

2020

Exploring Persistence of Indigenous Students at a Midwest University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Michelle Sayers

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Exploring Persistence of Indigenous Students at a Midwest University

by

Michelle Sayers

M.S.W., Grand Valley State University, 2005

B.Sc., Lake Superior State University, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2020

Abstract

Indigenous students attending non-tribal colleges represent approximately 1% of the college student body, with a smaller percentage that graduate. Indigenous students often encounter racism and experience cultural differences. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore Indigenous students' persistence at a mainstream college in the northern Midwest. Purposeful and snowball sampling was used to create a final sample of 10 self-identified Indigenous students who completed at least one semester and were 18 years or older, one full-time staff person, and two-part time student workers. Data also included a review of university strategic documents, social media pages, and observations of campus settings. The case study protocol involved incorporating cultural practices of offering tobacco and smudging before interviews. Recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a content analysis strategy. The findings were consistent with Tinto's model of student departure and HeavyRunner and Marshall's family education model that underscored the importance of social interactions to persist academically. The key findings demonstrated students shared a proud connection to their culture, with the most impactful themes related to gratitude and giving back to the Indigenous community. The findings contribute to promoting social change by suggesting a culturally inclusive campus community would further support the Indigenous students' sense of belonging and contribute to persistence efforts and graduation. The study's findings can assist educators in understanding the challenges Indigenous students' experience at a mainstream campus and identify actions to build relationships and culture specific supports for Indigenous students.

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Dedication

To the students and staff who participated in this study, I want to dedicate this to all of you. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for allowing me to share your stories. Your dedication and persistence motivated me to complete my studies. Aapii-chi-go Miigwetch, a very big thank you!

Acknowledgments

I want to thank Dr. Carl Valdez for his support, guidance, and patience during my long journey. His steady presence and understanding were something I could rely on. I would also like to thank Dr. Debra Wilson for her knowledge and patience for waiting for me to finish my dissertation, finally. Her words were encouraging and feedback direct. I would not have asked for a better committee. Their expertise and guidance are much appreciated. To Dr. Susan Markus, who provided me with feedback that, at times, made me unsure of myself, but it was that feedback that pushed me and helped me reach my goal.

I also want to thank my family for being my cheering section. They may not have always known what I was facing, but their curiosity, encouragement, and belief in me was a source of constant support. And to my partner Al, who I met halfway through my journey, but who was patient and loving as I sat endlessly in front my computer. I am grateful he was there for me and listened to my rants, gave me a hug when I cried, and cheered me on when I was not sure I had it in me to continue.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Native Americans make up approximately 1% of the United States' population, with 17% Native American high school graduates attending university (Post-Secondary National Policy Institute, 2019). Indigenous students make up approximately 1% of the post-secondary population (Chee, Shorty, & Robinson Kurpius, 2019; Creighton, 2007; Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013). In North America, completion rates for Indigenous students in higher education range from 75% and 96% who will not complete their education or graduate, representing a dropout rate two times higher than White students (Creighton, 2007; Gordon & White, 2014; Keith, Stastny, & Brunt, 2016). While there is a considerable amount of research documenting minority students' challenges in mainstream education, few studies have explicitly examined the Indigenous college student experience. Like other minority students, Indigenous people have to contend with the absence of familiar cultural supports, which makes the stress of secondary education more overwhelming (Jessop & Williams, 2009; Leonard & Mercier, 2016; Milne, 2016; Olsen Harper & Thompson, 2017). Institutional, faculty, and student racism increase stress (Buckmiller, 2010; Hardwood, Browne Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012), and academic weakness (poor study skills, inadequate preparatory course work at the secondary level) places these students at higher risk of dropping out (Marshall, Marshall, & Bartlett, 2015; Olsen Harper & Thompson, 2017; Powless, 2015; Scholfield, O'Brien, & Gilroy, 2013).

There has been a great deal of research on student persistence, particularly in post-secondary education. Academic and social factors play an essential role in helping students stay in school and graduate. Cultural differences, such as an emphasis on wholistic well-being and connection to others and the land contrasts with the Eurocentric values of individualism and autonomy. These differences challenge Indigenous students to engage and integrate into the school culture and develop a connection to the teachers and peers (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). For many Indigenous students, racism and negative stereotyping are pervasive, as is a sense of not fitting in. However, research exclusively focusing on the cultural characteristics and persistence of Indigenous students is still limited.

This case study's focus was to understand the experience of Indigenous students attending a non-tribal college and explore what it means to persist as an Indigenous student, despite the obstacles and barriers mainstream education presents. The study included self-identified Indigenous students over the age of 18 pursuing a baccalaureate degree and who were in at least their second semester of studies. The study was bound by the university's geographical location, given its proximity to various local tribal communities, which contributed a higher than average Indigenous student population.

This chapter briefly outlines the Indigenous students' background and experiences, which guided the purpose of this study, followed by a presentation of the overarching research questions. An introduction to Tinto's model of student departure and HeavyRunner and Marshall family education model claims the significance of a positive social connection with peers and faculty contributes to persisting in college.

Following an explanation of the theoretical framework, the nature of the case study method used for this research is explained, including definitions and descriptions of frequently used terms. The assumptions and limitations section briefly includes theoretical assumptions that guided the research questions related to persistence and connection to community or social networks while in college. Also, this section presents the importance of culture concerning persistence, considering the adverse history and challenges Indigenous students experiences in education.

Background

As public awareness has grown regarding the economic, social, and educational challenges of North American Indigenous peoples, researchers have examined historical and contemporary factors that continue to restrict opportunities for their individual and collective development and economic success. In North America Indian boarding or residential schools' policies existed between 1875 through 1969, with the last residential school in Canada closed in 1996 (Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2016). The intention of the boarding school actions was cultural genocide, with education intended to assimilate the Indigenous children by ways of extreme punishment and inhumane acts.

The consequences of past actions of Indian boarding or residential school policies undermined cultural autonomy and forced assimilation into White society continue to challenge today's students, demonstrated by racism and limited academic preparation for higher education (Olsen Harper & Thompson, 2017). Assimilation efforts resulted in adverse consequences such as high rates of poverty, violence, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, and poor housing conditions. Adverse effects of assimilation are predictors

of poor health and well-being (Bougie & Senecal, 2010; Kaspar, 2014; Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2016). The forced assimilation policies also resulted in fewer resources directed towards reservation and local education settings and subsequent generations mistrusting mainstream institutions (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2014; Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010). Hansen & Antsanen, 2016). Thus, Indigenous students have suffered from a lack of academic preparation and an inability to fit into mainstream college settings (Weaver, 2015). With only 0.67% of degrees earned by Indigenous students in the United States, attrition tends to be higher for this group (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintron, 2007). There has been little research on how Indigenous college students' experiences fit into the mainstream college model that places focus on culture and identity as contributors to persistence.

Since 1968 in the United States, tribal colleges and universities have emerged as alternative avenues for meeting Indigenous students' multidisciplinary needs (McClellan, Tippeconnic Fox, & Lowe, 2005). In response to the desire for self-determination of education for Native American students in higher education, the first tribal college opened in 1968 in North Dakota. Since this first tribal college opened, tribal colleges and universities in the United States emerged as alternative pathways for meeting the multidisciplinary needs of Indigenous students (American Indian Higher Education Consortium and the American Indian College Fund, 1999). Tribal colleges' approach to higher education from an Indigenous lens provided Indigenous students with mentors, cultural events, culturally inclusive curriculum, and Indigenous faculty in their college experience (Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Moeller, Anderson, & Grosz, 2012). The main

differences between mainstream colleges and tribal colleges are that tribal colleges' everyday practices incorporate cultural events, values, history, and ceremonies that match their cultural experiences into the curriculum, services, and campus culture (Powless, 2015). Tribal schools effectively met students' cultural and educational needs by engaging in cultural practices that fuel a strong sense of identity, reducing the stress of racism and feeling different (Hampton, 2013). The embrace of culture is an integral aspect of academic success rooted in the tribal colleges' efforts. Jenkins (2010) presented that culture inclusion does not have to be an obstacle when it becomes an integral part of the learning process with measures that include consultation and inclusion of Indigenous people. By providing an inclusive, culturally relevant curriculum and social supports, Indigenous graduates are capable of competing as professionals throughout the United States while maintaining their Indigenous culture and identity and providing culturally sensitive services to Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations (Bordeaux, 2014; Weaver, 2015).

In addition to academic demands, minority college students experience challenges such as racism, lack of financial resources, inadequate academic preparedness, and increased family commitments (Marshall et al., 2015; Olsen Harper & Thompson, 2017; Powless, 2015; Scholfield et al., 2013). The interconnected and wholistic Indigenous worldview differs from a Western ideology of autonomy and independence. Cultural adjustment involves the ability to adapt to social interactions and an institution's culture. Indigenous students rooted in their culture often exert additional effort to adapt to

mainstream campuses. Negative interactions related to academics and the social environment can impede Indigenous students' efforts to persist (Watson, 2009).

Formal education for Indigenous people has been a history of aggressive assimilation, the absence of culturally inclusive curriculum and environments, and limited knowledge of Indigenous culture and history. While tribal schools attempt to counter these experiences by incorporating culturally relevant curricula and services, this study focuses on Indigenous students attending a non-tribal university. Efforts of Indigenous institutions are not easily transferable to predominantly White or mainstream institutions. Administrators, faculty, and campus staff could further support Indigenous students' experience by increasing an understanding of the experiences of Indigenous students in mainstream institutions.

Problem Statement

Tinto's model of student departure proposed college students' inability to integrate into the college culture and who have distinct values and beliefs that differ from the college culture are less likely to overcome these differences, leading to an increased likelihood of departure from school. In addition to academic demands, Tinto suggested that students from different cultural backgrounds may not have the same experience in the social activities, events, and relationships that contribute to academic success (Christie & Dinham, 1991). However, this has not been adequately studied, particularly for Indigenous cultures. Further research could include specific variables on Indigenous student experiences and Indigenous culture. Research on Indigenous students' specific

strategies would add to the literature related to Indigenous college students and persistence efforts that lead to complete college.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to explore Indigenous students' persistence to complete college at a mainstream college in the northern Midwest. For this study, thoughts, actions, and beliefs that contribute to college completion defined persistence. The study examined Indigenous culture to learn how connections to meaningful cultural and social activities encourage persistence.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study investigated the meaning of culture and persistence among Native American college students at a predominately White college.

RQ1: How do Indigenous students describe experiences of being minority students in a mainstream college setting?

SQ1: How are connections to others, holistic well-being, and other Indigenous cultural elements experienced in attending college?

RQ2: What is the meaning of persistence to Indigenous college students attending a mainstream college?

SQ2: What Indigenous cultural strengths contribute to student persistence?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study

Tinto's model of student departure was used to guide this case study regarding the persistence of Indigenous college students. Tinto suggested several factors contributed to students remaining in schools, such as academic preparedness, social interactions, and

involvement in the institution. The school community consists of faculty, peers, and other professionals a student may encounter on campus. Participation and social relations on campus vary across each institution, and positive social relationships that are inclusive and supportive can contribute to persistence (Creighton, 2007). Students are more likely to persist when they can confidently integrate socially into a school community that fosters a commitment to the institution and the goal of completion (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Morley (2003) examined the social integration of African American and Latino(a) students and found that peer culture and the institutional environment negatively influenced social and academic integration efforts. The challenges in college settings are linked to the differences in precollege academic preparation and the pervasiveness of a color-blind society and impact the college social experience. Keith et al. (2016), Leonard and Mercier (2016), and Milne (2016) explored the educational experiences of Indigenous students. The authors found fundamental differences experienced in the education settings compared to fellow White students, leading the Indigenous students to experience a lack of sense of belonging among peers and school staff. The history with the education of Indigenous students included racism, lack of preparation, and differences in worldviews. These barriers to social integration challenges made it more likely there would be an adverse impact on feeling accepted and the motivation to remain in school.

Tinto's model of student departure was used in this study to examine social relationships and persistence in terms of Indigenous students. The model of student departure considers the importance of positive relationships on campus when examining

college persistence (Tinto (1987;2012;2015). According to HeavyRunner and Marshall (2003), the family education model integrated Indigenous cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices to frame an approach to understanding persistence. The family education model's key features encompass cultural beliefs and values related to spirituality as built-in protective factors that incorporate interconnectedness with classmates and teachers. These features contribute to self-awareness, balance, and a sense of responsibility to others and the process of lifelong learning. HeavyRunner and Marshall (2003) highlight the importance of relationships with the family, peers, and the community the student interacts with to realize and reach their potential. Using the family education model and Tinto's model of departure, this study attempted to examine student's actions and Indigenous cultural features that contribute to persistence.

Smith, Stumpff, and Cole (2012) highlighted the positive impacts of culturally relevant course content, academic support, peer relationships, and how professional development and training that involve the incorporation of Native American culture and courses improve Indigenous student engagement. The positive impacts for Native American students included increased motivation and involvement in their studies and more personally seeing material and scenarios in the curriculum that match their cultural experiences. For Indigenous students entering a predominantly White institution, the process of socialization may require learning how to function in an environment with different cultural norms and interactions (Huffman, 2010). Similarly, in a study of Native American college adjustment, Watson (2009) found that a familiar setting and a stable cultural identity supported Native American students as they encountered different

cultures on campus (Watson, 2009). A well-founded identity of an Indigenous student and routine cultural practices can safeguard students' efforts to develop social relations. This current study envisioned using the model of student departure and the family education model, which emphasizes Indigenous values that place prominence on developing positive relationships with family, peers, and the community. Further, this connection to others fosters persistence to achieve the goals and potential the student aspires to.

Nature of the Study

This study adopted a case study approach. Yin (2012) suggested that a case study is suited for examining the complexities of culture to develop a closer understanding of a single or small number of cases in real-life contexts. In North America education authorities and higher education institutions are attempting to create initiatives to reconcile the legacy of the Indian Residential School era (Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, 2015; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The results of this study may help identify practical initiatives to help Indigenous students persist in college.

The setting of the study was one public university situated in the northern Midwest that offered baccalaureate degrees. The primary reasons for choosing the research site were its distinctive geographical location with its above-average Indigenous population in the state and proximity to me as the researcher. There are 12 public universities in the state offering baccalaureate degrees, with the next closest public university 162 miles away. According to the university registrar enrollment reports, the

university has a considerably high Indigenous population, representing approximately 10% of the overall student population. Units of analysis consisted of individual participants (students and staff), public documents, social media sources, and campus observations. Students were in their second semester or beyond in their studies.

The sample size consisted of 10 students who self-identified as Indigenous and were 18 years of age or older and three staff members from the Indigenous Student Center (one full-time member and two part-time student workers). I completed an ethics review process for the research site after receiving Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. I sent letters to local tribal communities notifying leaders that participants in this study may include tribal members. I used campus social media and college emails to announce the study. Data were organized and analyzed following Yin's (2009) recommendations, which included arranging the data into categories, themes, and charts to organize the data.

Definitions

The following definitions were used based on language from the literature and the names used to identify indigenous people in North America. This study was conducted in the United States, however, due to the geographical boundaries imposed by the United States and Canadian governments, terms from both countries were used in this study. The following definitions were also used for key search terms in this study.

Aboriginal people: Original inhabitants of North America with a unique heritage, languages, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2012).

American Indian or Alaska Native: A person with blood lineage in a federally recognized tribe or village based on blood quantum, a term created by the United States government to determine tribal citizenship based on the percentage of Indian Blood using documentation of ancestry and tribal citizenship (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016).

Culture: The shared values of a group that consist of learned behavior expressed through language, customs, shared activities, artifacts, symbols, and ways of thinking and living life (McMaster, 2015).

Dominant worldview: Concepts involving making meaning and sense of the world developed through socialization, interactions, and beliefs based on Western or Eurocentric mindsets (Hart, 2010).

First Nation: A term to refer to status and non-status Indians of Canada (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2012).

Indian: Another term used in North America. The Canadian government used this term to identify the three cultural groups recognized under the Constitution Act: Metis, Inuit, and Aboriginal people. Further, through legislation, the government developed standards for defining whether an individual is a status or non-status Indian and considered a legally recognized Indian for purposes of registration with the Canadian government (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2012).

Indigenous: A term used internationally to define autonomous societies that originate in a given area and face attempts at oppression and assimilation against their original culture (University of British Columbia, 2009).

Indigenous worldview: Worldview based on mental, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral connections between self and the world, where relationships to all things living are integral to understanding and knowing (Castellano, 2015).

Native or Native American: individuals originating from a particular geographic location, not intended to represent a specific ethnicity but is used as a self-identifier. (University of British Columbia, 2009).

Persistence: Thoughts, actions, and beliefs that contribute to the completion of college (Seidman, 2005).

School culture: A culture unique to its setting but also a product of a broader societal culture in terms of its beliefs, values, and practices that are collectively shared by the dominant group that exists within the setting (DePalma & Jennet, 2010).

Assumptions

The primary assumption in this research was that Tinto's model of student departure was appropriate for the target population of this study because the model takes into account the significance of developing positive social relationships with peers and faculty to persist in college (Tinto, 1987; 2012). This model has evolved to recognize differences in minority students' experiences of college integration and development of positive social relationships (Tinto, 2015), but not specifically with Indigenous students. An additional assumption is that identified philosophical differences between Western and Indigenous ideologies (i.e., Western doctrines of individualism and competitiveness versus the Indigenous ideology of collective responsibility and wellness as a connection to others) are contextually meaningful to understanding student persistence and the

college academic experience. These assumptions guided the research regarding its theoretical orientation, interview processes, relationship-building strategies with participants, and data analysis plan.

Scope and Delimitations

The specific aspects of the research problem addressed in this study are that cultural features among Indigenous students attending college may uniquely contextualize the experience of persistence. These features include the connection to others and holistic well-being. This study used Tinto's model of student departure to explore social relationships and how the student perceives those relationships. HeavyRunner and Marshall's family education model was used to examine social relations integral to Indigenous cultures.

Models related to self-efficacy and quantitative methods were considered but not chosen for this study because of the limitations of underrepresented populations and low sample sizes. Self-efficacy is the belief that one is competent and capable of accomplishing a given task or goal. Self-efficacy and normalized assumptions that a person attaches meaning on what other people think or say about them can guide decisions to persist in school and impact interactions in social encounters, quality of life, stress levels, and coping strategies (Bandura, 1997, 2006). Spruill, Hirt, and Mo (2014) examined self-efficacy and persistence of male students and said race was associated with challenging college persistence, despite desires and aspirations to succeed.

Bean and Eaton's psychological model of student retention examined a student's college experience and the psychological attributes, such as coping skills and perceptions

of power within the environment that lead to staying in school. The student's academic and social interactions are connected to student integration into the college setting with beliefs that reinforce or hinder persistence. This process is dependent on the perceptions and coping skills of the student. The student's ability to exert control of psychological responses and control of their experiences throughout the college experience plays a role in the process of how motivation is perceived and affects students' positive or negative perception of the college experience and motivation to persist in school (Johnson, Wasserman, Yidirim, and Yonai (2014). Bean and Eaton's model was not used because the focus of this study was not on the psychological attributes of students, but rather on the Indigenous culture and how the student's culture may connect to the academic and social experiences and interactions of Indigenous students.

Many minority students face challenges to their self-efficacy when they experience racism and discrimination. Adaptation to a different culture can be challenging. Fiske and Fiske (2007) said that students may experience acceptance or rejection when adapting to the dominant culture's expectations. Rodgers and Summers (2008) also used Bean and Eaton's model on retention with African American and White students to examine the psychological process of efficacy expectations. The authors recommended conducting future studies with other ethnic or racial groups and the building of culture-dependent models to better understand the motivation of different racial or ethnic groups. DeWitz, Woolsey, and Walsh (2009) recommended exploring different ways to promote the success of underrepresented populations, with an increased focus on factors such as connections to peers, family support, and faculty encouragement.

Self-efficacy and the psychological process of merging campus and off-campus life focus on the sense of purpose in life and core beliefs that one has the power to produce desired results and a sense of control of the environment to motivate success. The purpose of this case study was to explore the persistence of Indigenous students and their ability to persist despite cultural differences, rather than their capabilities to acculturate into the dominant culture.

Limitations

I conducted member checking with participants to ensure I was accurately depicting the information they shared. Addressing credibility involved using multiple sources of data. This study included observations of common public and Indigenous service areas, interviews with both students and Indigenous Student Center staff, and a review of a variety of documents. Documents included annual reports, strategic plans, institutional websites, and social media pages. Another step was debriefing with my dissertation committee members to discuss the study approach, isolate flaws, test ideas, and detect researcher biases or preferences. Another way I addressed credibility was through iterative questioning, allowing me to probe for details to uncover possible discrepancies and return to participants previous statements to reframe the interview question. Informing all participants of their right to withdraw at any time ensured that participation was done freely without a sense of obligation or coercion, which is important so as not to skew data.

Monitoring the development of thick descriptions of data by paying close attention to each participant's story as unique and not treating stories collectively helped

to ensure the dependability of this qualitative inquiry. Member checking included a summary of responses after each interview. Indigenous students in higher education are often a small population to gather a robust sample and posed limited generalizability of the findings to other institutions, situations, or populations. Carefully recording and reporting data collection methods, number, and length of each interview session, helped support trustworthiness.

Transferability refers to how research findings will be useful in other settings. It was imperative to develop clear explanations in terms of how information was collected, analyzed, and reported. Shenton (2004) recommended an audit trail that include process notes related to procedure and strategies and the development of conclusions and connections to literature and theories. The development of an audit trail assists in terms of appropriate participant selection, locations to observe, data collection method, and documentation review, all which support trustworthiness. For this study, the audit trail was comprised of documentation of raw data, field notes, and summaries. I wrote notes throughout the research process to capture descriptive information of the setting, observations, and my personal thoughts and reaction. Reflexive notes helped to incorporate my reactions and predictions to assist me in not infusing my own experiences into the research process.

Delimitations are selected aspects of the research process related to the problem, location, time, and sample selected (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The ideal time frame to collect data from participants was January to April when most students were on campus. Timeframes avoided included midterms, final exams, and study breaks when students

were not readily available to participate because of demands of studying or being away from campus.

My awareness of personal bias was heightened as an Indigenous person who experienced racism, discrimination, and feeling different. As recommended by Stake (2010) to address researcher bias, I kept a journal to capture my thoughts or reactions as they were experienced following each interview session. I did not use notes as research data; they served as thoughtful commentary to point out my influences during data collection, analysis, theme generation, and composition of the final report. Additionally, debriefing with my dissertation committee members helped in terms of checking for personal biases and testing ideas and interpretations.

Significance

This study may complement existing literature regarding persistence and contribute to information about the relationship between Indigenous culture and persistence. This study can also help expand cultural distinctions common to Indigenous students, as well as identify the contrasts with mainstream campus culture which may influence persistence. Often, Indigenous students must learn how to adapt to the culture of the school. Prosser (1999) said that culture includes “ways of constructing reality and different cultures are simply alternative constructions of reality” (p. xii). The present study may provide insights into how to recognize cultural differences and the development of practices and strategies that do not require diverse students to adapt to be successful. Culture is more than heritage, history, food, or artifacts. It encompasses language as it relates to communication, creating meaning, and development of social

relationships (DeVillar, Faltis, & Cummins, 1994). This study may contribute to positive social change by increasing positive relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures through understanding and relationship building. This enhancement of social relationships may, in turn, influence change in the overall culture of the school. School culture is a combination of norms, values, and overall behaviors of students and staff which influences and conveys the underlying message of the school (Kunjufu, 2013). School culture also includes patterns of perceptions affecting behavior and systems of relationships and related subcultures (Prosser, 1999). College students and staff may benefit from increased knowledge of the Indigenous students' experiences and increase relationship building to develop a school culture that is inclusive and welcoming of the Indigenous culture.

This exploration of college persistence of Indigenous students is relevant to positive social change, and hopefully, the results will lead to encouraging Indigenous students to complete college and helping schools understand the importance culture holds for Indigenous students. When students graduate from college, this leads to more substantial employment and financial well-being of Indigenous graduates. Relationships increase education attainment, and financial capacity contributes to the welfare of individuals and communities. This study also demonstrated how resilient the Indigenous population is, despite current and historical challenges. Protective factors that buffer against adversity and stressors lead to positive adaptation and adjustment, fostering resilience (Rawana, Sieukaran, Nguyen, & Pitawanakwat, 2015; Waller et al., 2002). While resilience is not the focus of this study, the strength of the Indigenous population

can highlight how generations withstood aggressive attempts to eradicate their culture, and consequently inspire the preservation of the Indigenous culture in the college setting.

Summary

This chapter provided a brief introduction to the experiences of Indigenous students attending college. Before entering college, it is likely Indigenous students were impacted by oppressive educational histories stemming from assimilation efforts that carried with them into the experience in higher education. This chapter supported the importance of increasing graduation rates and persistence among Indigenous students as essential for overcoming this oppressive history and reducing the risks posed by poverty, unemployment, and poor health. The chapter further demonstrated that this population is underrepresented in higher education. Also explained was how Indigenous culture is inherently different from the worldview that encapsulates autonomy and individualism of the Western culture. The Indigenous cultures of North America centers around holistic connections to self, family, and community. Consequently, educational attainment contributes to the well-being of not just the individual but also the family and community. It is essential to present this holistic view, as it connects to Tinto's model of student departure.

Chapter 2 includes the literature review, expanding upon concepts and information introduced in this chapter. The chapter also discusses challenges for minority students in college settings and the relevance of cultural and ethnic diversity on campus. The importance of Tinto's model of student departure and HeavyRunner and Marshall's

family education model, which emphasizes the importance of family, community, peer, and teacher relations, are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 includes an overview of the methodology of this study, as well as the rationale of the research design, participant criteria, and sampling procedures. Procedures for data collection and analysis are outlined. Chapter 3 will also present ethical considerations and aspects of trustworthiness and protection of human subjects.

Chapter 4 includes a description of the research setting and participants. This chapter will present how the data was collected and the data analysis process. Before presenting the data, the chapter will outline evidence of trustworthiness. The last section of the chapter reveals the data as it was organized into five themes and corresponding categories.

Chapter 5 contains key findings from the data analysis process that corresponds to the themes and categories presented in Chapter 4. The information is presented using the overarching research questions to organize the presentation of the categories and themes. The chapter also sets forth limitations, recommendations, and implications of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Indigenous students face struggles in addition to academics, such as poverty, isolation, racism, and culture clashes (Buckmiller, 2010; Hardwood et al., 2012). This literature review summarized Indigenous cultures and college persistence to explain challenges Indigenous students experience when finishing college. The purpose of this case study was to explore Indigenous students' persistence at a mainstream college in the northern Midwest. This study highlighted the features of persistence as specifically related to Indigenous students. In this study, persistence is the actions, thoughts, beliefs, and academic abilities of students that contribute to their perseverance in terms of continuing their education.

Minority student challenges are a common focus when examining college student experiences; however, with a small representation of Indigenous students on campuses it is challenging to measure persistence factors and culturally specific theories regarding the persistence of Indigenous students. In this chapter, the review of the literature further demonstrated the importance of acknowledging and incorporating Indigenous culture into the fabric of college campuses to encourage the persistence of Indigenous students to complete their education. The literature review also highlighted traditional theories of persistence. In North America, Indigenous students are underrepresented in studies that include minority students due to low enrollment numbers. The diversity of the Native American population across the United States makes it challenging to present a consistent statistic on dropout rates. However, as an example, Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2010)

presented that across the United States less than 50% of Indigenous post-secondary students graduate. The small samples of this population ideally lend themselves to qualitative studies exploring the unique cultural characteristics of this underrepresented population that demonstrate challenges related to cultural differences and a high dropout rate of Indigenous college students. Research on the effectiveness of tribal colleges with the incorporation of culture in curriculum services is beneficial for understanding how tribal schools are thriving and nurturing environments for Indigenous students. However, more research is required to examine experiences involving culture and persistence of Indigenous students in predominantly White institutions.

Literature Search Strategy

Online computer databases including Academic Search Complete, Complementary Index, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), and Education Research Complete, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and SocINDEX were used for the literature review of this study. Government and institutional sources were found using Google Scholar. Keywords used in this search were *American Indian, Native American, Aboriginal, Indigenous, college persistence, resilience, retention, minority students, college, higher education, college completion, college dropout, and culture.*

Diverse Cultural and Ethnic Experiences in Higher Education

Many minority students face a myriad of challenges, even before entering the classroom. Seidman (2005) stated that with the increasing enrollment of students from minority populations, institutions must respond to cultural differences with culturally appropriate support and pedagogy; otherwise, college completion will remain low for minority

students. Several factors, such as racism, insufficient college preparation, poverty, or cultural differences, are consistent for minority students. The selection of schools may depend on economic status, adequate housing, access to tutoring, and pre-college academic preparation. Engberg and Allen (2001) found that students who have parents with less than or equivalent to high school diploma education have lower college enrollment rates and manifest less parental influence in terms of education choices and career aspirations than students without a history of poverty.

Minority students face further hurdles after arriving on campus when attempting to adjust to cultural environments and social dynamics of new environments and norms. Colleges where the dominant Western worldview guides policies, practices, and social norms can negatively impact persistence for culturally and ethnically diverse students. Curriculum and campus environments that are not culturally diverse generate feelings of isolation for minority students because of differences with the dominant culture. Furthermore, racism is often covertly embedded in everyday practices and relationships, going unnoticed and unchallenged by the dominant culture (Jessop & Williams, 2009). School culture can shape a student's experience. Faculty and administrators may acknowledge diversity, but according to DePalma and Jennet (2010) in a study of transphobia on college campuses and Wei, Ku, and Liao (2011), who examined the perceptions of African American, Asian American, and Latino students, college representatives often fail at challenging deeply rooted negative societal beliefs and practices that perpetuate isolating school cultures experienced by minority students. The authors suggested the disregard of minority experiences bolstered feelings of isolation

and difference for diverse students whose cultures differ from that of the school culture and the majority of the school population.

Cultural differences have provided significant challenges for underrepresented populations. A focus on negative experiences for minority students, such as racism and not fitting in, has not provided insight into understanding how minority student's culture can become a buffer against negative experiences. The literature search resulted in a scarcity of sources that examined the Indigenous culture as a protective factor or influencing persistence, leading to a gap that allows for further exploration of how using the culture of Indigenous students can be adopted as a strategy to overcome some of the challenges faced by Indigenous students.

Minority Student Experiences

The experience of Indigenous students prior to entering college can set the tone of the campus experience when Indigenous students are the minority population. In a study of Native Canadian high school students and teachers, Kanu (2006) said that positive personal interactions between faculty and staff who understood their culture contributed positively to their sense of self-efficacy. A strong sense of self-efficacy reinforces student's motivation and commitment to continue their education. Cultural expectations also guide social relationships and often determine who is accepted or not. Students may experience acceptance or rejection depending on their ability to adapt to dominant cultural expectations; this can result in feelings of loss of control and trust (Fiske & Fiske, 2007). Aside from academic demands, minority students have experienced social and cultural clashes, conditions of pervasive poverty, discrimination, language

differences, divergent philosophies, and lack of significant social relationships. These added challenges and negative interactions on campus lead to negative experiences and barriers to student success. Jonson-Reid, Davis, Saunders, Williams, and Williams (2005) said that for minority students, nonacademic considerations such as the school environment and sense of marginalization as a minority could adversely influence self-efficacy, academic performance, and persistence. A negative environment can hinder a sense of social competence, consequently impacting persistence.

Lundy-Wagner (2012) conducted a literature critique of degree completion with gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The authors revealed socioeconomic status was not conclusive in predicting achievement; for example, students classified as low socioeconomic status were not always disadvantaged, and middle-class students did not consistently outperform lower-class students. Lundy Wagner highlighted cultural differences and integration challenges for students from a minority culture. Magno and Schiff (2010) examined the literature on best practices for immigrant students on college campuses. The authors of this literature review pointed out how vital school leadership is to support students as they integrate into an unfamiliar culture, where students feel dissimilar and isolated by cultural and language differences. As a result of the literature of best practices, Mango and Schiff recognized that further research is necessary to identify solutions that ensure the transition to college for immigrant students, with family identified as an essential factor for immigrant student support. In a longitudinal study, Kim, and Nunez (2013) followed 3,774 high school students at 360 high schools located in 39 states, through sophomore up to two years after the expected graduation date.

Multicultural contextual influences such as ethnicity, family, social capital, economic status, support of teachers, and state-level support for 2- and 4-year colleges can influence college goals for students of diverse cultures. Despite economic status or support from teachers Kim and Nunez pointed out students who maintain a connection and have support from family promote success in college.

To understand the Indigenous college students' experiences identifying and understanding the impact culture has on learning and the college experience Espiner and Guild (2010) found that a supportive school environment promotes self-efficacy, a sense of control, and academic success. A campus environment where students can access support such as guidance, personal and educational support, and pre-college preparation reinforced persistence. Additionally, encouragement and role models could contribute to the development of self-efficacy. Schmidt and Akande (2011) suggested that tribal colleges have recognized the importance of providing an atmosphere that includes staff and faculty of the same ethnic and cultural background support academic persistence. With low numbers of ethnically diverse faculty and staff on campuses, Kayes (2006) that, on mainstream campuses, efforts by schools to make staff and faculty more culturally diverse and responsive to cultural differences are often short term and lack sustainability. Staff and faculty may resist intercultural sensitivity training out of defensiveness or minimization of limited knowledge of cultural differences. Kayes stressed, while the efforts may be educational, they cannot be transformational until individuals become more open to acknowledging biases, assumptions, and stereotypes. Changes occur systematically throughout the institution. Smith and Roberts (2007) also

presented that in addition to diverse student experience, diverse staff reported feeling isolated and misunderstood. Efforts to retain diverse faculty would provide more significant assistance and support to minority students. For staff and faculty, but especially for minority students, an inviting and supportive school environment can play a substantial role in persistence.

School Culture

Many elementary schools are based on a predominantly Caucasian system, where children are less likely to experience a school culture that represents diverse cultures. The school culture and climate can set the tone for the education experience. The experience may be positive or negative, depending on how effectively diversity, racism, and discrimination are addressed. Dessel (2010) explored existing literature for prejudice reduction strategies that foster an inclusive school culture and found that school programs developed strategies that promote small group connections among students and cooperative learning opportunities allowed students to interact with each other and develop prosocial attitudes. These approaches, from a systematic level, promoted inclusiveness, understanding, respect, and celebrated diversity in and out of the classroom. Another challenge for Indigenous students is the small number of Indigenous teachers in the education system. Indigenous teachers also experience racism and discrimination and often do not remain in mainstream schools for the long term. St. Denis (2010) examined the experiences of 59 Aboriginal teachers in public schools across Canada and described pervasive actions by administrations that questioned their abilities and qualifications, which impacted their sense of belonging in the schools. Fellow

teachers had a lack of understanding of the history of oppression of the Indigenous people, and the administration was reluctant or refused to include additional content that would address the historical issues, claiming that the material was sensitive and would create too much conflict. St. Denis demonstrated the Aboriginal teachers were underrepresented in the school system leading to less opportunity for role modeling and support to Indigenous students. Dessel and St. Dennis highlighted the experiences in elementary school culture for Indigenous students that set a foundation for the culture of education as students move from elementary to secondary school, before entering higher education.

For educators, including campus and teacher initiatives that account for diversity is important but often difficult to actualize. Students and faculty are often not prepared to examine issues such as White privilege or how to create multicultural inclusive curriculum and campuses. Cole, Rios, Case, and Curtin (2011) examined the attitudes of 173 first-year psychology students towards inequality, responding to diversity and addressing acts of racism and revealed the students were more likely to deny the existence of racism but became more aware of White privilege. Further, Cole et al. concluded that students who signed up for this elective course might also be more open to examining the challenges of racism and open to confronting racism. One of the difficulties with diversity courses or content is that it is often an elective or small unit within the class. In a qualitative study, Schoorman and Bogotch (2010) examined the concept of multicultural education and the perceptions of 27 K-8 teachers at a Laboratory School. The study elicited three themes: multicultural education was an affirming

concept, the idea would be well suited for the classroom with diversity, and multicultural education was more about issues that related to justice and equality than cultural differences. The teachers were able to identify what constituted multicultural practice, but many were still unable to concretely say that they were practicing effectively with diverse students. Schoorman and Bogotch concluded that multicultural education should be an everyday paradigm, rather than a sporadic approach to a specific topic or situation.

Negative Perceptions of Minority Students

College enrollment of minority students can be adversely impacted by faulty perceptions of academic ability based on race or ethnicity. Kim and Nunez (2012) used longitudinal data to examine college attainment based on race and ethnic classification, with 46% Black and 31% Hispanic students enrolled in 4-year college programs, as compared to 57% White students. What stood out in this longitude study were factors such as a family with limited experiences with higher education and insufficient precollege preparation adversely impacted college enrollment of minority students. Kim and Nunez recognized building stronger relationships with students and families and efforts by teachers to address cultural differences can foster college enrollment and retention. In western Canada, Riley and Ungerleider (2012) interviewed 21 elementary teachers to examine the perceptions teachers had of English as a second language (ESL) and Aboriginal students. The teachers unintentionally made decisions related to the achievement potential of students based on their identified classifications of Aboriginal, ESL, and with students not having an identified classification. Most teachers claimed that they opposed stereotypes but contradicted this with their comments and assumptions

about the factors relating to high or low achievement. Teachers were surprised when Aboriginal students attained high achievement scores, demonstrating a lower expectation. The results demonstrated the importance for teachers to understand their false perceptions of student's abilities based on ethnic or cultural classifications. Moeller et al. (2012) revealed teacher interpretations of invitational practices with Native American high school students in a qualitative study with 38 teacher candidates who participated as hosts of a workshop for Native-American students. Teacher candidates felt their actions were inviting, but upon completion of the workshop, the efforts did not provide a greater understanding of cultural differences, history, and real-life challenges of Native American students. Relationships are universal across cultures. Deficient knowledge and understanding of Indigenous culture, experiences of Indigenous people, and flawed perceptions hinder the development of positive relationships with Indigenous students.

Indigenous Student Experiences

The education system and learning environment have been fraught with unpleasant experiences for Indigenous students for decades, a system that was oppressive and isolating for many Indigenous students. Cultural differences created increased barriers when teachers are predominantly Caucasian and are unfamiliar with the Indigenous culture and unaware of the history of oppression that has impacted generations of students (Bombay et al., 2014; Buckmiller, 2010). Further, educational practices follow a Western paradigm that differs from the Indigenous values of a wholistic approach to learning, such as the use of elders and the influence of the environment on education. Educators and policymakers are recognizing the importance

of understanding Indigenous traditional knowledge and courses that present the history of First Nations, and support in school to buffer against barriers to completing higher education (Council of Ministers of Education, 2010).

An awareness of ethnic and cultural differences is not enough to support Indigenous students in higher education. Buckmiller (2010) explored the experiences of Native American students in college residence and provided a glimpse into experiences of Native American students' campus life. Interaction with peers demonstrated an unfamiliarity of cultural differences or a lack of awareness among peers and faculty accentuated incidents of racism and stereotypes. Differing and contradicting values and cultural backgrounds from the dominant paradigm of Western values that promote individualism and competitiveness provided an additional layer of challenges for students whose worldview is shaped by values of connectedness and responsibility to others. Buckmiller recommended further exploration of cultural differences and the implications of interpersonal relationships for a better understanding of the experiences of students from differing cultural backgrounds in higher education. Cultural safety comprises practices and policies organizations and professionals undertake to acknowledge cultural differences and meet the unique needs of culturally diverse individuals engaging in organizations' services (Yeung, 2016). Cultural differences and social relationships can be affected by adverse interactions and different values and cultural views, negatively influencing a student's sense of self-efficacy, and causing their withdrawal. Indigenous students undertake efforts to fit in and find effective supports and meaningful relationships with peers and teachers from different cultures.

One of the features of many Indigenous cultures is the importance of relationships with family and community. According to the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (2010), family and social responsibilities were factors that contributed to school departures, such as family life and commitment, lower education attainment of household members, and limited involvement of parents in school activities. Lowe (2005) said that while academics are the main reason for attending higher education, the lack of a sense of belonging can negatively impact the educational experience. Another challenge faced by minority students, specifically Native-American students, is the ethnic and cultural gap between students and teachers throughout their academic lives. On college campuses where the student and teacher populations were predominantly Caucasian, the Indigenous students struggled to feel like a part of the university. Students struggle to feel a sense of belonging. Chee et al. (2019) examined self-beliefs of 158 Indigenous college students across the United States found cultural differences, a lack of role models on campus, and limited peer interaction with other Indigenous students contributed to their perceived academic stress (Chee et al. 2019).

Hardwood et al. (2012) said that Native American students living in campus residence demonstrated strategies by campus staff that promoted increased peer interactions created a sense of community and relationship building, which in turn contributed to a sense of belonging. Drywater-Whitekiller (2006) said the preservation of the Indigenous culture involves the ability to learn and actively participate in cultural activities. Drywater-Whitekiller's qualitative study of 19 Native American students in their last year of undergraduate studies found that the interaction with Native American

elders was predominant in maintaining life balance. The connection to the native language and culture was better preserved, contributing to a greater sense of identity, and providing a balance to life in both the Native American and Western cultures. A campus environment where the Western culture encourages competition, individuality, and autonomy compromises the Indigenous culture that emphasizes collective identity and the belief that the reciprocal connection to others is a responsibility. The benefits and gains of education are not considered self-serving but rather a means to give back to the community. Drywater-Whitekiller's use of qualitative research methods provided more descriptions of the experiences of the students and the importance of a strong sense of identity to withstand the struggles of fitting into a different cultural environment.

The limited representation in the literature of Native American participants and measures available specifically for the Native American experience has challenged the generalizability of quantitative studies on persistence. The mixed-method study by Garza, Bain, and Kupczynski (2014) examined factors such as efficacy, persistence, retention, and resilience of the first-generation college students, found it challenging to gain a clear picture of the efficacy factors of Native American students. Robinson Kurpius, Payakkakom, Dixon Rayle, Chee, & Arredondo (2008) examined student self-beliefs and college completion, cautioned generalizability due to small sample sizes when including Native American students. For this study, out of 750 surveys completed, only 41 were Native Americans. Thompson, Johnson-Jennings, and Nitzarim (2013) used quantitative methods to measure college persistence efforts and self-esteem of 156 Native American college students. Students who were able to retain a strong connection their culture while

going to school showed higher self-esteem scores. One of the challenges of using and revising standardized tests with Native American participants relates to the diversity of the 562 tribes across North America and their various languages and cultures. Thompson, Johnson-Jennings, and Nitzarim pointed out that persistence factors are related to the ability to acculturate or become bicultural. Concerning other measures, such as self-beliefs and comfort at the institution and social support, are also essential factors, but not necessarily representative of the Native American student experience.

Cultural and Ethnic Hurdles to Persistence

Connection to Cultural Identity

When examining the experiences of Indigenous students, factors such as connection to cultural identity can be either a positive or a negative influence when considering persistence among Indigenous students. Huffman (2008) measured correlations between Indigenous students with a reservation background, cultural traditionalism, and transition to university. For individuals with a secure identity as an Indigenous person and affiliation to cultural traditions the higher, the likelihood to withstand cultural differences and remain in school. Huffman reported the limitation of this research was the small sample, as found in several other studies that include Indigenous students. These findings support the relevance of exploring cultural influences on persistence. Huffman suggested further research on reserve experience and first-generation students is worth undertaking. Botha (2010) demonstrated in a qualitative study of Indigenous students in Africa a significance of Indigenous knowledge the students. The Indigenous students whose worldview differs from that of the institution

are better supported when the curriculum takes Indigenous knowledge and culture into account. This qualitative study demonstrated that around the world, Indigenous knowledge is a fundamental element in supporting the learning experience. This study showed that incorporating the connection to family, community, and the importance of spirituality into Indigenous knowledge was integral to overcoming the historical impacts of colonization. The study took place in South Africa, where Indigenous culture has played only a minor role in education. Botha's findings support greater inclusion of culture into the curriculum and education principles. Additionally, Afrocentricity takes into consideration the importance of both physical and spiritual knowledge in the process of learning. A culture-centered approach requires commitment from policy creators and implementation in the classroom so that diversity is acknowledged, and for the inclusion of the Indigenous. While there are differences between the Indigenous and Western worldviews, incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the learning experience brings beneficial consequences for Indigenous students.

Robinson Kurpius et al. (2008) completed a study to examine factors relating to non-completion by Native American, Latino, and African American students with a focus on self-beliefs and academic performance. In this quantitative study, the researchers measured the self-beliefs of 750 first-year college students who were European American, Latino, or Native American, with 41 Native Americans being represented in the 750-student sample. This study demonstrated that Native American students differ in self-beliefs and persistence from European American and Latino students. The results showed cultural differences in valuing collectivity versus individuality. This quantitative

study on self-efficacy and persistence suggests further research to understand Native American students and the cultural features that support persistence. As a component of Indigenous knowledge, Styres, Zinga, Bennet, and Bomberly (2010) underscored the importance of a collaborative, respectful, and reciprocal relationship of many Indigenous cultures. Indigenous knowledge incorporates both physical and spiritual aspects. It is imperative to realize the inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing into the college curriculum to acknowledge and understand the process of cognition from both Western and Indigenous perspectives. Culturally connected interactions and practices foster Indigenous student success. For example, tribal schools located within tribal communities, which are controlled and staffed by tribal groups, align more closely with Native American students' learning and social interaction styles. The tribal schools that incorporate culture into the curriculum are community-based, so students do not have to travel away from their families; these schools are also operated predominantly by Native American teachers and staff. However, these schools are often underfunded, offer limited academic programs, and follow different accreditation standards (Jenkins, 2010). Tribal colleges have demonstrated that culturally relevant content that is holistic incorporates the language, history, and culture of American Indian groups and can prove to be supportive of the education experience. The tribal colleges tend to be smaller, provide more interaction with students, and are located close to family, friends, and community. This model has proved to be effective in supporting academics and can be beneficial in mainstream institutions in supporting greater social integration (Martin, 2005). Tippeconnic Fox (2005) affirmed it is integral to students feeling connected and

belonging to have a supportive relationship between students and faculty, but also to have faculty who share the same cultural and ethnic background. Faculty who share the same ethnicity as students can provide the kind of support that develops positive relationships to foster persistence. Still, 0.2 % of faculty in higher education are Native Americans. Familiarity with cultural knowledge and challenges can be supportive and provide a sense of community and connectedness that is commonly rooted in most Native American cultures.

Campus Environment

For minority students, harmful campus environments, where fear of victimization or marginalization occurs, reduce feelings of social competence, and a sense of power and control is diminished (Jonson-Reid et al., 2005). Racism can have a detrimental effect on health and wellness and can lead to lower rates of education, academic achievement, and employment, and poor coping skills. For example, in Australia, Pedersen and Barlow (2008) demonstrated that false beliefs and negative preconceived ideas about Australian Aboriginals contributed to an uncomfortable atmosphere, allowing prejudice against Australian Aboriginals to remain as an undercurrent in the campus environment. Australian Aboriginal research was included in this literature review because the experiences of Indigenous people in New Zealand and Australia parallel the experiences of Indigenous populations in North America.

Gómez-Zermeño (2018) described intercultural education as a deliberate process and practice of educators that consider diversity and the intersection of socio-cultural experiences and recognition of the unequal realities of Indigenous students. Deardorff

(2011) summarized the importance of intercultural competence in schools but also acknowledged that there is a struggle between defining the concept and putting it into the fabric of practices on campus. Deardorff presented that intercultural competence requires transformational learning and experiences that move out of the classroom, into social opportunities, and addresses multiple worldviews. Becoming more interculturally competent requires critical reflection on current practices, possible changes, and methods to implement these changes outside of the classroom. Watson (2009) also argued the relevance of having a strong cultural identity in withstanding acculturation and therefore adapting while maintaining one's cultural identity.

Focus on Recruitment Versus Retention

Developing retention strategies for Native American students is equally vital to recruiting; however, the literature review revealed that examining the experiences of Indigenous students entering higher education is the first step. Retaining students with academic, curriculum, and social support that considers account the cultural aspect has the potential to reduce feelings of isolation and meet the needs of Native American students, families, and communities. Culturally respectful retention efforts safeguard success in higher education and stimulate learning and the desire to complete higher education at the family and community levels. McKinley Jones Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom (2012) acknowledge the importance of addressing institution-specific strategies that range from recruitment and retention to graduation and pointed out strategies that foster family and community involvement. Protective factors such as pre-college preparation and community and tribal involvement interventions aimed at

teaching elementary and middle school students supported aspirations and persistence in higher education. In addition, McKinley Jones Brayboy et al. recommended Native American faculty, who can serve as role models, contribute to students finding a sense of belonging and support. Also, the Native American community and family involvement are protective factors can be replicated by creating a sense of family and community on campus.

While completing the literature review several ideas were revealed for further exploration related to further understanding Native American students' persistence in higher education. Investigating the features of the culture of Native American students that differ from mainstream culture builds on well-documented themes, such as poverty, inadequate college preparation, or racism, with social relationships supporting well-being and persistence in education. The following section elaborates on the importance of social relations, Tinto's model of student departure and social interactions consistent with the Indigenous culture characteristics of HeavyRunner and Marshall's family education model.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical frameworks used to guide this study were Tinto's model of student departure and HeavyRunner and Marshalls family education model to examine education resiliency from a Native American perspective, focusing on the importance of incorporating family and community in the educational experience. The literature on retention theories has concentrated mainly on Eurocentric views and experiences. As Larimore and McClellan (2005) said, Native Americans are the population least likely to

enter higher education and complete their educational pursuits. The authors stressed that research on retention specific to Native American students should be encouraged. There is currently limited literature on the topic, and due to the numerous tribes across North America and their diversity, results are difficult to generalize. Larimore and McClellan pointed out that retention literature may identify factors related to dropping out of school but do not examine the cultural differences that also contribute to the challenges that Native-American students face. Larimore and McClellan advised that for Native American students, assimilation was the consequence of fitting in to succeed.

Traditional Theories

Tinto: Model of Student Departure

Tinto's model of student departure has been widely used to examine the factors that contribute to students' abandonment of higher education; however, some authors will argue that the model does not accurately capture the experiences of minority students, particularly concerning social relationships. Meeuwisse, Severiens, & Born (2010) supported including ethnicity in the departure theory acknowledged the importance of social support, and negative school culture contributed to understanding the departure and retention factors of minority students. Factors such as limited interaction with other peers, cultural and ethnic differences between student and teachers, and outside commitments such as family, work, or community involvement detract from developing positive social relationships on campus (Burke, 2007). Persistence is encouraged, as Tinto (1987) suggested, when a student can better integrate into the college environment. This positive

integration contributes to the ability to develop positive social relationships both on and off campus.

When considering retention theories, it is crucial to acknowledge Tinto's model of student departure that includes the academic and social integration experiences in the college environment. Morrison and Silverman (2012) summarized the three stages Tinto's model of student departure as follows: The first stage involved separating oneself from the communities of the past. This departure from the community may be physical and psychological, seeing oneself moving away from family, high school friends, and physical dwellings. The second stage is the transition from the past community to the college community. The third stage is integration, where the student feels fully incorporated into the college community. Integration involved assimilation into the academic and social communities and covers both informal and formal relationships. Formal academic relationships included the congruence or incongruence between the student's skills and abilities and the academic demands of the institution. Causal relationships include those among students, faculty, staff, and peers related to attaining educational goals. Formal social relationships included involvement in school activities such as clubs and student government. Informal social relationships included personal friendships and peer group involvement. Interestingly, the Native American cultural traditions that revolve around the relationships between community, family, and peers have promoted success and adaptation to a different culture (Watson, 2009).

Tinto (2012) proposed conditions that foster success beyond academics and may address the multiple factors that contribute to departure. The first condition relates to

clear and consistent expectations, such as the time needed to dedicate to studies. First-year students are often unsure on this count. Also, expectations about the rules of informal interactions may not be understood by all students. The information may not be communicated openly or hidden in student conduct books or on the institution internet. The lack of attention to these critical rules can perpetuate feelings of isolation and negative peer interactions. Clear and consistent communication also includes follow-through on the rewards and consequences, reducing intentional and unintentional isolation and discrimination. The third condition is comprehensive support from academic, social, and financial services. Support such as study groups, tutoring, supplemental instruction counseling, mentoring, and ethnic student centers are examples of comprehensive support services. Positive interactions and environmental influences are connected to student goals and integration because these experiences increase the quality of learning.

Students from different ethnicities and social classes manifest significant differences from White students. These differences include real experiences with discrimination, limited peer interactions, and role models from the same race, cultures, or economic background leading to increased isolation (Tinto, 1987). Engstrom and Tinto (2008) said that the support required for academic completion might not be accessible only from college; additional support is also necessary to meet student needs. The emphasis on support is in line with HeavyRunner and Marshall's family education model, which acknowledges the strong ties and connection to family and community to support overall well-being, not only for the individual but also for the community. Charbonneau-

Dahlen (2015) highlighted support, mentorship, and a sense of hope that can come from positive emotional, social, and academic support in the school environment, motivating students to remain in school and work against the self-destructive thoughts of giving up and failure. Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgenson (2012) explored 21 American Indian students' experiences, where features such as poor communication about support available on campus, from financial aid assistance to peer mentoring, hindered success. Flynn et al. pointed out the importance of a social environment that promotes social and community connection. Still, for some students coming from reservation life, the transition to campus life can be challenging. These experiences are complex and interwoven into individual experiences, and institutional preparedness to address and provide communication, mentorship, academic and social support, and recognition of cultural differences and flexibility is required for institutions to respond to those cultural differences.

Incorporation of Indigenous Philosophy

The basic tenets of culture connect to the land (environment), an identity that extends beyond individualism, and the collective identity of the group (clan or tribe) to which one belongs. This cultural view supports holistic practices to nurture the spirit of an individual. Examining Indigenous students' realities and persistence in using Indigenous philosophy helps in acknowledging the different experiences of this population (McDougall, 2015). France (1997) highlighted that different tribes would have divergent views; however, a central theme of interconnectedness and holistic understanding is shared among different tribes. This understanding includes a belief system where decision making and the problem-solving intertwines with understanding

how to relate to each other. This worldview promotes a way of living based on life lessons and interactions that promote balance for the emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical aspects of the self while reinforcing the interconnection with other people and the environment. This philosophy is not based on individualistic and competitive values, but rather on mutual and holistic interactions and a process that begins at birth (Keene, 2016).

Indigenous philosophy demonstrates a way of living based on values and practices that incorporate connectedness, a concept encompassing spiritual wholeness. The interchange of relationships supports well-being and knowledge (Thayer-Bacon, 2002). These concepts are crucial in understanding Indigenous learners and aspects that may contribute to college persistence, despite the challenges to cultural views and the minority status on most campuses. It is complicated to make comparisons between Indigenous philosophy and Eurocentric views. The Indigenous culture center around the concepts of responsibility to self and the connection to all living. This concept of responsibility demonstrates a connection to people and things beyond oneself., creating a broader concept of life.

Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge can be applied to the theoretical framework of persistence models that consider the culture and the strong family and community relationships relevant to Indigenous people. In a qualitative study, Guillory and Wolverton (2008) examined Native American college students, college administrators, and faculty perceptions of the factors connected to barriers and college completion efforts of Native

American students. The qualitative study supported the relevance of retention theories and highlighted the possibilities when they examined the experiences, using a cultural lens other than the Western perspective. Guillory and Wolverton said that incorporating Indigenous knowledge could bring out strategies that address academic performance and pedagogical approaches to promote persistence. These findings demonstrated the limitations of current retention and persistence models, which may not be well-suited for examining and understanding Indigenous students.

Integration and Persistence

Incorporating culture can assist in identifying key features that support resilience and persistence among Indigenous students. In a quantitative study of 272 Latino college sophomore students, gathered from national data sources specifically for Latino/Hispanic students. Hurtado and Carter (1997) stated student engagement and affiliation are connected to student development and a sense of belonging. Due to feelings of being a part of the outgroup, minority students may have more difficulty incorporating themselves into the dominant college culture if they feel that doing so would separate themselves from their native community. The results provided compelling findings suggesting that while Tinto's model is beneficial helps emphasize the importance of the college environment, it does not acknowledge the challenges of integration for minority students because cultural differences complicate the process. The responses to adversity are different for students from the dominant culture.

As Kuh and Love (2002) said, Tinto's model of student departure promoted academic achievement when students perceive that their program and classes have

relevance and practical value. Students maintain psychological comfort with their social groups and a sense of belonging. These constructs influence overall performance and responses to the experiences in college. In consideration of cultural differences, the authors state further that minority students most often are attempting to adapt to the broader, dominant built-in culture that has been accumulated and shared through daily actions. New members within the school culture are more likely to be confronted with pressure to integrate. Kuh and Love recommend that a cultural perspective requires a greater understanding of the complicated process minorities endure to adapt and integrate into the college environment and culture.

HeavyRunner and Marshall: The Family Education Model

HeavyRunner and Marshall introduced the family education model, demonstrating the Indigenous knowledge, beliefs, and practices nurtured the efforts of building the resilience of Indigenous students. The model incorporates a holistic view that identifies protective factors built on cultural beliefs and values related to spirituality. The concept of spirituality is integral to this model because it embodies the interconnected relationships with others, supports balanced living, self-awareness, and a commitment to lifelong learning. The recognition that families and communities contribute to individuals realizing their potential will encourage the community to nurture its overall potential, becoming a stronger community. Tinto's and HeavyRunner and Marshall's models were used as the theoretical framework to structure the research questions for this study and respect and adopt a familiar approach for many Indigenous students.

Theoretical perspectives on Indigenous education have been growing and expanding while adapting and incorporating the experiences and worldview of Native American culture. The family education model was founded on traditional Indigenous knowledge and cultures while considering the common barriers and struggles familiar to Indigenous students. The model recognizes the critical role that family and community play in the positive development of self. These relationships serve as the primary social unit to meet the needs of individuals and assist them in becoming contributing members of the community. One of the premises of the model suggests that attending school out of community includes unfavorable feelings of separation from family and community, a sacrifice required to attain higher education. When using the family education model it is essential the educational setting honor and include the family or give a sense of extended family to nurture support and partnership in the educational experience—providing that sense of family while at college builds on the factors that contribute to Native American student persistence. The development of the model also recommended the schools incorporate strategies that would help Native American student persistence. Failure of the school to recognize cultural background and the importance of that in education will lead to futile efforts. With that in mind, an ability to keep family and the sense of family and community in the school setting contributes to education success as a collectively owned sense of achievement in the American Indian culture (Huffman, 2010).

Gloria and Kurpius (2001) conducted a quantitative study on persistence, examining the possible relationships of social support and comfort, utilizing surveys measuring self-beliefs, social support, encouragement in the university, and decision to

withdraw. The study included 33 American Indian students enrolled in liberal studies at a large Southwestern university in the United States with findings that reinforced a sense of connection and fitting in on campus contributes to fostering positive faculty and peer relationships during the college experience for American Indian students. Positive social relationships increased self-beliefs and supported staying in school; however, cultural differences appeared to have more of a negative influence on the sense of comfort of fitting in necessary in the college environment. The small sample size of this qualitative study due to the diversity of tribes across the United States made this study difficult to generalize for all American Indian students. The limitations of the research and the authors' recommendations suggested further exploration is warranted into the specific influences that may contribute to cultural differences and relationship building, support the use of qualitative research methods to gain insight into the experiences of minority groups with such small representation on campuses.

A qualitative study conducted by Guillory (2009) examined the perceptions of 30 Alaskan and American Indian students and staff as well as state board representatives from three state universities in Washington, Montana, and Idaho on factors and barriers related to the persistence of Alaskan and American Indian students. All participants not only reported that academic and social support had a positive influence on persistence but also recognized a greater need for an increase in campus support. This study made a secure connection to the need for academic and social support in retention strategies. Recommended strategies included peer mentoring, connection to family and tribal communities, and support for single-parent families. The focus of the study was to

determine whether students, administrators, and teachers had similarities or differences in their perceptions of retention. The themes that emerged from the research provided greater insight on what strategies to focus on to promote persistence. Students and administrators both identified financial struggles as barriers, but the students placed a greater emphasis on the need for improved support for academic and social interactions. Guillory proved the importance of social and educational support. It further contributes to the current body of research that encourages a greater understanding of Indigenous student experiences and recommends future research on more appropriate strategies to support academic and social relationships. A limitation with the findings is the diversity of the numerous Indigenous cultures makes it difficult to generalize to the overall Native American population, and strategies that might work best when tailored to specific Indigenous populations.

Huffman (2010) described transculturation as a process of socialization whereby individuals learn to function in a new cultural setting without letting go of their cultural identity and traditions, to interact positively and successfully in a unique cultural context. Cultural identity includes embracing the Indigenous philosophy of balance, spirituality, collective roles, and personal responsibility (Watson, 2009). Manathunga (2015) described the significance for students from non-dominant cultures of having a place where social support is planned and provided to create a sense of community in line with their cultural traditions, they find a balance in their academic and personal selves. Creighton's (2007) study illustrated that minority students had achieved integration by

using their secure identity and social-psychological abilities with confidence, thus abating assimilation into the dominant culture.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter was separated into three key areas: diverse cultural and ethnic experiences in higher education, cultural and ethnic hurdles to persistence, and theoretical foundations. Cultural and ethnic diversity and hurdles to higher education were subdivided into further groupings to reflect the challenges faced by minority students, and specifically Indigenous students. Theoretical foundations were presented through two topics, a traditional retention model and a model following an Indigenous perspective, which demonstrated that while conventional approaches have been useful in examining college persistence to understand the experiences of Indigenous students thoroughly, the Indigenous perspective added a greater awareness of the Indigenous culture and the persistence of Indigenous students.

The literature review revealed there is more to learn about Indigenous students and their persistence in higher education. Indigenous students constitute a small percentage of minority students in higher education. The current literature demonstrates that the challenges of other minority students are often like those of Indigenous students. However, small sample sizes and tribal diversity have led several authors to suggest further exploratory qualitative research based on particular Indigenous groups or institutions. Also, current theories have not exhausted the specific cultural aspects of the Indigenous worldview concerning retention and persistence. Researchers suggested that minority students face struggles beyond just academic challenges in higher education;

however, the literature has limited sources for examining the experience of Indigenous students. For quantitative studies, sample sizes are often too small to generalize findings or to make comparisons or demonstrate relationships among factors and other ethnic groups. Low sample sizes of Indigenous college students and the variety of tribal differences and cultural identities leads to challenges with quantitative studies to find significant results when measuring Indigenous student persistence. Green (2007) suggested the use of qualitative research in exploring critical and complex problems and ways to improve conditions to capture the intricacies and diversity of experiences of participants that standardized instruments would not capture. The process of qualitative research builds a holistic picture and allows for detailed views and analyses in a natural setting. Green further recommended, when possible conducting research with non-White participants, the researcher's ethnicity matches that of the interviewees to reduce suspicion and skepticism, or if that is not possible, to consult and train with a cultural guide.

Underrepresentation can lead to the further marginalization of representation of Indigenous people in the upper management and upper-level decision-making positions in academics and policy, where their voices struggle to be heard. Indigenous students, worldwide, share similar struggles in finding their place at majority culture institutions, with mostly non-Indigenous professors, staff, and peers. Further, the cultural differences rooted in a collectivist ideology counteract with the individualist ideology of the Western worldview. Aside from the academic demand, Indigenous learners experienced isolation and oppress in throughout their education. Schofield, O'Brien, and Gilroy (2013)

explained considering the experiences of Indigenous learners may illustrate how campuses can be isolating and oppressive for Indigenous students.

Further, the literature review demonstrated the relevance to examine the persistence and experience of Indigenous students using a cultural framework consistent with the population examined. Many current studies use models developed through a Eurocentric worldview. Styres et al. (2010) emphasized research should benefit not just the academic community but also the population under examination. Using longstanding theories and models is useful when investigating persistence; however, the literature review consisted of research that supported the incorporation of cultural elements to aid the traditional theories and to understand better and meet the needs, specifically, of ethnic and culture diverse populations.

The literature review consisted of articles of students of different ethnicities and cultural faced additional challenges beyond academics. Minority students share common non-academic challenges such as poverty, discrimination, language differences, and opposing values. Academic difficulties in conjunction with human relations on the college campus can lead to negative experiences for minority students and, in turn, can raise hurdles to student success. The literature review, which was conducted with a focus on Indigenous students, demonstrated the importance of exploring the experience of Indigenous students in higher education, the uniqueness of this student population's experience, and showed the importance of a culturally relevant approach to examining persistence. The literature showed for Indigenous culture is diverse, student representation is a small percentage of the overall student population, and the collective

culture often contradicts the self-sufficient and competitive culture of higher education institutions guided by Western ideologies. The literature demonstrated the importance of including an Indigenous cultural lens when applying persistence theories to the unique cultural experiences of Indigenous students.

Chapter 3 outlines the chosen research method of case study. The following chapter illustrates how case study design was a suitable method for exploring the experiences and perceptions of Indigenous college students in terms of persistence. The chapter will address methodology, instrumentation, participant selection, and research questions, the role of the researcher. Chapter 3 will also cover the aspects of trustworthiness, human subject protections, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to explore Indigenous students' persistence at a mainstream college in the northern Midwest. The case study design was the research method of choice. Indigenous students are often underrepresented in research. The chosen university presented a unique opportunity as a research site because of its geographic location with an above-average Indigenous population and proximity to two Indigenous communities. The methodology section outlines procedures for participant recruitment, selection, interview, and data collection. Following the methodology section, the data analysis process will be described, and what was done to verify and establish the trustworthiness of data. The final section of this chapter discusses ethical considerations such as the protection of human subjects, respecting Indigenous cultures, and adherence to ethical research practices.

Research Design and Rationale

This qualitative case study investigated the culture and persistence of Indigenous college students at a predominately White college. For this study, persistence was defined as the thoughts, actions, and beliefs that contributed to college completion. Culture was defined as the shared values and behaviors of a group that embodies their thinking and way of living.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do Indigenous students describe experiences of being minority students in a mainstream college setting?

SQ1: How are connections to others, holistic well-being, and other Indigenous cultural elements experienced when attending college?

RQ2: What is the meaning of persistence to Indigenous college students attending a mainstream college?

SQ2: What Indigenous cultural strengths contribute to student persistence?

Research Method Rationale

The typical research method for investigating a single or small number of cases to understand real world contexts is the case study design. The case study design was suitable to describe a phenomenon within a bounded context where it cannot be separated from the context in which it occurs. As a methodological approach, the use of case study allowed for the use of multiple data sources. Data sources included student and staff participant interviews, a review of annual reports, strategic plans, and social media sites.

Case study design was well suited to examine the subjectivity of human experiences and meanings created through social interactions. Personal stories of students and staff provided increased insights into understanding human experiences that influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Yin (2009) described case study design as the exploration of contemporary events that cannot be controlled, which allows for the examination of contextual conditions in terms of personal experiences. In addition to exploring nonacademic challenges, such as racism and socioeconomic conditions, this research design facilitated the exploration of participants' perceptions of the Indigenous culture and persistence.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher involved recruiting, contacting interested participants, arranging interview sessions, conducting 13 interviews, and member checking upon completion of discussions. The first contact with each student was through emails expressing responding to interest in participating in the study and scheduling meetings. The second contact with students occurred during interviews. During each interview, I provided participants with an overview of the research process and asked for consent to participate. After interviews were completed the recordings were transcribed. I reviewed each audio recording and transcript. I analyzed the transcripts, and a final report was created. I will be responsible for disseminating the results.

The research also involved reviewing documents, including annual reports and strategic plans and information on social media sites. I reviewed the university documents posted on their webpage and social media sites for themes related to supporting Indigenous students and Indigenous culture on campus. I also engaged in campus observations of Indigenous-specific departments and common public areas such as study areas, libraries, and cafeterias to document aspects of campus culture reflective of initiatives to support Indigenous students and cultures. These observations were recorded and matched with themes that emerged from interview data, documents, and literature.

Specific potential conflicts involved research bias and dual relationships. I am an Indigenous woman from a local community and work at a neighboring city community college. A potential conflict was that participants might have been former or current

students or related to me. This conflict did not arise, thus averting perceived obligations or pressure to participate, or excluding any participants. Additionally, I conducted ongoing reflection journals for potential bias to ensure that my own experiences and biases did not affect the interview and data analysis process. I disclosed information to and debriefed the research committee chair to check for potential bias.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The target participants for this study were students who had completed at least one semester of their current program of study. Students in their first semester were excluded from this study due to the limited time spent in the college setting. Participants were self-identified Indigenous students, 18 years of age or older, and otherwise not restricted by gender or First Nation/tribal affiliation. Participants also included students who had previously attended higher education but must have completed a minimum of one semester in their current program of study at the research site. Participants included university staff who either had a job specifically to support Indigenous students or engaged with Indigenous students on campus. I chose a sample size of 12-15 participants and conducted a total of 13 interviews. There is no specific number at which saturation happens. However, rich data is not about quantity but rather quality. Fusch and Ness, (2015) and Walker (2012) recommend to determine saturation with a data sample of this size it is vital to ensure that participants are asked the same structured questions, and no new information emerges, and researcher biases have been recognized and accounted for.

Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) suggested that saturation can be reached after 12 interviews when attempting to understand a homogeneous group's common perceptions.

The case study sample included students, staff, documents, and social media sources of one public university in the Midwest. The university grants both associate and baccalaureate degrees under the following colleges: College of Criminal Justice and Emergency Responders, College of Education and Liberal Arts, College of Health and Behavior, College of Innovation and Solutions, and College of Science and the Environment.

According to the United States Census Bureau (2018), the university is situated in a city with a population of 13,552 people, with 13% identified as Native American. In comparison, the state's overall representation of Native American people is 0.7%. There are two tribal communities within a half hour's drive from the city, with which the majority of participants identified their membership. There is a total of 12 federally acknowledged tribes in the state. The urban Indigenous community predominantly consists of Chippewa, Potawatomi, and Odawa Nations (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019).

Purposeful sampling was primarily used to recruit participants based on the geographic area and size of the institution. After two participants did not respond to an email from me responding to their initial interest in participating in the study a second means of recruiting participants, snowball sampling was utilized. Criterion sampling ensured participants who met the criteria outlined above. The university was selected because of its high percentage of Indigenous students (10%), being situated in the vicinity

of several tribal communities, and proximity to me. Flyers were posted at the Indigenous Student Center and on social media with the permission of the university (see Appendix D & E). The announcement included criteria for participation, nature of the study, and instructions on how to contact me. Participants who reached out to me were contacted by email to arrange the interview. Interviews lasted, on average, 1 hour. Each interview was followed by a data check lasting 15 to 20 minutes.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation included the interview guide, interview questions, and interview protocol for Indigenous students and staff (see Appendix F, G, H, I & J). The documents contained an overview of the study, field procedures such as site information and site contacts, guidelines for the protection of human subjects and data, the case study interview questions, and a guide for writing the case study report. Field notes included the thoughts and my observations before and after each interview. Digitally recorded and written notes on observation included a description of the interview setting, participants, and participants demographics.

Data collection encompassed documents from the institution, such as annual reports, strategic plans, and Indigenous-related policies and procedures. Annual reports and strategic plans were located on the university's website for public access. Data from the university and social media sites were also reviewed and analyzed. Additional instruments included digital recorders and audio recordings of interviews stored on password-protected USB sticks.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants were recruited using flyers posted on social media that outlined the study objectives and criteria for participants (see Appendix D & E). Permission was obtained from the college to post flyers advertising for student participants. Interested students were provided with my contact information to schedule a date and time for the interview. I responded by email to interested participants and scheduled a meeting and provided each person with pertinent information to make an informed decision to consent to participate. Participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary, not connected to grades or any college function and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. When there was a conflict in scheduling, such as illness or student timetables threatening to exclude participants, an alternative time frame for the interview was scheduled. Snowball sampling was used to recruit additional participants.

Interviews with students and staff were held on campus in a pre-booked room. A request was made to use a place on campus where the decor did not boost the school identity or spirit, and private from shared spaces. A spare office to conduct interviews met the needs for individual interviews. Before each meeting, participants were offered a pouch of tobacco and provided the opportunity to smudge with sage before the discussion began. This offering followed the Indigenous protocol of seeking the interviewees' time respectfully and showing appreciation for their sharing their stories, thus starting the interview process on a positive note.

Documents reviewed included the institution's most recent annual report and the strategic plan retrieved from the university's website. I scanned current information on the university's website and social media pages related to Indigenous initiatives. These documents were reviewed for themes containing support, services, and practices specifically to Indigenous students.

I was responsible for recording the face-to-face interview data and retrieving all documents to review, also bearing the onus for contacting participants to schedule the face-to-face interview, member checking, and debriefing if necessary. Participants were interviewed once. The data were recorded using a digital recorder and stored for transcription and analysis. Each interview was stored in a separate file on USB sticks, with file names using codes or pseudonyms to not disclose participant identities. The files stored on the USB sticks were encrypted and stored in a locked file case, and all data will be kept for five years and then destroyed.

Walden IRB approved in January 2019. The research site's ethics application approval was also granted. All students and support staff who decided to participate in the case study were informed of their role and their rights in participating in this study. Interviewees were notified of the study's goals and objectives, the time required for the face-to-face interviews, the data collection, and the storage and analysis procedures. Additionally, interviewees were informed of the opportunity for member checking upon the completion of the data collection process. When scheduling the face-to-face interview, I briefed the students that they were free to discharge themselves from the interview at any time or withdraw their data at any stage throughout the research process.

Additionally, participants received a \$10 Starbucks gift card as a sign of appreciation for their participation. Participants were informed of locations to access Indigenous helpers and the campus counseling services if they would like to process or discuss their experience. Students were informed they might be further contacted by me after data collection and analysis for member checking purposes. Students were made aware that they can obtain a copy of a summary report of the findings.

Data Analysis Plan

A general analytical strategy involved placing data into different arrangements by creating a matrix of categories and developing data displays with flow charts and graphs. The data was rich and complicated, requiring the data to be organized into relationships and possible second-order categories, with the information further being tabulated to detect frequency of events and categorize relationships. I organized the data into broad groups then categorized into more specific themes with the use of color-coding, bolding, underlining, and clustering data as outlined by Yin (2009) who said the thoughtful and careful organization of data in such a way further allows for the use of tables or conceptual maps to demonstrate relationships and inspire theoretical conjecture. Yin (2012) stated organizing data allows for the information to form the narrative that will help develop the general findings of relevant concepts and relationships between concepts into a sequentially organized story.

Verification of Trustworthiness/Authentication

Yin (2009) described constructing validity strategies that demonstrate multiple sources of evidence to establish a chain of evidence. The strategy I used included the data

sources of student interviews and documents and web-based media that acknowledged initiatives unique to Indigenous students. The multiple sources of information contributed to corroborate themes.

To ensure that I had accurately captured the participants' experiences, I checked with participants after each interview to ensure the data accurately reflected the participant's experience and information was not misinterpreted. As the interview data and documents were examined, I considered each piece of data as individual pieces of information to extract themes. To corroborate generalizations, it was essential to identify and make meaning out of discrepant data. I used a table to identify cases and record themes assisted in organizing the data. This display of information provided the opportunity for thorough analysis and detecting alternative explanations that may not have been considered. It was essential to note of discrepancies and continue to use the methods of coding and charts to continue organizing the data. A careful review of the literature again assisted in extracting the meaning behind discrepant data. Moreover, the data were not initially discarded but used and analyzed further.

Due to the complexity of culture and the influence culture has on creating meaning, I engaged in reflexivity. Reflexivity is a process of heightened awareness and reflection throughout the research process that promotes bias analysis and review of personal perceptions that may unintentionally find their way into the research process. Heightened awareness of personal thoughts and reactions to the data promotes responsive and flexible personal reactions to human responses (Lahman, Geist, Rodriguez, Graglia, & DeRoche, 2011). I digitally recorded, wrote and reviewed field notes throughout the

interview process and data analysis to address my reactions. The audit trail included records containing a description of the data analysis, synthesis, and theme development, tracking connections to the literature, relationships, and interpretations that emerged throughout the process. The audit trail also contained field and process notes related to procedure and strategies, reflexive notes and researcher predictions, notes on instrument development such as observation setup and interview question development, and notes on the development of the findings, conclusions, and development of the final report connecting the findings to the literature and theories.

Given the nature of this study there were no other coders evaluating the data, therefore, intercoder reliability could not be addressed. Therefore, to address reliability, the consistency of data coding was ensured through intra-coder reliability; the individual researcher is responsible for following a consistent manner of coding to ensure reliability. To address consistency, Mouter and Vonk Noordegraaf (2012) recommend reducing ambiguity by having the interviewer ask clarifying questions to ensure the interpretation of answers is evident; therefore, the method of coding the responses from interviews was explained. Additionally, adhering to the case study protocol also assisted in reliability.

Protection of Human Subjects

Several steps taken to ensure the protection of human subjects included Walden Institutional Review Board approval. I also completed and complied with relevant human subject approval required by the research site. I also sent letters informing local tribes that tribal members may be participants in this study (see Appendix K). I received a signed letter of cooperation by the research site and was permitted to post flyers on

campus. Flyers were posted to inform students on social media and in the Indigenous Student Center to recruit volunteer participants.

Additional Ethical Considerations

The responsibility of the psychologist not to enter relationships where harm may be foreseeable or unavoidable. It is the investigator's responsibility to ensure that no harm occurs or impairs the relationship. Due care is taken to screen out students who have had a relationship with me. An important consideration is the nature of small communities and that I a member of a local First Nation, and there were potential participants may have been related to me. Students known to me would have been screened out to ensure that a dual relationship or harm did not occur. There were no participants known or related to me. The American Psychological Association (2017) cautions against instances of multiple relationships to avoid compromise to objectivity, competence, and performance of a researcher. During the informed consent process, I fully disclosed information that described a researcher's role in the field of education and in the community in efforts to minimize conflicts in relationships and potential harm. I needed to maintain a keen awareness of both professional and personal boundaries to ensure that personal values and beliefs did not interfere or get infused into the research process and did not influence the relationship with participants.

The intent of providing all relevant information about the research process to potential participants was to allow them to make an informed decision to participate in and continue with the research process. Information in this process included disclosing potential risks such as emotional discomfort, the sharing of data in final reports, and the

publication or the possibility of personal data subpoenaed for legal reasons, such as reported disclosures of abuse to child welfare authorities. This information is shared regardless of how seemingly insignificant it may be. The process of gaining informed consent involved several steps. The first involved providing enough detail in the posting for participants. The next step involved verbal information sharing during email contact with respondents to the advertisement. During this process, potential participants were informed of the nature of the study and the requirements to participate. It was essential to familiarize participants with the potential risks and likely benefits of their participation. Given the nature of qualitative research, participants were notified that their participation involves sharing their personal stories. Acknowledging the potential risks and benefits of sharing personal stories was critical to the informed consent process. I let participants know that while the risk may be low, the potential risk of emotional discomfort or reaction is common when sharing personal stories, mainly if they are negative experiences. However, it was also essential to discuss the benefits of sharing one's account. The benefits included greater insight about peer and faculty relationships, and that the collection of personal stories may inspire positive change on campus for Indigenous students.

Participants were also provided with the necessary information to make an informed choice to participate in the study. Participants were asked to sign a detailed written consent form to indicate their agreement to participate in the study. Throughout this process, participants were informed their participation was voluntary and that if they chose to withdraw from the study, there were no consequences for doing so (see

Appendix B &C). Participants were informed of the data collection and analysis procedures and how the information was stored and protected. Again, during member checking, participants were reminded of the informed consent process and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Upon completion of the final report, the participants will be provided the opportunity to review the work and will be informed of the intended audiences.

Privacy and confidentiality were prominent in the research process. Participants were provided with a thorough description of the protection of identifying information using pseudonyms and codes when collecting, organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing their data for the final report. The following steps were taken to handle data. Interviews were digitally recorded and stored in an encrypted file. Interview data were transcribed and stored in an encrypted file, and data analysis software was not used at this time. I stored data on a password-protected computer. Hard-copy files were stored in a locked file cabinet. Participants were informed that their personal and identifying information would not be shared with other participants, fellow students, teachers, staff, or administrators. With a tight-knit Indigenous community and a small university, there is some risk that the details of participants and the nature of the narrative shared could inadvertently reveal some participants' identity. This potential risk was disclosed to interested students when scheduling the interview and during the face-to-face meeting. The member checking process provided another opportunity to check for accuracy participants to determine the potential risk of harm, which allowed them to remove their information from the study if they so wished.

The research was completed in the northern Midwest of the United States. I additionally reviewed and abided by the ethical and legal policies, both national and local. I also followed Panel on Research Ethics in Canada to develop and maintain rapport throughout the research process. This practice included transparency of information, flexibility, and sound judgment to ensure the best interest of participants and minimize risk.

Finally, the most crucial consideration was that this study took into account past encounters with the education system that makes Indigenous participants reluctant to participate Harding et al. (2012) stressed researchers acknowledge and respect any perceived influence over participants resulting in a reluctance to share personal stories and knowledge. This minority group had experienced negative interactions in higher education related to racism, discrimination, and violence that may have been a part of their school experience, and outside their school experiences, across a lifespan. Considering these adverse experiences, there was a potential risk of triggering emotional reactions or negative memories. Support services such as campus counseling, crisis intervention, community support, and contact information about elders and traditional healers were made available for students.

Summary

This chapter outlined the steps taken for recruitment, the interview process, and data analysis. The institution was selected because of its high population of Indigenous students and location near several tribal communities. In addition to addressing the standard protection of human subjects, this chapter explained the importance of

respecting the historical experiences of Indigenous people and the inclusion of cultural traditions, such as offering tobacco when meeting with students, as a sign of appreciation.

Chapter 4 presents the results of interviews with 10 Indigenous students and three staff associated with the Indigenous Student Center. Results include the Indigenous students' experiences, strategies they used to persist, and descriptions of what culture meant to them. Staff members discussed the services provided to Indigenous students and experiences working with these students.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter describes this case study's results that explored the persistence of Indigenous students attending a small mainstream college. The purpose of this case study was to examine Indigenous students' persistence at a mainstream college in the northern Midwest to understand better the thoughts, actions, and beliefs that contribute to persistence. The study examined how meaningful cultural and social activities encourage persistence of Indigenous students. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide educators a greater awareness of barriers and solutions to support Indigenous students.

Chapter 4 includes descriptions of Indigenous students lived experiences, including strategies these students use to persist and aspects of campus life that support or impede their college experiences. The first portion of Chapter 4 describes participants, research setting, qualitative analysis process, and results of the interviews. The remainder of the chapter follows research questions that provided the basis for participant interview questions for both students and staff.

RQ1: How do Indigenous students describe experiences of being minority students in a mainstream college setting?

SQ1: How are connections to others, holistic well-being, and other Indigenous cultural elements experienced when attending college?

RQ2: What is the meaning of persistence to Indigenous college students attending a mainstream college?

SQ2: What Indigenous cultural strengths contribute to student persistence?

Setting

I completed 13 interviews with 10 students, one full-time staff, and two part-time student workers at one small university situated in the Midwest. Participants identified predominantly with the closest local tribe—all participants but the two part-time student workers identified as Indigenous. I attended one Indigenous Student Center advisory meeting that included members from two local tribal communities and Indigenous organizations. I conducted observations of four public areas on campus: the library, Indigenous Student Center, athletics building, and a coffee shop/restaurant. Documents and information included institution webpages related to campus life, the school's overall goal and mission, and documents relating to the university's strategic plans since 2018. The university offers both 2-year and 4-year degrees. All student participants were in 4-year degree programs. The university has approximately 2100 undergraduate students, with 88% in-state residents and the remaining non-residents. According to data collected by the Indigenous Student Center full-time staff, the university has a 10% Native American student population.

As outlined in Chapter 3, purposeful and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants. The preferred mode of communication of the institution is email. Recruitment of participants involved a flyer emailed to the student listserv by the Indigenous Student Center staff and posted on the college's social media site. The school experienced approximately six snow days, resulting in full or partial campus closures and canceling of classes, that impacted recruitment efforts and scheduling of interviews. Winter tends to be cold and flu season, and two students requested rescheduling

interviews because of illness. One student who emailed me to participate in the study did not respond to email replies to set an interview time and was not interviewed. snowball sampling was employed to address a lower than desired response rate, resulting in the recruitment of two additional student participants and one other part-time student worker. One student provided the name of two additional students. I sent out an email inviting them to participate in the study, explaining their names were provided by other students. The two students agreed to be in the study.

I completed interviews during the winter semester. The interviews took place in a vacant office located in the university's Indigenous Student Center. The room contained a desk, several chairs, and a few filing cabinets. Since the room was vacant, it did not contain distracting décor or college-related images. On two occasions, interviews were interrupted, one by maintenance examining the heating system in the room, and the other by a student looking for a full-time staff member. The Indigenous Student Center was located across from the library along a row of houses that housed special interest groups. I recorded all interviews using two devices simultaneously, an iPhone and a digital recording device. I completed interviews Monday through Friday between 9:00 am and 6:00 pm between February 28 and April 30, 2019.

Demographics and Participant Characteristics

I completed 13 interviews with 10 students, one full-time staff member, and two part-time student workers at one small college situated in the northern Midwest. Participants predominantly identified with the closest local tribe. All but the two part-time student workers identified as Indigenous. The average age of student participants

was 25.5 years of age. The youngest was 18, and the oldest student was 38. Pseudonyms were used to report participant data (see Table 1).

<i>Student Participant Demographics</i>				
<u>Student</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Tribal Affiliation</u>	<u>Year of Study</u>	<u>Program of Study</u>
Molly	21	Chippewa	Senior	Criminology
Johnny	33	Chippewa	Junior	History/pre-Law
Kevin	22	Chippewa	Senior	Kinesiology
Robert	19	Potawatomi	First-year	Criminal justice
Ally	23	Chippewa	Senior	Biology/biochemistry
Leah	23	Chippewa	Senior	Arts and business
Charlie	30	Navajo	Senior	Nursing
Corey	39	Chippewa	Junior	Sociology
Julia	18	Chippewa	First-year	Nursing
Christina	28	Chippewa	Junior	Business administration and entrepreneurship

Staff

The full-time staff member was in her role for over 20 years. During the staff member's tenure at the university, she had seen several changes in the team and programs offered to support Indigenous students. One of the part-time student workers was from the local area and attending the university for a second degree. She graduated in 2016, worked in her field of study, and returned to enhance her professional skills with a second degree. Before being informed of a student job opening, she had not heard of the Indigenous Student Center or its services. The second part-time student worker was a first-year student and worked at the Center since the fall semester.

Students

The programs of study of the students interviewed included criminology, history, pre-law, sociology, biology/biochemistry, criminal justice, business administration entrepreneurship, nursing, kinesiology, and theater. Five participants were seniors, three were juniors, and two were first-year students. Eight students identified as Chippewa and members of the closest tribal community. Two other students identified as Potawatomi and tribal members from another part of the state, and one student identified as Navajo from a tribal community out of state. While all students identified with their respective Tribal Nations, several commented that they were not directly connected to or lived in their tribal communities. The average age of student participants was 25.5; the oldest was 38, and the youngest was 18.

Campus Observations

The campus covers several blocks with multiple buildings housing administration, a library, bookstore, dining hall and meeting center, physical fitness building, row housing for fraternities, and academic clubs. Each building appeared to concentrate on areas of study, including classrooms, lecture halls, labs, and shared spaces. Students shared that they spent most of their time in one or two buildings depending on their area of study.

The Indigenous Student Center staff invited me to attend the year-end advisory meeting to hear from community members on the group's goals to enhance the experiences of Indigenous students on campus. The advisory group consisted of Indigenous community members with a vested interest in the services and support

provided to Indigenous students. The advisory members came from the local tribal communities, past graduates of the university, tribal employees, tribal leaders, and Indigenous organizations. The advisory group's goal was to provide insight into Indigenous strategies to support Indigenous students and make recommendations and advocate for changes.

Documentation

I viewed several documents related to the university's directives that acknowledge and support Indigenous learners. The materials specifically mentioned the unique geographic location with several Tribal Nations surrounding the institution, which supported statements that highlight the importance of tribal and cultural inclusion. Documents included information posted on the university's webpage, such as the mission statement, strategic plan documents, course catalogs over three years, and social media pages.

Data Collection

I interviewed 10 students who self-identified as Indigenous, one full-time staff member who identified as Indigenous, and two part-time student workers who identified as non-Indigenous. Pseudonyms were used to report participant data. I was the sole interviewer. A goal of an anticipated sample size of 12-15 participants was met, with 13 participants interviewed. Each meeting began with an introduction and overview of the goal of the research project. The informed consent form was read over and signed, followed by the presentation of the gift card. After the participants signed the consent form they were presented with a small pouch of tobacco, acknowledging gratitude for

their participation and a show of respect for their time and information they were about the share. A smudge bowl with sage was offered before or after the interview to focus positive energy during and after the interview. A few students participated in the smudging practice.

Student interviews lasted an average 30 minutes, with the longest at 59 minutes and the shortest lasting 21 minutes. The average staff interview was 30 minutes with the shortest being 14 minutes. I predicted meetings would last one hour, on average, but interviews did not take as long as anticipated. The interview guides (see Appendix F and Appendix H) provided the basis for the interview questions (see Appendix G and Appendix I). I asked a different set of questions of students and staff. As presented in Chapter 3, it is essential to return to members to ensure consistency and accuracy of answers. The interview questions were presented sequentially with follow up questions or summarization of lengthy responses. After each interview, a brief conversation summarizing the interview responses occurred. According to Mouter and Vonk Noordegraaf (2012), asking clarifying questions assists in ensuring the interpretation of answers is clear and reduces ambiguity during the analysis of data.

Two devices captured all interviews: an iPhone and a digital recorder. I used two recorders in case there was a malfunction with one recording device. One device failed to record during one interview, but the second device captured the conversation. Each discussion occurred on campus at the Indigenous Student Center in a spare office. The office was minimally furnished and decorated, free from items such as information or

flyers specific to university or Indigenous-specific supports or resources that may have influenced the interview responses.

All interviews were saved on a password-protected USB drive. During the Indigenous Student Center advisory meeting, the agenda and meeting notes were provided and were scanned and saved to a password-protected computer. The file was encrypted, and the hard copy shredded. The meeting involved an introduction of the advisory members and time for me to provide a brief description of the research study. I observed the discussions related to updates from the full-time staff member, areas of success, and concerns followed by recommendations and action items.

I made written notes and digitally recorded notes related to on-campus observations and saved on a password-protected computer. Due to unexpected hand surgery, real-time handwritten notes were not made as planned after all interviews. Audio recordings captured my thoughts and observations before and after each interview. Documents reviewed were accessed using public websites, university websites, and printed brochures. I stored hard copies of documents in a locked filing cabinet in a home office.

Data Analysis

The data I analyzed in this case study derived from 13 interviews with 10 students, one full-time staff member, and two part-time student workers. I reviewed 12 documents and social media sources. These documents included publicly published strategic plans, course catalogs covering three years, curriculum review, advisory meeting

notes, and the Indigenous Student Center pamphlet, as well as web media such as the institution's website and Indigenous Center Facebook pages.

I planned to transcribe all interviews; however, a professional transcription service was used due to hand surgery. The interview recordings were compared against the transcripts, and notes helped to clarify and correct transcription errors. Errors related to terms that were geographic-specific and for words used to describe Indigenous cultural events or practices that may not have been familiar to the professional transcriber.

I listened to the interviews a second time and took notes that helped designate words and phrases that stood out. I had intended to use qualitative data analysis software to assist in the organization of codes and themes, but it was more efficient to use handwritten notes initially, then transfer the notes and transcripts into word processing and spreadsheet programs. All data were organized using color coding, bolding, italicizing, and underlining of codes and themes. I employed Saldana's attribute coding initially to organize information such as settings and participant demographics (e.g., age, the program of study, Indigenous nation affiliation).

I used the research questions to begin the deductive coding process and provide a general direction to organize the data. The deductive codes were then color-coded and arranged into categories, themes, and subthemes. The first codes included a connection to culture, student experience, and campus representation of Indigenous culture. I listened to interviews several times, making notes to begin secondary coding. Tinto's model of student departure and HeavyRunner and Marshall's family education model guided the

identification of secondary codes and corresponded to the initial codes and then were arranged on a diagram. Five themes emerged from the data.

The first theme, experience as an Indigenous student, presents the students' narratives in three categories: neutral experiences, racialized generalizations, and perceptions of feeling different. The category, racialized generalizations, was further categorized into two subcategories: emotional impact and apathetic reaction. I arranged the second theme of the significance of culture and community into two categories and subcategories. The category connection to culture contained two subcategories: secure connection and desire for an increased connection. The category, connection to community, included responses reflecting students' connections on campus and their personal lives. The third theme, campus environment: responsiveness to Indigenous culture, contains the two categories of inclusion and exclusion. I further organized the fourth theme, persistence strategies, to represent the two categories, being Indigenous and general strategies. I further organized the category of being Indigenous into four subcategories to describe resilience, gratitude, role model, and culture-specific strategies. The themes overlapped the theoretical propositions resulting in the fifth theme of social connection and culture, which was inspired by the model of student departure and the family education model that supports the importance of social connection, sense of community, and a connection to culture that contributes to persistence. For the final theme, social connection and culture, the data were arranged into two categories that represent the participants' suggestions to enhance the experience of Indigenous students on campus. The categories included Indigenous student center support, with a

subcategory of participant suggestions and Indigenous relevance and incorporation, with a subcategory of participant suggestions of incorporating the Indigenous culture on campus (see Figure 1).

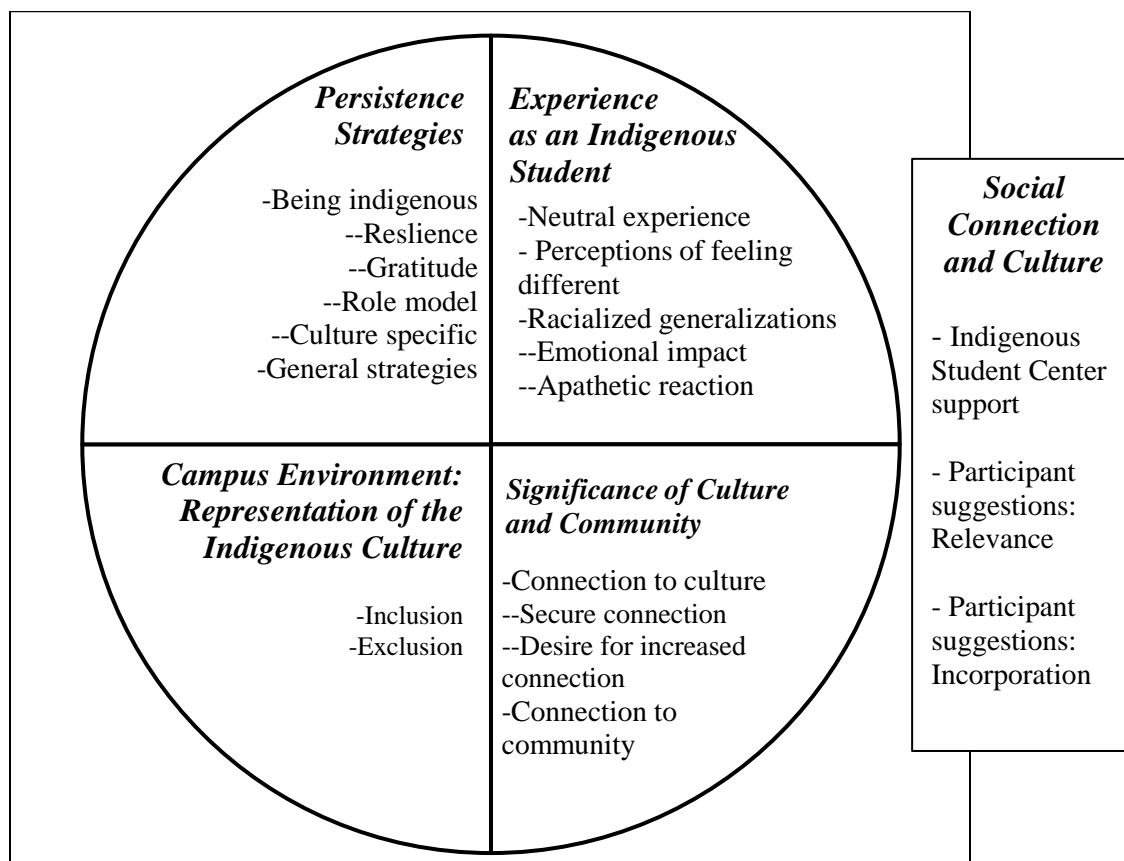


Figure 1. Organization of themes and category organization.

Discrepant Data

Bazely (2009) recommended that when there appears to be discrepant data, the goal is to identify the data, to determine the meaning, and stress the importance of treating each interview separately. I placed information from each participant into a table organized by each interview question, and I reviewed data for themes and assigned codes and colors. I made a notation when discrepant data appeared. There was one participant

whose response differed the most. Corey's overall responses were similar to other answers; however, the most significant discrepancy related to his connection and reliance on his Christian faith. In a review of notes taken after the interviews and reflections on discrepant data, the reference to Christian faith was different from the other participant responses. Yet, Corey's overall general experience was consistent with the themes of the other participants.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

According to Saldana (2016), achieving credibility involves gathering large amounts of data that involves strategic in-depth interviews that include opportunities to explore further during the meeting to clarify and allow participants to elaborate. I asked the 10 students one set of questions and a different set of questions for three staff members. When clarification or elaboration were required, I asked clarifying questions or summarized the information to ensure the accuracy of each participant's responses. As the investigator, I believed it was important that further questions were asked during the interview to confirm the accuracy of participants' experiences and clarify information that was not clear. When further detail was sought or to ensure accuracy, I asked additional questions to ensure I understood the information expressed by participants. For example, when several students used the word resilience, asking them to explain further or provide a specific example brought out the connection students had to a collective awareness of cultural resilience versus individual resilience strategies. Yin (2012) described the importance of credibility because it allows for each participant's story to

unfold to promote a convincing claim that the lessons gained from their story are meaningful. Simmons (2009) stated that cross-checking individual accounts with other sources can support the claims that are worthy as presented. In addition to student interviews, I interviewed one full-time staff member and two part-time student staff members. Also, one advisory meeting was attended, which consisted of local Indigenous members with a vested interest in the university's efforts to support Indigenous students. I reviewed 12 documents published by the university for statements that contained the intention or directive to support Indigenous students and connection to the local tribal communities.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the research findings that can be generalized or transferred to other settings, evident through the development of an audit trail that demonstrated how the research was conducted from participant selection and location of research to data collection method (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012). Transferability was demonstrated by adhering to the interview protocol, following the same steps when posting for participants, communicating with participants, and describing the nature and purpose of the study. The research protocol outlined the steps concerning where and how the interview process would occur. I conducted each interview at the same location, with the same equipment, and with the same questions for each participant. After each interview, notes were made that described the interview setting, observations of the environment, and any other noteworthy observations or reflections.

Dependability

Dependability and transferability are closely related. Dependability relies on the ability to research similar settings that would elicit similar findings, if the procedures can be operationalized (Reminyi, 2012; Yin, 2009). Documentation of the details of the study included a consistent process that outlined the interview, transcription, coding, and analysis process, but also included recording all details that log descriptive data, dates, and timelines of the research, and notes on observations and personal reactions and reflections of the researcher (Yin, 2012). I reviewed the protocol before each interview. The interview room was set up the same for each meeting. I followed the same steps of introducing myself, describing the research project, completing the consent form, offering the thank you gift card, and recording the interview. A digital journal was kept after each interview, commenting on the process and reactions as the investigator. I approached data analysis consistently with each meeting. Transcription of interviews, coding of data, and data analysis were completed within a two-month time frame to avoid extended time between each step, so that interview data were fresh.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to dependability, transferability, and credibility. The use of the interview protocol and personal reflection assisted in maintaining a consistent process with each interviewer and his or her data. The reflection aspect was essential to catch possible bias that may impede the research process. As an Indigenous person, I needed to reflect on my thoughts, reactions, and feelings throughout the research process. There were a few occasions when the students' stories were familiar to me both as a student and

as an Indigenous person. Still, upon reflection, these familiar stories brought me back to the literature that highlighted the importance of understanding the students' experience and the purpose of bringing about positive social change. The process of listening, transcribing, and analyzing the stories was conducted with reflection each time by journaling notes or by capturing my thoughts with the digital recorder after interviews. Reminyi (2012) suggested asking questions about the study that seek to support the topic of sufficient interest; and make the methodology adequate, the required data accessible, and the data analysis suitable.

The university's location and the large Indigenous population in the area are unique and differs from larger urban center universities. I used case study as the method because of the complexity of the Indigenous culture, the geographic location, and proximity of several tribal communities within miles of the city and the university. The town is situated where Indigenous peoples have lived historically. These features support Yin's (2009) recommendation that case study is supported when a unique setting and population bound the study. Also, Yin (2012) suggested the use of multiple data to confirm the study findings. In this research study, I interviewed 10 students and three staff, attended one Indigenous advisory council, and reviewed 12 documents published by the university and social media sources.

Results

RQ1

Experiences as an Indigenous student. The theme *Experiences as an Indigenous student* reflected a range of reactions organized into three categories: neutral experiences,

perceptions of feeling different, and racialized generalizations. When describing racialized generalizations, I divided the data into two subcategories: emotional impact and apathetic reaction.

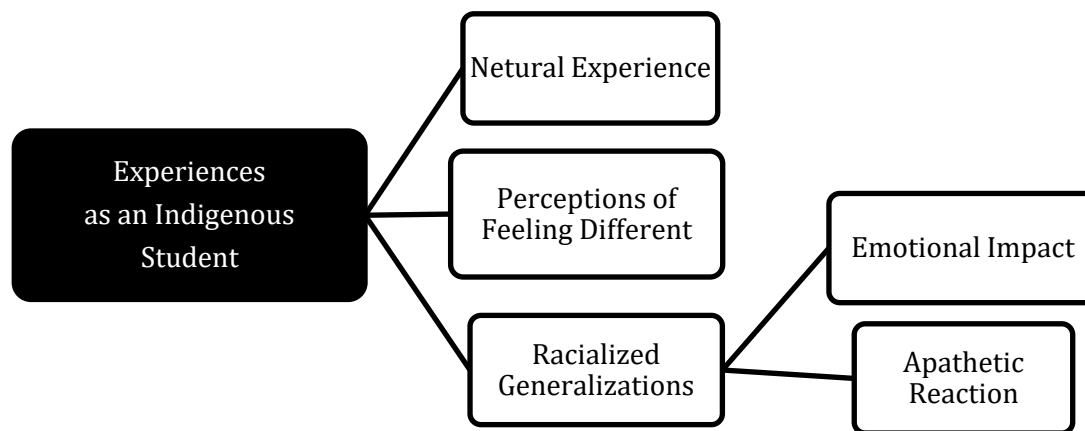


Figure 2. Theme 1. Experiences as an Indigenous student.

Neutral experience. Several participants stated that being an Indigenous person did not significantly influence their experience as a student or in their interactions on campus. Johnny, a mature student who returned to school after years of being out of school, transferred from a local tribal college after earning an associate degree, reported that the local area is rich in history and close to local tribal communities. Johnny stated, “This area has a very rich history concerning Native Americans, and I mean you’d pretty much fit right in. I mean, it’s not anything abnormal to see a Native American walking around the streets of the city.” Being Indigenous did not have any impact on his experience. He further remarked, “I haven’t really had a need as a native student. But, I mean, I haven’t come to the university saying I need this or that as a tribal member.”

Kevin and Julia used the word neutral to describe their experiences. Julia said, “I wouldn’t say it’s bad or good. I’m neutral about it.” She shared that she felt included and

supported at the college and did not see her experience as different from any other student would encounter. Julia did remark that college was different from her high school experience. She knew several other Native American students at her high school, and cultural activities were typical. Kevin described that, as an Indigenous person, he did not feel a sense of a native community on campus:

As a native person, I don't feel any sense of community here, but if I take that out, and I just say, do I feel a sense of community at the university. I would say within my program, there is some sense of community. But other than that, like, I mean, I go to this school, and I see people on campus, and I might like chat with and whatnot, but I don't feel like community overall.

Kevin acknowledged that he did not put himself out there to be a part of the campus's Indigenous community. Kevin also recognized that his experience on campus was not adverse and that being Native American did not influence his experience at the university. He did acknowledge that being native was unique and that others did not understand. When describing his experiences, Kevin said, "It's just kind of neutral. They don't disregard any individual's culture, but they don't really enhance it either." Molly commented that she often was mistaken for other ethnicities, "People mistaking me for another ethnicity is kind of off-putting, I guess—when somebody just assumes. And I've had people like make jokes, like probably considered like racist jokes. But other than that, no uncomfortable or negative experiences." She described her experiences as pretty neutral, stating, "I wouldn't say it's bad or good, be pretty neutral about it. I have nothing negative to say."

Perceptions of feeling different. The second category reflected the awareness of being different from other students. Christina described feeling awkward and a few times judged by her teachers and staff because of her life with poverty. She indicated her teachers had judgmental responses regarding the welfare system and dependence on the system, which made her feel out of place:

I grew up on welfare and subsidized housing, and my first week, my teacher [said he/she] doesn't agree with that, and we should not have it. I would have been homeless most of my life if not for that. It is interesting being in the business program. It clashes with the culture quite a bit. So, having to balance that has been difficult.

Christina further commented that poverty is something that is often a collective experience for Indigenous people. When describing going to the Indigenous Student Center, Christina said:

I am going to say the Indigenous Student Center is probably the only place that I feel comfortable, to be honest. There are not a lot of native people in my classes. I feel out of place. So, it is a place I come. It's like, "Ahh, my people."

When asked what words she would say to a Native American person interested in attending the university, she responded:

You might feel isolated, but coming to the Center, you can already feel the hominess. They cook here. You can have chicken and wild rice soup. So, at least you have one place to go and hang out and meet people that are okay. But if you go to another area, don't expect a lot of warmth.

Ally, another student who shared she often was mistaken for being Asian, commented that she noticed fewer negative experiences as an Indigenous student, but still felt like she was not accepted and, “Nobody really cares about my culture at all.” Ally recognized her teachers were not Native American and were often not from the local area, which she explained contributed to her perception that her culture did not matter and exacerbated her sense of being different. She made the point that she adored her teachers, but they lacked cultural knowledge and were unable to make connections to cultural aspects in the curriculum or her experiences.

Racialized generalizations. When analyzing participants’ experiences as an Indigenous student, two subcategories emerged from the category racialized generalizations. The first subcategory included the students’ emotional response, and the second subcategory described the response to racialized generalizations with apathy. Most participants indicated that the campus environment was not a place where racism was overtly prevalent. However, one participant wanted to make a point that racialized generalizations were not common. Corey commented that the campus was pretty accepting of all diversity, including Indigenous people, and he did not notice any overt racism:

So, there is this guy on campus [who is Black and gay] can do okay in this area that’s predominantly White and predominantly Christian and predominantly conservative, right? And if he can hold his own and I don’t see any bullying, I don’t see any of that here. We’re all just here to get an education, right?

Molly reported that she experienced people joking and saying unfavorable comments about native people, but she did not perceive the comments to be intentionally hurtful. She said, “A lot of people make jokes about people who live on the reserve. Natives are alcoholics . . . have lots of domestic disputes, can’t drink whiskey, you know, the normal stereotypes.”

Emotional impact. Several students shared stories of racialized generalizations and connected to these accounts more personally. While Corey did not experience negative consequences on campus, he acknowledged racism existed in the community and had been something he faced throughout his life. He provided a recent example related to a local news article criticizing controversial Indigenous images’ characterizations in the local media. Some comments supported the use of the images, and others suggested they perpetuated racist remarks. Corey said, “Boy, is it ever still here. It’s unfortunate. . . . If you don’t think racism doesn’t exist in this area, think again.” He made the point that racism is real, still happens, yet is not something one sees openly.

Charlie and Kevin shared parallel responses relating to a connection to their Indigenous identity and culture but also expressed a disconnect because they defined their relationship in their own way. They both shared an internalized struggle to feel a link to the community because they did not represent a “typical” image of a Native American, and the negative stereotypes are difficult to speak out against. When asked about attending events on campus, Kevin said:

I haven’t really been to many cultural events that our tribe offers. And to be

honest with you, it's mainly because I would feel uncomfortable to go because I didn't go at a young age. So, for me to like, go to the event I would, maybe, like, feel out of place. So that prevents me from going to the events.

Charlie acknowledged the stereotypes and preconceived notions about Indigenous people were not a true representation of Indigenous people but were often used to generalize images of Native Americans. "I would like to change some of the notions people have, you know . . . like we are not all like that." He has an interest in being a role model for not just Indigenous people but all people. He also shared the struggle of the pressure of judgment based on physical appearance. In his home community, he did not have the "typical look" of his tribal community and acknowledged he had to overcome some issues related to his own identity:

You know, I kind of get in the way of myself with that, going back to the whole . . . I didn't grow up on a reservation. That's probably a little bit of myself, and that's some issues I need to deal with. I need to really explore that.

Ally acknowledged that society consists of different ethnicities and mixed ethnicities. Still, for her, even though she identified she was "half" Native American, that half was an essential and proud part of her identity. This identity was important to her. She talked about her physical appearance, and it created an outward identity for others. She said:

I never really felt like accepted, and nobody really cared about my culture at all. Which I mean, there's pros and cons to that. Pros are, I guess, we're all on the same playing field. Right? But then, also, cons are those that they think we were

all from like the same origin, and we're not. Because I don't necessarily look very, very native.

Ally and Molly shared it is common that they often are mistaken for being Asian, and sometimes other ethnicities. Molly shared:

A lot of people have mistaken me for like Asian or something. But people mistaking me for another ethnicity is kind of off-putting, I guess—when somebody just assumes. And I've had people like make jokes, like probably considered like racist jokes, or whatever.

When asked about her experience as an Indigenous student on campus, Molly said, "A lot of people have mistaken me for like Asian, or something. Some other ethnicity." Ally described that being considered another ethnicity had a personal impact, and misrepresented who she was:

A lot of people tell me I look White or Asian. I get Asian all the time, but I am half native. So, it's a really important thing to me. Sometimes, that kind of makes you feel like you're singled out in a way because it's like nobody really understands who you are.

Apathetic response. Several participants had an indifferent reaction to experiences of racism. Molly talked about not being affected by comments:

A lot of people make jokes about people who live on the reservation. Natives are alcoholics, Natives have a lot of domestic disputes, so on and so forth. Can't drink whiskey, you know? So, the normal stereotypes. I don't really let myself get too emotionally involved in stuff like that. So just kind of laugh about, I guess if I sat

down, thought about it for a long time, it probably bugs me, but I don't let it.

Because what is the point in that, you know?

Like Molly, who acknowledged some stereotyped comments, Robert described several events that either mocked or disrespected his culture, but stated, "It was nothing I couldn't shake off." He provided detail of several incidents and the negative stereotypical comments shared by many of the participants. Robert said, "You may see Native Americans, and people look at you as a phenomenon." People regularly ask him questions; he described some as silly and some as hurtful. He shared:

Some people ask me questions that are really dumb. Some are really interesting questions . . . but it's also kind of hurtful. Sometimes, it's stereotypes. Sometimes, they giggle. One person asked, "So you smoke much peyote?" But later to come to find out they were actually serious about that question. It was everywhere. It happens all the time, actually. So, the jokes just keep coming. It's not bad. People just don't have knowledge about the culture. So, they don't know what's serious, what to joke about, what not to joke about.

Robert acknowledged he has heard the typical stereotypes, has had sounds mocked. He said, "One person actually offended me and doing AHAHAHAH" [as Robert moved his hand over his mouth]. He was accustomed to comments, as he saw family members treated negatively because of their physical appearance. When asked whether the negative experience happened while attending college, he reported the experiences occurred both at college and before he arrived at the school. Robert said, "It was everywhere. It happens all the time, actually." He talked about the jokes getting old and

being tired of hearing them. Robert described a proud, secure connection to his culture, still he admitted he did not practice his cultural traditions on campus because he was protective of his traditional medicines and artifacts. Robert shared that someone had asked him, “What you do with the pouch of tobacco? You weirdo.” He also shared one of the perceived common experiences of college students was drinking; because of that, he would not bring his traditional medicines to the residence on campus. He did not trust what others would do with them, including friends, so he preferred to keep that part of his life at home. With a collection of vivid racialized generalizations, racialized behavior, and stereotypes, his overall reaction normalized these experiences, accepting that these have been things he has encountered regularly.

SQ1

Significance of culture and community. The theme of significance to culture and community included two categories: connection to culture and connection to community. For connection to culture, the responses were arranged to capture students’ secure relationships to their culture and those responses that articulated a desire for an increased connection to their culture. Under this theme, the second category reflected the importance of a connected community, whether it was to the campus community or a link to the student’s community.

Connection to culture. The responses represented in this category describe the students’ expressions of the importance of their connection to culture, whether it was a secure connection to culture or a desire for an increased connection to their culture.

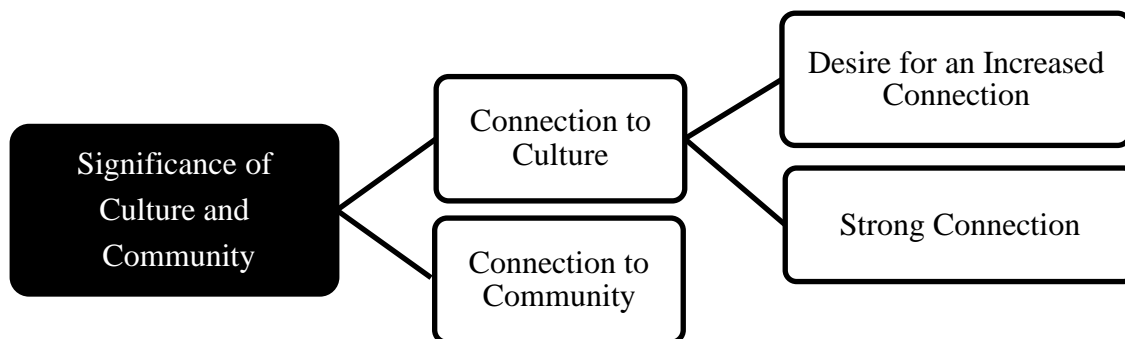


Figure 3. Theme 2. Significance of culture and community.

Desire for an increased connection. Several students described not being very connected to their Indigenous culture, but responses demonstrated they did embrace aspects of their culture that contributed to their persistence. For example, Kevin expressed that he could not think of a specific strategy related to his culture but shared that he did equate his weekly sauna time to that of a sweat lodge. As he said:

I use some of the traditions that our culture has to help me with the just overall well-being, like, for example, like sweats. I don't have a sweat lodge, but I use a sauna. They're are pretty similar in the fact that you go in there, and you kind of relax and sweat and everything. So, like, I use that as like a relaxation tool for if I have a hard exam or something on a Friday. Like, that we can all go take a sauna and different things like that, like holistic, well-being thing.

Johnny described himself as not immersed in his culture but did want to learn more about things, like his clan connection. He further shared that he did practice his culture in his own way by being in nature as one of those ways he found a connection and

calmness. He talked about the connection to his culture and how he was trying to incorporate his culture into his life:

My grandfather, who I am tribal through, and that was during the era of assimilation and all that other stuff that was going on, so they kind of laid low in the native aspect of things. And I've been in the military, and I just got out three years ago, so I haven't had much. But since moving home, I tend to carry myself with the values of a tribal person. So, offering tobacco when I go hunting or fishing and stuff like that, giving thanks. Trying to stick to my native roots, gathering, and stuff like that.

Kevin expressed a desire to learn more about the culture. He did not have a connection to his tribal community. Kevin expressed curiosity in learning more about his Indigenous culture, but he voiced hesitancy in attending campus events that prevented him from developing a connection to the Indigenous community. He stated, "I didn't go at a young age to tribal events . . . but I'd be interested to go to them."

Charlie also talked about his hesitance when describing his cultural practices. He shared that he did smudge occasionally, but not all the time. He shared that when at home, he did not fit his tribal members typical characteristics, but here in this community, he could identify as Indigenous because of physical characteristics. He said, "I didn't grow up on the rez. I try to take ownership [of his identity], but sometimes it almost feels like I am not allowed to." The desire to prove Indigenous people can be in the medical field drove his motivation and made the point that he was a nurse who

happened to be Native American, not a Native American nurse. Ally shared that it would have been nice to have more opportunity to learn crafts and be more involved in events:

I used to be really involved in a lot of things, actually. I was involved in our local Pow Wows and involved in our Tribal Youth Council in high school, but since I've been in college, I actually am not nearly as involved as I'd like to be. I know it's something to improve on and start taking some different craft classes when we move downstate to learn how to bead, make dream catchers, moccasins, stuff like that. I really haven't been taking the time that I need within my culture.

The connection to nature, to others, living a positive life, and practicing in crafts, ceremonies, or community events is fundamental to holistic wellness. The students identified that they do things in their own way but would benefit from having more Indigenous culture on campus. Christina said, "If they could get some cultural programs here, to spread some awareness, bring some historic aspects, I think that would do some wonders for the few native students who are here." Like Kevin, Robert said he would participate in events on campus if he knew about them.

Strong connection. Leah and Robert clearly expressed a secure connection to their culture, describing actions such as using Indigenous medicines regularly, attending community events and ceremonies and actively participating in their home communities. Leah stated, "I would say it's [connection to culture] pretty strong because I try to practice things and learn new things and get involved. Just connecting with the Creator and just think about things instead of just jumping right into certain things."

Leah also expressed the importance of acting positively and making a conscious effort to live by their traditional elders' teachings [lessons]. Leah described the importance of her culture, and her sense of identity was important to her because "Even though it's pretty colonized [campus and society] it's powerful . . . to have your Native self-come through in this non-Native thing." Even though Robert made a conscious effort to protect his culture and cultural artifacts from his college peers, he strongly felt that being native was "like a brethren, like the brothers in blue." He described with pride that he could walk into another tribal community or meet another Native person and feel welcomed and accepted. Christina and Robert took pride in knowing their clan and Indigenous name and related to this cultural significance and meaning. Christina said, "I got my name when I was a kid, Little Snapping Turtle, Mikinaakoons, and then I just recently got my adult name, Mikinaak Kwe, Snapping Turtle Woman. We are fighters." Robert, a criminal justice student, proudly shared he identified with the Bear Clan. He said, "Bears are in my tribal list. They're like the protectors, I guess—the defenders, definitely. My dad said I have like this overwhelming ability to protect everyone put the world on your shoulders. It's me."

Connection to Community. The category of connection to the community was divided into two subthemes, connection to the campus community and the student's community. Several participants acknowledged an essential link to the community, either on-campus or in their personal life, that has contributed to their persistence. Some students explained their support system was a part of their community, whether they were family, friends, and or their program peers.

Johnny, Charlie, Ally, and Corey, who described themselves as non-traditional students because of their age and have families of their own, expressed that they did not think the university could meet their needs to engage them as community members. They each indicated they were at a stage of life where the typical campus events geared to a younger population were not an interest. Their communities were where they made their meaningful connections. Kevin stressed the importance of a sound support system, which he found off-campus with his family and friends. Kevin said:

I think that being a part of a community is essential for somebody because I don't want to say like psychological and like, physically. They're all kind of tied in together, right? So, I think having people around that have similar interests and have a concern for me, and I've concerned for them is really important. I guess I'm grateful to be a part of a community.

As Kevin prepared for graduation, he commented that his support system encouraged him, cheered him on, and gave him that extra boost when he wasn't sure he would continue. Kevin emphasized that being a part of a community was vital to a person's overall well-being. Robert also talked about the importance of friendships, a difference from socializing:

I try to maintain friendships. That's a little difficult to do sometimes just because I'm so busy and I'm utterly exhausted. I find socializing and maintaining friendships are two different things. Friendships are like close people I have who I can talk to about things. Socializing is I go to a group event where I can do an activity and show people that I'm not just like a hermit in my own room. I'm

actually a person.

Robert could socialize, such as go to a hockey game, but the bonds could get you through a tough time and provide balance to his life. Robert also talked in detail about his close connection to his tribal community. He said, “I could go on for days; there were just so many good times. I love my Native tribe. I loved all the stuff I did with them.” However, Robert lived hours away from his home community while attending school.

A connection to the campus community was often program-dependent, and students supported an increased effort to promote an Indigenous community on campus. Kevin, Robert, Julia, and Christina would like to see more activities related to the Indigenous culture and offered during times that may attract more students. Charlie talked about the time he invested in his studies and with the same group of people he started with in his program. Charlie said, “It takes a little bit of effort to really connect with other Natives” when talking about low key visibility of a native community on campus. He spent a great deal of time at the Indigenous Student Center. Still, he acknowledged he was not aware of any other Native American student in his program, and it was difficult to determine who was Native American by physical characteristics. So, the students who attended the Center might be Indigenous or not.

Ally talked about feeling different and isolated, but when attending the Indigenous Student Center, she felt like she was a part of a community, “It’s helpful to come in and sit around with people you might not know, but you know you are part of a community.” Christina also discussed the Center as a place where she fit in and the only place where she felt comfortable. Her impression was that there were not many other

Native American students in her program or on campus. Christina said, “I’m a very non-traditional student. I’m one of the oldest people in my classes. And there’s not a lot of native people in my classes, at least, openly native.”

RQ2

Campus environment: Representation of the Indigenous culture. The theme campus environment was created after several participants commented on the high percentage of the local Indigenous population, close tribal community neighbors, and above-average Indigenous student population on campus. Two categories described participants’ perceptions of whether the university was inclusive or exclusive in representing the Indigenous culture.

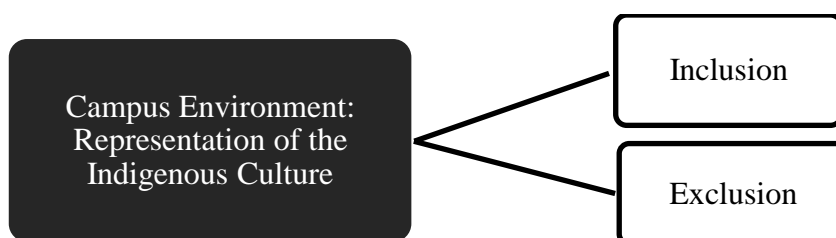


Figure 4. Theme 3. Campus environment.

Inclusion. When answering a question related to the support of the Indigenous culture represented on campus, nine students and the two part-time student staff consistently mentioned the acceptance of the state’s Indian Tuition Waiver supports the Indigenous culture. For some participants, the tuition waiver was the only solid effort they could identify on behalf of the university to be inclusive of the Native American

culture. Several students mentioned they would not be a university student if the tuition waiver did not exist.

When reading the university's mission and vision page, there was an acknowledgment of the importance of diversity and an environment that is inclusive, welcoming, and values that support freedom of expression and respect. The vision section also included the importance of collaborative relationships with the tribal community colleges. As Leah noted, she experienced opportunities when her culture was recognized, but described her education as delivered from a Eurocentric point of view. She was completing a double major and noticed the art department, as she described, "striving to bring about different cultures and educate people," and was more inclusive of culture, by including Native American playwrights. She said:

So, in my theater program, not necessarily the business but the arts stuff, they wanted more of my culture. We always talked about Shakespeare and all these other ones, but then we started reading like some Native American playwrights, learning about different things.

Leah felt honored that the teacher sought permission from a playwright to have the main character changed to a Native American female so that Leah could showcase her culture:

Well, actually, it's kind of cool because there was this play, and it was originally written for an African American woman and a White male, but I emailed them [the playwrights] and asked to change it to fit a Native American woman. Long story short, he emailed me back. He and his agent, which was super cool because

he's super busy, said yes. We were able to do that. So technically, I was the first Native American woman to play that part.

In Leah's second major, she expressed that there were opportunities to incorporate Indigenous knowledge or issues, but teachers or courses did not include this.

Debbie, a part-time student worker at the Center, believed that the university was inclusive as a whole:

I think they're very inclusive. And I've seen a lot of different people who have a lot of different backgrounds at the school. The last college that I went to, you did not see other cultures there. You typically saw White people, Caucasians. You didn't really see anyone from any other sort of ethnicity. So, coming up here and having different cultural backgrounds here—it's very nice, and it's very inclusive.

Concerning a visual representation of the Indigenous culture on campus, all students and staff mentioned the library displays and the activities offered during Native American Heritage Month in November. Students were pleased to see the exhibits but also wanted to see more permanent recognition of the culture throughout the campus all year round. Molly stated that she learned the most Native American history in her elective class. She was thankful she was able to learn something about her Indigenous history. Interviews with part-time staff revealed that the Indigenous Student Center's primary role was to provide cultural activities. When describing what she saw as the Center's efforts to ensure inclusivity, Suzanna described it as a place of acceptance and comfort:

It is about supporting anybody that comes in and helping them to learn about the resources that we have. It's more about creating a space for anyone. It feels like a

lot of what we do here is more just—again [getting back to] because we're so small, just trying to make it an inclusive space for anybody, so making sure of it. It sort of feels like anyone that feels like they are sort of on the fringe or from outside.

Micki, who was the only full-time staff member at the Center, talked about her role and priority she placed on supporting the students:

I'm not really so much concerned with titles as I am about the well-being about my students. Whatever the students need, it doesn't matter what time of day or night. I think my role here is student support, and that encompasses many things, from academic support to making sure that they have shelter if there's bad weather, that they don't have to drive a long distance. I'm also responsible for the Indigenous Student Center, responsible for introducing the rest of the campus to culture, and I do that through events. We celebrate Native American Heritage Month. We bring in speakers every week, or we do some sort of cultural activity every week during that month.

Exclusion. A walk-through campus supported student responses that described a very minimal representation of the Indigenous culture on campus. I walked through several different buildings housing administration services, classrooms, athletic facilities, the library, one of the on-campus restaurant/coffee shops, and the Indigenous Student Center. The interviews occurred during the winter semester, and displays were not representative of the Indigenous culture. The athletic facility predominantly displayed athletic-related information and prizes. The restaurant/coffee shop contained a large

seating area with tables, chairs, comfy couches, and armchairs. There was reading material distributed on bookshelves ranging from novels to magazines. Aside from few pieces of artwork in the occasional office space, there wasn't a noticeable presence of the Indigenous culture across campus. The most dominant display of culture was at the Indigenous Student Center.

Several students who were from the local area were predominantly members of the closest local tribe. Many of the respondents were unaware of the local history of the Indigenous people. When asked about the representation of the Indigenous culture across campus, Christina commented, "I don't feel like they incorporate the culture. It used to be a military base back in the day, and they don't really acknowledge that either. That's not really discussed a lot, the history of the place."

Charlie believed the services and support from the Indigenous Student Center were excellent, but there was only one full-time person and the few students who helped out. He believed it could not be expected that one person was to plan, promote, and financially support events with such a small group of people. Charlie said:

For Native American month, we're supposed to get the resources to make sure that our culture can be represented on a month that this university has deemed, hey, this is 'your guys' month. It's kind of like, we need a little backup. That's an awful lot to do.

He reiterated that his focus was his studies and would have liked to see the university and local tribes get more involved in promoting culture. Charlie thought it was essential to point out that all the responsibility should not just be on the university, but more presence

from local tribes on campus, supporting events, or collaborating to present speakers. Collaborative efforts would help increase the presence of Indigenous culture from people who understand the culture and have more resources to help share cultural knowledge and activities.

Ally made a comparison to her high school. She commented that she did not see a prominent display of the Indigenous culture on campus compared to when she was in high school. She said, “Even something as simple as a rock garden with cultural meaning and plaques that have some history makes a difference, just anything that would recognize, and acknowledge would be amazing. Native Americans were the first ones here.” Most students acknowledged that the local tribe was a neighbor. Charlie stated, “The two local tribes, just down the street, is such a part of the city’s culture.” There are opportunities to learn more about culture and include more cultural elements. Respondents also commented that the university was quite culturally diverse, and that diversity did not seem to be a problem. Still, at the same time, it is also not an emphasis on the Indigenous culture or other cultures.

Ally expressed that she saw a culture gap and that the university as a whole, students and staff, did not know how to meet Indigenous students’ needs and that Indigenous students were also not talking about their needs. Christina shared a story of one of her professor’s efforts to close the cultural gap:

The teacher was trying to build relationships between non-tribal people and the local tribal people. Get people involved with rides to events. She was hitting a lot of resistance and was told you don’t understand why they don’t do this or that, but

she felt they are just people. A lot of teachers aren't from the area. They're not from this state even. So, they didn't grow up with a lot of the culture, dealing with the cultural aspect of things or the lower income. So, hearing a teacher actually trying. So, I mean, that was reassuring. But I think she is met with a lot of conflicts and no one wants to really deal with that, confront it or try to fix things, build bridges.

Leah, a double major in arts and business, felt more inclusion in the arts program. She further commented that she did not believe it was intentional but recognized that people who are passionate about the arts tend to be more open and diverse thinkers. She said:

In the arts center, it was like they were striving to bring about different cultures and educate people. I did feel the difference, and it's not like the business professors were saying like, "Boo, the Natives are—", whatever. They were just different. There's not really a whole lot of classes to teach about the native side—it's more Eurocentric.

The various university documents posted on the website relating to strategic directives acknowledged the unique geographic location with close tribal neighbors and rich heritage of the area, recognizing the large Native American population. One theme to strengthen services was to develop courses in Native American studies and to enhance the relationships among the university, tribes, state, and across the nation. Another theme in the documents supported the goal of strengthening culture and stewardship by acknowledging history and culture. In a review of three years of college catalogs and

course offerings, a total of five courses specific to Native American studies were listed. Several participants and one of the advisory members, who is a graduate, commented that the classes were listed but not always offered. The interest was there for the courses, but not always provided.

SQ2

Persistence strategies. The following responses related to the theme of persistence strategies, revealing the strategies students shared that contributed to their persistence. The two categories included being Indigenous and general strategies. The category of being Indigenous was classified into four subcategories: resilience, gratitude, role model, and culture-specific strategies. The second category captured the general strategies students used that contributed to their success and continuation of their students.

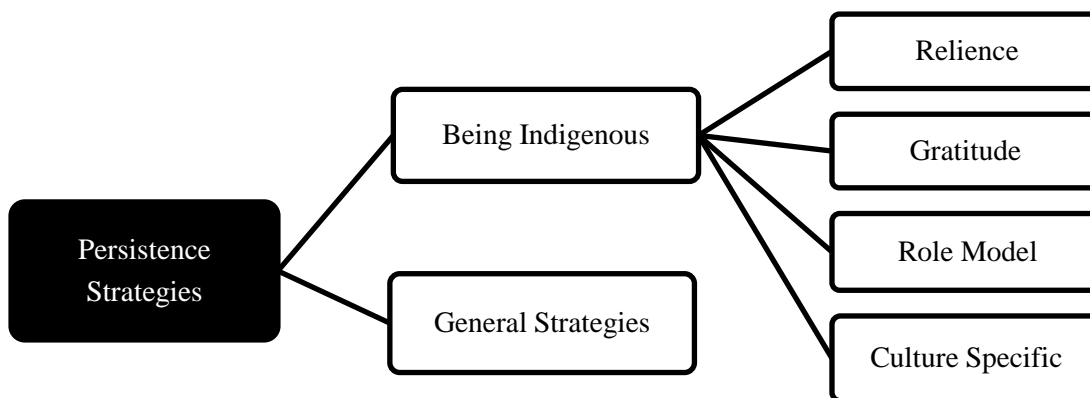


Figure 5. Theme 4. Persistence strategies.

Being Indigenous. The results in this section was organized after the participants related shared how they connect to their culture and being Indigenous. The results demonstrated that the participants connected with four common themes, resilience,

gratitude, being a role model, and culture-specific strategies.

Resilience. Christina described resilience as a stubbornness. She said, “I take it one day at a time.” While growing up on the reserve, she saw a lot of her peers not make it, sidelined by partying, addiction, and incarceration. She was determined to succeed, even though she admitted it was challenging.

Similarly, the end goal fueled Charlie’s persistence. As a non-traditional student, mature and with a family, he knew what was at the end. It was an ending he described as beneficial not just for himself but for others. His future goals included incorporating Native American traditional knowledge about medicines and healing into the nursing practice. Charlie said “I will be there for other native people. [They] see me and feel comfortable.” Like Charlie, Robert believed his cultural awareness and understanding of the tribal community could only add to what he had to offer in his criminal justice profession. Concerning what he had learned about the culture, he said, “Oh my gosh, teachings are big part—how to use the medicines. When do you use them? When to speak or not to speak, manners.” Robert followed what he had learned as a way of life and interacting respectfully with others. When referring to his interest in criminal justice, he shared his father told him he had an “overwhelming ability to protect everyone put the world on your shoulders. It’s me.” Robert also shared the lessons he learned from elders about hard times. He said, “Let’s see all these horrible things, and we’re all grateful. Some Native Elders would say, “We’re just all laugh and have a good time.”

Debbie, another part-time student worker, who was non-Indigenous, noticed a type of resilience in Native American students. She shared her reflection on the struggles

she saw experienced by the Indigenous people with whom she worked. She was astounded to see an immense source of strength when the clients she worked with had a connection to their culture:

If you look at the history and everything, Indigenous people have been through a lot and how they have continued to nurture their culture and make sure that it doesn't die, make sure they passed it to their children. Those central pieces of their culture, for those that are connected to it, it seems to be your huge source of strength for them. I know some aren't very connected, but a type of resilience that I noticed most of the native people I met have, and sometimes it might just read like stubbornness, but what they really mean is that they don't give up on whatever they're doing.

Resilience is not just a matter of not giving up but getting through some difficult things that have stemmed from generations of struggles. Debbie said she was not Native American. In her culture, she shared that a sense of stubbornness drives one toward succeeding, but the resilience she witnessed was different.

Gratitude. Gratitude was another subtheme that emerged when students discussed their experiences as Indigenous students. Students were grateful for the opportunity to attend university. Most of the students talked about the commitment to their studies and the importance of graduation because the tuition waiver allowed attending university. Several students mentioned they were at college because of the tuition waiver, and without it would likely not be in school. Kevin was appreciative of the support from his

tribe; a financial contribution made it possible to go to school and continue with a master's degree. Charlie said:

I kind of feel like I've reaped benefits that I didn't necessarily sow because like the tuition waiver and stuff. That's why we really want to work in Indian health. That's why I want to do those things. I want to give back.

Another student, Julia, said:

I do have the tuition waiver; I was able to get that. So, I feel like that's even more because I never was always going to college. For me, it's like whether like what degree I want to get or like because right now, I'd like to go further than a nurse. You know what I mean. I'm going to be able to go as far as I can and then help as many people as I can, and just kind of push myself, and that's going to help me get there, something that's really beneficial and that's going to really help me. I'll be able to come back and help out the community or other communities, too.

Students talked about the importance of giving back, a sense of responsibility to succeed because of the financial support, underlined the theme of gratitude. With this sense of responsibility to succeed, they regarded this responsibility to serve as role models for other Indigenous people, another subtheme that emerged.

Role model. Many of the students, such as Charlie, Leah, Ally, and Kevin, commented that their success was not just personally significant, but also to other Indigenous people who may not picture themselves as nurses, doctors, scientists, business professionals, or actors. Their success serves as a role model and a representation of their tribes and their culture. Julia believed she had a responsibility to graduate because the

tuition waiver allowed her to be in school. A quote she heard captured her sense of commitment and responsibility to be successful in school was, “To whom much is given, much is expected. I am going to be able to go further in my education and help as many people as I can. [It’s] not just about me.” Johnny said, “And the demographics, there’s only 1 or 2% Native Americans in the law program. I guess I look forward to representing our tribe going on and doing that,” as he planned to further his education at law school. Ally knew that the percentage of Indigenous people who were or in the sciences was low. She stated:

I was reading how low of a population that Native Americans are actually found within, like being a doctor, being in the science field. It is very rare. . . . That kind of drove me because I want to be able to tell people, no matter where you come from or no matter who you are, you can make this reality too.

Knowing this drove her to be successful, to represent her people and not let them down.

Culture-specific. The last subcategory characterizes the responses by strategies participants used that were associated with their Indigenous culture. Leah shared her struggles could have sidetracked her success. Just weeks away from graduation, with certainty, she stated she did not want to be another statistic. She acknowledged that she drew strength from her culture by starting her day off with gratitude, smudging daily with the sacred medicines, and maintaining the humility to ensure she started her day off with balance and kept negativity at bay. Similarly, Robert shared that he was very connected to cultural activities when he was at home but did not on campus. He referred to his identification as a member of the Bear Clan. He stated, “I am a protector. That is who I

am supposed to be” as he pursued his studies in criminal justice. He relied on this connection to be successful. Corey talked about, “keeping an eye on the prize, remember the past, don’t want that life for self and children.” While he did rely on Christian faith, being Native American was a part of him. He had been exposed to plenty of cultural teachings and acknowledged that there was an overlap of his Christian beliefs and Native American beliefs. He said, “I’m Christian and a native together. That’s who I come in as, a student.” These combined beliefs gave him the strength and determination to persist and reach his goal. Kevin talked about he would like to learn more about how natural medicines can be incorporated into his profession. He said:

Because being kinesiologist, what I’m interested in, in particular, is natural ways to help people’s health. And I’m really interested how, like, all the teachings from our culture could be implemented and maybe learn about a little further so that people could use that and stay healthy rather than, like, medicine.

General strategies. This next category under the theme of persistence strategies presents the responses students shared as general strategies that have helped them to be successful. Christina, Kevin, and Molly stressed the importance of discipline, studying, and keeping with a schedule. Molly commented that her efforts and commitment “lead to good grades and scholarships.” Similarly, Johnny credited his time in the armed forces for the discipline he recognized was required to get good grades and to make the dean’s list. Johnny kept family time a priority, doing his homework after the children were in bed to ensure he had balance in his life:

I made the dean's list most semesters, and there's only been two times I didn't make it. Yeah, I guess, what I do is I will come to class and then I tend to leave my schoolwork till after my wife and daughter go to bed. And then I'm up late working on my schoolwork. I guess just finding the time, being a family man trying to go through school is what I find easiest.

Ally talked about the devastating feeling of failing a course and not letting that stop her. She learned how to understand the material versus memorization. She decided that learning the content led her to be a tutor. She now tutored for several of her courses:

I know my biggest turning point was my junior year. I was taking a couple of really, really hard classes—physics and biochemistry. I guess I just really wasn't good at the subject. So, I've never failed anything ever in my entire life. I have always been a straight-A student, always been really good at school, and I get to physics, and I failed the entire course like it was a hot mess. I was like, okay, I really need to either think about what am I doing that's not working and how can I make myself better so I can handle this...I realized that I was studying to memorize not studying to actually learn it. Then, also learning how can I apply it to my everyday life because, sometimes, we don't think about like that, and we just want to be a cookie-cutter biochemist, and in order to be actually really successful, you can't be cookie-cutter and just follow recipes. You have to actually understand what's going on. So, I started challenging myself to actually try and improve that and actually retain stuff, which I've been doing a lot better

at. Then, on top of that, I decided that year that I was going to go ahead and be a tutor for all the classes that I did not like.

Leah shared that reaching out for help when she was struggling was very hard but realized that reaching out and talking about her struggles helped her remain in school:

One thing that I did, that I really had to learn to do actually, and it took a while to get to that point, was to talk about things. It was very hard for me because I was going for, or I was going through, a crappy time. I won't go into detail, but like I had to learn to talk about certain things and asking for help. I didn't really grow up to ask for anything, so asking for help when you needed to, that was definitely difficult. But, after I did that and I saw that you ask and you shall receive for the most part—like I think the main driver too was, I don't want to be as a statistic, just another statistic. I want to show people that you can do this no matter what you've gone through, or no matter what you're going through, that's possible.

Features of Tinto and HeavyRunner and Marshall's Models

Social connection and culture. The final theme was arranged based on responses aligned with Tinto's model of student departure and HeavyRunner and Marshall's family education model. This theme, social connection and culture, includes three categories that represented the students' impressions of the Indigenous Student Center support and the participant suggestions on the relevance of the Indigenous culture and inclusion of the Indigenous culture students that might enhance the experiences and promote persistence for other Indigenous students campus. The three categories include Indigenous Student

Center support, participant suggestion: Indigenous relevance, participant suggestions: incorporation.

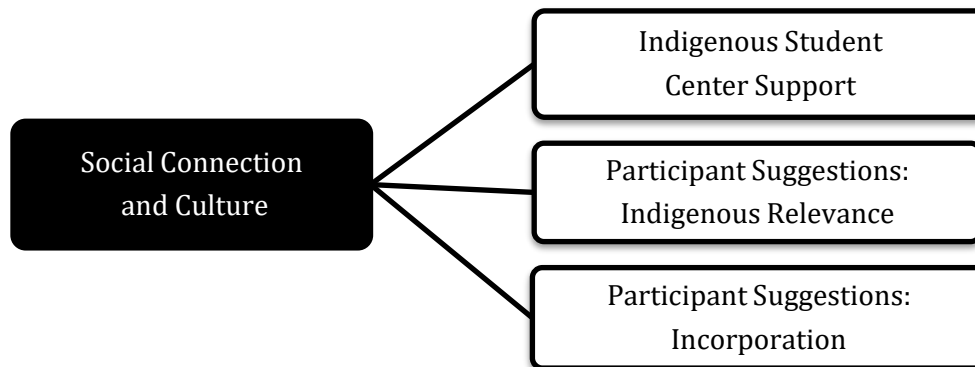


Figure 3. Theme 5. Social connection and culture.

Indigenous Student Center support. Most students said the Indigenous Student Center was an effort the university made to acknowledge the Indigenous culture. Like many respondents talking about the Indigenous Student Center, Julia said: “It is great to have services like this,” even if it was their first time at the Center. The one full-time staff member of the Indigenous Student Center, Micki, stated that she was a one-stop-shop and wore many hats to support Indigenous students. One of Micki’s roles was to provide cultural events and encourage participation in local events, “Most recently, we went to watch the process of maple syrup made the old way.” She was there to support the students the best she could, and if unable to help, she would find someone who could:

And I think a lot of people are just grateful that this center is here for them. We also have community members that come in, and also, they participate and the support of my students as well. But I also think too that I have a lot of help

through my tribe. People are always, they are very supportive of the Native Center.

While Micki was proud of the sense of home, comfort, and support at the Center, she was aware students did not always know about the Center:

Once they're here and find out about us, I think they can. It's been termed home away from home. If you use the services of the Native Center, you will have support as a native student. If you did not, I can't guarantee beyond the walls of the Center, what you're going to experience. I've had reports of one end of the gamut to the other—from racial slurs to, you know, we're curious about your culture, things like that.

Debbie, a part-time student worker at the Indigenous Student Center since the start of the academic year, stated her role was to support the students who attended the Center and to help prepare for the events taking place during Native American Heritage Month in November.

A proud event for Micki was being able to bring in the drumming ceremony during convocation. She said, "Our native drum, oddly enough at commencement, we have a lot of people who come up and say thank you for doing that. That makes me feel so good, and all the drummers feel good about it too." The inclusion of drumming was an opportunity for everyone on campus to celebrate the culture as the drum beat in celebration of student success. She was approached by non-Indigenous family members of graduates to express gratitude to experience that part of the Indigenous culture. Micki was connected to the local tribe and could refer students for further support and cultural

events. She would like to see more on campus but recognized one full-time staff member could not do it all.

After a review of documents and social media pages, comments from students posted included, the Center is “like a second home, a great place to do homework, enjoy baked cookies, and chat.” Charlie confirmed that the Center was a home away from home. As a student who was mature and with a family, he commuted each day. The Center provided him a welcoming space to destress and rest from his studies. He spent a lot of time at the Center during his downtime. He said, “You know, I cook. I eat here, right. Yeah, like I could sit here on the couch, and that’s okay.” Ally appreciated the quietness and the free services offered. She attended the Center approximately once per month. She said, “It’s really quiet. Like no one to bother you. That’s why I come. The free food is always a win for me. I don’t worry about buying or packing a lunch.” Student comments reinforced the message published on the Center’s flyer that emphasized students, staff, and community members felt welcome and included.

Suzanna, a part-time student worker, responded that, in general, the university did provide support to Indigenous students because of the Center. Still, as a non-Indigenous person, she acknowledged that this Center was an excellent place for anyone who may feel different, describing the Center as “a place less weird to hang out where you won’t feel stuck in the middle of everything.” Outside of the building, she commented that it could be very isolating and awkward for those who didn’t feel like they had a place. She further described her observations of the Indigenous culture and student experiences, “If I

were Indigenous and very heavily involved in my culture, I would feel invisible. I would definitely appreciate a place like this [the Indigenous Student Center].”

Participant suggestions: Indigenous relevance. The next category involves suggestions students made to enhance and support the Indigenous culture and students. Most students acknowledged there was a rich Indigenous history of the surrounding area and the loss of culture. They also expressed an interest in learning more about Indigenous culture. Johnny said, “Natives are starting to go back to their cultural roots, to be at the same level as our ancestors. [The university] could be more accommodating of that.” As junior, Johnny acknowledged that there may be things occurring, but he had not heard of the events happening at the Indigenous Student Center. Similarly, Ally stated, “We are on what is historically Indigenous territory.” Several students recommended increasing the offering of courses specific to Indigenous history, knowledge, and practices. Robert recognized the untapped resources connected to many Native American traditions and teachings related to nature and the outdoors. He suggested these concepts could be incorporated into courses. Micki talked about the importance of promoting the Indigenous culture and how that could support a person. She said:

I think in the past, there was a huge disconnect. I think that this disconnect is getting shorter because now we’re able to be ourselves. We’re relearning our language. We’re relearning our culture, our spiritual ways, our ceremonies. I think that’s very important to just a person’s ability to have confidence in themselves and the self-esteem and the support. You know if you feel alone . . . you just don’t

feel as strong, I think, as a human being. You know, but if you have the support network, I think that makes all the difference in the world.

Participant suggestions: Incorporation. The next category, relevance of the Indigenous culture, included suggestions from participants that promoted increased inclusion of the Indigenous culture. Kevin and Charlie were interested in learning more about plants' natural healing properties and how this topic was relevant and would fit into their fields of study.

Christina noticed that, when she transferred to the university, there were not many options for electives in Native American studies and nothing specific in her program but did get transfer credits for Indigenous studies courses she earned at a local tribal college:

They did transfer, and it was whatever their equivalent would be here. But they're not offered here. So, I don't know how that works. They keep it in the catalog, but it's not offered. Okay, so I almost feel like they're trying to fluff up their catalog.

But then they don't offer the course.

She further suggested the inclusion of courses creates awareness of Indigenous culture and issues and courses:

If they could get some cultural programs in here, get to spread some awareness, bring some historic aspects in, I think that would do some wonders for the few native students who are here. More speakers, more demonstrations, more educational stuff to be offered not only just to the tribal students but for other people to be aware of the history of this area of even the school of how it was

founded and say something, anything. [chuckles]. Art classes, I've seen they did have a dream catcher event.

When Robert was asked for suggestions, he said, "If there is a sacred fire around here. It'd be better if there's a sacred fire. That would be awesome." He also offered to provide some cultural information:

I know quite a bit about medicines, hunting, the wildlife area of my, of the tribal area just because I've been there for so long. I just know. I don't know a whole lot about one thing. There's a bunch of little things, and I know a little bit about each kind if that makes sense. But if I was asked to come in, say a few words, or whatever about what being native is, I wouldn't mind.

Ally and Robert recommended the university focus on staff and other students so that they could learn more about Native American people and their experiences. When referring to an awareness of being different as an Indigenous person, Ally said, "Sometimes, that kind of makes you feel like you're singled out in a way because it's like nobody really understands who you are." She further stated that it would be helpful for teachers to learn more about Native Culture:

I think they [teachers] should be required to take a class about different cultures, so then they're more exposed to it. So, they can better teach their students or something like that or do workshops or something. Because again, all my professors at least in the science department, they're very sweet people, very nice people. I love them, every single one of them, but they have no idea about anything about Native American culture because they're White.

Similarly, Robert suggested a do's and don'ts information campaign to reduce stereotypes and disrespect of his culture.

Micki believed that the combination of the rich Indigenous culture and communities that surrounded the university and a 10% Indigenous student population was enough to support a more significant investment of courses and resources to promote and support Indigenous students and their culture:

We have 10% of the population here. I think that's significant. I've suggested programs in plant medicine, things like that, that are our native language. I think we need a language class. I think we need a history class. I think we need possibly a class as it relates to our environment because we as natives, one of our roles is to be stewards of the environment. I think we could use some classes like that. If we had classes that were specific to tribal like law and management of resources, things like that, I think that would really—our fisheries and wildlife, things like that.

A scan of the university's website page and Facebook page supported Micki's and several students' comments about the university taking more significant strides to promote the Indigenous Student Center. The webpage and Facebook page of the university did not have a clear, direct link to the Indigenous Student Center. Several tabs, such as student life and campus events, did not lead to the Indigenous Student Center. A keyword search for the Indigenous Student Center resulted in a contact card page that contained Micki's name and contact information for the Center. That was the only searchable result on the website. One of Micki's challenges in promoting events was that

the distribution of information through campus email did not work effectively. Micki stated, “I send out emails. I try to be in your face as much as possible. I send out emails to the entire campus. I know that students are finding out that way, if they read their email, and according to the university, that is the official method of contact.” Micki did post events on the Indigenous Student Center Facebook page, but you have to join it to know it exists. Kevin and Molly commented that emails that announce events are helpful to let students know what is happening. Still, Kevin stressed that due to the numerous emails sent each day, it is difficult to filter out what may be of interest or relevance. He said:

Emails are not a good way for the campus. Like, stay connected with students because, honestly, we get so many, that myself and other students included, we just like delete them if it doesn’t look like it’s interesting. We just delete it right away. I’m not going to lie. You know?

Several students had commented that they did receive emails about Indigenous Student Center events, but may not attend due to the timing, class commitments, they forgot, or the emails get lost as one of many received each day. Several students commented that they were unaware of the Center. Kevin, a student in his final semester of studies, said, “I’m now aware there’s the row house here for Native American students. I knew very little about the services provided for like, say, students before this, to be honest with you.” Julia didn’t know about the Indigenous Student Center until this research study. She was a first-year student and suggested an increased effort to create awareness other

than emails. She said, “even booths at the orientation or that sort of stuff like or email more regularly to say what’s going on this week.”

The following responses explain a perception by staff and students that may contribute to increased involvement on behalf of the entire university, not just Indigenous Student Center staff. Micki commented that there was some support from the university, but there could be more to promote culture and cultural events on campus. Being off for the summer, Micki missed out on being a presence during orientations. She suggested the least effort could be to assign a student worker to promote the Center in her absence. She said, “I’m not here, but I have all of the things that we need for orientation. They do a lot of orientations when we’re on break, which does not make sense to me.”

Micki saw a loss of involvement from outside the Center, something she contributed to financial constraints, numerous changes in University presidents and people in key positions who were not familiar with the Indigenous culture, the local community, and the services of the Indigenous Student Center. Charlie and Micki’s sentiment were the university did not actively promote or participate in events that promoted the Indigenous culture.

Debbie recognized that the university could do more to support the Indigenous students, more grants and scholarships, stating, “If there are some, it is not very well known.” She also thought if more people outside of the Indigenous Student Center promoted services and events, there would be more students participating. Suzanna was not surprised that many participants had not heard of the Indigenous Student Center before this research study. Suzanna reported that this was the second degree she was

earning at the university. Suzanna graduated a few years ago, and this semester was the first time she heard about the Indigenous Student Center because someone told her there was an opportunity for a student job. Otherwise, she would have continued to be unaware of the Indigenous Student Center and its services. She commented on how more students would benefit from the services of the Center if its existence could be promoted more across the university:

There is the Center, and the Center is great, but most people don't even know it's here. I feel like we're still on the education phase. It just feels like we have such an interesting mix of people of these different majors and sorts of people and that. It feels like a safe place to be, and I just try and help emphasize that part of it because people don't realize that we have a whole computer lab over there. We have a bunch of books downstairs, just a bunch of stuff here. People don't know what this place is. I feel like that's honestly the first step—that people don't realize that it exists, and they can't use it but not aware of.

Suzanna commented that the Center was a very open and welcoming environment for any student, not just Native American students.

Micki also noted that staff numbers decreased through the years, and the supportive role of academic advising was no longer one of her duties. When she was in this role, she noticed that the Indigenous students had to come to the Center to meet with her, increasing student awareness and accessing services and support. The Indigenous Student Center's pamphlet and Facebook page state that the Center is a place where "Each student's needs are recognized, and we do our best to help them achieve their

goals.” The Center is a place to create community and meet other students. Micki was not concerned about her title, but about the connections and supporting students. Her primary role is to provide cultural events and *laissez* with the local tribes. One of her challenges as the only full-time staff member was coverage at the Center. It is challenging to attend tribal functions and meetings when someone must be at the Center for the students, and although there are part-time student workers, they are not there every day or during times that would allow her to be more active outside of the Center.

Another challenge with a skeleton staff is organizing events during Native American Heritage Month. This is an excellent opportunity to share the culture. Still, Micki mentioned that it was a significant task for one full-time staff member and a handful of students to accommodate a month’s worth of events and knowledge sharing and operate the Center. Also, Micki supported students’ comments that the university could increase its effort to promote the Center. When Charlie transferred from a local tribal college, he believed he would not have known about the Center if he was not told about it by his advisor from his tribal college. Charlie commented that it is really up to the student to seek out the Center and participate. He said, “Culturally, you know, you kind of have to push it yourself if that’s what’s really important to you, kind of search it out and you will probably connect with people and find things and find other like people.”

Summary

Two research questions and two sub questions guided this study and data analysis. This chapter described the data collection process and analysis of interviews. The data

derived from interviews with 10 students, one full-time staff member, two part-time student workers, and a review of university documents, website and social media.

RQ1 and SQ1 addressed participant descriptions of their experiences as an Indigenous student, and the significance of connections to others and cultural aspects are experienced while attending college. When sharing their experiences as Indigenous students, the results of the study indicated that most of the students did describe some form of racism or racialized stereotypes. The reactions were divided between having a neutral response to having an emotional reaction. Participants acknowledged the Native American History and large Native American population in the area. Participants expressed that racism was not overt or prevalent on campus. A few students felt that being Indigenous did not have an impact on their college experience. Some of the words used by participants to describe their experiences included unfavorable, the typical stereotypes, and jokes about Native Americans and the culture. Students who described their experiences with apathy normalized and accepted the comments because they were encountered so regularly. Other students' reactions were feeling awkward, hurt, offended, no one cares about the culture, isolated, not accepted, mistrust, and judged.

A connection to the culture and community was important for participants. They described the connections as being holistic and connected to their wellbeing and their success at school. The way the students connected to their culture differed. Many of the participants described their interpretation of how they practiced their culture by connection to a way of life, such as being positive, giving thanks, and a relationship with nature. Some students who described themselves as not being immersed in their culture

still demonstrated a connection that was meaningful and contributed to their sense of identity as an Indigenous person. The connection to the campus community was mostly to their program of study. Many of the participants wanted to see more cultural events at the school, but the campus was not a place they were able to engage in a cultural community. Many of the students described feeling isolated or different and found a place to fit in at the Indigenous Student Center. The participants acknowledged a connection to a community was important and supported their success but found that support mostly in their personal lives off-campus.

RQ2 and SQ2 involved participant responses that described what persistence meant to them and how they connected culture to persistence. The results of the study indicated that the students found the most inclusive action by the university was through the acceptance of the Indian Tuition Waiver and the services of the Indigenous Student Center. Most students identified the month-long acknowledgment of displays and activities during Native American Heritage Month in November. The students suggested the university increasing staff at the Indigenous Student Center and increasing collaboration from staff outside the Centre to promote and provide more cultural events on campus. Additional efforts could include offering more Indigenous-specific courses, content, and events that reflect the history, knowledge, traditions, and art forms of the Indigenous culture. Students suggested these actions could enhance an Indigenous student's experience and lesson cultural gaps among students, peers, and teachers. Suggestions further promoted the inclusion of local tribal communities to provide knowledge and support through collaboration. Recognition of the local tribal community

and collaborative efforts were also highlighted in the university's website and academic strategic plans. The connection to community and Indigenous community on campus, supported by the local tribal community, was also emphasized by participants.

The persistence strategies described by participants included general strategies consistent with successful students, such as a commitment to studies and homework, balancing personal life and academic demands, accessing tutoring and supports. Student strategies varied from specific activities to a general way of thinking that align with the Indigenous culture. A few students relied on cultural practices such as smudging to maintain balance and reduce negativity. Other students strongly connected to their culture through their clan they were associated with, with a sense that this identity defined who they were and how they behaved. Others connected their success to a sense of gratitude for the opportunity to attend university through the tuition waiver. Several students and staff talked about the resilience of Indigenous people, and although they may have experienced challenges throughout their life, such as poverty and oppression, giving up was not acceptable. This resilience led to responses that connected students' desires to act as role models to other Indigenous people who may not see another Indigenous person in the fields of criminal justice, science, medical, law, or arts. The students acknowledged a sense of responsibility to contribute back to their community, serve as role models, and persist despite their challenges.

In Chapter 5, I present interpretations of the four overall categories, themes, and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis. Overarching research questions aligned with categories and themes and were derived from the analysis process and students'

narratives that influenced their suggestions to meet the needs of Indigenous students. The next chapter shows the importance of culture the participants described and their sense of gratitude, responsibility, and resilience that drives their motivation and persistence.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents limitations, recommendations, and implications of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendation

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to explore Indigenous students' persistence at a mainstream college in the northern Midwest. Participants' narratives involved the cultural features of Indigenous college students, and relationships, connections, and social interactions that contribute to their academic persistence and perceptions of institutional culture and Indigenous cultural worldviews. The research questions were:

RQ1: How do Indigenous students describe experiences of being minority students in a mainstream college setting?

SQ1: How are connections to others, holistic well-being, and other Indigenous cultural elements experienced when attending college?

RQ2: What is the meaning of persistence to Indigenous college students attending a mainstream college?

SQ2: What Indigenous cultural strengths contribute to student persistence?

A case study design was the chosen methodology to explore the unique experiences of Indigenous students. This study was contextually bound by the university's geographic location, with a higher than average Indigenous student population. The following sections explain each of the research questions and critical findings associated with themes. The results section also connects the findings to Tinto's model of student departure and HeavyRunner and Marshall's family education model. A discussion of the study limitations, recommendations for future research, and implications for social change follow the results section.

Interpretation of the Findings

RQ1

Experience as an Indigenous student. Indigenous students described a range of experiences. Some students described their experience as neutral, where being Indigenous did not significantly impact their school experience. Conversely, experiences included feeling different, with racialized generalizations and stereotyping. Several students expressed a greater connection to the Indigenous culture and expressed a connection to the culture they incorporated into their life.

Neutral experience. The students who provided a detached description of their experiences also mentioned that they were not very connected to their culture. Students who are more cross-cultural or bicultural may be more likely to adapt to the college environment (Chee et al., 2019). McKinley Jones Brayboy et al. (2012) said that students who are more familiar with non-Native cultures and communities might have different experiences than students more familiar or immersed in the Native culture and community. et al. (2012) suggested that the more acculturated a student is to the school culture, the less connected they remain to their tribal community. Morrison and Silverman (2012) also pointed out that integration into the college culture is easier when the student can assimilate into the culture or when their culture is congruent with that of the campus.

Perceptions of feeling different. Several respondents said they felt different from their classmates and teachers. These perceived differences involved socioeconomic status, cultural differences, and life experiences as an Indigenous person. It is not unusual

for a minority student to feel isolated and not belong if students and teachers are not from their own culture or community (Lowe, 2005). It is common for Indigenous students to have to leave the familiarity of their home communities for higher education, and that separation from community involves sacrifice. Participants described feeling isolated and distanced from home communities. For a few of the participants leaving their community behind was challenging. The students who felt different acknowledged the Indigenous Student Center as a place on campus where they fit in and described the Center as a home away from home. Lack of cultural connections can be detrimental to academics, social competence, health and wellness, and coping skills, and may impede students' desire to persist (Jonson-Reid et al., 2005; McKinley Jones Brayboy et al., 2012; Pedersen & Barlow, 2008; Morley, 2003).

Several students talked about feeling different in the classroom, sharing that some faculty were unfamiliar with their culture, and courses were derived from a Eurocentric lens. Moeller et al. (2012) said that examining teacher perceptions of Native American students contributes to comprehending Indigenous students' experiences and relationships with on campus. Schofield et al. (2013) said that having university staff examine how cultural differences influence learning experiences may provide insight into reducing students' feelings of oppression and isolation. Smith et al. (2012) recommended the inclusion of culturally relevant courses, services, and peer relationships for schools to positively influence persistence.

Racialized generalizations. Students shared several instances of being the target of stereotypes involving Indigenous people and their culture. Many students normalized

these instances and referred to the comments as normal occurrences. When talking about stereotype and generalizations, three participants did not describe specific comments. Still they alluded to what Molly described as “the normal stereotypes,” or as referenced by Kevin and Charlie, the “typical images of Native people.” These generalizations were not describing positive traits but seemed to be consistent with negative stereotypes that perpetuate an emotional impression of hearing comments regularly.

Emotional impact. Several students described incidents involving racialized generalizations that contributed to feelings of isolation, desensitization, and choices to distance themselves from their culture. Several students commented that they did not engage in cultural practices on campus because of adverse reactions or lack of respect. When asked what they would tell another Indigenous student about what they may experience on campus, Christina and Ally both referred to the concept of isolation.

Students were aware that their culture is different from mainstream culture, and peers and teachers are often not knowledgeable about their culture. Cultural differences between Indigenous students and Caucasian students and staff are exacerbated because Indigenous cultural norms are unfamiliar to teachers and peers. The students’ stories demonstrate that it is common to encounter racialized generalizations. The university culture and climate can shape a student’s experience, so lack of staff addressing negative beliefs and stereotypes towards Indigenous people can increase their feelings of difference, isolation, and rejection (DePalma & Jennet, 2010; Wei et al., 2011). A review of the literature supported that stereotypes and biased negative perceptions from teachers can adversely impact students’ experiences (Kim & Nunez, 2013; Lundy-Wagner, 2012;

Magno & Schiff, 2010; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Racism increases student stress (Hardwood et al., 2012). As for students' reactions, while some may seem indifferent, there are negative consequences of feeling different or being exposed to overt racialized generalizations. The pervasiveness of racism and negative stereotyping diminished Indigenous students' opportunities to experience a supportive environment (Espiner & Guild, 2010; Kim & Nunez, 2013; Smith & Roberts, 2007).

Apathetic Reaction. What was surprising to me was the collective tone of apathy. The apathetic responses reinforced that these everyday encounters are embedded in society and go unnoticed and unchallenged by the dominant culture (Jessop & Williams, 2009). Students described several overt instances of racialized generalizations, with peers and staff mocking their culture, which heightened a sense of having to defend against stereotypes, and the need to protect their cultural artifacts and practices from others who would not respect their culture. Molly acknowledged that she hears such comments regularly, but said, "I guess if I sat down, thought about it for a long time, it probably bugs me, but I don't let it. Because what is the point in that, you know?" Robert made a choice to not bring or use his medicines at school, such as sage, cedar, or tobacco because he did not think his medicines would be respected while on campus. He said, "I don't want my friends to get into it. It's very special." Acceptance of the culture and experiencing a connection on campus can be beneficial, but students risk additional pressure to either change or suppress their beliefs to fit in on campus (Chee et al., 2019).

The foundation of Tinto's model of student departure is that academic preparedness, positive social interactions, and involvement in the school lead to college

completion. However, the process is more aligned with integration for being successful. The responses demonstrated the added layer of challenges Indigenous students face when attending school and adjusting to this new chapter. It is not unlikely that there is increased pressure for minority students to invest additional emotional and mental efforts to engage to integrate with the school environment to find their place in the college community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Stereotypes can threaten students' sense of identity, creating pressure to conform and change who they are to fit in or develop coping strategies while attempting to preserve their identity. For most students, cultural practices were reserved for off-campus, or they had to leave their cultural items at home. Given this, an emphasis on recognizing diversity, and ending such negative experiences can build a safer environment for Indigenous students (Dvorakova, 2018).

SQ1

Significance of culture and community. Participant responses capture their personal meaning of culture. The students also described their connection to their culture. Some students commented they had a strong connection, while others did want to have a greater connection to their culture.

Connection to culture. The participants stories revealed a range of ways in which students connected with their culture and their sense of identity. There was not a consistent description of an Indigenous student experience. Native American people's experiences differ significantly due to the differences amongst tribal nations and Indigenous persons (Tachine, Cabrera, & Yellow Bird, 2017). However, a consistent

theme of culture links the student experience, with an emphasis on connection to culture and some form of community.

Desire for an increased connection. Several students expressed an interest and desire to see more cultural events on campus and in the curriculum. Johnny support increased efforts. He said:

I feel like society now especially, Native American heritages, are starting to go back to their cultural roots . . . maybe being more accommodating to that, holding smudging sessions here, or I don't know what they do here. Maybe they do that. Well, considering I'm a senior, and I'm just learning about this [Indigenous Student Center].

Ally commented that the region surrounding the university has a high Indigenous population and she would like to learn more about Indigenous history, not just events. She said:

It's nice that we have these talks, the month of February, but I think we honestly need a lot more classes, especially at this school. Just to get to know our culture because they don't talk about it. I feel like I don't really know much and have learned a little bit about different crafting, the purpose of Pow Wows, all our different dances. I know a lot about that but not really anything about the actual history.

In the Indigenous culture, support can be found in family and community, which contributes to realizing individual potential and advances community potential (HeavyRunner & Marshall, 2003). As Robert put it, about having a connection to other

Indigenous people, "I can walk into any tribe. I'm from this tribe, and I'm welcome with open arms because I'm native." Christina stated, "[The Indigenous Student Center is] probably the only place that I feel comfortable. . . I come here. It's like, 'Ahhh, my people!'"

Nurturing a connection to the Indigenous community would address the students' desire to learn more about the culture and nurture the pride students have in their culture. The participants were consistent in suggesting that if they had known of the Center and its services, they would have participated more and would have likely connected with other Indigenous students. Julia, Kevin, and Johnny were not aware of the Indigenous Student Center before the study. Julia said, "If it's just me or they haven't put it out enough there for resources. So, I feel like they could be doing more, let the students know... bring awareness to it like for other people, too." Flynn et al. (2012) said that poor communication about support, whether financial or peer mentoring or social events, hinders students' success with different cultures. For minority students, creating a sense of community reminiscent of their cultural traditions can provide the balance required to maintain academic success (Manathunga, 2015). Preserving a cultural connection while students engage in a different culture at school, social interaction, cultural involvement, and cultural knowledge allow for the awareness to resist assimilation efforts and any further cultural loss (Lucero, 2014).

Strong connection. For students with a secure connection to their culture, the ability to participate in cultural events and traditions while at college strengthened being part of a shared community. Responses demonstrated that a secure connection to a

community and their culture, the ability to participate in cultural practices and traditions, reinforced a positive sense of identity. A collective identity, shared experiences, and connection to the different aspects of the culture promoted gratitude and care for others. This connection motivated the students to succeed and give back to the community and be a positive role model. The Indigenous culture values a collective identity, including the group (tribe or clan) to which one belongs (Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, 2010; Hampton, 2013; McDougall, 2015; Tachine et al., 2017). Salis Reyes (2019) supported a connection to others to maintain wellbeing, particularly as students encounter challenges as individuals whose culture is different from most of the campus population. The desire to be a role model supports HeavyRunner and Marshall (2003) family education model that acknowledged the family and the community cannot be there for the student on campus, so a connection to a community on campus is essential. A community that includes cultural aspects familiar to the student, and with possible inclusion of the local tribal community on campus. Connection to family is important, but when family is not available looking towards a friend or someone, they could depend on is critical to remaining in school (Selden, 2002). This connection is important to cultivate, and nurturing Indigenous pride is essential to help students mitigate the loss or any attack on their culture from negative school experiences, such as racism, the pressure to assimilate, and a sense of not fitting in (Keene, 2016).

Connection to community. Tinto (2015) stressed social engagement as being one of the essential conditions to succeed in school. For Indigenous students, relationships are important, and positive social relationships support overall wellbeing and persistence in

higher education (Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, 2010; Dessel, 2010; Hardwood et al., 2012; Jenkins, 2010). Feeling different and encounters with racism and stereotypes can negatively impact self-efficacy and persistence (Keith et al., 2016). Social encounters that include both academic and social integration can influence commitment to the college. This commitment included developing a positive rapport with a teacher in the classroom, which can lead to trust and comfort in cultivating positive relationships outside of the classroom (Sidelinger, Frisby, & Heisler, 2016). When referring to teachers' and peers' limited awareness of the Indigenous culture, Christina said, "More cultural awareness with staff and other students. They don't recognize that there are even tribal people around because they are coming from cities. It's a dying culture, and like 'No, we're still here'." When referring to her teachers, who she perceives do not understand her culture, she agrees that increasing cultural awareness among teachers is essential. Ally said,

I think, again, just understanding where these students are coming from, understanding their culture because again, I think it's just one of those things that they just don't even think about. Sometimes that kind of makes you feel like you're singled out in a way because it's like nobody really understands who you are.

The literature has supported that connection to others is important. To understand the holistic nature of the Indigenous culture, McDougall (2015) emphasized relationships and connections. It also includes a belief that one's actions, both negative and positive, impact oneself and others.

RQ2

Campus environment: Representation of the Indigenous culture. The responses from participants described their experiences and feelings of being an Indigenous student on campus. Some responses reflected experiences that described feeling included on campus. Other students shared responses with their thoughts being different from their peers and faculty.

Inclusion. In recognition of the limited opportunities to practice their culture on campus, the students provided several suggestions to enhance the experiences of Indigenous students. The students consistently supported an increased effort on behalf of the entire school. The family education model endorses using cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices to foster resilience (HeavyRunner & Marshall, 2003). Drywater-Whitekiller (2006) said incorporating Indigenous culture and language into the curriculum can promote and strengthen balanced living through reciprocal relationships between diverse cultures. Participants suggested including Indigenous aspects on campus because of the vibrant local Indigenous history and high Indigenous population on campus and the surrounding community. Kevin suggested courses related to Native Americans so that one can learn more about the culture. He also said this might "start to build a little bit more of a community on campus for this group [Native Americans]." College documents also recognize the unique geographic location, not just because of the nature-filled surroundings, but also the importance of relationships with the Indigenous community. Each culture benefits by learning through meaningful exchange between different

cultures, thereby expanding each culture's mutual understanding without permitting primacy to any culture over another (Watson, 2009).

Positive social interactions with faculty, peers, and other professionals contribute to retention (Creighton, 2007). The Indigenous Student Center is a positive place outside of the classroom, where students can study, relax, or socialize. Christina said, "I'm going to say the Center, right now, is probably the only place that I feel comfortable, to be honest." Ally and Christina also shared that they felt their experiences as Indigenous persons were not understood, and they often felt isolated on campus. As mentioned earlier, even other students who had not been to the Center before commented that it appeared like it was a positive place and good for Indigenous students. The staff at the Center recognize the importance of a connection and constructive support. Micki said, "You know if you feel alone . . . you just don't feel as strong."

Participants' comments align with the literature. Attending Indigenous-specific events and spaces created a sense of home away from home and promoted a sense of belonging and cultural affirmation (Tachine et al., 2017). The opportunity for Indigenous learners to access and benefit from familiar cultural practices, settings, and social interactions with people who understand or who are from the same culture creates protective buffers against the challenges expressed by the minority students (Rawana et al., 2015; Waller et al., 2002).

Exclusion. The campus consists of several different buildings over two blocks, with buildings focused on athletics, program-related buildings such as the arts, business, or sciences, library, bookstore, administration, and row housing for clubs, fraternities,

and sororities. Across from the library is the location of the Indigenous Student Center. As students described, the campus setting was neutral. There was no predominant presence of the Indigenous culture or any other culture across the campus. The obvious representation of the Indigenous culture was at the Indigenous Student Center.

Only a few students referenced the inclusion of Indigenous culture in their program or across campus. Several students pointed out that they were not aware, until this study, of the Center and its services. Many participants commented on the visible Indigenous population off-campus and were aware of the several tribal communities neighboring the campus. Many of them claimed to be unaware of other Indigenous students on campus, and that one cannot judge by physical appearance. They reiterated that physical appearance is not how they would identify another Native person. However, identity is often characterized by physical appearance. Corey did point out that "People, in general, go by what you look like, not by how you identify." Comments such as this were significant, particularly after Ally and Molly commented that they are often mistaken for other ethnicities and asserted how their identity is important. The literature notes a significant absence of familiar faces of the same ethnicity, culture, culture-specific supports, and social patterns for minority students (Milne, 2016; Olsen Harper & Thompson, 2017). The articles found during the literature review supported that incorporating culture on campus can be beneficial for students like Christina and Ally, who expressed feeling isolated and different.

As Botha (2010) said, a campus that is dominated by a Western worldview contrasts with students from diverse ethnicities and cultures, resulting in contradictory

worldviews. The author suggested incorporating cultural elements into the campus services and curriculum support for students from a minority culture. Molly was appreciative that the school offered a Native American humanities elective course and Leah respected the theatre program, which she said made concrete efforts to include her culture by choosing Indigenous play rights and changing the leading character to an Indigenous person. Molly learned a lot of history that she was not previously aware of and Leah was proud to represent her Indigenous identity. These students' appreciation demonstrates the positive impression this inclusion had on them.

Strategic planning documents covering 2017 through 2021 stated that one of the greatest opportunities for the university included "marketing of niche programs that related to our location [natural beauty, outdoor recreation . . . Native and Indigenous tribes, safe hometown feel...]." Regarding to acknowledging professional responsibility, the university documents also include direction to "strengthen Native American studies and revive a Native American minor as part of integral history. Developing courses or units within courses that incorporate native people's culture will strengthen the bond with local Native American tribes." While the documents mentioned of the directives that acknowledge the Indigenous culture, many of the participants were unaware of how the university, aside from the Indigenous Student Center, promoted and included the Indigenous culture across campus.

SQ2

Persistence strategies. The strategies students described emphasized the significance of connection to others and culture. The themes that emerged demonstrated a

collective identity that reinforced the features students defined as motives related to their culture and persistence.

Being Indigenous. HeavyRunner and Marshall (2003) said Indigenous culture emphasizes relationships and connections to individuals, family, and community, leading to greater holistic wellness. Being a role model or a positive representative of their community summarized the sense of connection the student had to their community and motivated their desire to succeed. A positive sense of identity includes a collective identity of the group (tribe or clan) to which one belongs (Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, 2010; McDougall, 2015). To be an assured individual, one must recognize and contribute to the social relations of their community. The success of one member represents the success of the community.

Several students described a secure connection to their culture, engaging in cultural practices fairly regularly on campus, while others described themselves as not being connected to their culture. Nonetheless, they consistently shared the belief that their efforts were not just for individual gain, but also for other Indigenous people and their community. Interestingly, this emphasis supports the literature, which suggests that the maintaining a strong cultural identity will have higher odds of fostering persistence. Students with a secure sense of identity and social-psychological abilities are more likely to withstand assimilation pressures and rely on their confident sense of identity to persist (Creighton, 2007). A strong cultural identity and positive campus relationships that acknowledge and respect culture foster persistence (Smith et al., 2012).

For those who identified as non-traditional students, a sense of community was not an expectation of their college experience as mature students having experienced life before attending or returning to university, or who have families and children. Recognizing the demands shared by many of the participants, a review of the literature supported Indigenous students, like other minority students, struggle to manage the demands of academics, family life, financial stress, and incidents of racism (Marshall et al., 2015; Olsen Harper & Thompson, 2017; Powless, 2015; Scholfield, O'Brien & Gilroy, 2013). Nevertheless, for these students and those who said being Indigenous did not impact their education, they supported an increased presence of culture through events, courses, and increased cultural knowledge by faculty and staff. Interestingly, students who commented that they were not actively involved with Indigenous services and events also did not see a visible Indigenous community on campus. Still, the students emphasized a desire and importance of being part of an on-campus Indigenous community.

Resilience. A collective resolute strength best describes the participants' sense of resilience. Participants identified resilience as something from their culture. This determination to persist was also connected to fighting against stereotypes, to be role models for other Indigenous people, and to confidently represent their community. Participants expressed a distinct sense of pride. The pride they felt was on behalf of their community and for Indigenous people. When examining the importance of identity for Indigenous students, Drywater-Whitekiller (2010) pointed out that respondents in her

study of college retention among Native American students, the students expressed their sense of identity in different ways; their expression and practice were diverse.

The students were open about the challenges they faced as an Indigenous person. Their motivation to succeed was not just a personal goal but also instrumental in inspiring and proudly contributing to increasing the presence of Indigenous professionals in their fields. Keen (2016) said the reality of coming from a minority culture comes with challenges. Keen studied Native American students who attended a pre-college program designed explicitly for Indigenous students with opportunities to incorporate culture and openly talk about difficult conversations related to racism and stereotypes. Open conversations and acknowledging the experiences is beneficial for Indigenous. This current study and the literature presented here promote building campus capacity that support Indigenous students by building on the connections and importance of relationships of family and community.

Gratitude. Another theme shared by participants was gratitude for the opportunity to attend university because of the tuition waiver. The idea that it was essential to give back, be a role model, or contribute to the community indicated a sense of gratitude and fueled their desire to succeed. Drywater-Whitekiller (2010) described the concept of giving back as a factor of Indigenous resilience that supports or nurtures the student, family, and community.

In a study exploring the cultural meaning of giving back in the Indigenous culture Salis Reyes (2019) validated the students' responses of this current study and believed that Indigenous cultural values and the efforts that nurture reciprocal and collective

relationships are grounded in what is considered both a gift and a responsibility. These relationships include family, peers, and community, both on and off campus. The connection and sense of responsibility to others further connect to HeavyRunner and Marshall's (2003) explanation of spirituality, as a value of interconnection with others, leads to balance, self-awareness, and responsibility to lifelong learning. Attending university was not taken for granted by the students interviewed and they viewed this opportunity as a gift, with their commitment to succeed in appreciation for the opportunity to attain their degree.

Role model. The literature review and voices of participants emphasized that mentors, cultural events, and a culturally inclusive curriculum that makes up the Indigenous students' everyday experiences can counter the adverse encounters of minority students (Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Moller, Anderson, & Grosz, 2012.) The family education model (HeavyRunner and Marshall, 2003) recognized the collective sense of achievement. Richardson (2012) reinforced HeavyRunner and Marshall's concepts that responsibility goes beyond self. Responsibility includes a connection to something beyond oneself, rather as a responsibility and contribution beyond individual success. Being a role model was important, but equally important was knowing there is a sense of comfort or familiarity in being a professional who is Indigenous, when encountering other Indigenous people as clients or patients. Charbonneau-Dahlen (2015) stated support and mentorship from someone who shares the culture offer hope of emotional, social, and academic realization for minority students. The concept of being a role model was essential, but also a recognition that it is

exceptional to encounter an Indigenous professional. Students recognized that Indigenous people pursuing studies in medical, criminal justice, law, science, and art professions are significantly underrepresented. Several students commented that they believed they may have been the only Indigenous student in their program.

As already mentioned, feeling different and experiencing racism can negatively impact self-efficacy, leading students to give up (Keith et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the challenges experienced by the Indigenous students did not appear to deter them from persisting. Several participants expressed their interest in participating in the study because they felt it was essential to contribute to something that may lead to change for other Indigenous students.

Culture-specific. The strategies used by the students ranged from approaches that explicitly connected to their culture to general strategies. Cultural practices contributed to holistic wellness and nurture the spirit of an individual (McDougall, 2015). The culturally specific ways students shared included smudging daily, gratefulness, creating artifacts such as copper pots or woven baskets, or ceremonies such as sweat lodges, feasts, Pow Wows, or sacred fires. The disclosed practices connect to the importance of a secure identity as an Indigenous person, positively influencing transition into the college culture and developing social relations (Burke, 2007; Watson, 2009).

Students who shared a stronger connection to their culture reported that they engaged with their cultural practices mostly off-campus. Students' strategies attributed to their culture represented a mindset or belief in actions, such as smudging or participation in ceremonies. The students described routine and conscious efforts to maintain balance

and to live their lives connected to family, a sense of community, or nature that allowed them to persist. Relationships and responsibility to others are fundamental in the Indigenous culture (Styres et al., 2010). They point to the importance of strategies such as having reciprocal relationships, becoming a tutor, practicing gratitude, and returning daily to nature to gain a sense of calm and reflection, or connecting their behavior to their family clan animal. Richardson (2012) said that participating in cultural practices involves connection to nature and animals, such as identifying with an animal's characteristics and the responsibilities in nature, which then mimic that person's duties in life.

General strategies. While this study's focus was to explore Indigenous cultural strategies related to persistence, this section acknowledges the hard work and efforts the students dedicated to their studies. The students' general strategies included habits and beliefs related to time management skills, dedication to their studies versus social distractions, and the importance of balancing school with personal and family life. These strategies reinforced the students' desire to persist despite cultural differences, stereotypes, and the demands of their studies. The students were proud of their accomplishments, and their academic and personal strategies support the commitment to succeed.

Features of Tinto and HeavyRunner and Marshall's Models

Social Connection and Culture

Indigenous student center support. The impression participants shared about the Indigenous Student Center, my observations of the Center, and the university documents

support the Center's goals, which is to create a sense of community. A school's culture is critical to persistence, and for many Indigenous students, coming from a culture not represented on campus can make the transition to college more challenging (Flynn et al., 2012). The pressure to adapt to the campus's dominant culture and practices may lead to feelings of rejection and loss of control and trust (Fiske & Fiske, 2007). Students commented that the Center was warm and welcoming, and they would return in the future. Campus strategies that could be minority student-specific are often inconsistent and do not foster a sense of family and community (McKinley Jones Brayboy et al., 2012). Other students who have attended the Center thought of it as a home away from home. HeavyRunner and Marshall (2003) suggested that the sense of family on campus can build upon the social connection to effectively manage school culture that is new to the student. Charbonneau-Dahlen (2015) highlighted the importance of support, mentorship, and a sense of hope that draws from the emotional, social, and academic support in the school environment.

Indigenous relevance. Participants acknowledged that Indigenous culture is not widely known or understood. Consequently, increasing the Indigenous presence was a consistent sentiment of participants, recognizing the university's location, with its close tribal neighbors and an above-average Indigenous student population. The literature acknowledges that understanding different cultures is the responsibility of the school. Campuses that consist of a relatively non-diverse faculty and administrators may not understand the practices that would sustain a supportive setting for ethnic and culturally diverse students, and incorporating a sense of a family or community and the inclusion of

tribal involvement may be challenging (Kayes, 2006; McKinley Jones Brayboy et al., 2012). Tribal colleges have recognized that an atmosphere that supports college persistence includes Indigenous cultural aspects in the campus settings and curriculum (Schmidt & Akande, 2011). Referring to other Indigenous cultures around the world whose ways of understanding and interacting with each other differ from the Western worldview that dominates campuses, Botha (2010) stressed the importance of Indigenous knowledge and culture to support the minority students.

Incorporation. Participants suggested adding Indigenous content to the curriculum, an increase in events, and the promotion of events. Many students were unsure how the staff outside of the Center included or promoted events. A few students pointed out that many of the teachers are not from the local area, nor are they aware of the Indigenous history or culture. The inclusion of both physical and spiritual aspects of Indigenous knowledge differs from Western or Eurocentric ways of knowing, making the integration of Indigenous culture on campus even more complex for the staff and administrators. Recognizing the complexity of including the Indigenous culture on campus, Styres et al. (2010) suggested a process between campus leaders and Indigenous people that is collaborative, respectful, and reciprocal. Students also acknowledged that they did not know all of the history or cultural practices. Several students conceded that increasing Indigenous-specific events and courses would be challenging for the one full-time staff at the Indigenous Student Center. For example, resources that are culture-specific would require specialized knowledge. Roy (2019) recommended three crucial

considerations: ensure representation of a non-biased history, meticulous research from reputable sources, and incorporation of local history.

Limitations

The study included 13 interviews with 10 students, one full-time staff, and two part-time student workers, which was within the range of the anticipated sample size of 10 to 15 participants. While the plan to use purposeful sampling initially attracted nine participants, snowball sampling attracted four additional participants. However, there was only one full-time staff member explicitly designated with a position to work with Indigenous students. The low number of full-time staff participants raises concerns about thematic saturation. Other full-time staff, whose role is not related to the Indigenous Student Center, may differ from the one full-time staff person's viewpoint presented in this study. The study occurred between February and April. Several days of snow and cold impacted interview schedules and dates available for interviews. Conducting the study early in the fall semester may lessen the effects of snow days and cold and flu. On the other hand, conducting the study in the fall may exclude some participants. For example, two participants were in the second semester of their first year. These two students would have been excluded from this study if interviews were conducted in the fall. Holding interviews in April with students may prevent challenges in returning to the students for clarification once the semester has ended.

What makes the location of the university somewhat unique may also limit transferability. Several neighboring tribal communities are within a 5 to 15-minute drive from campus. The surrounding community has a high Indigenous population, compared

to larger urban cities and universities with more diversity in minority populations, limiting the transferability of the findings to other campuses that differ in their Indigenous population, programs, and services. Future studies should consider this when choosing a research site, recognizing the variances between the hundreds of different Indigenous Nations across North America and the United States.

As an Indigenous woman who has experienced similar situations as the participants, constant awareness to remain personally detached was important to prevent researcher bias. Acknowledging bias can be challenging. Ongoing journaling, reflection, and at times just allowing a feeling helped me to move forward.

Recommendations

The results of this study suggest that Indigenous students often experience feelings of difference and commonly encounter racialized generalizations. The participants supported increased efforts to promote and provide Indigenous related services, events, and course content. The strategic documents indicated a direction towards further developing the inclusion of the Indigenous culture and history and strengthening the relationships with the local Indigenous community. The inclusion of diverse cultural representation on campus is significant. Still, this did not emerge strongly in the narratives of the participants.

The results further supported higher education institutions promote services available to Indigenous students and have a campus where a student may not feel isolated or different. Kevin, a graduating student, was not aware of the services of the Center until this study. He suggested the promotion of the Center at orientation. He said:

I think the first time they step on campus at orientation, there should be something for the Native American students. But if they could introduce them to the Native American students and faculty on campus right at the very beginning, at least, will feel like they're a part of something rather than an outcast.

Flynn et al. (2012) said that ineffective communication about support, whether financial, peer mentoring, or social events, hinders success for students' success from different cultures.

The results of the study also showed that students identified with being Indigenous in various ways. A common theme was the pride in their efforts and a sense of responsibility to succeed and give back to the Indigenous community as role models and familiar faces in their professions, where there are low numbers of Indigenous professionals. To expand on this study results, a qualitative inquiry could explore the meaning of identity as an Indigenous person, focusing on the features of collectivism and gratitude. Exploring of how these features relate to their sense of identity and as motivators to succeed may help elaborate on what the students shared in this study.

The study also consistently demonstrated connection to others. Several students responded to the study because they related to the importance of supporting other Indigenous people. By sharing their stories, they may be a positive influence for others. As demonstrated in this study, and support by Hart (2010) an important contribution to positive social change is research that involves Indigenous people, including Indigenous researchers and theories that come from Indigenous perspectives.

The study results are limited in scope. This study's findings are limited to participants' current circumstances and bound by the make up the Indigenous population attending a university this size and in this geographic setting. This study does not address Indigenous students from larger urban areas, where local Indigenous communities are not as close as in this study. Future research could explore Indigenous students' post-graduation. Future research may include longitudinal studies following Indigenous students over time to observe how motivation to persist functions in academia and beyond.

Implications

The primary implication of this study highlights the importance of cultural inclusion to diminish the students' sense of isolation, stereotypes, and racism. The inclusion of Indigenous culture on campus and in the curriculum may decrease the negative experiences often encountered by Indigenous students. Bougie and Senecal (2010) and Kaspar, (2014) acknowledged that ethnic diversity on campuses has increased, and it is not uncommon for the students who feel different from their peers to struggle to find their place on campus. Additionally, the absence of the Indigenous culture in the learning setting can lead to unintended assimilation, which historically led to detrimental effects on the overall well-being of Indigenous people (Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2016). While attending college many minority students are expected to adapt to the dominant culture. However, concrete strategies could recognize the cultural differences of the Indigenous students, because their diversity is present in the classroom. Pyne and Means (2013) examined minority college student experiences and underline the

importance of underrepresented students' voices are heard to feel accepted the value of Indigenous students' unique lives are worthy of representation in the classroom and across campus.

For positive social change to occur, Lowan-Trudeau (2017) acknowledged that scholars, educators, and participants must fight against cultural imbalances. The efforts that support Indigenous students within the institution can be strengthened through partnerships across all college departments and with local tribal members to help educate, provide cultural knowledge on practices, and work together to install consistent Indigenous culture strategies. The adoption of new knowledge and modeling of positive, inclusive, and accurate information about the Indigenous culture on campus will have a positive impact on the campus environment (De Korne, López Gopar & Rios, 2019). The insights gained from participants can provide administrators a starting point to assess the campus culture and practices.

I plan to share my results with educators through conferences and presentations. Indigenous students' voices demonstrated that they want their stories to be shared, both their negative and positive experiences as an Indigenous student. I plan to highlight the voices of the students, ensuring not to endorse my ideology of what will work. I would also like to share how much students' stories have touched my life and provided me support and motivation to pursue my goals.

The overall recommendations I would share from this experience are for educational institutions to ask the Indigenous students about their experiences, listen to their suggestions, support the recommendations they make, and become a part of their

community experience. Presenting students' narratives may assist educators and administrators in gaining an increased understanding and empathy for the challenges of being a minority student, but specifically, an Indigenous person attending an institution with a limited number of other Indigenous peers and teachers in their program. Educating students, teachers, and college staff about a minority culture can create a campus culture that can reduce harmful stereotypes and comments. The adoption of new knowledge and modeling of positive, inclusive, and accurate information on campus about the Indigenous culture will have a beneficial impact on the campus environment and Indigenous students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to explore Indigenous students' persistence at a mainstream college in the northern Midwest. The students regarded their success in school as an achievement not just for themselves, but an accomplishment on behalf of the tribal communities and other Indigenous students. They saw themselves as role models and as models in their respective professions. Whether students were in their first year of study or getting ready to graduate, they supported increased efforts to support Indigenous students on campus. The intention was to explore the cultural features that may contribute to persistence. A common statement among participants was connection to others, not necessarily on campus, but to their community and other Indigenous people. Despite vivid incidents of racism, many participants downplayed these incidents, and for some, persistence was driven by the desire to prove the stereotypes wrong.

The Indigenous worldview embraces collective success, and the concepts of individuality and competitiveness contrast with the cultural experience and knowledge of the Indigenous students. Most students described themselves as non-traditional and did not get overly involved in a campus community. Many of the students did not feel connected to the campus in general. By and large, the inclusion of Indigenous culture in curriculum and support was a desire of students that could address the more adverse experiences shared by participants. Despite feeling different or unsure of their culture, the concept of a collective cultural resilience was the most impactful topic that arose from the study. Whether students were actively involved in cultural practices or not, the idea of being Indigenous and resilient was important. Further, being resilient was not a matter of importance for each student individually, but for themselves and other Indigenous people. Future studies of Indigenous students may also focus on HeavyRunner and Marshall's concepts and collective resiliency.

The message I take away from participants' voices is that Indigenous people and culture, as Robert described, do not have to be seen as some kind of phenomenon. Instead, the value of community and connection to others, as consistently described by participants, can be recognized to support Indigenous students' overall well-being and persistence. A sense of community and connection to others was at the heart of their stories. Students' stories hold a vital message for educators that Indigenous students often feel different and would like to see the acknowledgment of their culture, and they have a desire to connect with their culture while on campus and feel accepted. Increasing a

presence of the Indigenous culture on campus supports inclusivity of Indigenous students, because they will thrive when they feel connected.

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Appendix A: Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer: _____

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: “*Exploring Persistence of Indigenous Students at a Midwest University*” I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant’s name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I’m officially authorized to access, and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Consent Form – Students

You are invited to take part in a research study about culture and persistence of Indigenous students attending a university in the Midwest. The researcher is inviting self-identified Indigenous students who are 18 years and older that have finished at least one semester of their program to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Michelle Sayers who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this case study was to explore Indigenous students' persistence at a mainstream college in the northern Midwest. The study may gain a greater awareness of the cultural features and persistence of Indigenous students attending a non-tribal institution potentially identify barriers and solutions to support Indigenous students in their university experience.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in one face to face interview that is anticipated to last 1 – 1.5 hours.
 - Interviews will be held on campus in a private room
 - Interviews will be digitally recorded (recordings will only be used to accurately record data)
- Meet with the researcher for a follow up meeting to review and confirm the data analysis and to make any corrections to information provided for approximately 1 hour.

Here are some sample questions:

- In regard to your cultural identity, how would you describe your connection to your culture?
- Can you describe your experience as an Indigenous student in the university?
- As you walk through the campus hallways describe how the university demonstrates the inclusiveness of the Indigenous culture.
- What do you identify as strengths that you draw from your culture to persist (continue) in school?

Information Collection:

The information gained by the researcher from your interview will be recorded, transcribed then used along with other participants will be examined for common themes to be used in a final research report.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one at Lake Superior State University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as minimal risk of emotional triggers possibly related to negative experiences related to negative race relations or reminders of the experiences or impacts of residential school. This may bring out feelings of sadness, loss, or frustration connected to the talking about the negative personal experience. A list of local support services will be provided to participants. In general, being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or well-being.

The potential overall benefits of the study include a greater awareness of the experiences of Indigenous students at a predominantly White institution and identification of potential strategies to support the persistence of Indigenous university students. The benefits may include greater insight for peer and faculty relationships and that the collection of personal stories may inspire positive change on campus for Indigenous students and serve as role models for other Indigenous students.

Payment:

As an expression of appreciation for your time and willingness to share your personal story, a small gift is being provided at the end of the interview process, a \$10 The Starbucks gift card. If you decide that you no longer wish to participate in the study, you will still be provided with a gift to acknowledge your time.

Potential Conflict of Interest:

The researcher is a First Nation member from a local community and works at a nearby community. A conflict may arise if potential participants are former or current students or family members of the researcher. These individuals will be excluded from the study to avoid perceived obligations.

Privacy:

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, tribal affiliation, will also not be shared. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. Real names will be replaced by codes and pseudonyms in analysis and the final report. A summary of cumulative results will be available for the public containing non-identifying information. In addition, a final report will be submitted to ProQuest for publication. As slight as the risk may be, any information disclosed about child abuse is required by law to be reported to the proper child welfare authority.

Data, such as written notes, audio or video recordings will be kept secure with encrypted files, in a password protected hard drive and stored in locked cabinet with the researcher. Data will be kept for a maximum period of at least 5 years, as required by the university, then will be destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at michelle.Sayers@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university.

Walden University's approval number for this study is 12-18-18-023487 and it expires on December 17, 2019.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to decide about it, please indicate your consent by signing below

Printed Name of
Participant _____

Date of consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix C: Consent Form -- Staff

You are invited to take part in a research study about culture and persistence of Indigenous students attending a Midwest University. The researcher is inviting staff who interact and are engaged with Indigenous students on a regular basis (this may include support staff, professors, or administrative staff). This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Michelle Sayers who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this case study was to explore Indigenous students' persistence at a mainstream college in the northern Midwest. The study may gain a greater awareness of the cultural features and persistence of Indigenous students attending a non-tribal institution potentially identify barriers and solutions to support Indigenous students in their university experience.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in one face to face interview that is anticipated to last 1 – 1.5 hours.
 - Interviews will be held on campus in a private room
 - Interviews will be digitally recorded
- Meet with the researcher for a follow up meeting to review and confirm the data analysis and to make any corrections to information provided for approximately 1 hour.

Here are some sample questions:

- In what ways does the university support a connection to the Indigenous culture?
- What does your role play in developing supportive relationships with Indigenous students?
- How would you describe the school culture as it relates to inclusivity for minority students, particular Indigenous students?
- What Indigenous services or supports you are aware of on campus?

Information Collection:

The information gained by the researcher from your interview will be recorded, transcribed then used along with other participants will be examined for common themes to be used in a final research report.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one at Lake Superior State University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as minimal risk of emotional triggers possibly related to negative experiences related to negative race relations or reminders of the experiences or impacts of residential school. This may bring out feelings of sadness, loss, or frustration connected to the talking about the negative personal experience. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or well-being.

The potential overall benefits of the study include a greater awareness of the experiences of Indigenous students at a predominantly White institution and identification of potential strategies to support the persistence of Indigenous university students. The benefits may include greater insight for peer and faculty relationships and that the collection of personal stories may inspire positive change on campus for Indigenous students and serve as role models for other Indigenous students.

Payment:

As an expression of appreciation for your time and willingness to share your personal story, a small gift is being provided at the end of the interview process, a \$10 The Starbucks gift card. If you decide that you no longer wish to participate in the study, you will still be provided with a gift to acknowledge your time.

Potential Conflict of Interest:

The researcher is a First Nation member from a local community and works at a nearby community. A conflict may arise if potential participants are former or current students or family members of the researcher. These individuals will be excluded from the study to avoid perceived obligations.

Privacy:

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, also will not be shared. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. Real names will be replaced by codes and pseudonyms in analysis and the final report. As slight as the risk may be, any information disclosed about child abuse is required by law to be reported to the proper child welfare authority.

Data will be kept secure with encrypted files, in a password protected hard drive and stored in locked cabinet. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at michelle.Sayers@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university.

Walden University's approval number for this study is **12-18-18-023487** and it expires on **December 17, 2019.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by signing below

Printed Name of
Participant _____

Date of consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix D: Research Study Flyer - Students

Walden University Doctoral Research Study Invitation**Seeking Indigenous Students to
Participate in a Research Study**

Seeking self-identified Indigenous students 18 years of age and older who have completed at least one semester of studies to volunteer to take part in a study of Persistence of Indigenous Students.

As a participant in this study you will be asked to meet with the researcher for a face-to-face interview to share your experience as a college student.

Participants will be asked to meet for 1 interview session, lasting approximately 1-1.5 hours and 1 follow up session after all data has been collected to verify accuracy of information.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card.

For more information about this study or to volunteer for this study please contact:

Michelle Sayers

Doctoral Student, Walden University

Michelle.Sayers@waldenu.edu or (705)206-4117

Appendix E: Research Study Flyer - Staff

Walden University Doctoral Research Study Invitation**Seeking Student Service Staff to
Participate in a Research Study**

Seeking student support staff who provide services to Indigenous students to take part in
a study of
Persistence of Indigenous Students.

As a participant in this study you will be asked to meet with the researcher for a face-to-
face interview to share your experience in providing supportive services to Indigenous
students.

Participants will be asked to meet for 1 interview session, lasting approximately 1-1.5
hours and 1 follow up session after all data has been collected to verify accuracy of
information.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card.

For more information about this study or to volunteer for this study please contact:

Michelle Sayers
Doctoral Student, Walden University
Michelle.Sayers@waldenu.edu

Appendix F: Interview Guide for Indigenous Students

Overarching Research Questions

RQ1: How do Indigenous students describe the experience of being minority students in a mainstream university setting?

SUB QUESTION 1: How are “connections to others”, holistic well-being,” and other Indigenous cultural elements experienced in attending university?

RQ2-Qualitative: What is the meaning of persistence to Indigenous university students attending a mainstream university?

SUB QUESTION 2: What Indigenous cultural strengths contribute to student persistence?

What has the student done while at the university to persist?

- Study/work
- Utilized tutor
- Accessed mentors
- Cultural services on campus
- Cultural services off campus
- Support from family
- Support from friends
-

What has the student successfully attained while at university attained

- Course knowledge
- Friendship
- Sense of belonging
- Personal growth
-

What cultural aspects does the student personally access?

- Elders
- Cultural teachings
- Ceremonies

How has the student been affected by cultural services on campus?

- Feelings about self
- Attitudes toward university completion
- Future aspirations
- Interpersonal skills
- Relationship with peers

- Relationship with faculty/staff
- Sense of belonging

What negative aspects/problems have the students experienced as a minority?

- Isolation from family and community
- Lack of sense of belonging
- Academic difficulties

Appendix G: Interview Questions – Indigenous Students

Overarching Research Questions

RQ1: How do Indigenous students describe the experience of being minority students in a mainstream university setting?

SUB QUESTION 1: How are “connections to others”, holistic well-being,” and other Indigenous cultural elements experienced in attending university?

RQ2-Qualitative: What is the meaning of persistence to Indigenous university students attending a mainstream university?

SUB QUESTION 2: What Indigenous cultural strengths contribute to student persistence?

Demographic Questions

- How old are you?
- What First Nation/Indigenous community do you identify with?
- What university program are you in?
- What year of study are you in?
- There are many terms for Indigenous people, which term do you identify with and prefer?

Cultural Identity/Connection Questions

- In regard to your cultural identity, how would you describe your connection to your culture?
- What cultural strategies do you identify with as you are in school?
- Does the university contribute to a sense of community for you, if so, how so?
- What are your thoughts about being a part of the university community?

University Service Questions

- What Indigenous services or supports you are aware of on campus?
 - What other support services are available to you on campus?
- In what ways does the university support your connection to your culture?
- In what ways has the university not supported your culture?
- If could make a recommendation to the university what would it be to improve the experiences of Indigenous students?

Persistence

- What things do you do to remain successful in school?
- What do you identify as strengths that you draw from your culture to persist (continue) in school?

School Culture

- What is your impression of the school efforts to meet the needs of Indigenous students?
- If I were an Indigenous student attending school here can you tell me what my experience may be like?
- As you walk through the campus hallways describe how the university demonstrates the inclusiveness of the Indigenous culture.
- If you have experienced anything uncomfortable or undesirable as a student what could the university provide that would enhance your experience as an Indigenous student?"
- Can you describe your experience as an Indigenous student in your program?
- Can you describe your experience as an Indigenous student in the university?

That covers my questions, is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix H: Interview Guide – University Staff

Overarching Research Questions

RQ1: How do Indigenous students describe the experience of being minority students in a mainstream college setting?

SUB QUESTION 1: How are “connections to others”, holistic well-being,” and other Indigenous cultural elements experienced in attending college?

RQ2-Qualitative: What is the meaning of persistence to Indigenous college students attending a mainstream college?

SUB QUESTION 2: What Indigenous cultural strengths contribute to student persistence?

What is your role/contact with Indigenous students?

- Faculty – part-time/regular
- Support staff – part-time /regular
- Counselor – part-time /regular
- Administration – part-time /regular

What is the awareness of staff in regard to the experience of Indigenous students?

- Cultural differences
- Racism/discrimination
- Sense of belonging/isolation
- Academic struggles/deficiencies
- Language differences

What is your knowledge of cultural supports for Indigenous students?

- On campus
- In the community

Appendix I: Interview Questions – University Staff

Overarching Research Questions

RQ1: How do Indigenous students describe the experience of being minority students in a mainstream college setting?

SUB QUESTION 1: How are “connections to others”, holistic well-being,” and other Indigenous cultural elements experienced in attending college?

RQ2-Qualitative: What is the meaning of persistence to Indigenous college students attending a mainstream college?

SUB QUESTION 2: What Indigenous cultural strengths contribute to student persistence?

Demographic Questions

- What is your role at the college?
- How long have you worked at the college?

College Service Questions

- What Indigenous services or supports you are aware of on campus?
- In what ways does the college support a connection to the Indigenous culture?
- What does your role play in developing supportive relationships with Indigenous students?
- In what ways can the college improve a stronger connection or relationship with Indigenous students?

Persistence

- What does persistence mean to you?
- As it relates to having a connection to culture, what are your thoughts on the role culture and persistence has for Indigenous students?

School Culture

- How would you describe the school culture as it relates to inclusivity for minority students, particular Indigenous students?
- What is your impression of the school efforts to meet the needs of Indigenous students?
- If you were an Indigenous student attending school here can you tell me what that experience may be like?
- As you walk through the campus hallways describe how the college demonstrates the inclusiveness of the Indigenous culture.

- Can you describe whether you are aware of any negative experiences as an Indigenous student at this college?

That covers my questions, is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix J: Protocol for Interviews

1. Equipment
 - a) Access to electrical outlet in the interview room.
 - b) Digital recorder.
 - c) External microphone.
 - d) Spare batteries for digital recorder.

2. Interview Room Set
 - a) Contact interview site staff for room availability and security for unlocking doors
 - b) Check room for noise distraction prior to each scheduled interview.
 - c) Test and prepare digital recorder.
 - d) Set up microphone closest to interviewee.
 - e) Set the room up with comfortable seating and a table for equipment.
 - f) Set up smudge bowl and sage for optional smudging for participants.
 - g) Prepare a bundle of tobacco to provide to each participant.

3. During the Interview
 - a) Begin each interview with an introduction with the date, time and name of interviewee and interviewer.
 - b) Complete a test run with interview and play back to ensure sound and clarity.
 - c) Ask each question in a clear voice and monitor pace of speech.
 - d) Ask the interviewee to speak louder or repeat if answer is not clearly heard.
 - e) Avoid rustling papers during the interview.
 - f) At the end of the interview indicate “this is the end of the interview with . . . “
 - g) Thank the interviewee for their time.

4. After the Interview
 - a) Listen to the recording to check for abnormalities in recording
 - b) Transfer each recording to a USB memory stick and save each file with the date and initials of interviewee
 - c) Keep USB memory sticks in a secure/locked container until transcribed

Appendix K: Letter to Local Tribes

August 21, 2018

Dear Chairperson and Board of Directors,

My name is Michelle Sayers. I am a member of a local First Nation and a current Ph.D. student with Walden University. I am currently working on gaining Institutional Review Board approval to conduct a study at the local University to interview Indigenous students. A part of this process is to inform and request permission from local tribal communities that may be impacted by this research.

I am writing to inform your Chairperson and Board that this research is being conducted and may include some of your members. My research topic is the persistence of Indigenous students at a mainstream university. The purpose of my study is to bring about awareness of the resolve of Indigenous students and to draw out how culture may contribute to that persistence.

My goal is not to reiterate negative experiences of Indigenous students, but rather to explore and highlight the resilience and richness of the Indigenous culture. The potential overall benefits of the study include a greater awareness of the experiences of Indigenous students at a predominantly White institution and identification of potential strategies to support the persistence of Indigenous university students. The benefits may include greater insight for peer and faculty relationships and that the collection of personal stories may inspire positive change on campus for Indigenous students and serve as role models for other Indigenous students.

I acknowledge that Indigenous peoples across North America have endured many injustices and that the research process historically has not been transparent and well intentioned for Indigenous people. As a member of a local First Nation and an ongoing student of non-Tribal schools I respect the importance of providing the Tribe this notification and to seek any approval the Tribe feels appropriate to include members from your community in my research study. The research will be taking place on the campus of the University. Upon completion of the final report of my research I will prepare a summary of results and share with the Tribe, participants, other students, interested community members and the university.

I am including my curriculum vitae, a research abstract, the informed consent form to be used with participants and the questions I will be asking Indigenous students. In order to complete the Institutional Review Board process and proceed with my research I require verification that the Tribe acknowledges this research and does not oppose.

If there is anything else that you require of me before I proceed with the research, please let me know. I look forward to hearing back in regard to my request. I am hoping to begin posting for students in early September and then interviewing by late September to early October before the student's schedules become too overwhelming with midterms or finals.

Respectfully,

Michelle Sayers