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Native American Male Perspectives on Successful Higher Educational Attainment: Primary
Motives and Practices in Overcoming Hinderings Barriers in Degree Attainment

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in American Indian Studies

by

Aaron Taylor M. Wilson

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Native American Male Perspectives on Successful Higher Educational Attainment: Primary Motives and Practices in Overcoming Hindering Barriers in Degree Attainment

by

Aaron Taylor M. Wilson

Master of Arts in American Indian Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Felicia S Hodge, Co-Chair

Professor Duane W Champagne, Co-Chair

There is an ongoing crisis among the Native American male population as they seek higher educational attainment. Currently, Native American males are experiencing such low numbers of higher educational attainment that their reporting they could be considered non-existent. This study identifies the primary motives of Native American male students who have successfully reached educational degree attainment. Understanding and discovering the major barriers in higher educational attainment among Native American male students, their management practices and the strategies that contributed to successful completion of a college degree program is a secondary aim. Study finding indicate the primary motive of Native American male students to earn college degrees is to obtain knowledge and skill sets that would allow them to engage in

work that will result in positive outcomes within their tribal communities. The findings also identified major barriers to educational attainment which were lack of support within higher educational institutions, cost associated attendance and living expenses, and being away from their communities. In addition, the inability to ask for and receive the help necessary to move forward in the educational process was noted. The findings highlight the need for and significance of asking for help, traveling home often to participate in ceremonies and tribal gatherings, finding and building support groups within the university setting, and religious practices that contributed to the success and excellence of the participants to reach degree attainment.

The thesis of Aaron Taylor M. Wilson is approved

Christine Samuel-Nakamura

Felicia S Hodge, Committee Co-Chair

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University of California, Los Angeles

2018

Dedicated to

Angus McFarren,

Elizabeth Juan,

Nerissa Juan,

Nova Wilson,

and

The Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community

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Prologue

I feel an introduction of myself would best put the work of this thesis in a perspective clearly highlighting its importance not only to me, but the significance of the problem to Native American students and their communities. As a Native student, I do what I can that will best serve our relatives as seen in the work of this thesis. I know as a Native scholar I have an opportunity to alter the harmful methodologies previously used to harm our relatives and to engage in work that will promote the interests of Native Americans. Moving forward and acknowledging that I am not bound to an academic script that academia that has forced its self on so many others, this work is by and for Natives. There is nothing wrong with non-Native authors writing on Native topics, peoples, as long as their work is not harmful to Natives. However, I believe Native scholars have and continue to contribute significantly to the field. Their work should be viewed as the authority on Native topics and their work should not be altered to fit non-Native criteria. Native scholarship is vital and crucial to establishing the truth about Native experiences and communities. This thesis is written in a manner that best serves my community and indeed is valuable to all Native communities.

My name is Aaron Taylor M. Wilson, I am a non-traditional first-generation college student, college graduate, graduate student, and an enrolled member of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community. Higher educational attainment and my experience within academia has had a significant positive impact in my life in many ways. My understanding of the significance of higher educational attainment has come to me in many ways throughout my academic career and my life journey. One way the significance and necessity of higher educational attainment has been brought into light was by a first-hand comparison of two environments, one made up of people who have earned a college degree, and the other with

people who do not have a college degree. I know such a comparison between those who have and have not earned college degrees can be problematic. However, when trying to support an argument due to many additional factors, variables, and components that contribute to the outcomes of socioeconomic status there are common factors present that cannot be ignored. There are no doubt factors within this type of comparison that has motivated me to consider higher educational attainment for Native American male students. I do not intend to use the comparison to support an argument, but rather to show a framework of how I have become motivated to consider higher educational attainment for Native American male students. As I became more aware of higher educational attainment and all that it encompasses, I have also been actively conscious of 'who' goes to college and earn degrees to try to understand what motivates them to go into college programs. For those who are not able to go into college programs, I seek to understand the barriers they face that prevent them to earn degrees?

I know I do not have all the answers but I feel my experience as a Native American non-traditional student which is considered to be a marginalized group within higher education circles could add some perceptiveness to the reality of marginalized groups within higher education. I think I can successfully say that there are indeed structures within higher education and there is in fact an element of exclusion that is built into these structures. The question now is how they affect other students like me, other Native American male college students. How can I bring awareness to this type of exclusion, and how powerful higher educational attainment can impact an individual's economic outcome has been motivation for me in my studies in the field.

Introduction

“we need to learn their way, not only learn their ways but master them...” –Participant XX

Native American males are experiencing extremely low higher educational attainment. Whereas the Native American population reports increasing educational attainment numbers overall. Native American males experience lower educational attainment as compared Native American females and other males from all racial/ethnic groups. The literature is scant on this topic as few studies have been reported on educational attainment experiences among Native Americans.

The current work offers some general notions and explanations to current hindering contributing factors that have led to the low numbers in higher educational attainment among Native American males. However, in the already scant body of literature there is minimal information on the contributing factors that lead to successful higher educational attainment experiences among Native American male students. Broad concepts, ideas, and suggestions are found in the current literature that attempt to give possible explanations to why this phenomenon is ongoing. The literature suggests a great need for programs carried out in the college setting that are geared to support Native American male students within universities.

The aim of this study is to determine the main contributing factors and motivations for Native American male students to earn college degrees, and to discover the hindering barriers they experienced during their academic journeys. In addition, this study establishes a “best practice” knowledge base for understanding the most helpful factors in managing barriers

during the academic journey.

The questions asked in this study are:

- (1) What was the main reason you decided to go to college?
- (2) What were some of the greatest barriers you faced during your academic journey?
- (3) How did you manage the barriers you faced during your journey to a college degree?

This study examines positive experiences to identify what contributed to the success of these cases, in our case those are Native American male college students who successfully earned college degrees. The study sought to determine what were the most significant motivating factors in the participant's experience that led to the completion of a college degree. While it may seem broad to ask both the reasoning and motives behind the academic journey, and to ask for major barriers and how best to manage these barriers, the participants in this study are able to attest to the areas of inquiry in great depth. Identifying the primary reasons for the participants to be interested in, and how they managed to complete college programs could put forth additional knowledge that can be used to help encourage and assist others in this demographic. Also, identifying major barriers participants faced during their academic journey can be helpful in understanding effective ways to combat and manage barriers within the academic setting to help others within this population successfully earn college degrees.

Research Problem

Native American males have the lowest college graduation expectation rate out of any other race group.

Higher educational attainment for the Native American population has experienced significant increases over the last thirty years, however, the population still have the lowest enrollment, and graduation rates among all racial/ethnic groups. According to Brayboy et al. (2012) once enrolled in a college program American Indian/ Alaska Natives (AI/AN) experience the lowest graduation rates among all racial groups. Only 4 percent of the United States American AI/AN population hold bachelor's degrees, while 27 percent of the Caucasian population hold bachelor's degrees. This means that for every one American Indian/ Alaska Native person that holds a bachelor's degree, there are seven Caucasian persons who hold bachelor's degrees. Native American students have the lowest graduation rate among all racial groups.

According to Aud et al. (2011), in 2008, only 38.3 percent of AI/AN students completed a college program leading to a bachelor's degree, which is the lowest rate of all racial and ethnic groups. According to Brayboy et al. (2012) while the enrollment of the AI/AN population has increased over the last thirty years, women have experienced a significantly higher rate of enrollment, than that of the men within the population. Brayboy et al. (2012) points out that Native American men are receiving fewer doctoral degrees now than thirty years ago. According to Shotton et al. (2013) Native American students are unrepresented in graduate programs making up only a fraction of a percent (0.6 %) of the entire total graduate enrollment for all populations. AI/AN women make up 64 percent of the 0.6 percent of the graduate enrollment of the AI/AN and men making up 36 percent of graduate enrollment.

The aim of this study is to identify the main motivational factors for Native American males to earn college degrees and to identify hindering factors, and barriers they faced during their academic journey. The study also aims to understand how Native American males managed these barriers and how they overcame them which led them to successfully earn a college degree. The current literature is scant at best when looking at higher educational attainment among the AI/AN population, especially when it come to the ultralow numbers of higher educational attainment for Native American males. The majority of the current literature on the topic discuss whole population statistics of higher educational attainment for the Native Americans, however, when it comes to the Native American males, there is little found that offers insight to the cause for these low numbers in educational attainment. There is even less on why or how the successful cases within the population have been successful in the face of ultralow numbers.

This study contributes insight to why Native American male students are motivated to go to college, and to identify barriers they face during they academic journey. This will add to the current knowledge base of known hindering factors, and insight on practical management practices for barriers within the higher educational attainment process for this population. Identifying process and strategies, which the participants utilized to manage barriers they encountered during their journey to a college degree, can put forth useful insight that can be helpful to others in population who want to pursue a college education and will most likely encounter the same or similar barriers during their work to earn a college degree. The questions for this study are (1) What is the primary reason you went to college? (2) What were the largest barriers you faced during your academic journey? (3) How did you manage the barriers you faced during your journey to a college degree? Examining successful cases among Native American male college graduates will put forth insight and add to the knowledge base for higher

educational attainment for the Native American male students. Also, it is important to identify reasons why Native American males who have earned college degrees are successful in the face of the ultralow numbers in enrollment and attainment.

Chapter One: Literature Review

“The available data tell a grim story about the past and present, but the “real story” how American Indian boy and men are faring in the world is not fully told” –Brayboy & Bang

“There is a dearth of research addressing the particular needs and experiences of Native males in regards to college access or persistence...” –Brayboy et al.

The current literature is scarce at best regarding the experiences of Native American males within higher educational attainment. The literature focused on the entire Native American population and their experiences in higher educational attainment is present, but still remains scant compared to the available literature of other ethnic populations in higher education.

According to Brayboy et al., (2012) AI/AN student higher education enrollment has increased dramatically over the past thirty years. However, AI/AN women have experienced a significantly higher increase in enrollment than that of AI/AN men. Between 1976 and 1994 AI/AN female bachelor degree recipients increased by 135 percent, while during the same period AI/AN male bachelor degree recipients increased by only 51 percent. In addition, over the same period AI/AN female doctoral recipients increased by 143 percent, while AI/AN doctoral recipients **decreased** by 0.1 percent. Brayboy et al. (2012) discuss facts indicating Native American men are receiving fewer doctoral degrees now than thirty years ago. This decrease in male Native American doctoral degree recipients is a major concern.¹ There is a major decline in Native American male degree recipients not only at the doctoral degree level, but also at the master, bachelor,

¹ Brayboy, Bryan McKinley. *Postsecondary Education for American Indian and Alaska Natives: Higher Education for Nation Building and Self-determination*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley Subscription Services, 2012. P 57.

associate, and vocational degree levels. It is the case that today there is a crisis in higher education with higher educational attainment among the American Indian male population.

Brayboy et al. (2012) show that AI/AN females received degrees at a significantly higher rate across the board, at every degree level from 1976-1994 than that compared to AI/AN males. During this time-period the following statistics show the degree distribution percentage change in the American Indian population categorized by gender; Associate degree: AI women 137 percent, AI men 51 percent. Bachelor degree: AI women 135 percent, AI men 45 percent. Master degree: AI women 126 percent, AI men 33 percent. Doctorate degree: AI women 143 percent, AI men -0.1 percent. Professional degree: AI women 303 percent, AI men 40 percent.² The current body of literature is minimal when looking at American Indian students in higher education, both for male and females, it is particularly scarce among the experiences of American Indian males. Also, there is little currently in the literature on the crisis in low numbers of higher educational attainment among American Indian males. American Indian males are a minority within an already small minority of those who obtain college degrees in the overall general population. While it is true that American Indian women outpace American Indian men, the total number of the American Indian population who have degrees are ultralow and should be noted as an issue to be address (with the aim to increase the overall higher educational attainment numbers of the entire American Indian population). According to Brayboy and Bang (2015) “only 13 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives earn bachelor’s degrees compared to 29 percent in the general population.”³

² Pavel, D.M. *American Indians and Alaska Natives in Postsecondary Education*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement National Center for Education Statistics, 1998.

³ Brayboy, Bryan. ”A Study of Indigenous Boys and Men.” [Http://www.equalmeasure.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/A-Study-of-Indigenous-Boys.pdf](http://www.equalmeasure.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/A-Study-of-Indigenous-Boys.pdf). Accessed October 9, 2018

Shotton et al. (2013) suggest while there is a growing acknowledgment within higher education about the issues, Native American students are facing and experiencing the current body of work is scarce “The issues, needs, and characteristics of this population are multifaceted and unique. Understanding student success, development, and learning, particularly with regard to culturally relevant and inclusive models, is at the core of the student affairs profession. Unfortunately, the current literature is almost silent with regard to these issues among Native American students in higher education.”⁴ Also, Shotton et al. (2013) show while currently Native students as a whole group are experiencing an increase in higher education graduation rates, while simultaneously still accounting for the lowest percentages of all degrees that are conferred annually.⁵ Brayboy et al. (2012) report that American Indian students have the lowest aggregate graduation rate among all racial groups. AI students had a six-year graduation rate who began college in 1996-1997 of 36.7 percent, while White students had a graduation rate of 57.2 percent, Asian American at 62.6 percent, African American at 44.8 percent, and Latina/ Latino 38.2 percent during the same time period.⁶

Brayboy et al. (2012) assert Native Americans are least likely to earn degrees from high school and be successful based on the measures used to define or determine success in higher education. Lee Jr. and Ransom purport “Despite the dearth of literature on Native American males (and women) in high school, most studies cite thorny teacher-student relationships and

⁴ Shotton, Heather J. Shelly C. Lowe, and Stephanie J. Waterman. *Beyond the Asterisk Understanding Native Students in Higher Education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2013. P 1.

⁵ Shotton, Heather J. Shelly C. Lowe, and Stephanie J. Waterman. 2013. P 7.

⁶ Brayboy, Bryan McKinley. *Postsecondary Education for American Indian and Alaska Natives: Higher Education for Nation Building and Self-determination*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley Subscription Services, 2012. P 57.

lack of parental support as factors related to their high dropout rates.”⁷ According to the literature, the numbers of Native American high school students who are college ready are very few in numbers, especially among Native American males.

While there is little found in the literature as to why Native American males fall so far behind Native American women in higher educational attainment, it is helpful to set up a framework on the ongoing crises in higher education surrounding Native American males. A good place to start is understanding that Native Americans are the least likely to graduate from high school, and very few Native American male high school students are college ready. Lee Jr. and Ransom state in an article on educational experiences of men of color within the scope of pathways, retention, and graduation in higher education, “with respect to persistence in high school, Native American males are more likely to be absent from school, suspended, expelled and repeat a grade than most other racial/ ethnic groups (Devoe and Darling-Churchill 2008).”⁸ In a 2003 study carried out by Greene and Foster, Native American high school students had the least college ready transcripts at time of high school out of any other group. Twenty one percent of Native American had college ready transcripts compared to thirty six percent of that of all other students.⁹ In the scarce current body of literature little is known about the cause of the high school dropout rates among Native American students, however the literature suggests that poor

⁷ Ibid. pp xi-25.

⁸ Lee JR., John Michael. *The Educational Experience of Young Men of Color: A Review of Research, Pathways and Progress*. College Board Advocacy & Policy Center. P 21

⁹ Greene, J. P., and Forster, G. *Public high school graduation and college readiness rates in the United States*. Education working paper no. 3. New York: Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. 2003.

quality relationships between Native American students and their teachers is a possible contributing factor among several others.

Brayboy et al. (2012) show AI/AN students have the lowest higher education graduation rates out of all racial/ethnic groups. “Once enrolled in institutions of higher education, AI/AN students experience the lowest graduation rates among all racial/ethnic groups. Whereas four percent of the Indigenous population in the United States has a bachelor’s degree, 27 percent of the White population holds this degree. (Native American Higher Education Initiative, 2005).” Brayboy et al. (2012) show that “Indigenous men are less likely to graduate than Indigenous women. The six-year graduation rate for AI/AN men from the 1996-1997 academic year is 34.3 percent, compared to 38.6 percent for AI women (NCES, 2005a).”¹⁰

The current literature surrounding American Indian students within higher education suggests that Native American students are unrepresented in four-year universities and are mostly found to study in two-year institutions. And at the same time approximately 20 percent of the American Indian students who are enrolled in a two-year school with the plan to transfer into a four-year institution do so; Cohen and Brawer (2003) “only 22 percent of students who start at the community college with intentions to transfer actually do so”¹¹. Also, according to Brayboy et al. (2012) it has been constant among Native students to attended institutions that are non-four-year institutions. Data suggests that Native American students are underrepresented both in prestigious private and four year sectors in higher education, while simultaneously are over

¹⁰ Brayboy, Bryan McKinley. *Postsecondary Education for American Indian and Alaska Natives: Higher Education for Nation Building and Self-determination*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley Subscription Services, 2012. P 56-57

¹¹ Cohen, A. M., and Brawer, F. *The American community college*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2003.

represented in less prestigious public and two year sectors. According to Brayboy et al. Native students are most likely to enrolled in two-year colleges rather than four year schools.¹²

Native American males have the lowest college graduation expectation rate out of any other race group. Ross et al. (2012) show, “60 percent of Asian males, 59 percent of males of two or more races, 56 percent of White males, and 54 percent of Black males expected to complete at least a bachelor’s degree, compared with 44 percent of Hispanic males and 33 percent of AI/AN males.¹³ We see that Native American males are the least college ready at the time of high school experiencing high dropout rates, while experiencing low numbers in the population that have college ready transcripts, and those who are seeking college degrees have the lowest graduation expectation rate out of any racial/ethnic group.

According to Lee Jr. and Ransom the largest disparities between gender and racial groups is in higher educational attainment. Lee Jr. and Ransom suggest there is an evolving connotation to the term “gender gap” when applied to higher educational attainment. Whereas before it implied a male dominated percentage of a population in a given space, now the term when applied to higher education indicates a female dominated population .“Just as alarming as the college completion gaps that exist for minorities in America is the gender gap that persists in college completion historically, the term “gender gap” has been used to refer to the inherent prominence that men have in society identifying how women have generally lagged in

¹² Brayboy, Bryan McKinley. *Postsecondary Education for American Indian and Alaska Natives: Higher Education for Nation Building and Self-determination*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley Subscription Services, 2012. P 55

¹³ Ross, T., Kena, G., Rathbun, A., KewalRamani, A., Zhang, J., Kristapovich, P., & Manning, E. *Higher education: Gaps in access and persistence study* (NCES 2012-046). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. 2012.

educational, economic and social achievement. Recent trends would suggest, however, that the term is developing a new connotation, generally describing how women are out performing men in terms of educational achievement and attainment in society.....”¹⁴ Brayboy et al. (2012) Show American Indian males are most likely not to graduate with a four-year degree when compared to American Indian females in the population. Further, during the 2007-08-year 60.7 percent of Native American females were awarded bachelor’s degree, while 39.3 of Native American males earned bachelor’s degree during this period.¹⁵ This is about a 20 percent disparity within the population in higher educational attainment.

The current literature is scarce when addressing the main contributing factors to the low higher educational attainment levels among Native American males. Williams et al. (2014) suggest that colonization has carried a crippling effect on Native male higher education participation abilities. As a result of conquest, Native male traditional roles were greatly diminished, Native males are no longer warriors, protectors, and providers. This has produced humiliation, and emasculation for Native American males. “The long-term effect of being conquered had demoralized Native men. One result of this has been a tendency to shy away from education. Native women, on the other hand, are becoming empowered through education.”¹⁶ Williams et al. (2014) suggest that some of the low number of college participation found among Native males can be attributed to the view among them that college is for women. “Moreover,

¹⁴ Lee JR., John Michael. *The Educational Experience of Young Men of Color: A Review of Research, Pathways and Progress*. College Board Advocacy & Policy Center. P 11

¹⁵ Aud, S., M. Fox, et al. *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*. Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics. 2010.

¹⁶ Williams, Ronald A. *Men of Color in Higher Education: New foundations for Developing Models for Success*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2014. P 76.

some of the educational disparities result from Native American men choosing not to go to college, not following through on a commitment or goal they may have set for themselves or that their families have set for them. In fact, some Native American men view higher education or education in general as being for women, thus explaining the lack of motivation and the absence of any sense of responsibility and obligation some Native American men feel with respect to education.”¹⁷

Williams et al. (2014) show that United States history has had an influence on the education of Native men, “History has had an impact on the education of Native people, and as a result Native men continue to lag behind in higher education as fewer graduate with an associate’s degree or higher.” In the face of the low levels of higher education attainment among Native American students especially Native men, Williams et al. suggest the “cultural remedies” could put forth methods to alleviate educational disparities. Williams et al. assert that the restoration and celebration of the “rites of passage” through cultural ceremonies among Native communities could teach responsibility and obligation to families, and communities for Native boys. This would highlight the importance and value of culture for future Native Men, additionally showing them the importance of committing to goals. Williams et al. (2014) suggest that traditionally Native men who carried out the rite of passage for Native youth serves as role models for families to help nurture and develop Native boys to men. Williams et al. suggest that it is important for communities to develop role model programs so that Native American men who are successful in education, career, family, parenting, and commitment are celebrated, and given positions to help and guide Native youth, “The number of Native American men who are

¹⁷ Williams, Ronald A. *Men of Color in Higher Education: New foundations for Developing Models for Success*. P 71

successful in any of these areas may be minimal, and the number of role models small, but the establishment of such a program is imperative.” Also, mentoring programs aimed at and carried out by Native men to their youth in their communities, is suggested by the literature. The need for university and colleges to echo these type of programs to put forth support for their Native American students is also found in the current literature. Williams et al. (2014) suggest that Native American men, and men in general will listen to what other men have to say about a given subject, and college and universities should create coaching and mentoring programs for their Native male students. Williams et al. suggest that college and universities need to develop an approach that will encourage Native men take on mentoring roles for Native men entering college.¹⁸

In general, Native students, both male and female, need intervention on multiple fronts to increase the overall higher educational attainment for this population. Deloria and Wildcat (2001) suggest that Native students going into large universities from small communities struggle greatly with the transition. Within Native American culture there is an importance, and emphasis placed on relationships with people, and places. To help Native students with this transition higher educational institutions need to provide a space where Native students are welcomed and provide with a space to express their tribal beliefs and practices.¹⁹ Williams et al. (2014) suggest that according to Rindone’s (1988) finding, family is the one of the most significant contributing factors to the success of Native American students in higher education.

¹⁸ Williams, Ronald A. *Men of Color in Higher Education: New foundations for Developing Models for Success*. P 71-76

¹⁹ Deloria, V., & Wildcat, D. *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Resources. 2001.

Other key contributing factors are finding space, and a sense of belonging within higher education: “Finding a sense of place, family, and belonging within higher education is instrumental in Native student success.”²⁰ HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) discuss the need for family center environments in higher education to provide support for Native American students.²¹

It is important that communities, college, and universities put forth support systems that will increase the higher educational attainment of Native American students. The literature suggests Native American students require support systems from their communities, in addition to requiring support systems in colleges, and universities. Williams et al. (2014) suggest that support systems play a crucial role in increasing the retention and graduation rates for Native males in higher education. Williams et al. also suggest the need for Native communities to look for solution to the crises Native men are facing in higher education through culture remedies and communal guidance.²²

²⁰ Williams, Ronald A. *Men of Color in Higher Education: New foundations for Developing Models for Success*. P 71-77

²¹ HeavyRunner, I., & DeCelles, R. *Family Education Model: Meeting the Student Retention Challenge*. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 41(2), 29-37.

²² Williams, Ronald A. *Men of Color in Higher Education: New foundations for Developing Models for Success*. P 71-77

Chapter Two: Methods

“They appreciated it, but never went through, it could be reached but it wasn’t for us” –Participant 22

This study is a qualitative explorative study utilizing semi-structured interviews with open ended interview questions. The use of a qualitative study was selected for many reasons, primarily due to the flexibility of semi-structured interviews put and the ability to allow the participant to accurately describe their experiences, and even to include their own take on very specific questions, and terminology. Merriam describes qualitative research being based on belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon.²³ This study can be considered the most common type of qualitative research which is an interpretive study. According to Merriam and Tisdell “Thus qualitative researchers conducting a basic qualitative study would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences.”²⁴

Purposeful sampling was used for this study and is described by Merriam and Tisdell as based on an assumption in which the investigator intends to discover, understand, and gain insight, so the investigator must select a sample that would provide this and the most can be

²³ Merriam, Sharan B., and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016. P 23

²⁴ Merriam, Sharan B., and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. P 24

learned.²⁵ According to Chein purposeful sampling would be like calling on medical specialist professionals to determine the best route to exercise in a given medical case, the selected medical professional are not intended to express the opinion of the whole medical community, but rather provide specialized expertise.²⁶ Snowball sampling is the type of purposeful sampling used in this study. Snowball sampling is also called ‘network’ or ‘chain’ sampling, and is one of the most common forms of purposeful sampling. The investigator locates a few key participants who meet the criteria of the study and asks the participants for referrals.²⁷

All the participants had to meet the following criteria to be eligible for this study; participants had to be enrolled in a federal recognized tribe or be of Native American decent, be male, and have had to earn a college degree at any level: either an associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree from an academic institution. Five recruited Native American male college students who have earned college degrees enrolled in the study. Some participants were graduate students finishing up a master’s degree program, others were current graduate students in the middle of a master’s degree program. Others were undergraduate students working on a bachelor’s degree.

The rationale behind the criterion for the participant being male and a Native American enrolled in a federal recognized tribe, or be of Native American decent was to be able to have a pool of participants who would be able to attest to the experiences of Native American male

²⁵ Merriam, Sharan B., and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementaion*. P 96

²⁶ Chein, I. Appendix: An introduction to sampling. In L.H. Kidder (Ed.), *Selltiz, Wrightsman & Cook’s research methods in social relations* (4th Ed.). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1981

²⁷ Merriam, Sharan B., and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementaion*. P 96

college students who have earned a college degree, which encompasses the main aim of the study. The rationale for the participants to meet the criterion of having earned a college degree was to ensure that the experiences of the participants could not be viewed as non-valid or was not just theory or theoretical, and that they could accurately describe the positive and hindering contributing factors during the academic journey to degree attainment for Native America males who have successfully achieved degree attainment. In other words, to say that their experiences would be considered to hold validity, whereas if the participants would have only completed three quarters of a college program their experiences and suggestions could be looked at in a less accurate light.

It was essential to ensure the reliability of the data. Thus the participants had earned a college degree to be able to participate in the study, otherwise the ability of the participants in this study to attest to college degree attainment for a Native American male could be questionable or the possibility of the reliability of the data could be questioned. While the aim of the study is to determine the main reason for the participants to go into college programs and to determine and identify the largest barriers during their experiences, it would be possible for a potential participant to accurately describe their main reason to enter a college program and identify significant barriers during a college program and be accurate without earning a degree.

However, this study wants to discover what the participants identified as barriers they experienced during their academic journey and to attest to how they managed to overcome them which led them to the completion of a college program. The study could add to the understanding of not only the types and possible barriers in which members of this demographic could face and do face during a college program, but provide some insight on how

to manage them. The practices to manage barriers during higher educational attainment for this population will add to the current literature on this topic.

The use of snowball sampling led me to the participants in this study. The participants of this study were enrolled in the same university, so the method of sampling in this study could possibly be described or considered as a blend of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. I was led to qualified participants through several Native American student organizations, as well as students enrolled in courses that were in the field of Native American studies. Following approval by the UCLA Protection of Human Subjects committee (IRB), participants were reached by email between January and February of 2018 and asked for their consideration to enroll in the study. No incentives were given to the participants to enroll in the study.

The data was collected by recording interviews either in person or over the phone by an audio recording device. The interviews carried out in person were held in a private room. The interviews conducted over the phone were carried out in the same private room, a phone was set on speaker, so that the audio recording device could record the conversation. The interviews ranged from an hour and thirty to forty-five minutes in length. The interviews consisted of semi-structured open-ended questions. The interview protocol had 10 interview questions with some probing questions for some of the interview questions.

The interview questions included questions the participants name, tribal affiliation, current academic major, and their current academic standing. Also, the respondents were asked about the steps in the participant's academic career after high school that led them to their current academic standing. The interview questions were aimed at establishing their high school

experiences, how education was viewed in their households growing up, whether either of the participant's parents went to college, and if so did they earn degrees. Also, was college something enforced growing up in their households and what was the primary reason for the participants enrolling in a college program. The participants were asked if they would like to share any stories that served as motivation to pursue a degree in higher education. The participants were asked about the barriers they faced during their academic journey and how they overcame the barriers. And lastly, the participants were asked if they would like to comment additionally, or contribute anything further to the study. The interviews would commence by going over the purpose of the study with the participants. The researcher wanted to clarify the current problem that the study was interested in, which is addressing the ultralow Native American male college graduate numbers. The researcher emphasized to the participants they have done something extraordinary by earning college degrees, and that they were part of a small group within the overall population of Native American males that have done so. Also, to clarify that the information put forth was intended to help aid other Native American male college students or those who are thinking of tackling a college program, and generally promote higher education among the Native American population.

The design for the interview protocol was semi-structured was to allow for the flexibility for each participant to tell their story in the way they felt fit. It was not intended for the interviews to be carried out by going through each question one by one, and answering each one at time, but rather having the expectation that one single question would lead into answering multiple questions on the interview protocol, this method proved to work well, and provided a good flow of the interview. Many times during the interview participants would answer multiple questions on the protocol just by answering the first two questions. Meaning in answering one

question the participant would continue to describe their experiences and often cover multiple questions on the interview protocol. The participants would often answer several questions out of the order on the interview protocol just by sharing their stories and experiences. Going back at times to ask questions that were on the protocol that was not answered proved to kept the flow of the interview moving. When the participant was wrapping up a question, it allowed me to ask a question on the protocol we did not cover and the interview flow picked up again. Asking additional probing questions based on the responses of the participants would allow the participant to additionally address a research question that was not covered by their current response. The use of a semi-structured interview did provide a flow, it was helpful in the data collection process. This type of flexibility allowed for the participant to take control of their answers and contribute to the discussion that was unique to their own perspectives and allowed the participants to engage in telling their experiences in a way they felt most comfortable.

The recorded data was transcribed verbatim and analyzed. The data was analyzed by using the constant comparison method which entails looking for common themes and similarities within the data. The interviews were compared to build and make connections for common themes among them. Then a comparison between the themes found in the data and the current literature contributed to the analysis of the data. In addition, the findings from the data and what was not in the literature was noted. This study used hand coding to code the data. Many common themes were present in the data among the experiences of the participants.

Chapter Three: Findings

“Even at the beginning of my career I have always maintained and I have always considered my people as being the primary benefactor of me staying in college, and obtaining all this knowledge and skill set that will allow me to return to my reservation and help advance the socioeconomic position that we are in now.”

-Participant AA

The findings of this study show several common themes among the participant’s higher educational experiences. Identical motives to enter and complete a college program was found amongst the participants. Further, the participants shared similar experiences and in some areas identical experiences with hindering barriers and factors in their higher educational attainment journeys. The main reason the participants were motivated to go into a college programs to earn degrees was to be able obtain skills that would allow them to go back to their tribal communities and engage in work that would contribute to positive outcomes. The main ongoing motivation found among the participants of this study to obtain college degrees was the desire to be able to use their education to put forth positive changes and work on projects that would have positive outcomes in their tribal communities. The majority of the participants were motivated to use skills they acquired during their academic careers for the betterment of their tribal communities. All the participants were motivated to go into a college program to an earn a college degree so that they could engage in work that positively served a specific community and engage in work that consisted of helping others. One primary motivating factor for the participants in this study to earn a degree is so they would have the capacity to contribute and serve a specific tribal community. The participants were motived to see a college program to degree completion by focusing on the potential impact their education could have on their own tribal community, rather than self-driven interest.

The findings show the participants shared similar high school experiences, every participant described their high school experiences as being 'average'. Further, none of the participants were engaged in college preparation programs in high school and most of the participants were not college focused in high school. It was clear that a fair description of the high school experiences among the participants was doing what they had to get through and graduate. Participant 11 said he partied a lot with his friends, but was good at school and while he spent a lot of his time with his friends in recreational activities during his high school years, he was willing to do the work required to finish and went to night school to graduate on time; he was not thinking about college in high school. Participant XX described his high school experience as being average and was not thinking about college during high school years, however, he was considering trade school after he graduated from high school. Participant 22 worked a lot during his high school years, had great standardized test scores (i.e. S.A.T.), but was never thinking about pursuing a college degree. It was not until his last year of high school when his father told him to start applying to colleges. His father pointed out tribal community problems and talked to him about the need for people from the community to go into universities to earn college degrees and return to the community to put forth changes for the betterment of their tribal community. The problems within his tribal community were ongoing and the possibility of addressing these issues, contributing to change, and positive outcomes motivated him to see his father's advice through. He then looked at the possibility of entering into a college program and return to the community within a serious light and has been the primary motivating factor for him to earn a college degree.

College was looked at as something prestigious in the homes of the participants, but little was known about college. College was not something viewed at as being accessible to the

participants. Only one of the participants had a parent hold a college degree. The majority of the participants were first generation college students. Participant 11 was never pushed by his parents or family to go to college, but college was looked at as something very prestigious in his home growing up. Participant AA grew up in home where western education was valued and was considered to be very important. This participant was pushed growing up to go to school, attendance was enforced with a strict, yet positive attitude. Growing up the bus was his means to get to school and if he missed the bus he would have to walk to school. School was looked at seriously in his childhood. However, when he started his academic journey post high school there was little if any resources available to him to pursue higher education. Participant 22 grew up with college being appreciated, but nobody in his family went through a college program and earned a degree. Growing up his family looked at college as a reachable accomplishment in general, but had the belief that it was not for them. His family worked labor skilled jobs primarily and would discuss to the children in the family that a means to avoid this type of work would be through educational attainment. However, college was not viewed at as something that you automatically pursued right after high school as the general next step. Little was known about college accessibility and was not first considered a viable approach to learn skills needed to enter into the marketplace to work. When participant XX was asked if college was talked about in his house growing up, his reply was “no, not at all”. There were no discussions throughout his high school experience within the family in regards to college as the next step after high school. There was no clear pathway to college for none of the participants. Most of the participant’s parents did not go to college, only one participant had a parent who held a college degree and that same parent was the only parent with a graduate degree in the study among all the parents of the participants. It was either trade school or no college for all other parents of the

participants in the study. Participant XX's father was the first one in his immediate family to college and it was for a Trade school, which he successfully completed. Participant 11's parents both did not go to college, but his siblings did earn college degrees. He had a sister with associate degree and a brother with a bachelor degree. Even with the desire to go to college knowing college could potential positively impact their lives there was no clear pathway in the experiences of the participants.

The findings show a common theme when it comes to the primary motivating factors to go to college and earn degrees among the participants. The main driving motivation for the participants to go to college was so that they could add to their knowledge base and learn the skills that would allow them to have a positive impact on a community. The participants of this study were motivated by being able to have a positive impact on a given community. The assumption of this study was that the participants would be motivated to go to college so that they could have access to higher paying professional positions. The findings show the participants were not motivated to earn college degrees for personal gain. The findings show the motiving factors for the participants are aimed at communal or altruistic gain, specifically for the betterment of tribal communities. All but one participant had the goal of entering a college program and learning skills and growing intellectually with the intent of returning to their tribal communities to use what they had gain in college through education to work for the betterment of their tribal communities. To clarify the one participant with the aim to not to return to his tribal community was interested in serving a local community made up native members coming from several tribal communities. While his motives were not identical to the other participants, his college aspirations were still motivated by serving tribal community members and working to help them.

Participant AA described the primary reasons for him to college was so that he could provide for his family and engage in work that would positively impact the current socioeconomic status of his tribal community. He said at the beginning of his career he has always maintained and considered his people as being the primary benefactors of him staying in school. Participant XX primary reason to go to college was so that he could have the credentials and education to head a tribal social service program. He was motivated to enter into a college program to earn the credentials and skill set that would allow him to head a social services program in a tribal community. His aim was to engage in work that would best promote the well-being of the community members by advocating for changes to the current practices of the social services program. He wanted to include practices that involved cultural elements to the meet the needs of Native families. He knew this type of change to policy could only be made by a qualified person and part of the qualifications required to implement this type of structural change would evolve the skill set and knowledge base that comes with a college education.

Participant 22's main goal going into college was that he could return home to his tribal community and take on leadership roles where he could advocate for changes for the betterment of the community. Going into the college program was not for personal gain, but rather motivated by the possible ways he could contribute to improve the conditions of his tribal community. His father would speak to him and point out the current common ongoing problems within the tribal community and discuss the need for changes in tribal leadership, knowing the need for new leadership to advocate and aim at tackling problems within the community.

A clear common theme with the participants of this study is the main motivation going into a college program to earn degrees was intended by the participants with a specific reason,

and purpose. Participant LL sole reason for going to college was along the same lines as all the other participants, generally to return home to his tribal community and work for the community to try and improve the current conditions. Specifically, this participant went to a college program so that he could earn a law degree. Earning a law degree was always the goal for him, he wanted to earn a law degree and return home and engage in legal work that would improve the current conditions of his tribal community. All the participants were able to identify problems within their own communities they felt they could work to improve the overall well-being of their communities through their educational attainment. All the participants believed the knowledge and skill set learned in a college program would give them tools and skills they needed to return to their tribal communities and engage in work that would contribute to the betterment of their communities.

This study sought to find the main motives for the participants to go into a college programs and earn degrees, as well as to identify barriers the participants faced and how they managed them during their academic journeys to degree attainment. There were several themes that were true of all the participants in this study and most of the findings were right along the lines of the ‘general’ concepts of barriers found in the current literature, however this study was after more specificity when it comes to understanding barriers in higher educational attainment among Native American males and further how to effectively manage these barriers. The participants were able to give great insight to major barriers they faced and how they were able to manage them. Overall it was found that the common barriers the participants experienced during their academic journey was leaving their communities and going into a large university, money, being in toxic environments within the university and lack of support for them within the university, and difficulty asking for help. An interesting finding amongst the participants was

when asked how they successfully managed these barriers it was found that the participants heavily relied on their spirituality in the management of multiple barriers they faced during their academic journey.

Leaving home was a significant barrier for the participants, it is something that was detrimental at times to the participants during the course of their studies. Being away from home for the participants is much more than stepping out of their comfort zones, it is leaving their cultural environment, which is connected to their religious practices and going into environments that are not culturally supportive of Native Americans cultural practices and beliefs. Participant AA experienced negative effects spiritually and psychologically as a result from being away from home. Being away from home entailed being away from cultural ceremonies and gatherings would negatively impact his experience within the university at times. This participant was motivated to overcome this barrier by knowing he could go home and work to improve his community as a result of the completion of his college program. To help cope with the hardship of being away from home the participant relied heavily on prayer. The practice of prayer would help him face tough and challenging times during his academic journey associated with multiple barriers and issues that arise surrounding barriers. Being able to rely on his faith helped him deal with many tough circumstances associated with cost of attendance, work and school loads, and being away from home through his entire academic journey. He would also travel home as much as he could to participate in religious ceremony that would recharge him. The high cost associated with traveling home combined with the high cost of college attendance made it difficult to do so as often as he would like, but when he did get the chance to it was extremely beneficial to his well-being. At one point during his academic journey the travel home from the university he was attending was around 16 hours, so the time and cost to travel home to recharge

was step. Traveling home as often as possible is also a common theme found amongst the participants of this study in regards to techniques and practices used to manage the barrier of being far away from home during their academic journeys.

Participant 22 is from a small community, about a ten hour drive from the university he attended. Being away from home was highly stressful during his academic journey and additionally being from a small community going to a larger city setting where the university was located was also an issue that was difficult and was associated with being away from home. He would travel home often to cope with the hardships of being away from home, even with the ten hour drive he would still make it home to combat the hardships of being away. This participant would travel home often, at times as frequent as every weekend at times. However, the cost associated with traveling home took its toll and sometimes the participant would not be able to do so. It was so important for the participant to visit home, he would make the ten-hour drive home and ten-hour drive back, a total of 20 hours' round trip. Being this far from home and needing to go home often for his well-being can be a significant barrier when trying to engage in rigorous college work. Not being able to go home due to the high cost while trying to successfully navigate the higher educational system is a barrier that has multiple fronts and severe negative implications. Participant LL was about a five-hour commute to the university he attended and would travel home often during the early stages of his college journey. This participant discussed the hardships he experienced being so far from home and being from such a small community during his academic experience. The cultural shock of being from a small community and going into a large university setting was uncomfortable and took effort to adjust. In addition, trying to keep up with the rigorous course work again proves to be problematic and shows that being away from home can have several negative implications and effects to students

from small tribal communities. Being away from home and coming from small communities and going into the large city university setting has been highly problematic and proved to be a barrier in high educational attainment for Native American male students.

Traveling home often is a tool used to help cope with being away from home, not only from the culture shock experienced with small tribal community members who transplant into the busy hustle of large cities and universities, but also to engage in cultural and religious ceremonies held within their communities. It would prove to be difficult for any student who is going from a small community to a large city university and taking on a fulltime college work load. Students generally that come from small communities have to work on dealing with all the adjustments from transplanting and simultaneously learn how to navigate the higher educational system, as opposed to someone who is accustomed to large city life. This type of adjustment and the work load of full-time study would be strenuous for any student, but with Native students there is an additional cultural component. Native students experience negative effects from leaving small tribal communities and going into large universities due to the lack of cultural support in large universities for Native American students. The lack of cultural support and space for Native American culture within the university is a major contributor to this ongoing problem. Being away from ceremony and cultural gatherings can have negative impacts on the well-being of a student who is engaged in cultural and spiritual practices that take place in specific geographical locations that are within the tribal communities. Not having access or the ability to participant in these practices have negative impacts for Native students who participate in them.

The use of religious practices was used in the management of several barriers the participants faced, especially to cope with being away from home. The participants would pray to help them deal with the hardships that were associated with being away from home and other

barriers they faced while they were in the university during their journeys to degree attainment. Participant 11 would pray often to recharge and to help him manage every obstacle he encountered along his academic journey. This participant believes his faith got him through college. He relied on his faith to get him through hardships with the belief that everything would fall into place even when situations were uncertain. Situations such as admission into college programs, paying for costs associated with attendance, living expenses and other barriers. While having to work full time throughout his entire academic journey which ended with the completion of a graduate program, it was very stressful balancing work and studying. He was often in situations where he did not know how he was going to pay for his cost of living and attendance and would always pray and would find a way through whatever obstacle he was currently facing. Participant AA relied heavily on his faith to manage several barriers as well and expresses how central and useful his faith was in the management of obstacles he experienced during his academic journey. This participant would pray to help him manage toxic environments and people in the university that would often give him anxiety and unneeded stress. His spirituality and the practice of praying gave him strength to deal with and overcome barriers associated with toxic environments and people so that he could see his college program to completion.

Another major barrier found among all the participants was money, the high cost of attendance and the high cost of living would add hardships to the experiences of the participants during their academic careers. Many of the participants experienced high levels of stress associated with their financial situations during their academic journeys. Having enough money to cover their total cost of attendance and living expenses was a struggle for all the participants. Even while some of the participants were awarded generous grants from various sources

including their university, it was not enough in most cases to cover the total cost of attendance and finding resources to help them cover their total cost of attendance and living expenses was difficult for all the participants.

The high cost of attendance forced participant AA to leave a college program after he was three quarters the way through because he could no longer cover the cost of the college program even while he was working while going to school. His academic performance was more than satisfactory, but had to leave because he did not have access to sufficient funds to cover all the costs associated with attending. The high cost of living and attendance proved to be a significant barrier to this participant's higher educational attainment. Having to leave a college program due to the inability to afford the program was a major setback. However, this negative experience did not stop the participant from reaching his educational goals and did obtain a degree from another program. The program was not willing to aid him in finding alternative methods for covering the cost of attendance, so he had to leave the program. This is problematic because he was in a program that was focused on an area of study he was interested in and was performing well academically.

Participant 22 had to sleep in his car a whole academic term because he did not have the money to cover housing costs. Not having a bed to sleep in at night to rest added stress to this already rigorous work load. He did not reach out to his family because he did not want them to worry about him while his was away in college. Both participants were motivated to get through the hardships of this barrier by knowing a college degree would give them the skills needed to engage in meaningful work to promote positive change in their tribal communities. Also, again, prayer was used by participants to manage barriers associated with money, the participants' faith played a huge role in both cases. They would pray frequently to help alleviate the stress and

worrying they carried when trying to plan and strategize methods to cover the cost of attendance. Another finding associated with lack of funding was the negative impact on a participant's physical health as a result of worrying about money problems and lack of sleep due to high work hours per week and number of hours needed to study.

One participant talked about being always pressed for time, having to work full time to cover the cost of attendance and study to maintain the required G.P.A. requirements for his program did not allow him time to cook fresh food, exercise regularly, and sufficient time to sleep. There was simply not enough time in his day to do so. Having to work to make the money he needed to cover cost of attendance took a negative toll on his well-being on multiple fronts. Having to work full time while enrolled in a full time college program would not leave much time in the participants week to enabled them to engage in self-care practices that would have improved their overall wellbeing while enrolled in college. Not having enough time for 'down time' would compound over their academic journeys. Participant 11 discussed how between work, and the long commute to work, and the time needed to study there was little if any time left to himself to relax, or even get enough sleep which would increase his anxiety levels.

Another common barrier found amongst the participants was lack of support from school faculty and people within the academic setting, often resulting in the participants experiencing toxic environments during their academic careers. Participant 11 describes how he felt he was discriminated against because of his race by multiple instructors, hindering his participation in classes. He would often would not participate in classes due to the reactions he would receive from faculty. Participant AA experienced discrimination from faculty and staff that held positions at the university he attended. He felt the college environment hindered his success within the university at times. Participant LL experienced toxic people though out his academic

career. It was common for participants of this study to find support groups to help them manage this barrier during their experiences. They would reach out to people to find support and even create support groups to combat toxic environments in the academic setting. Participant LL would identify the need to remove himself from toxic environments and to reach out to people who supported him. The participants would rely on support groups to aid them in the management of barriers associated with toxic people and environments. When the participants were asked to make suggestions surrounding this barrier to future students from similar backgrounds, the participants suggested to first acknowledge the necessity to remove one's self from a toxic situation. And secondly reach out and find friends that will serve as a support group for you, this is extremely important in the success of completing a college program according to the participants. Additionally, according to the participants some of the toxic environments they experienced within the college setting surrounded Native identity politics, even to the extent of being targeted within Native groups for their own Native heritage. According to participant 22 even though the university makes effort to make every student welcome, it is evident that the support for Native male students within the university is very minimal. The minimal support from faculty and staff within the university significantly contributed to hardships during the academic journeys of the participants of this study.

Another common barrier experienced by the participants of this study is the inability to ask for help. Many of the participants would find themselves in situations where their pride would get in the way of them asking for available help, it was not a feasible option in their consideration, even in cases where they knew of someone or an organization that could offer help to them. All the participants struggled with asking for help, many would overcome this barrier later in their academic careers realizing they could have utilized seeking help from others

at the beginning and throughout their whole academic careers which they would have greatly benefited. Participant 22 found it difficult to ask for help especially when it came to money. The high cost of attendance would often over extend his budget and while applying to as many scholarships as possible he would still have to ask for help from family to help him cover costs. According to him asking for help was extremely difficult and unsettling. The participants suggested setting aside self-pride to be able to ask for help because asking for help is both hard to execute, but also necessary and beneficial. Participant AA recommends putting aside pride and stubbornness to be able to ask for help from those who are in the positions to help. Participant XX suggested that a student not take on the entire academic load by yourself and to put aside pride and to ask for help.

The findings showed that asking for help, stepping out of one's comfort zones to build a support groups, exercising to manage stress and engaging in religious practices were tools utilized by the participants to get them to degree attainment. Also, these management tools were suggested by all the participants to other Native American male students who are considering or are already in a college program. There were many other useful suggestions among individual participants, such as always getting to class early, joining school clubs of interest, work on organization and time management and efficiently balancing work and studying. The previously mentioned management tools were found to be utilized by all the participants. According to the participant's, college programs create lots of stress and if the stress is not managed it will become over whelming. The participants recommended exercising regularly and using breathing exercises to help with stress management. Also, understanding the need and significance of having a support group is pivotal to the success of these students. It was found that every

participant spoke at great length about the importance of support groups, how it aided to their ability to manage ongoing barriers they faced during their college carriers and how it helped them get to degree attainment.

The participants were asked to list some additional habits they utilized to succeed in colleges classes the participants suggested to always getting to class early which can help greatly with success in classes, class participation, class seat selection, punctuality, identifying personal weakness and strengths and working on their weaknesses will contribute greatly to positive outcomes. Connecting with students and people who are going through similar experiences or the same experiences will help greatly coping with stress and facing barriers encountered within the university. The participants all encountered prejudiced people within the university setting and suggested to be prepared to encounter it. It was suggested it will likely happen and always be mindful of the history of Native American people, especially the harmful oppression and exclusion they have faced in the past and still experience currently can serve as motivation to keep moving forward. Some participants confronted prejudice people when they encountered it and had positive experiences and others would ignored this type of toxicity and had positive experiences. In both cases prejudice was always passively provoked, such as back-handed comments.

These types of action carried out by ignorant people put Native Students in toxic environments and created hardships for them. This barrier was managed by the participants by both combating by discussion and non-participation. The participants spoke about the importance of awareness and the need to remove themselves from toxic environments. All the participants encountered toxic people and experienced toxic environments created for them by people within the academic setting. Knowing how to navigate these type of people, situations, and

environments contributed greatly to the success of the participants. The participants suggest that ignoring the negative stereotypes associated with Native Americans is important and finding positive role models contributed to their success in higher education. One participant suggested to be aware of all the negative things that are pushed into the sub-conscious of Native people and that this type of oppression has been carried out for a long time and with a great deal of effort. The importance of empowering Native youth and engaging in work that is aimed at changing the current narrative surrounding Native people is critical to helping Natives students reach degree attainment. Also, to dive into to their culture, even if they currently know very little, it is important to get involved in cultural revitalization and awareness.

Chapter Four: Discussion

“ its ok not to be a perfect student and get straight “a’s” and doesn’t mean you are not as good.”
-Participant LL

The assumption of this study was the main motivating reason for Native American male college students going into a college program to earn a degree was post-secondary gains associated with employment such as to increase their marketability for employment, or just to gain access to higher paying jobs. The findings of this study show this is not the case. The findings show the participants motivations to enter into and complete a college program was to be able to learn skills and obtain knowledge that would allow them to go back to their tribal communities and engage in work that would be aimed at producing positive outcomes and contribute to the betterment of their tribal communities. The motives of the participants to earn college degrees are not self-serving, on the contrary, they are motivated to work and promote positive outcomes that are community focused. They were motivated to overcome and endure many barriers during their academic experiences by focusing on how their post-graduation work would positively contribute to their communities. The participants of this study are members of an almost nonexistent demographic within higher educational attainment. Given the current ultralow numbers found among Native American males who have earn college degrees the participates in this study added valuable insight to the experiences of successful cases in higher educational attainment among the Native American male population. The participants experienced many common themes in hindering barriers during their academic carriers.

It is critical to change the narrative surrounding marginalized communities within higher education, to promote and increase growth in recruitment, retention, and attainment among these

groups. In this work the intention was to bring into light the excellence of these students who were able to reach degree attainment in the face of being practically statistically nonexistent. We must look at the current state of marginalized communities within education as being excluded by intent if methods and programs are not put into place to increase their presence within academia. We must ask higher education educators, administrators, and policy makers to engage in efforts to increase the attainment levels for those population we have ultralow numbers. If nothing is done to increase the attainment levels for these populations it is as if higher educational institutions are contributing to the problem by doing nothing. Higher education is for everyone and every effort should be made by all governing authorities when groups within educational institutions are not participating at levels that can be considered inclusive.

Major barriers participants of this study faced during their academic careers were meeting the financial costs associated with attendance, living expenses, asking for help, lack of support from faculty and others within the university setting, and being away from home. The participants were able to give insight on management strategies used to combat barriers and the findings showed the methods used to cope and manage issues were similar among the participants. Being away from home was a significant barrier found among the participants. Traveling home often was carried out as management strategy used to combat this barrier even when it was financial costly and the distance was significant. Being away from home entailed much more than just stepping out of a comfort zone or having to make adjustments to a large city pace when coming from a small dissimilar community. The participants experienced negative physiological and spiritual impacts caused by being away from home while attending a university due being absent from cultural gathering and ceremonies. Participants engaged in cultural ceremonies and attended cultural gatherings that took place within their tribal

communities, and being away from cultural ceremonies negatively impacted their well-being and proved to be a hardship during their educational experiences. Going into a university setting that was not supportive of cultural customs of Native American culture added stress and negatively impacted the experience of the participants. Acknowledging that being away from home is much more than being home sick for Native American students, the lack of access to cultural and religious practices and other losses need to be acknowledged when discussing barriers for Native American students.

Asking for help was difficult in the academic setting across the board for all the participants. The hardships of tackling an academic program was difficult for the participants on many fronts and in combination with not being comfortable asking for help compounded hardship of completing a college program. All the participants shared they had difficulty asking for help and recommend to current or future students to put pride aside and ask for help. According to the participants asking for help can reduce the hardships that will arise associated with a college program and students can benefit greatly from help from others during their educational journeys. All the participants experienced financial hardships during their academic careers. Often resulting in the participants to be pressed for time due to the high number of hours they needed to work weekly to cover educational and living expenses. The participants experienced high levels of stress surrounding money problems and having limited time to study. Given the socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants, some participants did not have access to financial aid options that some other students might have been offered, loans such as the parent plus loans and family contributions. This resulting in the participants having to take on the total cost of their educational and living expenses on their own.

The participants experienced lack of support from faculty and staff within the academic

setting. Even with support from some faculty and staff within the university, the participants overall experienced a lack of support from the majority of faculty and staff they encountered. The lack of support from faculty and staff within the university would hinder success at times and have negative impacts on their academic experiences. Programs that are aimed at promoting an awareness among academic departments are needed to highlight the current ultralow higher educational attainment status among Native American male college students and that the lack of attendance among this group is not due to many factors, one being institutional structures. The lack of support that exist for these students within the university setting and how it negatively contributes to their experiences by creating and enforcing hindering barriers are needed to be brought into light. The lack of current literature on this topic does not offer enough breadth to really understand why the ultralow numbers in higher-educational attainment among Native American male are where they are at currently.

The success of the participants in higher educational attainment can be attributed to many factors including motivations and the management strategies carried out to overcome hindering barriers they faced during their academic journeys. Going to class early, learning how to navigate the university system, asking from help from those who are in the positions to help, traveling home often, building support groups, removing themselves from toxic environments and avoiding toxic people, applying to multiple scholarships for funding, thrifty money management, learning to balance work and school work and relying on faith was central to the success of the participants to earn degrees. Also, acknowledging the inevitability there will be encounters with prejudice people, knowing how to overcome these types of toxic environments by being aware of motivations to earn degrees, understanding importance of removing themselves from these environments, and finding support groups has contributed to the participant's successful

management of toxic environments during the educational experience.

Additional research is needed to better understand why Native American males are experiencing ultra-low numbers in higher educational attainment. Research is needed to understand why the numbers of the Native American male student higher educational attainment rates are declining. More research is needed to create programs that will aid Native American male college students combat barriers they face during their academic carriers. Further, research is needed to look into what universities have already done to combat low numbers in higher educational attainment for marginalized communities to determine what has been done that has produced positive outcomes for those who groups who are experiencing ultralow numbers in educational attainment. Also, work is needed to determine if there are other effective methods that can be utilized to promote the educational attainment among Native American male students and other marginalized students. Additional research is needed to be able to advocate for polices that will aid in increasing the low numbers in educational attainment among this population and similar populations. Also, determining how can Native tribes and urban AI/AN programs be more helpful and supportive not only for Native American male student population, but the entire Native American student population to bring awareness of this ongoing crises in higher educational attainment. Looking to the current experiences of those who are from marginalized communities within higher education and have successfully navigated through college programs to degree attainment can help find helpful solutions and methods that will help future students succeed in higher education within these populations.

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