daily, and in our research, we continue this dance between academic expectations and cultural identities, realities, relevancy, and safety. We dance between self and cultural preservation and safety and survival in the academy. We struggle to be seen as the experts in our own cultures and are pushed to see others as the “experts.” As Smith (2012) further states ...

Many researchers, academics and project workers may see the benefits of their particular research projects as serving the greater good ‘for mankind,’ or serving a specific emancipatory goal for an oppressed community. But belief in the ideal that benefiting mankind is indeed a primary outcome of scientific research is as much a reflection of ideology as it is of academic training. It becomes so taken for granted that many researchers simply assume that they as individuals embody this ideal and are natural representatives of it when they work with other communities. (p. 4)

As a Native scholar, I have had to find a balance between conforming to academic expectations and honoring Native voices and Indigenous ways of knowing. While I have included voices in the Literature Review that do not have the Indigenous lens, it is important to

understand that non-Native researchers “are often unacquainted with the issues surrounding the tribal nations, including the customs and traditions of the communities, that they so eagerly wish to quantify. Profound misunderstandings then manifest themselves in the discipline and make it difficult for decolonization and recovery of Indigenous knowledge” (De La Torre, 2004, p. 185).

As I complete this study on racism in the education system, while I also move through this very system, I have experienced this need to conform in hopes that I can meet standards decided upon within the system, and still honor and maintain cultural values. This has not been without struggle and advocacy, and at times, I have had to make uncomfortable choices that do not align with my own cultural values. It is not lost on me that “As Indigenous intellectuals committed to our Indigenous nations, we threaten the power and authority claimed by institutions, disciplines, and peoples created, in part, from the oppression of our people” (Mihsuah & Wilson, 2004, p. 5). With that being said, our Native voices are valuable and need to be heard and brought forth in all topics related to our people. “As Indigenous scholars we simply cannot reject that which is unacceptable to the academy (because we value all Indigenous knowledge), so our task is to challenge the academy as an agent of colonialism” (Mihsuah & Wilson, 2004, p. 73).

Appendix A: Outreach Flyer

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR A STUDY ON NATIVE AMERICAN EXPERIENCES WITH RACISM IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Share your experiences through one-on-one interviews via Zoom

Do you meet the following qualifications?

- *Identify as Native American | *Are age 18 or older | *Are a parent
- *Have attended an educational program in California between the ages of 0-8.

To check eligibility and to sign up, please complete this brief survey

[Click here](#) or visit <https://tinyurl.com/NativeECE>

OR

Scan here with your
phone camera



All participants interviewed will receive a \$20 gift card

For more information or if you have questions, please contact

Kiana Maillet | Primary Investigator

Mail001@cougars.csusm.edu or kmaillet@ucsd.edu

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form



California State University
SAN MARCOS

Invitation to Participate in Research (Adult Consent)

Invitation to Participate

Kiana Maillet, a doctoral candidate in the joint doctoral program at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD) is conducting a study that seeks to explore Native American people's perceived experiences with racism, including micro-aggressions, in early childhood education. You are being contacted because you indicated interest in participating in this research study from the initial electronic survey distributed by the researcher.

You have been recruited because of your unique experiences and perspectives on these topics.

Description of Procedures

By participating in this study, you will be interviewed regarding the above topics about experiences in early childhood education. The interviews will be approximately 60-90 minutes long and will be conducted via Zoom. The interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed.

Risks and Inconveniences

Although the risk is minimal, some risks may include the trigger of emotions that may come up due to prior history or experiences with the education system. Inconveniences include the time needed for the interviews as well as sitting for a long period of time. There is the potential for loss of confidentiality; however, every effort will be made to protect your privacy and safeguards will be in place to minimize risks.

Safeguards

A list containing resources available at little, or no cost, will be included with the consent form in the event that any participants become distraught during the interview. Interviews will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for the participant and breaks will be taken as needed to minimize possible discomfort from sitting for long periods of time.

As the researcher, I will do everything I can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this study. All information collected in the interviews will be held in confidentiality. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You have the right to stop the interview at any time without any adverse consequences. Confidentiality will be ensured in the final research document by the use of pseudonyms of people and places.

The risk associated with data confidentiality will be addressed in several ways. Personal information collected through Qualtrics will be downloaded and stored as a password-protected file, in the researcher's password-protected computer, separate from the data. Signed consent forms and written notes will be stored in a key-secured file cabinet, separate from the data; both, computer and file cabinet, are located in the researcher's office. A transcription company may be used to transcribe the interviews. The transcription company will be professionally held to a confidentiality agreement that will protect the data collected. Once transcription is completed and checked for accuracy, audio recordings will be destroyed. Transcripts will be kept in the researcher's password protected computer, in a password protected file, separate from any identifying data. Consent forms, personal data collected through Qualtrics, and handwritten notes will be kept for a maximum of three years. At the three-year mark, consent forms, and handwritten notes will be shredded and personal data collected through Qualtrics will be permanently



deleted. Confidentiality will be ensured in the final research document by the use of pseudonyms of people and places; no identifiers will be used.

Voluntary Participation

Participants can refuse to answer any questions and withdraw participation in this study at any time without consequences. If the length of the interview becomes inconvenient, you may stop at any time. There are no consequences if you decide not to participate.

Benefits

A potential benefit of the study is the increased knowledge about the experiences Native American people have in early childhood education. Another potential benefit is that this study may find areas of need that can be addressed through future programming and resources.

Incentive

All participants in the study will receive a gift card in the amount of \$20 that will be sent via email. Participants will be able to stop the interview at any time and receive the gift card, even if they do not get through all of the questions.

Questions

For questions about your participation or to report any problem or unanticipated consequences, contact the principal investigator in this study, Kiana Maillet, by phone at (619) 507-2998 or by email at mail001@cougars.csusm.edu. You can also contact the Faculty Advisor of this study, Manuel Vargas by phone at (336) 831-6926 or by email at mvargas@csusm.edu.

“This study has been approved by the California State University San Marcos Institutional Review Board. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Institutional Review Board at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.”

I agree to participate in the research study.

I give permission for my interview to be digitally audio recorded

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Printed Name of Research Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

Printed name of Researcher

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Definitions

Early Childhood Education is recognized by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as education for ages birth--8 years old, which includes preschool through early elementary school (1993)

Racism (include a short definition here)

Microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al, 2007).

Demographic Questions

What is your age?

What is your gender?

What is your highest level of education?

What is your current field of employment?

What region is your tribe from?

How many children do you have?

Parents experiences with racism in early childhood education

1. How old were you when you first started school?
2. What grade were you in when you first started school?
3. What was your relationship like with your teachers?
4. What was your relationship like with your peers?
5. Please tell me about any conflict or struggles that you had in school.
- 6.. Please tell me about a time that experienced racism in early childhood education.

Parent’s describing racism in early childhood education experienced by their children.

1. How many children do you have?
2. What are their ages now?

For each child we will go through a set of questions.

1. How old was your first child when s/he began school?
2. What grade was s/he in?
2. Did s/he go to public, private, or Tribal school?
3. How would you describe your child’s relationship with the teachers?

4. How would you describe your child's relationship with peers?
5. Please tell me about any conflict or struggles that your child had in school.
6. Please tell me about a time that your child experienced racism in early childhood education.

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