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Cherokee College Students' Experiences with Cultural Incongruence on Primarily Whitestreamed Campuses

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Cherokee College Students' Experiences with

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by

Matthew C. Rom

MEd, University of Central Oklahoma, 2015

BBA, University of Oklahoma, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

February 2019

Abstract

The persistence rates of Native American students in higher education are lower than other underrepresented groups. Research suggests that the discrepancy could result from factors outside of students' academic knowledge. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how Cherokee students perceive their tribal culture affects their ability to persist at institutions of higher education with a primarily Whitestreamed campus culture. Tharp's cultural compatibility theory and Astin's student involvement theory guided the development of the research questions. The research questions explored potential differences between Cherokee students' tribal culture and the culture these students percieve exists on their college campus, how those differences could influence their ability to persist, and the educational changes Cherokee students suggest are made to increase persistence rates. Interviews with 8 Cherokee students from 2 institutions in the Midwest region of the United States were analyzed using open coding. The resulting themes suggested that participants perceived cultural incongruence with the campus culture, which often led to feelings of isolation and a lower sense of belonging. Involvement in campus activities and groups and encouragement from family and community helped participants persist. Suggested changes to the learning environment included incorporating indigenous instructional methods, creating dedicated spaces for Cherokee students, and increasing mentor relationships. A positive social change implication of this study is the increased knowledge and understanding of the factors that may contribute to low persistence rates of Native American students.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my three children: Gordon Louis, Addison McKenzie, and Paxton Charles. May you always understand and appreciate the power of education and strive to exceed your own expectations. I only hope you will use the benefits of education to help others just as this study is intended to help Cherokee students. While completing my doctoral program was important, my legacy will always be the three of you!

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the importance of my family, specifically the selfless sacrifices of my bride, Sandie, whose efforts allowed me to complete my doctoral program. You watched our kids without complaint numerous times when I spent long nights and weekends focused on my academic work. Equally important was your ability to be a constant source of motivation and a sounding board when I doubted myself. Without your constant support I would not have achieved my goal. I would also like to thank Nick the Cat who was always by my side throughout the numerous hours spent writing this dissertation.

Educators have had a profound impact on my life. I hold my experiences in public school in high regard and believe a select few have helped shape my journey. I would like to acknowledge Mr. Tom Huff, Mr. Michael Bynum, Mr. Robert Franklin, Mr. Lloyd Snow, and Dr. Frank Cooper from the Sand Springs Public School District for their mentorship and guidance during my younger years. Each of these educators helped instill a strong foundation and desire to pursue academic achievement. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Myron Pope and Dr. Ed Cunliff for their encouragement to pursue my doctoral degree while also providing support throughout the process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Persistence rates of Native American students in U.S. 4-year colleges are lower than other populations, with less than half of Native American students earning a bachelor's degree 6 years after starting their academic program (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017; Strayhorn, Bie, Dorime-Williams, & Williams, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). However, while Native American students have lower persistence rates compared to many other college student populations, they possess similar academic competencies as other underrepresented groups, as measured by high school graduation rates and college entrance exams (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Lower rates of degree completion, despite similar academic competencies, may indicate persistence rates of Native American students are a result of multiple factors and not solely their academic knowledge upon entering higher education. Factors that have been explored and found to affect underrepresented student persistence rates include, but are not limited to, incongruent academic–social contexts (Wold, David, & Butler-Barnes, 2017), limited preparation for the rigors of higher education (Adelman, Taylor, & Nelson, 2013; Mosholder & Goslin, 2013), the absence of a sense of belonging (Booker, 2016; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012), low academic self-efficacy (Feldman & Kubota, 2014; Ryan, 2015), and the traditionally Whitestreamed design of educational structures (Fryberg, Covarrubias, & Burack, 2013; Wilcox, 2015). Educational structures with Whitestreamed designs impose "White history, mores, morals, language, customs, individualism, cultural capital, and other forces as the norm" (Urrieta, 2010, p. 47).

If higher education administrators were able to increase persistence rates of Native American students, they could benefit Native communities by increasing in the number of educated Native individuals who can go back to their communities and provide skills and services that might otherwise not be available from non-Native individuals (Brayboy, Solyom, & Castagno, 2015; Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Makomenaw, 2014; Waterman & Lindley, 2013). The positive social change implication of this study is the increased knowledge and understanding of the factors that contribute to low persistence rates of Native American students, specifically, to expand knowledge of how cultural difference may affect persistence rates among Cherokee students.

In the following chapter I provide an introduction to, and overview of, the study. Topics covered include the following: background information, the study's problem and purpose statement, research questions, an overview of the conceptual framework used to design the study, a discussion of the nature of the study, definitions, scope, limitations, assumptions, and significance of the study.

Background

Prior to the arrival of European settlers, Native American education focused on topics such as survival skills, social education, responsibility to the community, spirituality and the connection to nature, and vocational training such as tending to the home or hunting for the community as a whole (Reyhner, 2006). Reyhner (2006) noted that the responsibility of educating youth was the responsibility of family who relied primarily on stories and lived experiences. Since the arrival of European immigrants in

the 1600s, Native Americans have faced changes to their way of life and the threat of forced assimilation (Calloway, 2006). A primary method of assimilation was through the formal education of Native Americans, which suppressed traditional Native culture and languages in favor of European customs and the use of English as a primary language (Brayboy & Lomawaima, 2018; Reyhner & Eder, 2017; Torres, 2017; Urrieta, 2016). Groups of Native Americans resisted European education; those attending typically did so because of legal requirements, which resulted in tense relations between Native Americans and European settlers (Reyhner & Eder, 2017). The practice of diminishing Native culture and customs did not result in favorable outcomes for Native American students (Demmert & Towner, 2003). Reyhner and Eder (2017) noted that Native Americans exposed to educational environments taught exclusively in the English language often experienced a sense of cultural disintegration whereby they did not assimilate into the European culture yet were unable to return to Native customs. The result was feelings of isolation.

Members of the Cherokee Nation experienced many of the same hardships as other tribes struggling with the social and demographic changes brought by European settlers (Peter, 2007). Although Cherokees developed tribal schools to educate their youth, efforts by European settlers to educate Cherokees in the ways of a Christian life continued into the early 1800s, including the establishment of missionary school systems whose mission was to domesticate the Tribal Nation (Dupree, 1976; Moulder, 2011). Cherokee education remained strong despite the existence of missionary schools. The Cherokee Nation was considered one of the most literate Native groups within the Indian

Territory, having books and newspapers published in their native language (Oppelt, 1990). Dupree (1976) noted that 11 missionary schools operated in the Cherokee Nation by 1831, but formal education of all types stopped in 1838 after the Cherokees' removal from their native lands by the U.S. government.

Members of the Cherokee Nation who moved to what is now Oklahoma established 10 Native schools in an attempt to reestablish their traditional indigenous education system (Oppelt, 1990). However, while providing culturally based education was important, tribal leaders recognized the benefit of understanding the customs of Whites and established two seminary secondary schools, one male and one female, which provided Native children with a more Whitestreamed education (McClellan, Fox, & Lowe, 2005). The goal of the new schools was to provide a learning environment where students could learn about European values without having to give up their tribal culture. The leaders anticipated that those attending the seminary schools would teach the more conservative Cherokees who were not interested in learning European values. The seminaries created conflict within the tribe (Mihesuah, 1991). Mihesuah (1991) noted that tribal control over education ended when Oklahoma obtained statehood in 1907, resulting in students returning to public schools where they were expected to set their tribal culture aside and learn within a Whitestreamed system. While the Cherokee Nation developed secondary education systems, they never developed a dedicated tribal college. However, many Cherokee students attend college on the campus of Northeastern State University which sits on the site of one of the original Cherokee seminary schools and

offers degree programs in Cherokee studies and indigenous studies (Northeastern State University, 2016).

Low persistence rates among Native American students currently attending primarily Whitestreamed colleges and universities may be a result of the same suppression of tribal identity experienced by Native Americans during the early periods of European colonization, with educational structures that minimize or omit Native culture and customs as well as with educators who do not possess the cultural knowledge necessary to teach Native American students effectively (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Stein, 1992; Strayhorn, 2012). Larimore and McClellan (2005) discussed the importance of educational structures being congruent with Native American culture, noting that the educational environment may serve as a substantial factor in persistence ability among Native American students, even for those with strong academic abilities when entering higher education (Grebennikov & Shah, 2012; Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2014; Marsh, 2014; Wells & Horn, 2015).

In response to consistent low persistence rates, the establishment of higher education institutions in the 1960s exclusively for Native Americans has provided an educational environment designed around Native culture and customs (Reyhner & Eder, 2017). Tribal colleges provide opportunities for Native American students who would not otherwise attend college, while also providing a second chance for students who did not succeed in mainstream institutions (Makomenaw, 2012: Reyhner & Eder, 2017). DeLong, Monette, and Ozaki (2016) noted that Native American students who attend tribal colleges typically have greater graduation rates: approximately 90% of students

earn an associate's degree whereas the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017) reported first-year persistence rates at mainstream institutions at approximately 77% for Native American students entering higher education in Fall 2015. While students attending tribal colleges may experience greater educational outcomes, Delong et al. (2016) noted that those who transfer from a tribal to a mainstream institution have difficulties completing their academic program. The findings of Delong et al. (2016) lend support to the assumption that educational environment may influence whether Native American students persist.

An examination of empirical literature related to persistence issues of Native American students in mainstream higher education provided few articles devoted to Native Americans as the primary sample under investigation; those studies examined the population as a homogeneous unit and did not account for cultural differences among tribal nations and for students who might come from similar tribal backgrounds but grew up in different environments. For instance, the approximately one-third of Native American students who reside on formal reservations or tribally owned land may have different cultural experiences compared to those residing on nontribal land (Wolf, Butler-Barnes, & Van Zile-Tamsen, 2017). The lack of discoverable literature suggests a gap in studies that examine persistence issues among Native American students as members of specific tribal nations.

This study was designed to develop a more detailed understanding of why Native American students have issues persisting in their academic programs at mainstream universities. The intricacies of culture within different tribal nations may limit the ability

to use generalized understandings of persistence issues among Native Americans as a whole. Developing an understanding of Cherokee students' perceptions of their cultural conflicts and educational needs may provide improvements in persistence rates and provide insight into the needs of other tribal nations.

Problem Statement

Persistence rates of Native American students are lower than those of other student populations, with less than 50% earning a bachelor's degree within 6 years of enrollment (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017; Patterson, Waya, Ahuna, Tinnesz, & Vanzile-Tamsen, 2014; Wolf et al., 2017). Despite higher rates of attrition, Native American students may possess academic competencies that are similar to other underrepresented students (Mosholder & Goslin, 2013) and the differences in persistence rates may result from factors other than academic preparation. Several authors have examined the relationship between discrepancies among Native American and institutional culture and academic outcomes, including Bingham, Adolpho, Jackson, & Alexitch (2014), Fryberg et al. (2013), Keith, Stastny, and Brunt (2016), Larimore and McClellan (2005), Moore and Slate (2010), and Thompson, Johnson-Jennings, and Nitzarim, (2013). Incongruence between Native American students and institutional cultures may lead to higher rates of attrition due to feelings of isolation, a sense of alienation, unclear expectations, limited access to faculty, and incongruent learning methods (Bingham et al., 2014; Charbonneau-Dahlen, 2015; Grebennikov & Shah, 2012; Smith, Cech, Metz, Huntoon, & Moyer, 2014).

    Prior studies have traditionally treated Native American students as a homogeneous group when examining persistence rates. This limits the implications from the studies as differences in tribal cultures may affect Native American students' ability to persist within their academic programs (Preston & Claypool, 2013). However, several authors have stressed the importance of focusing on culture at the tribal level because each tribal nation's unique characteristics can affect how students learn and how they interact with their educational environment (Gonzalez, 2011; Smith et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2013). In response, Moore (2016) conducted a qualitative study to determine how Native American students' tribal affiliation may influence academic success in higher education. Using a sample of 10 students from the Sioux Nation attending a tribal community college in South Dakota, Moore found students who perceived that the culture on campus was congruent with their tribal culture believed they could obtain greater academic success than those who did not perceive a positive relationship with their campus culture. In Moore's findings, students' tribal cultural identity was congruent with the tribal-based culture found on the campus of the tribal community college, leading to greater educational outcomes that were consistent with results found by Huffman (2011) and Makomenaw (2014). Moore (2016) stated that future research should examine the influence of culture on academic outcomes for Native American students from different tribal nations. Moore also noted that, while the need to examine the success of students from different tribal affiliations exists, future studies should also focus on mainstream institutions to explore the impacts of nontribal institutions on Native American student outcomes. Accordingly, this study explored how

Cherokee students perceive their cultural identity influencing their ability to persist within their academic programs at a mainstream institution of higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Cherokee students perceive the way their tribal culture affects their ability to persist within an academic program at mainstream institutions of higher education within primarily Whitestreamed campus cultures. The study focused on students with formal Cherokee tribal membership. Authors of the empirical studies reviewed for this study typically categorized Native Americans as a homogeneous group when exploring persistence issues, thus ignoring the unique cultural attributes found in different tribal nations. Semistructured interview questions were used to improve the understanding of how culture may relate to persistence levels of Cherokee students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed through this qualitative study:

RQ1: What differences, if any, do Cherokee students perceive between their tribal culture and the culture found at a predominately White institution of higher education in the United States Midwest?

RQ2: How do Cherokee students perceive these differences influence their ability to persist in college?

RQ3: What changes to their educational program do Cherokee students perceive would increase their own and other Cherokee students' persistence in college?

Conceptual Framework

The study used a conceptual framework that combined Tharp's (1989) cultural compatibility theory and Astin's (1984) student involvement theory. They are complementary with each examining the relationship between persistence and students' interaction with their educational environment through different lenses. In the following two sections I provide background on the major theoretical propositions of both theories. A more detailed description is provided in Chapter 2.

Cultural Compatibility Theory

The fundamental tenet of the Tharp's (1989) cultural compatibility theory is the improvement of learning outcomes when instructional methods are congruent with a student's natal-culture background. Tharp noted that cultural mismatches occur when students' home cultures do not align with the culture found on campuses. These mismatches increase the chances of students having difficulty succeeding in their academic programs (Jahng, 2014). Cultural mismatches may lead to instances where teachers do not have an adequate frame of reference through which to understand the behaviors of students and their educational preferences that are important for academic achievement (Hillard, 1989). Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier, and Pearce (2012) noted that it is the institutions' responsibility to find ways to increase the compatibility between student and institutional cultures to achieve greater learning prospects. The inclusion of Tharp's (1989) cultural compatibility theory provided a mechanism with which to study and to understand how Cherokee students perceive how the positive and negative attributes of incongruences in their home and institutional culture affect their academic achievement.

Student Involvement Theory

The fundamental tenet of Astin's (1984) student involvement theory is the relationship between students and their interactions with the campus environment. Specifically, students with higher rates of involvement typically persist in higher numbers compared to those who are not involved. Scholars have relied on the work of Tinto (1975, 1988) when examining persistence rates of students in higher education. While Tinto's work remains relevant, several authors (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Metz, 2004; Rovai, 2003; Tachine, Cabrera, & Yellow Bird, 2016) have been critical of his theories because they are not generalizable to diverse student populations, thus minimizing the effects of culture. Minimizing the effects of culture may limit the theory's relationship between student engagement and Native American persistence rates. Recognizing the unique needs of diverse students, Astin (1984) proposed a student development theory that emphasized the interaction of factors, such as students' backgrounds and educational environments, as a predictor of student outcomes. Astin postulated that these factors interact with one another and influence students' abilities to persist. The inclusion of Astin's theory in this study provided a lens through which to study and understand how individual characteristics of diverse students impact their ability to persist within academic programs. Specifically, Astin's theory provided a framework to examine how cultural incongruence may limit opportunities for Native American engagement within their educational environment.

Nature of the Study

The study used a basic qualitative design to explore perceived cultural incongruences of Cherokee undergraduate students who had completed at least 1 year of academic work on their current campus. Basic qualitative designs seek to understand how individuals interpret and make meaning of their experiences and provide a mechanism to gain insight into their experiences (Merriam, 2002; Merrian & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam (2009) described studies using basic qualitative designs as placing focus on "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). Such studies seek rich and detailed descriptions of the investigated phenomenon (Kahlke, 2014); they are typically inductive, use open coding and multiple categories to create a thematic analysis (Lim, 2011).

The phenomena investigated in this study were the potential differences between home and institutional culture perceived by Cherokee students and how these perceived differences, if any, could affect their ability to persist within higher education. The study utilized in-depth, semistructured interviews to gain insight into the cultural experiences of Cherokee students. Qualitative interviews allowed for the exploration of experiences of others from their perspectives and helped provide a level of understanding not possible through the researcher's own experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participants were required to have completed a minimum of 1 year of residency on their current campus to afford the opportunity to experience fully any differences in personal and institutional culture. Data collection incorporated indigenous methodologies, including encouraging

the use of storytelling, as participants described the interactions with their institutional culture (Tachine et al., 2017). Data analysis used open coding and thematic analysis to determine themes from participants' responses.

Definitions

The following terms used throughout the study may have subjective definitions. In an effort to avoid misunderstandings of the intended purpose of the terms, the following definitions are provided:

Cherokee Nation: Group of indigenous peoples forced to relocate by the U.S. federal government between 1836 and 1839 from their tribal lands in Texas, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee. The Cherokee Nation split into two groups after their forced removal with one group settling in North Carolina and the other group in Oklahoma.

Communal goals/orientation: Goals and worldviews directly related to giving back to one's tribal community (Smith et al., 2014)

Culture: Singer, Dressler, and George (2016), stated culture is an *"*Internalized and shared schema or framework that is used by group (or subgroup) members as a refracted lens to 'see' reality, and in which both the individual and the collective experience the world" (p. 6). Specifically, the "interplay between experiential learning, connection to the spirit world through interaction with others, and a field-dependent cognitive orientation highlights the interconnected, subjective mindset of Native American cultures" (Hain-Jamall, 2013, p. 16).

Native American: The U. S. Census Bureau (2012) defined a Native American as a "person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment" (p. 2).

Persistence: Persistence is the process of continuing toward a particular goal, in the case of this study, remaining in school with the goal of obtaining a bachelor's degree. Hagedorn (2005) noted a distinction between persistence and retention with retention being an institutional measurement of continued student enrollment whereas persistence is a measurement of students' own ability to remain within their academic program.

Reservation: An area of land held in trust by the U. S. federal government as outlined by treaties between the government and tribal nations subject to federal laws and regulations but typically exempt from state regulations (Guarino, 2016).

Whitestreamed: Urrieta (2010) described a Whitestreamed culture as one which "imposes White history, mores, morals, language, customs, individualism, cultural capital, and other forces as the norm or standard U.S. in society" (p. 47).

Assumptions

I made the following assumptions during the development of the study:

- Cherokee students participating in the study had a sincere interest in participating and were willing to openly share how cultural incongruence affected their experiences in higher education.

- Cherokee students have similar tribal backgrounds and experiences.

- Data obtained and analyzed through the study revealed how incongruences between home and institutional culture affect persistence rates of Cherokee students as well as provided insight into how Cherokee students would modify their educational structures to support academic achievement better.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this basic qualitative study focused on two coeducational public universities, South Central University (SCU), a doctoral-granting university and South Central State University (SCSU), a master's level university (pseudonyms used to maintain confidentiality). Both institutions are in the Midwest region of the United States with student populations originating primarily from the same geographic area. Native American students comprise approximately 5% of the student population on both campuses. The institutions do not provide Native American student demographics by tribal affiliation; however, Cherokees represent a large percentage of Native Americans in the region. The chosen institutions stress cultural understanding and engagement while emphasizing the need for students to become global citizens. Accordingly, the schools strive to promote collaboration between students from different backgrounds as a way of building an inclusive environment.

The study examined Cherokee students' perceptions of how their tribal culture may differ from the institutional culture found on their respective campuses and how the differences, if any, may impact their ability to persist. The study focused on the students' perceptions of how cultural incongruences may impact their ability to persist, but did not explore what skills students need to develop to increase persistence rates. The

responsibility of increasing persistence rates was placed on institutional factors and possible modifications to campus culture before students would be expected to modify their culture or behaviors.

The sample for the study consisted of Native American undergraduate students who hold formal Cherokee tribal membership. While students who self-identify as Cherokee may maintain similar cultural customs and traditions as those with formal citizenship (Akee, Stockly, Darity, Hamilton, & Ong, 2017), they were not included in the study sample. The definition of what constituted formal tribal citizenship was determined by each of the three federally recognized Cherokee tribes. Transferability of results to other tribal nations may be limited due to the unique cultural traditions held by each group.

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Limitations

</div>

One limitation to the findings of this study was the decision to limit participants to two higher education institutions in a small geographic region, specifically, institutions that emphasize cultural engagement as part of the overall first-year student program. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) noted that study location may affect a study's results. The cultural environment on the two campuses chosen for the study may have been more accepting of different cultural backgrounds, which, in turn, may have led to minimization of the effects of cultural incongruence. Recruiting Cherokee students from multiple institutions in different regions or selecting institutions that do not place such a significant focus on global and cultural competencies may have provided a better representation of the possible challenges facing Cherokee students.

The exclusion of Native American students who did not persist also served as a limitation of the study. Students who opted to leave school before finishing their academic program may have had negative experiences of such magnitude they could not remain within the educational environment. Excluding these students could have limited the opportunity to gain insight into how incongruence in tribal and institutional culture affects academic outcomes. Students remaining on campus may either have experienced minimal cultural incongruence or developed methods to reconcile such incongruencies and thus allowing them to persist.

A final limitation of the study was the possible bias of the researcher. Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2003) noted that the researcher can serve as a significant threat to the trustworthiness of a study if her or his bias is not addressed. While of Cherokee heritage, my primary cultural identification and practices follow traditionally Whitestreamed values. The presence of this bias could have led to inaccurate presumptions when listening to participants detail their experiences. Potential bias was limited using reflective journaling to document thoughts and feelings throughout the study. Ortlipp (2008) described reflective journals as a way to move the focus of limiting researcher bias away from controlling the researcher and more towards developing a method to consciously acknowledge the thoughts and values of the researcher through formal reflexivity in an attempt to understand how bias may impact a study. The journal maintained throughout the study helped identify when a perceived outcome of the study was potentially based on bias and not on participants' intentions. An additional way to

limit bias and to ensure that themes reflect the intentions of participants used in the study was to allow participants to view the final analysis (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Significance of the Study

In this study I provided information on the educational experiences and needs of Cherokee students enrolled in institutions of higher education with institutional cultures that may be incongruent to their own. The information obtained from the study could be useful in determining whether the cultural characteristics of Cherokee students require different learning environments for persistence compared to other student populations. Developing a better understanding of the needs of Cherokee students could lead to intervention programs that target these students' unique educational needs. These types of programs may be especially beneficial in areas where Cherokee students make up a large part of the student demographics on a campus.

Overall, the study has the implications for social change through the possible development of better persistence programs aimed at creating an educational environment where Cherokee students can complete their academic program. Mosholder and Goslin (2013) discussed how culturally relevant, noncognitive factors impact the persistence possibilities of Native American students, noting that many have similar academic competencies as other underrepresented groups when entering higher education. Creating a more culturally compatible environment for Cherokee students increases their opportunity for academic achievement while also creating a more diverse environment on campus through the increase of differing backgrounds and experiences (Morrison & Grbic, 2015).

Summary

Persistence rates of Native American students are lower than those of other student populations. Previous research has traditionally treated Native American students as a homogeneous group when exploring persistence rates. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Cherokee students perceive their tribal culture affects their ability to persist within their academic program at mainstream institutions of higher education with primarily Whitestreamed campus cultures. In the study, I ask if Cherokee students perceived differences between their tribal culture and the culture found on their campus. If differences exist, how did the differences influence their ability to persist? Finally, the study asked what changes Cherokee students would make to their learning environment to increase their own and other Cherokee students' persistence rates.

Tharp's (1989) cultural compatibility theory and Astin's (1984) student involvement theory comprised the study's conceptual framework which used a basic qualitative design to explore the perceived cultural incongruences of Cherokee undergraduate students who completed a minimum of one year on their campus. The study assumed participants had (a) a sincere interest in participating and were willing to share their experiences openly, (b) that Cherokee students have similar tribal backgrounds and experiences, (c) and that the data obtained and analyzed through the study would reveal how incongruences between home and institutional culture affect persistence rates of Cherokee students while also providing insights into how educators can modify learning environments to increase persistence rates.

A positive social change implication of this study is the increased knowledge and understanding of the factors that may contribute to low persistence rates of Native American students. The result of the study may lead to the development of better persistence programs aimed at creating an educational environment where Cherokee students can complete their academic program. The focus of the study is on how the institution can better meet the needs of Cherokee students and not how Cherokee students should modify their behaviors to more closely model the Whitestreamed culture found on campus.

In Chapter 2, I provide a detailed overview of the empirical literature related to persistence issues of Native American and underrepresented students and an examination of the conceptual framework that guided the development of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Persistence rates of Native American students in higher education are typically lower than other student populations, with approximately three out of every four students failing to complete his or her undergraduate academic program (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, Patterson et al., 2014; Wolf et al., 2017). While Native American students have greater difficulty persisting, many possess academic competencies that are comparable to other college students' competencies (Mosholder & Goslin, 2013). Lower rates of persistence, despite similar academic competencies, may indicate that factors outside of academic ability affect whether Native American students persist in higher education. The purpose of this study was to improve understanding about (a) how Cherokee students perceive differences between their tribal cultural identity and the Whitestreamed culture found on many college campuses, (b) how potential differences may impact their ability to persist, and (c) what modifications Cherokee students would make to their campus educational structure to better support their academic needs.

Several authors have examined the persistence issues of Native American students. These authors noted that the population may be underprepared for the academic rigors expected by universities and that it might also have difficulty finding academic success in cultural environments different from their own (Means & Pyne, 2016; Meyer, Spencer, & French, 2009; Thompson et al., 2013). Native American students may also have difficulty persisting due to a lack of exposure to skills necessary to succeed in higher education, limited access to faculty and mentors, feelings of isolation and

alienation, unclear expectations, and incongruent learning methods (Bingham et al., 2014; Charbonneau-Dahlen, 2015; Grebennikov & Shah, 2012; Liu, 2014; Smith et al., 2014).

In the subsequent literature review, I examine the empirical literature on the academic persistence of students in higher education. A synopsis of search strategies used in the development of the literature review is followed by an overview of the conceptual framework used in the development of the study and of the analysis of the collected data. Topics related to persistence examined in the empirical literature review include sense of belonging, academic self-efficacy, and the role of educational structures in persistence rates of students. In this literature review, I examine empirical literature exploring the factors that both positively and negatively impact persistence rates among Native American students.

Literature Search Strategy

Several databases were used to locate empirical literature for this study, including Academic Search Complete, PsycINFO, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), EBSCO, Pro Quest, Education Source, Taylor & Francis, and Sage Premier. Additionally, Google Scholar was used to perform broad searches. Keywords used to find literature included *Native American, higher education, college, university, persistence, diversity, academic achievement, underrepresented students, school holding power, culture, cultural incongruence, involvement, integration, sovereignty, retention, relationships with faculty, tribal, identity, indigenous people, prejudice, discrimination, individualistic versus communal viewpoints, family dynamics, family support, financial aid, academic self-efficacy, graduation, academic preparation, isolation,* and *sense of*

belonging. The literature search produced current literature related to factors that impact the academic persistence of Native American students in higher education.

Empirical literature focusing specifically on Native American students as a population was limited based on the search criteria used for this study. A broader search strategy was used to overcome the limited research availability including placing focus on minority and underrepresented populations such as African American, Hispanic, and Latino students. The decision to include these populations occurred after noticing their inclusion in the literature reviews or within study samples in many of the articles examining Native American persistence issues reviewed during the literature search. It became apparent these populations struggle with many of the same barriers to persistence and their inclusion within this literature review provided beneficial content for developing an understanding of factors impacting Native American student persistence.

Several factors affecting persistence of underrepresented students in higher education emerged during the literature search process including cultural incongruence, financial issues, feelings of isolation, academic self-efficacy, sense of belonging, prejudice and discrimination, inadequate academic preparation, relationships with faculty, and educational structures found on campus. A common theme among the reviewed literature is the potential interaction of these factors with one another to affect whether a student will complete their academic program. Exploration of these factors in greater detail occurs in subsequent sections of this literature review.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study combined two theories, specifically Tharp's (1989) cultural compatibility theory used to frame the impacts of culturally incongruent learning environments, and Astin's (1984) student involvement theory used as a lens in which to view the relationship between student engagement and academic persistence. The two theories are discussed in the next section.

Cultural Compatibility Theory

Tharp (1989) noted that differences in the level of achievement of students from differing cultures exist because of dissimilar experiences within their academic setting. Specifically, Tharp found achievement levels of Native American students were lower than students from the dominant culture on campuses of predominately White institutions of higher education. The fundamental tenet of the Tharp's cultural compatibility theory is the improvement of learning outcomes when instructional methods are congruent with a student's natal-culture background (p. 350). Instances of cultural incongruence may result in students being "disinterested, unmotivated, and defiant or resistant," resulting in substandard academic performance (Yamauchi, 1998, p. 190). Yamauchi (1998) noted that the cultural compatibility theory focuses on differences in cultures instead of cultural deficits placing emphasis on the development of learning environments better able to meet the cultural needs of students.

Several studies have used the cultural compatibility theory when studying academic achievement of students from non-dominant cultures. Reese, Jensen, and Ramirez (2014) and Reyes, Elias, Parker, and Rosenblatt (2013) noted disconnects

between Latino students and their academic program when students perceived their

school did not place value on their cultural values. Wyatt (2014) examined adjusting

curriculums to include culturally relevant pedagogies and the impacts such changes had

on culturally diverse students. Finally, Yamauchi and Tharp (1995) examined the impact

of cultural incongruence on Native American students. These studies are a small sample

of literature using the cultural compatibility theory as a guiding framework.

Student Involvement Theory

Astin (1984) focused on the relationship between integration into the campus

culture and persistence rates. The tendency exists to rely on the work of Tinto (1975,

1988) when examining student persistence. However, as Bean and Metzner (1985), Metz

(2004), and Rovai (2003) noted, Tinto's theories are not generalizable to diverse students

and are structured toward those who fit within the traditional culture found on campus.

Conversely, Astin (1984) incorporated factors such as a student's background and

experiences, influences of their environment, and student outcomes including knowledge,

attitudes, and beliefs developed during their academic program. Astin's belief was these

areas interact with one another and influence a student's ability to persist. The inclusion

of Astin's theory within this study served as a mechanism in which to study and

understand how individualistic characteristics of diverse students impact their ability to

persist within academic programs. Specifically, how cultural incongruence may limit

opportunities for Native American students to become involved on campus if they believe

they do not belong.

Review of Empirical Literature

In the following section I provide a review of empirical literature related to persistence among students in higher education. Topics include students' sense of belonging, perceptions of academic self-efficacy, congruence with educational structures, and other factors affecting their ability to persist within their academic program. The topics have the potential to positively and negatively affect persistence rates among college students.

Sense of Belonging

Developing a sense of belonging may be an important aspect of completing one's academic program. Morrow and Ackermann (2012) conducted a quantitative study using an online survey to determine if a relationship existed between students' perceived sense of belonging and their intent to persist. A total of 960 students were invited to participate of which 156 completed the survey. Morrow and Ackermann found a significant relationship between perceived sense of belonging and intentions to persist among students. Morrow and Ackermann also noted the importance of relationships between students and faculty as well as peer support as necessary to the development of a strong sense of belonging. The importance of developing relationships with faculty and peer groups was also found in the qualitative study conducted by Booker (2016). Booker interviewed six African American female students to explore their perceptions about their learning environment and sense of belonging. Participants noted the importance of sharing their experiences with others, especially when feeling excluded from the learning

environment. Booker noted such feelings of exclusion might negatively affect students, including preventing them from degree obtainment.

The cultural background of students may also impact whether they perceive a sense of belonging. Johnson et al. (2007) conducted a quantitative study using survey results from 2,967 diverse first-year students at several universities. Participant included Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, African American, Native American, and White/Caucasian students. Johnson et al. found students from underrepresented groups reported a lower sense of belonging compared to White/Caucasian students. Participants perceived their greatest increases in overall sense of belonging occurred within the residence halls. Johnson et al. noted that residence halls provide an environment where students can interact with others with similar backgrounds and form beneficial support networks. Findings of Museus, Yi, and Saelua (2017) do not support the importance of interacting with students with similar backgrounds as noted by Johnson et al. (2007). Museus et al. (2017) surveyed 499 diverse students to gain a better understanding of the relationship between campus environments and students' sense of belonging. Museus et al. found underrepresented students did not perceive associations with other groups with similar backgrounds or cultural issues as a significant factor in increasing their sense of belonging. However, the findings of one study may not diminish the perceived importance of developing support networks with others who share similar academic issues as a way of increasing a sense of belonging.

Congruity between student and campus culture may also affect a student's sense of belonging. In a quantitative study with 116 diverse participants, Wells and Horn

(2015) found cultural congruity was significantly related to a student's sense of belonging. Students who perceived a positive relationship between themselves and the campus felt a stronger sense of belonging. Wells and Horn noted that a relationship exists between students' perception of campus climate, their perception of tribal and institutional cultural congruity, and the overall sense of belonging on campus. Wells and Horn further noted that a strong sense of belonging originates with a student's positive outlook on the campus environment with those who develop negative feelings potentially having a difficult time finding academic success. Focusing on the effects of cultural discontinuity on students' sense of belonging, Wilson et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study to determine the relationship between students with cultures emphasizing strong family ties and students' development of a sense of belonging on campus. The dominant culture on Whitestreamed campuses typically favors a sense of individualism which may conflict with strong familial ties. Wilson et al. found students reporting strong familial ties described difficulties connecting with the campus environment. The difficulties of connecting with the campus environment often led to perceived feelings of isolation and an overall reduction in their sense of belonging.

Developing a sense of belonging includes learning, understanding, and adopting the norms of campus culture (O'Keeffe, 2013). However, as Wells and Horn (2015) noted, students interact with and understand campus culture in different ways based on their backgrounds resulting in differences in their processes of developing a sense of belonging. Vaccaro and Newman (2016) conducted a constructionist grounded theory study with 51 first-year college students to explore how students defined and developed a

sense of belonging. Vaccaro and Newman focused on students who were considered privileged and represented the dominant culture on campus and those who were minoritized. Three underlying themes shaped a student's sense of belonging: environmental perceptions, involvement, and relationships (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Vaccaro and Newman found both minoritized and privileged students noted being comfortable within the campus environment as well as fitting in were important factors related to a sense of belonging. However, minority students also perceived a sense of safety and respect from others as necessary components to developing a sense of belonging on campus. Vaccaro and Newman noted that the use of a single definition of what constitutes a sense of belonging among diverse populations might be ineffective due to the different factors identified by students as contributing to their overall sense of belonging in higher education.

Academic Self-Efficacy

Academic self-efficacy is defined as an individual's personal belief of how well they will accomplish a task, in this case, their perceived ability to thrive in an educational setting (Bandura, 1982). Students' perceived level of academic self-efficacy may affect educational outcomes. Feldman and Kubota (2014) conducted a qualitative study with a cross-sectional sample of 89 participants using the Hope Scale, Domain Specific Hope Scale, General Self-Efficacy Scale, and Academic Self-Efficacy Scale to determine if students with higher levels of perceived academic self-efficacy had higher grade point averages compared to students who reported lower levels of perceived academic self-efficacy. Participants originated from a private university in Northern California and were

approximately 60% Caucasian. Feldman and Kubota found academic self-efficacy

generally predicted grade point average with students who perceived greater levels of

academic self-efficacy reporting greater grade point averages. Feldman and Kubota noted

that a positive relationship may exist between self-efficacy and academic performance. A

limitation of Feldman and Kubota's study may reside in the factors outside of academic

self-efficacy potentially impacting academic performance over the academic careers of

students.

The benefits associated with high levels of academic self-efficacy may not be

limited to academic performance. Tate et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study to

investigate the influence of academic self-efficacy on underrepresented, first-generation,

low-income (UFGLI) students' decisions to pursue graduate level education. Participants

included 175 students, many who were first-generation students from underrepresented

populations, who completed a survey based on the Graduate Education Self-Efficacy

Scale, Family Influence Scale, and Perception of Barriers Scale. Participants were 37.4%

Caucasian, 27.7% African American, and 24.4% from various underrepresented

populations with the remaining electing not to select a race. Tate et al. found

undergraduate students' desire to participate in graduate-level education were higher for

those with higher perceived academic self-efficacy. Results from the study may indicate a

greater desire to enroll in continuing education occurs as a result of students' perceived

ability for academic success. A limitation of the study was the method of data collection.

Students completed a single study outlining their educational aspirations and perceived

academic self-efficacy. Although students who perceived lower levels of academic self-

efficacy did not express a desire to obtain advanced degrees, the reasons for their decision may be a result of factors outside self-efficacy such as financial constraints or the lack of need for an advanced degree in their chosen career path.

While Tate et al. focused on decisions to enroll in graduate school, correlations might also be able to be drawn to decisions to remain within a student's current academic program. Students who feel they cannot succeed in their current program may choose to leave before program completion. Ryan (2015) found similar results when examining the relationship between Hispanic students' college expectations and subsequent enrollment in 4 year degree granting institutions using data gathered from approximately 1,000 Hispanic students who completed the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002. Students who expected to attend college and believed they had the necessary skills to succeed were enrolled in higher education 2 years after secondary school in higher numbers compared to those who did not perceive the ability to succeed in school.

Students' perception of their academic self-efficacy may be affected by multiple factors such as campus climate, teaching methodologies, and support programs. Examining the role of campus climate on self-efficacy, Høigaard, Kovač, Øverby, and Haugen (2015) conducted a quantitative study to determine if a relationship existed between school psychological climate, perceived academic self-efficacy, and academic achievement. Participants included a convenience sample of 475 Norwegian students enrolled in the ninth and tenth grade at four different secondary schools from differing municipalities. Participants completed a questionnaire developed using the School Goal Scale and Academic Self-Efficacy Scale. Høigaard et al. found a student's perceived

level of academic self-efficacy to be a strong predictor of academic achievement but was also affected by the psychological climate on campus. Specifically, students who perceived the school psychological climate to be more task-based exhibited higher levels of academic self-efficacy and increased academic achievement (higher grades) whereas students who perceived the psychological climate to be ability oriented displayed lower levels of academic self-efficacy and lower academic achievement (Høigaard et al., 2015, p. 7). Results of Høigaard et al. are consistent with those of quantitative studies conducted by Alt (2015) and Othman and Leng (2011) who also noted effects of the task-based campus environment on academic self-efficacy and the subsequent relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement.

Additional components of the campus environment studied by Ballen, Wieman, Salehi, Searle, and Zamudio (2017) and Pugh Jr. and Tschannen-Moran (2016) are teaching methods used by instructors and support programs offered to students. Teaching methods and academic support programs may impact students' perceived levels of academic self-efficacy. Ballen et al. (2017) conducted a quantitative study to determine the effect of incorporating active learning environments on students' perceived sense of self-efficacy. The sample included more than 250 students taking an introductory evolutionary biology and biodiversity course at Cornell with data analysis using univariate general linear models with model significance determined by Akaike's information criterion. Participants were 35.9% White, 34.9% Asian American, and 21.4% representing a combination of other underrepresented student populations in Year 1 and 38.2%, 28.1%, and 25.4% respectively in Year 2. Data for the study included course

grades, pre-post knowledge assessment instruments, and surveys to gauge students' perceived academic self-efficacy. Students in year one experienced a traditional lecture classroom environment with students taking the course in year two having exposure to an active classroom learning environment. Ballen et al. found perceived self-efficacy among both White and underrepresented students increased between year one and two while increases in academic performance were limited to underrepresented populations. Ballen et al. noted that the increase in academic performance experienced by underrepresented students might be a result of lower initial levels of academic self-efficacy traditionally found in the population. While both groups gained confidence in their academic abilities, underrepresented students benefited the most from the change in instructional methods.

Student support programs such as preparation programs may also increase students' perceived levels of academic self-efficacy. Pugh Jr. and Tschannen-Moran (2016) conducted a quantitative study to determine the effect of the advancement via individual determination (AVID) program conducted in one Florida based school district on students' self-efficacy. The goal of the AVID program is to provide students with skills necessary for success in higher education. Participants for the study included 573 students from eight middle and high schools offering the AVID program. Approximately 55% of participants belong to populations typically underrepresented in higher education. Pugh Jr. and Tschannen-Moran found a positive correlation between participation in the AVID program and students' self-efficacy noting as students gained skills necessary to succeed in higher education their perceived ability to succeed increased. As noted by

Feldman and Kubota (2014), perceiving one's ability to succeed is an important factor in academic performance and ultimately students' decisions to persist.

Educational Structures

The structure of learning environments may impact success rates of underrepresented students. Wilcox (2015) conducted a qualitative study at a single school district experiencing lower graduation rates among their Native American population. The district chose to create a new educational structure for Native American students which provided learning environments designed for Native customs and learning needs. Through interviews with 14 teachers and administrators, Wilcox found a primary difference between the traditional and new program developed for Native American students was the focus on individual versus communal goals. The program developed for Native American students emphasized communal goals including a focus on project-based work, workshop based instruction, accommodation for students needing to be absent for tribal ceremonies, and the partnership between the school and students' families. The development of the Native American program examined in the study included relevant experiences based on real-world, experiential, and interdisciplinary learning opportunities in alignment with students' learning goals, a schedule which adapts to students' cultural needs, emphasizes students' worth, provides opportunities for peer and administrative support, and includes a partnership with students' families and community (Wilcox, 2015). Wilcox noted that subsequent analysis of the new program found dropout rates decreased among students enrolled in the new program and hypothesized the program designed around Native American students' unique cultural

backgrounds provided a safe and inviting educational structure where students felt a greater sense of belonging leading to the observed increased persistence rates. However, while dropout rates decreased, the infancy of the program may have prohibited the determination of a statistically significant relationship between the teaching methodology used in the new program and decreases in dropout rates.

The existence of social identity conflicting with the dominant culture found within an educational structure may lead to disparities in academic achievement for Native American students. Fryberg et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study with 90 participants, 41 Native American and 49 European American, from a single high school in the State of Washington to examine the role of culture on academic performance. Students completed a questionnaire designed to measure their level of dependence, trust for teachers, and academic performance. Based on self-reported data, Fryberg et al. found Native American students were more interdependent than European American students while European American students reported greater trust for teachers and academic performance. Through separate stepwise regressions, a statistically significant relationship existed between academic performance and the two predictor variables of trust for teachers and interdependence among Native American students while the only factor resulting in a statistically significant relationship among European American students was independence. Fryberg et al. noted that the tendency to focus on individualistic characteristics in the examined educational structure may lead to declines in Native American academic performance as the educational structures are incongruent with the communal culture shared by many Native American students. Fryberg et al. also

added the incongruence might lead to a belief among Native American students that they

do not belong with increases in an overall sense of self-belonging occurring when

educational structures match those of Native American students' cultural background.

Similar results were found by Lundberg (2014) who noted supportive campus culture led

to greater individual effort on the part of Native American students as they did not

perceive feelings of marginalization and misunderstandings. The development of

educational structures placing focus on independent learning may lead to learning

environments where Native American students do not feel safe to express themselves

culturally thus limiting the chances of academic success within the population.

      The perceived effectiveness of an educational structure may differ from student to

student based on previous experiences and successes or failures. Dashputra, Chari, and

Gade (2014) conducted a quantitative study to determine if a relationship exists between

student achievement and perceptions of educational structure effectiveness. Study

participants at a single institution included 152 medical students categorized as either

under or high achieving who completed the Dundee Ready Education Environment

Measure. Underachieving students (31) were those who had failed at least one

examination during their academic program while high achieving students (121) had

never failed an examination. Dashputra et al. found students' behavior was affected by

perceptions of their learning environment. Specifically, students dissatisfied with the

educational structure experienced lower academic achievement. Dashputra et al. also

noted high achieving students were more likely to report that they asked questions in

class and hypothesized poor academic achievement experienced by low achieving

students might be a result of low confidence in oneself leading to the decision not to ask questions in the classroom. In the examined study, high achieving students perceived more significant benefits from support systems compared to low achieving students and perceived a stronger sense of support from their educational environment. Dashputra et al. noted that students typically perform better in educational structures providing robust support systems as the systems may provide a source of motivation and increased self-efficacy for students.

Other Factors Affecting Academic Persistence

Numerous other factors emerged while examining empirical literature related to academic persistence of Native American and other underrepresented student populations. Examined factors contributed both positively and negatively towards students' ability to persist in their academic programs. The following sections provide a review of the empirical literature examining factors limiting and enhancing persistence rates among students. Factors prevalent throughout examined empirical literature include cultural incongruence, feelings of isolation, financial issues, prejudices and discrimination, inadequate academic preparation, relationships with faculty, family support, spirituality, college intervention programs, and student involvement. These factors may interact with one another to affect persistence rates.

Cultural incongruence. Incongruences between different cultures may result in adverse outcomes for students (Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008; McKinley & Gan, 2014; Schudde, 2016; Torres, 2017). However, predicting how incongruences in culture impact students become difficult as the components of Native American culture differ

among students from different tribal nations (Jahoda, 2012; Singer, Dressler, George, 2016; Tams, 2013). Guillory and Williams (2014) conducted focus group interviews with 53 individuals in an attempt to develop a definition of culture distinct to Native American students. Focus group participants discussed the complexities of establishing a single definition of Native American culture. A central focus was the interface of one's environment with factors such as whether an individual grew up on a reservation or in a more urban setting affecting one's cultural values. The central theme of the focus group participants was the dynamic nature of Native American culture and the impact of personal experiences on cultural development such as whether a student's family adhered to strict cultural traditions such as primarily speaking Native languages and engaging in spiritual rituals.

Several research studies have sought to determine how cultural incongruence impacts Native American students. Sánchez, Poll-Hunter, Stern, Garcia, and Brewster (2016) conducted five structured focus groups with 20 medical students and 18 physicians to explore factors impacting academic successes of Native American medical students. Both groups discussed academic difficulties experienced because of conflicts with institutional culture. Specifically, students experienced feelings of isolation due to feeling unwelcomed, a sense of tokenism, and a perceived level of inferiority compared to other students (p. 887). Participants noted that relationships with Native American mentors helped overcome cultural barriers experienced during their academic program.

Cultural incongruence may result in students having to choose between their culture and the culture found on campus. Bingham et al. (2014) and Smith et al. (2014)

conducted qualitative studies using semistructured interviews to explore Native American

students' views of their college experiences. Students reported having a feeling of living

in two distinct worlds (Bingham et al., 2014, p. 621) where the customs and norms of the

home were perceived to be in direct opposition to those found on campus. The perceived

cultural incongruences induced feelings of belonging uncertainty among students

resulting in the perception they did not belong in their academic program with some

students describing a desire to leave campus before completing their degree (Smith et al.,

2014).

      Feelings of isolation. Feelings of isolation may lead to a failure to complete a

student's academic program. In a qualitative study consisting of phone interviews with

2,085 diverse students who dropped out of school before completing their freshman year,

Grebennikov and Shah (2012) found feelings of isolation were a contributing factor to a

students' decision to leave school. The feelings of isolation noted by Grebennikov and

Shah have also been found to be experienced by Native American students (Guillory,

2009; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Mosholder & Goslin, 2013) with some feeling as if

they are "minorities among minorities" (Keith et al., 2016, p. 699).

      Feelings of isolation may be a result of a perceived struggle between tribal and

institutional cultures. Charbonneau-Dahlen (2015) examined differences in hope between

Native American and non-Native nursing students. Fifty nursing students completed a 30-

item questionnaire examining levels of hope during their academic program. Native

American students did not report significantly different levels of hope compared to non-

Native students. However, Native American students noted a perceived struggle between

their tribal and institutional cultures and more often felt a sense of isolation. Feelings of isolation may decrease the presence of hope resulting in self-destructive behavior decreasing academic performance and in extreme circumstances, withdrawal from their educational program (p. 50).

Feelings of isolation may result in students becoming reluctant to participate in campus activities. Sánchez, et al. (2016) noted that participants in their qualitative study felt as if they did not belong and developed a sense of isolation during their academic programs. As students isolated themselves from the campus community, they missed out on beneficial peer-to-peer experiences and networking opportunities. Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, and Thomas (1999) concurred with Sánchez et al. (2016), with results from their qualitative study exploring the social adjustment of African American students finding students perceived feelings of isolation. Participants described not wanting to engage in campus activities or use campus resources due to a feeling of cultural incongruence.

Financial issues. The financial stresses associated with unavailable or inadequate financial aid may limit persistence rates (Britt, Ammerman, Barrett, & Jones, 2017). Brooks (2015) conducted a qualitative study with five male and nine female students at a historically Black university to explore the relationship between support systems such as financial aid and persistence rates of traditionally underrepresented students. Participants noted that financial support from family and various forms of aid were instrumental in their academic persistence. However, while support was critical, many felt as if they were a burden to those providing support. Butcher (2015) and Boatman and Long (2016) examined benefits of financial aid noting students with financial limitations often must

extend the time spent in college while those receiving some form of aid can focus on school-related activities such as being engaged with the campus community.

Native Americans students may be especially vulnerable to the adverse attributes of financial issues. Aud, Fox, and KewalRamani (2010) noted that more than a third of Native American students live below the poverty line. Limited economic means require some form of financial assistance to maintain enrollment. However, as Bird and Castleman (2016) found in their quantitative study using the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, complexities associated with obtaining financial aid deter many underrepresented students from applying. Mendez and Mendez (2013) conducted a qualitative study surveying 964 students to examine the perception of Native American students using financial aid with approximately 79% of participants being White. White participants believed Native American students receive an inequitable amount of aid. Mendez and Mendez noted that the feelings of inequitable allotment of financial aid perceived by White students might lead to a sense of hostility against Native American students resulting in feelings of isolation and a sense of not belonging.

Prejudices and discrimination. Burkley, Durante, Fiske, Burkley, and Andrade (2017) examined prejudices and stereotypes associated with Native Americans. Not all prejudices were observed to be negative, with individuals frequently exposed to Native Americans expressing positively oriented viewpoints. Individuals with negative prejudice of Native Americans typically saw the population as lazy, poor, dependent on alcohol, and uneducated (p. 216). Burkley, Burkley, Andrade, and Bell (2017) used Native

American mascots to explore whether individuals had a greater stereotype application to Native Americans compared to other underrepresented groups such as African Americans. Participants included 132 students (71% White, 9% African American, 6% Native American, with other populations making up less than 5% of participants) from a Southwest university. Stereotype application occurs when individuals use stereotypes to judge a member of a specific group. Participants in the study showed a higher level of stereotype application when observing Native American themed mascots compared to those based on White or African American cultures. Results indicated a higher level of prejudice among study participants toward Native Americans compared to other underrepresented groups.

Bucchianeri, Gower, McMorris, Eisenberg (2016), Graham, Phillips, Newman, and Atz (2016), and Ly and Crowshoe (2015) examined feelings of prejudice and discrimination experienced by minority students and students' perceived academic consequences. Bucchianeri et al. (2016) noted that Native American students were subject to race-based discrimination, with female students reporting higher rates of discrimination compared to their male counterparts. Students who are members of multiple demographic categories, such as being female and Native American, perceived they were subject to greater stresses because of discriminatory behaviors of others. Graham et al. (2016) noted that minority students reported experiencing negative academic consequences such as reduced professional integration into their field due to the prejudicial and discriminatory actions of others.

While Native American students experiencing prejudice and discrimination may suffer negative academic consequences, they may also suffer on a personal level. Cheng and Mallinckrodt (2015) conducted a longitudinal survey of 203 Hispanic/Latino students to explore the link between discrimination and alcohol use. A significant and positive association between perceived levels of discrimination and alcohol problems were found. Fuller-Rowell, Cogburn, Brodish, Peck, Malanchuk, and Eccles (2012) found similar results while examining the association between perceptions of discrimination and alcohol use in 417 African American students who participated in the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study. Tendencies to gravitate toward destructive behaviors such as alcoholism may decrease the chances of a Native American student persisting throughout their academic program (Arria, Caldeira, Bugbee, Vincent, & O'Grady, 2015).

Inadequate academic preparation. Native American students may have difficulty persisting because of being unprepared for the academic rigors of higher education. White and Ali-Khan (2013) conducted several case studies examining factors related to the substandard academic performance of underrepresented students. Four students participated in the case study including a Native American, African American, and two Hispanic students. In addition to citing cultural incongruence and a sense of isolation, participants noted that they were not prepared for their academic program. Specifically, participants lacked a sense of institutional literacy such as how to complete college-level coursework and make use of academic resources provided by the institution (White & Ali-Khan, 2013). White and Ali-Khan (2013) noted that the lack of institutional

literacy might be a result of the participants' parents not attending college thus being unable to pass along beneficial information on how to succeed in college to their children.

As noted by White and Ali-Khan (2013), first-generation students may not develop a sense of institutional literacy beneficial in persisting in an academic program. In an attempt to develop a better understanding of the challenges faced by first-generation students, Stebleton and Soria (2013) sent a survey to 145,150 students enrolled at six large, public universities, to develop an understanding of perceived academic obstacles experienced by first-generation students. Close to 58,000 students responded with approximately 40% of responses coming from students in underrepresented groups. First generation students perceived they experienced greater academic obstacles compared to their non-first-generation counterparts. Specifically, first-generation students noted having weaker academic skills such as mathematics ability and inadequate study skills.

Improving academic preparation of Native American students may best begin before leaving high school. Alkhasawneh and Hargraves (2014) interviewed 16 diverse students to determine which personal characteristics lead to greater persistence rates. Participants with strong high school preparation typically had higher persistence rates. The benefits of preparation programs were also found by Aidman and Malerba (2017) while examining preparation programs targeted at middle school students. Students who participated in the examined preparatory programs reported they had more academic resources and developed a greater college-going identity. The benefits of preparation programs were also stressed by Komarraju, Ramsey, and Rinella (2013) in their

examination of how grade point average, results of college entrance exams, and non-cognitive factors impacted college grade point average. High grade point averages and college entrance exam scores did not translate to guaranteed success in college. Students with lower scores on entrance exams were able to persist within their academic programs as result of non-cognitive factors such as effective study techniques, prioritization skills, and a sense of dedication and resolve typically gained during preparation programs attended before arriving on campus.

Relationships with faculty. Studies examining the benefits of student-faculty relationships are well represented within the literature. Several differing populations have been examined including community college students (Price & Tovar, 2014), commuter students (Dwyer, 2017), African American students (McCoy, Luedke, & Winkle-Wanger, 2017), and Native American students (Lundberg & Lowe, 2016; Strayhorn et al., 2016). Native American students who develop relationships with faculty have been found in one study to have higher persistence rates (Mosholder & Goslin, 2013). Mosholder and Goslin (2013) noted that student-faculty relationships provide students with a sense of belonging and increase their chances of remaining in school. However, while Strayhorn, et al. (2016) concur with the benefits of student-faculty relationships outlined by Mosholder and Goslin (2013), they cautioned against placing too great of an emphasis on relationship building outside of a formal academic setting as they found benefits were only realized within the classroom with interactions outside of the classroom providing limited benefit for Native American students.

Family support. Native American students with robust family support systems may have higher persistence rates compared to those who do not. Bingham et al. (2014) interviewed 20 female Native American students to develop a greater understanding of the factors impacting persistence rates. Participants noted that family support systems were integral to their academic success. Support included messages of encouragement and the presence of a sense of accountability (Bingham et al., 2014). Expanding on the work of Bingham et al. (2014), Jackson et al. (2003) and Thompson, Johnson-Jennings, and Nitzarim (2013) noted that additional positive academic outcomes associated with high levels of family support included easier adjustments to college and an overall increase in the well-being of students with some form of family support being nearly imperative for academic success.

Family support structures may provide Native American students with beneficial knowledge on the inner workings of how to succeed in college. Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Klingsmith (2014) interviewed 22 African American and Latina/o undergraduate students and found many participants stated their family provided useful information on how to navigate the college process. Fries-Britt (2017) observed similar results but noted that participants were primarily second or third generation students and had the benefit of college-educated parents which are unavailable to first-generation students. Academic counselors working primarily with diverse students also noted the importance of family noting students had a better understanding of how to succeed in higher education (Ortiz & Sriaman, 2015).

Not all students expressed experiencing high levels of family support during their time in college. While interviewing eight minority STEM graduates to determine which factors helped students complete their program, Foltz, Gannon, and Kirchmann (2014) noted that some students did not feel their family was supportive of the academic process. Specifically, some participants stated their family shot down any dreams and aspirations of bettering themselves through education. Similar family pressures were observed by Grebennikov and Shah (2012) with student-family relationships becoming strained because of students' desires to participate in the educational process. However, while participants in both studies described a lack of support from family, both groups used the lack of support as a motivational tool to complete their academic program.

Spirituality. Spirituality may help Native American students persist in their academic program. In a studying using in-depth interviews with 16 undergraduate women of color in science fields, Ceglie and Settlage (2016) noted that participants felt they were able to tackle any academic challenges with a spiritual presence on their side. Several participants described the interchangeability of the benefits of family and spirituality with both serving as a support system to help them through periods of adversity. The denominational background of students appeared to be irrelevant as students from different spiritual backgrounds noted the benefits of the presence of a higher being (Ceglie & Settlage, 2016). Similar results were found while examing Latina/o (Cavazos, Castro, Cavazos, Cavazos, & Gonzalez, 2015), African American (Brooks & Allen, 2016), and Native American (Tachine et al., 2017) populations.

Formal attendance within a religious institution may not be a requirement to gain benefits from one's spirituality. While leaders of religious institutions provided valuable advice and guidance, students in one study were able to rely on their personal beliefs, traditions, and prayers when working through adversity without formal intervention from religious leaders or the need to gather in a formal spiritual structure (Brooks & Allen, 2016). However, in another study, Native American students described feelings of inclusion and validation as a result of gathering in their on-campus spiritual center (Tachine et al., 2017). As noted by Tachine et al.(2017), the perceived importance of spiritual centers on campus by participants may be a result of the emphasis Native American students place on their spirituality and the relationship between spirituality and one's culture and sense of belonging.

The connection between spirituality and persistence rates appear to be common among students from different backgrounds. Brooks and Allen (2016) conducted a quantitative study using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF). Based on a sample size of approximately 4,000 diverse students, factors such as a student's racial background, socioeconomic status, and gender did not impact the benefits gained from a sense of spirituality in college (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Based on their findings, Brooks and Allen stressed the importance of accounting for students' spirituality when developing persistence programs.

College intervention programs. College intervention programs may increase persistence among Native American students. Tovar (2015) conducted a qualitative study with 397 Latina/o students who had completed a minimum of one semester in college and

participated in the College Mattering Inventory. Tovar found participation in intervention

programs was significantly related to a student's perceived ability to persist in school.

While intervention programs significantly impacted Latina/o students' perceived ability

to persist, Tovar noted that the program's benefits are limited as the students who stand to

gain the most from the programs are unaware of their benefits. Kimbark, Peters, and

Richardson (2017) found similar results in their study examining community college

students who successfully completed student success courses. In a quantitative study with

432 students who responded to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement,

students who completed the student success course noted increased levels of campus

engagement and academic achievement compared to students who did not complete the

student success course. Kimark et al. noted that students who completed the course

developed academic skills and strategies which they perceived as essential to continued

enrollment in their academic program. Contrary to results found by Tovar (2015) and

Kimbark et al. (2017), in a meta-analysis of 89 studies examining intervention programs

effect on first-year GPA and 195 studies examining the relationship between intervention

programs and retention rates, Permzadian and Credé (2016) noted that intervention

programs such as first-year seminars only provided minimal benefits for students.

Specifically, Permzadian and Credé found intervention programs typically led to nearly

nonexistent positive effects on first-year GPA ($d=.01$) although the programs provided a

slightly positive effect on retention ($d=.11$) between students' first and second year. The

credibility interval of Permzadian and Credé's study contained a value of zero indicating

the observations may not generalize across multiple situations with some programs providing benefits to students while others provide none.

Benefits gained from college intervention programs may not be limited to increases in students' cognitive abilities. Stephens, Townsend, Hamedani, Destin, and Manzo (2015) examined how brief interventions promoting the benefits of students' cultural and social backgrounds impacted their ability to overcome challenges in college. Participants were divided into two groups, one receiving education on how their cultural and social differences are a strength and the other serving as a control group. Participants in the non-control group noted that their differences were a strength used to navigate their way through their educational journey and respond to adversity resulting in a more enjoyable experience. Similar to Stephens et al., Johnson (2016) found college intervention programs helped students develop useful skills such as effective study habits and an understanding of how to navigate the higher education landscape. Johnson conducted a case study including focus group interviews with 14 underrepresented students entering first-year students who participated in a summer intervention program. Students attending intervention programs perceived themselves as belonging in their academic program and noted that their peers who did not have the same feelings of belonging either changed their program of study or withdrew from the institution (Johnson, 2016).

The benefits associated with intervention programs may depend on the type of program available to students. Chingos, Griffiths, and Mulhern (2017) conducted a quantitative study with 968 students at regional universities in the northeast to determine

if students gained benefits from online-based intervention programs. Students who participated in the online intervention programs did not exhibit improvement in their long-term academic performance. Chingos et al. noted that intervention programs might provide greater benefit when conducted in person with online programs providing limited benefits due to the low touch nature of their design (p. 807).

Student involvement. Student involvement within the campus environment may result in higher persistence rates. Webber, Krylow, and Zhang (2013) conducted a quantitative study with 1,269 students at a single university in the Mid-Atlantic region who participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement to determine if participation in academic and cocurricular activities contributed to persistence. Cocurricular activities were defined as having conversations with friends and peers from different backgrounds outside of class and participating in campus and community activities. Webber et al. found students who reported frequently engaging in cocurricular activities earned higher grades and perceived higher levels of satisfaction with the academic environment.

Participation in cocurricular activities may have long-term academic benefits for students. Kilgo, Sheets, and Pascarella (2015) conducted a qualitative study using the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education to investigate the effects of active participation in specific high-impact educational activities. Activities included attending first-year seminars, participating in learning communities, conducting research, and participating in service learning activities (Kilgo et al., 2015). Participants included 4,193 students at 17 colleges and universities. Kilgo et al. found students who participated in

high-impact activities had higher academic performance scores compared to those who did not participate in the activities. Lumpkin, Achen, and Dodd (2015) found similar results while investigating perceptions of 208 students who participated in active learning environments. Active learning environments provide an alternative to the traditional lecture style classroom model allowing students to take an active role in the educational process. Lumpkin et al. found students perceived the active learning environment allowed them to better engage with their educational environment resulting in enhanced learning opportunities and a better understanding of course content leading to a more enjoyable academic experience. Traditional lecture based classroom environments may limit student involvement resulting in frustration and eventual withdrawal from the institution.

While student involvement may result in increased persistence rates among students, the timing of involvement activities may determine overall benefits. Flynn (2014) conducted a quantitative study using the 2004 and 2009 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study to determine how the timing of academic and social engagement behaviors impacted degree attainment. The study examined 8,700 first-year students in 2004 from 1,350 schools, of which 8,250 were still present in 2009. Flynn noted that both academic and social engagement were beneficial in academic persistence. However, Flynn found students who did not limit academic and social engagement experiences to their first year were more likely to persist compared to those who limited these activities to their first year on campus. Flynn noted that while only one study, results may indicate institutional involvement programs need to expand to include students after their first year on campus.

Summary

Using the literature presented in the previous section, I provided an overview of variables which affect persistence rates among Native American students. Throughout the reviewed literature, factors both internal and external to students were examined with each enhancing or detracting from students' ability to persist within their academic program. Variables impacting persistence rates among students include their sense of belonging, academic self-efficacy, congruence with the educational structure found on campus, and several other variables such as relationships with faculty and other mentors, feelings of isolation, inadequate academic preparation, family support, and spirituality. A recurring theme among the studies is the interaction of multiple variables on persistence rates. While researchers appeared to frame issues of low persistence through the lens of either the student or institution, the responsibility of increasing persistence rates fell primarily on the institution.

During the original search for empirical literature, an apparent lack of articles related directly to Native American students emerged. Articles focusing on Native American persistence issues were routinely based on commentary or reviews of other empirical research articles. As a result of the low number of empirical articles dedicated to Native American students, a gap in the literature emerged. While there appears to be a gap in empirical literature examining Native American students, the few articles including the population routinely examined Native Americans as a homogeneous group and did not account for the differences in culture and customs between tribal nations. Specifically, articles examining students from Cherokee tribes were not found during the

extensive literature review. As a result, the gap addressed within this study is the lack of literature related to persistence rates among members of Cherokee tribes.

A common theme among many of the reviewed articles was the importance of institutional capital for successful completion of students' academic programs. Students such as those from underrepresented groups or who are first generation may have limited institutional capital resulting in the need for institutional support such as mentoring relationships or orientation programs. The results from this study may contribute to the academic field by providing insight into the educational needs and viewpoints of Cherokee students. An increased understanding of Cherokee students' needs might be used to develop persistence programs specific to both Native American students in general and more specifically Cherokee students in an attempt to increase persistence rates among the population.

In Chapter 3, I provide an outline of the methods used in this basic qualitative design approach using semistructured interviews. The study approach examined the differences in tribal and institutional cultural identity perceived by Cherokee students, how these potential differences may impact Cherokee students' ability to persist in their academic program, and the modifications Cherokee students would make to their educational environment to better support their educational needs. Findings from this study may provide beneficial knowledge on the academic needs of Cherokee students which may be beneficial when designing future persistence programs.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how Cherokee students perceive how their tribal culture affects their ability to persist within their academic programs at mainstream institutions of higher education within primarily Whitestreamed campus cultures. The study focused on students who held formal citizenship in any of the three federally recognized Cherokee tribes. In the following chapter I provide an outline of the methods used to design and conduct the study. Topics covered include the study's research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, and trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

The study used a basic qualitative approach to explore perceived cultural incongruences of Cherokee undergraduate students who had completed at least 1 year of residency on their current campus. The chosen approach provided a mechanism to gain insight into the experiences of individuals and to develop an understanding of how they interpret and make meaning of their experiences (Merriam, 2002; Merriam, 2009, Merrian & Tisdell, 2015). The following section restates the study's research questions as well as defines the central phenomenon investigated in the study. The section concludes with an overview of the chosen research tradition, including an examination of other relevant research traditions not used in the study.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions using a basic qualitative design and semistructured interviews:

RQ1: What differences, if any, do Cherokee students perceive between their tribal culture and the culture found at a predominately White institution of higher education in the United States Midwest?

RQ2: How do Cherokee students perceive these differences influence their ability to persist in college?

RQ3: What changes to their educational program do Cherokee students perceive would increase their own and other Cherokee students' persistence in college?

Phenomenon Under Investigation

The phenomenon investigated by the study was the potential differences between home and institutional cultures as perceived by Cherokee students and how these perceived differences, if any, could affect their ability to persist within higher education. The study focused on cultural incongruence as a possible factor of low persistence rates as Native American students typically enter college with similar academic attributes as other underrepresented groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The disparity in degree completion between Native American students and other underrepresented populations, despite similar academic abilities, indicates that factors outside of academic knowledge may affect students' ability to persist in their academic programs, including incongruent academic–social contexts (Wold, David, & Butler-Barnes, 2017) and the

traditionally Whitestreamed design of educational structures (Fryberg et al., 2013;

Wilcox, 2015).

Basic Qualitative Approach Rationale

The study used a basic qualitative approach to explore how Cherokee students

perceive their tribal culture affects their ability to persist within their academic program

at a mainstream institution of higher education with a primarily Whitestreamed campus

culture. Basic qualitative designs seek to understand how individuals interpret and make

meaning of their experiences providing a mechanism to gain insight into their

experiences (Merriam, 2002; Merrian & Tisdell, 2015). Percy, Kostere, and Kostere

(2015) noted that studies using a basic qualitative design are appropriate when a basic

level of knowledge or understanding exists on the phenomenon under investigation, but

the researcher wishes to deepen their understanding through the perspectives of those

directly affected by the phenomenon. The study was based on the knowledge of the

disproportionate difficulties Native American students have persisting within their

academic programs despite similar academic competencies to other underrepresented

populations. The deeper understanding desired from the study was how Cherokee

students perceive potential incongruences within their tribal and institutional culture

affect their ability to persist. A benefit of using a basic qualitative approach is the ability

to align the approach with the study's research question without the need to frame the

study within an explicit tradition (Patton, 2015). A basic qualitative approach also allows

for the study of experiences related specifically to the phenomenon of interest without

having to examine the full lived experiences of participants which can be less intrusive than other approaches.

Other Qualitative Approaches Considered

Several other qualitative approaches were considered before selecting a basic qualitative approach for the study. The first qualitative tradition considered was a phenomenological approach. Starks and Trinidad (2007) noted that phenomenological studies seek to describe the meaning of a lived experience through those who have experienced the phenomenon of interest with data collection occurring through or interviews with the goal of gaining an understanding of participants' lived experiences. A primary concern with using a phenomenological approach was the inability to obtain the data needed to answer the study's research questions. Additionally, a phenomenological approach might require a longer-term commitment for participants possibly limiting individuals willing to participate.

A second qualitative tradition considered was a narrative approach. Narrative studies examine a phenomenon using participant narratives with emphasis placed on the experiences of a participant (Patton, 2015). Narrative inquiry often requires the continued engagement of participants to fully explore the phenomenon of interest (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Additionally, a narrative approach requires participants be able to recall details of past events (Fraenkel et al., 2012). A narrative approach was not selected due to the subjectivity risk and potential challenges associated with maintaining the confidentiality of participants. Additionally, as Moen (2006) noted, studies using a narrative approach require deep immersion in the field of study for a substantial period

which may be a difficult commitment for participants to make especially with other commitments such as homework, test preparation, and campus activities.

A final qualitative approach considered was an ethnographic study. An ethnographic study uses a cultural lens to examine how a phenomenon influences an individual (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Patton (2015) noted how ethnographic studies require researchers to immerse themselves among those they are studying. A concern of the approach is a potential lack of understanding of the complexities of Cherokee culture. Immersing oneself in the cultural experiences of participants requires a fundamental understanding of the various components of their culture. A second concern is the obtrusiveness of observations and the subjectivity risk when interpreting participants' experiences. Finally, the documents and artifacts potentially beneficial when developing an understanding of the phenomenon might not be available, limiting the amount of data available for analysis.

Role of the Researcher

I served as the sole data collector and analyst during completion of the study. Responsibilities included personally conducting the one-on-one interviews, transcribing data, and using thematic analysis to search for patterns and themes within participants' responses. As the researcher I must put aside all preconceived notions (Percy et al., 2015). I established a collaborative relationship with the institutions where the study occurred and maintained the relationship through the duration of the study. I do have an affiliation with one of the institutions used in the study, but I am not aware of any direct involvement with individuals who met the criteria for inclusion and subsequently

participated in the study and do not experience any conflicts of interest or ethical dilemmas during the completion of the study.

Qualitative studies do not allow for a clear separation between a researcher and study participants. As a researcher, I strove to maintain transparency and reflexivity during the duration of the study including when collecting, analyzing, and presenting data (Polit & Beck, 2014). My family background includes Native American lineage, specifically, from the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. The identification of personal bias and assumptions based on my background was crucial and continuous reflection was a must. The use of reflective journals during completion of the study may have helped increase transparency through the formal documentation of my opinions, thoughts, and feelings during the study (Ortlipp, 2008).

Methods

The following section contains an overview of the methods used while completing the study. Topics covered include participant selection, instrumentation, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures.

Participant Selection

The population for the study is Native American undergraduate students who are formal citizens of any of the three federally recognized Cherokee tribes. The sample of the study consisted of members of the population who completed a minimum of one year on their current college campus with a primarily Whitestreamed culture.

Sampling strategy. The study used a homogenous sampling strategy. Patton (2015) noted that a homogenous sampling strategy is beneficial when the desired sample

shares similar and unique characteristics and a researcher wishes to study the traits in depth. The unique characteristic of interest is the participants' citizenship within a federally recognized Cherokee tribe.

Eligible participants held formal Cherokee citizenship based on the citizenship criteria of their specific Tribal Nation. While Akee et al. (2017) noted that individuals who self-identify as members of a tribal nation may share similar cultural customs and traditions, the decision was made to limit the study to only those with formal citizenship. Participants must have completed one year of residency on campus before being eligible to participate to allow sufficient time to experience and interact with the Whitestreamed culture found on campus.

Recruitment materials such as flyers, handouts, and targeted electronic messages included information on the criteria necessary for inclusion in the study. Once potential participants were recruited, they were asked to sign an acknowledgment form as part of the implied consent process which indicated they are not eligible to participate in the study if they did not meet the stated criteria. Those who formally indicated they meet the study criteria were included in the overall sample.

Sample size. The goal of a qualitative sample should be to include enough participants to reach both data and thematic saturation. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) noted that samples which are relatively homogeneous might yield meaningful themes in as little as six interviews with the discovery of new themes becoming less frequent after 12 interviews. Accordingly, the sample size for the study was eight participants. The sample of the study was relatively homogeneous consisting of a group of college students

from a single tribal background within a limited geographic area which resulted in achieving thematic and data saturation with such a small number of participants.

Recruiting participants. Recruitment was facilitated by the department of student affairs on both campuses. Representatives from student affairs forwarded electronic copies of the study's recruitment materials to all students who listed Cherokee citizenship in their student record. Electronic messages were initiated by members of the student affairs staff as they were prohibited from providing student information to the researcher in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. I met with a Cherokee language instructor on the campus of SCU who also agreed to allow me to distribute recruitment materials to potential participants.

Instrumentation

I used an interview protocol consisting of primary and possible probing questions to collect data to answer the study's research questions. Alshenqeeti (2014) noted the value of interviews as they provide a holistic snapshot of an individual's lived experiences while also allowing the individual to express themselves in their own voice. Development of the interview protocol occurred through collaboration with the dissertation committee. Initial questions were adapted from studies by Jackson et al. (2003). Jackson et al. explored the academic persistence of Native American students with a focus on students' experiences and interactions with the campus environment. The interview protocol questions were designed to provide sufficient data to answer the three research questions driving the study.

Content validity of the instrument is the extent the questions measure or explore the phenomenon of interest (Brod, Tesler, & Christensen, 2009). One method of ensuring content validity includes a review of the instrument by a subject matter expert (Brancato et al., 2006). The interview questions developed for the study were reviewed by a member of the dissertation committee who is a subject matter expert in Native American culture. Additionally, the interview questions were tested on two students who did not meet the eligibility requirements for inclusion in the study to further ensure content validity. The interview protocol is included in the Appendix.

Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to explore how Cherokee students perceive their tribal culture affects their ability to persist within their academic program at mainstream institutions of higher education with primarily Whitestreamed campus cultures. The data collection plan for the study included exploring these perceptions through the use of semistructured interviews with Cherokee students. Patton (2015) noted that semistructured interviews provide the opportunity to introduce a level of flexibility into the interview allowing the researcher to respond to unexpected occurrences during the interview process.

Data were collected on participants' campuses in a location offering a level of privacy to ensure participant's confidentiality. Locations included private meeting rooms in the student union, library, and institutional administration buildings. Participants signed an informed consent document prior to beginning the study and were provided with a copy to take with them for future reference. Data collection consisted of a single

interview which typically lasted 40-60 minutes depending on the level of detail provided

the participant and the number of probing questions needed to understand the answers

provided by the participant fully. An electronic recording device was used to record

participants' answers for later transcription. Note taking during the interview session was

kept to a minimum to allow for greater reflective listening to occur.

Participants were debriefed at the end of the interview process. Participants were

reminded of the purpose of the study during the debriefing process and were asked if they

had any questions related to the study. Participants were provided a copy of the transcript

associated with their interview for transcript checking and were asked if they had any

corrections to the provided transcript. Each participant was provided with a copy of my

contact information in the event they had questions and concerns related to the study at a

later date. I concluded the interview session by formally thanking each individual for

participating in the study and informed them I would provide an overview of the study

results at the conclusion of the study. Participant participation in the study concluded

once they received and reviewed the transcript from their interview session as follow-up

interviews were not required.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was completed solely by me to ensure the validity and

reliability of the analysis process. Data collected during participant interviews was

transcribed through the Temi electronic transcription service. Transcripts produced by

Temi were checked against each recording to ensure accuracy with manual modifications

made when necessary. After ensuring each transcript matched the recorded audio the data

was analyzed using thematic analysis with open coding and multiple categories to search for patterns and themes without the existence of preconceived categories and themes at the beginning of the data analysis processes (Lim, 2011; Patton, 2015). The analysis process focused on the five steps outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2012):

1. Transcribe and summarize each interview.

2. Define, find, and mark in the text, excerpts that have relevant concepts, themes, events, examples, names, places, or dates.

3. Find the excerpts marked with the same code, and sort them into a single data file; then summarize the contents of each file.

4. Sort and resort the material within each file, comparing the excepts between different subgroups, and then summarize the results of each sorting.

5. After weighing different versions, integrate the descriptions from different interviewees to create a complete picture (p. 189).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers must take measures to ensure the trustworthiness of their work. Ensuring trustworthiness occurs through adherence to four criteria including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following section describes each of these criteria and their applicability to the study. The section concludes with an overview of the ethical procedures of the study.

Credibility

Credibility is the process of ensuring the study accurately represents the phenomenon under investigation (Tracy, 2010). Shenton (2004) noted that one way of

increasing credibility occurs through using methods tested and successfully executed in previous studies related to a similar phenomenon in addition to debriefing sessions ensuring the data collection protocol accurately investigated the phenomenon of interest. Ensuring credibility of the study began while developing interview questions. Initial interview protocol development used preexisting questions from Jackson et al. (2003), which examined a similar phenomenon, as a template for the types of questions required to fully address the study's research questions. I sought feedback from my dissertation committee after developing the initial draft of interview questions. One member of the committee is a subject matter expert on the topic examined in the study. Finally, the questions developed and submitted to the committee were tested on two participants who did not meet the eligibility requirements to participate in the study. The processed used during question development resulted in multiple revisions. Ensuring credibility continued while conducting the study by using member checking to ensure the data collected accurately reflected the intentions of participants and provided the information required to address the research question as suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000).

Transferability

Transferability is the process of presenting enough detail when describing the study that others can visualize if the methods and results can be applied to another setting (Patton, 2015). The primary method of ensuring transferability is providing rich descriptions of the settings, methods, and other components of the research study (Bitsch, 2005; Shenton, 2004). Throughout the study I provide detailed descriptions of sample participants, study location, and methods to increase the level of transferability of the

study. The goal of providing the level of detail included in the study was to allow future researchers to replicate the study without having to guess on what methods to use. Caution was taken to provide details rich enough to allow others to visualize if the study could be applied to their setting without compromising the confidentiality of study participants.

Dependability

Ensuring dependability requires providing enough details of the mechanics of the study to allow replication by other researchers. Dependability is difficult in qualitative research as the results might be context specific. Long and Johnson (2000) noted that increasing the dependability of a study occurs through the use of detailed descriptions of the processes used in the study. Further, Shenton (2004) noted that researchers should view their study as a template for future studies where other researchers can establish their own results using similar methods. As with transferability, the study sought to increase dependability through detailed descriptions of the data collection processed used in the study as well as a rich description of the research design.

Confirmability

Confirmability focuses on ensuring the results of the study are an accurate reflection of the data collected and not the views and bias of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). One method of ensuring confirmability is understanding the role of the researcher and being transparent about any issues which may affect the quality of data analysis. The study includes a section outlining the role of the researcher as it relates to the institutional settings where the study took place and the overall interactions between the researcher

and study participants. Including an audit trail showing the evolution of the various

decisions made throughout the study also increases confirmability (Shenton, 2004). I

used a reflective journal to document my thoughts and feelings as I conducted the study.

Notes from the journal helped ensure conclusions drawn during the study were based on

data collected and not personal bias or preconceived notions. I made notes on the

interview protocol during each interview of areas where I had questions or non-neutral

feelings towards a participant's answer. The notes were used to ask for or flag the

response as evoking an emotional reaction to help prevent the reaction from impacting

data analysis.

Ethical Procedures

Participant recruitment did not begin until receiving formal approval from the

Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of both Walden University and the two institutions

where I intended to collect data. The Walden University IRB approval number for the

study was 07-30-18-0663384. Both institutions deferred to Walden University's IRB

approval and granted access to their student populations for data collection. I also sought

approval from the respective IRB boards of each of the three federally recognized

Cherokee tribes. Approval form the various tribes was not required either due to the tribe

not having an IRB board or a lack of jurisdiction over the research sites where the study

occurred. A final review of the study was conducted by the Indian Health Services IRB

for the region where the study occurred but was deemed to be outside their jurisdiction.

While each IRB did not have jurisdiction over the research sites where data collection

occurred, they provided feedback on improvements to the study's design. Many of the

improvements were incorporated after consultation with the dissertation committee.

Participant recruitment and data collection began after receiving all required IRB

approval. Walden University's original IRB approval was for one research site requiring

the submission of a notification of procedural changes form when the second research

site was added.

Recruitment materials were worded to allow participants to understand the

purpose of the study fully and were designed to avoid instances of coercion (Haines,

2017). All participants were informed they were not required to participate in the study

and their decision to forgo participation would not be reported to their institution.

Recruitment materials and presentations reflected the purpose of the study to ensure

participants were not deceived in any way (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

Participants who participate in the study were notified they have the ability to

discontinue their involvement at any time without the fear of any form of repercussion. A

confidentiality agreement outlining how participant's data will be collected, used, and

stored during the duration of the study was completed before each interview session

began. While it did not occur, participants were instructed to inform the interviewer if

they begin to feel uncomfortable during the interview process to allow me to address their

concerns.

Data collected during each interview was transferred from my digital recorder to

my personal computer immediately after the interview concluded. Pseudonyms are used

throughout the study to maintain the confidentiality of research sites and study

participants. Identifying materials such as informed consent documents were not stored

with interview data to further maintain the confidentiality of participants. I am the only person with access to the data which was backed up on a jump drive and stored in a secure location where unauthorized individuals will not have access to the data. Data will continue to be preserved in accordance with the guidelines established by Walden University's IRB department.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

Chapter 3 provided an outline of methods used to design the study. The study used a basic qualitative approach to explore perceived cultural incongruences of Cherokee undergraduate students who completed a minimum of 1 year on their college campus. The study asked if Cherokee students perceived differenced existed between their tribal culture and the culture found on their campus. If differences exist, how did the differences influence their ability to persist? Finally, the study asked what changes Cherokee students would make to their learning environment to increase their own and other Cherokee students' persistence rates. Phenomenological, narrative, and ethnographic approaches were considered but not selected due to numerous concerns related to subjectivity and demand on participants. I served as the sole data collector and analyst during completion of the study and strove to maintain transparency and reflexivity during the duration of the study.

The study used a homogeneous sampling strategy. Eligible participants held formal tribal citizenship in one of the three federally recognized Cherokee tribes and must have completed a minimum of 1 year on their current college campus. Fliers and

targeted emails were used to recruit participants with the final sample size consisting of 8 participants.

Data collection consisted of semistructured questions asked during one-on-one campus interviews with each interview recorded for later transcription. Data analysis was conducted solely by me to ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis process. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis with open coding and multiple categories to search for patterns and themes.

Maintaining trustworthiness included ensuring the study retained credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ensuring credibility included using methods tested in previous studies while enhancing transferability and dependability involved providing rich descriptions throughout the study. Finally, ensuring the confirmability of the study included understanding my role as the researcher and being reflective throughout the study to ensure personal bias did not affect the study.

The study included several ethical considerations. First, Walden University's IRB provided formal approval of the methods used in the study before data collection began. The IRB departments for SCU and SCSU also approved. I contacted the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma for feedback on study design and incorporated many of their suggestions into the final study. Recruitment materials were worded to allow participants to understand the purpose of the study fully and were designed to avoid coercion and participants had the opportunity to stop participating at any time.

In Chapter 4, I present the results of the study. I begin with an overview of the study's setting, participant demographics, and data collection methods. A discussion of

the data collection technique used in the study as well as methods used to ensure

trustworthiness follows. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a detailed summary of study

results including direct quotes from study participants.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how Cherokee students perceive how their tribal culture affects their ability to persist within their academic program at mainstream institutions of higher education within primarily Whitestreamed campus cultures. The study sought to answer three research questions:

RQ1: What differences, if any, do Cherokee students perceive between their tribal culture and the culture found at a predominately White institution of higher education in the United States Midwest?

RQ2: How do Cherokee students perceive these differences influence their ability to persist in college?

RQ3: What changes to their educational program do Cherokee students perceive would increase their own and other Cherokee students' persistence in college?

In the following chapter, I provide an overview of the results of the study in relation to the three research questions. The chapter begins with a description of the study's setting and participant demographics. A discussion of data collection and analysis techniques follows, including a summary of the methods used to ensure trustworthiness of the study. I then present the results, framed by the study's three research questions.

Study Setting

Data were collected on the campuses of South Central University (SCU) and South Central State University (SCSU). Both schools are located in the Midwest region of the United States and draw students from the same geographic area. SCU is a doctoral

granting institution of over 30,000 students. The majority of students are White, and approximately 5% of the total student population identify themselves as Native American. The institution has several organizations tailored to specific student attributes and interests, and has a large Greek life presence with more than 25% of students belonging to one of the various Greek organizations on campus. Students at SCU have complained about administrative responses to past events on campus related to minority students.

SCSU is a master's level institution with over 15,000 students. The student population at SCSU has a relatively equal percentage of White and minority students with approximately 5% of students identifying themselves as Native American. The institution places a heavy focus on diversity and inclusivity and has more events and programs centered around diversity compared to SCU. While Greek-affiliated organizations exist, approximately 90% of students choose to forgo participation in Greek life. There is a greater emphasis on campus student groups at SCSU.

I did the interviews on both campuses in quiet public settings. Interviews at SCU were in the student union and the library, while interviews at SCSU took place in two conference rooms in the University's administration building. The locations of the interviews provided a centrally located venue with private rooms where participants could speak freely without worrying about others overhearing their responses. The selected sites also offered spaces free of excessive background noise and distractions to allow cleaner recordings of each interview for later transcription. I considered

participants' schedules when choosing the centralized interview venues to prevent participants from having to traverse from one side of campus to the other.

Demographics

A total of eight interviews allowed me to reach saturation. All participants informed me they held formal citizenship in a federally recognized Cherokee tribe and had been on their campus for a minimum of one academic year before participating in the study, thus meeting the criteria for participation. I did not require any of the participants to show proof of their citizenship, although several showed their tribally issued citizenship card during their interview. The study population consisted of three male and five female students with an average age of 28. The average age of participants was skewed by the inclusion of two participants who were approximately 50 years old. The average age of the other six participants was 23. Many participants were completing the final year of their academic program and no freshmen or sophomores volunteered. Six of the eight participants identified themselves as traditional students (attending college right out of high school) while two attended school later in life. Participants represented two of the three federally recognized Cherokee Tribes including the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians. I considered identifying and separating participant data based on their specific Cherokee tribe but decided against doing so to protect the confidentiality of participants. A summary of student demographics is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Institution	Classification
John	21	SCU	Senior
Rhonda	50	SCU	Senior
Peter	28	SCU	Doctoral
Cindy	22	SCU	Senior
Beth	23	SCSU	Senior
Jacqueline	22	SCSU	Junior
Marissa	49	SCSU	Senior
Roger	23	SCSU	Junior

Data Collection

Data collection began in September 2018 and concluded in November 2018. I interviewed a total of eight participants with four attending SCU and four at SCSU. The first round of interviews occurred at SCU, but it became difficult to recruit more participants, so I expanded the sample to include participants from SCSU to obtain thematic saturation. Interviews were scheduled primarily during traditional school hours with one interview occurring after hours to accommodate the participant's work and school schedule.

All participants participated in one-on-one interviews lasting approximately 40-90 minutes depending on the depth of answers provided. I intended to remain steadfast to the developed interview protocol (located in the Appendix) after having completed some

practice interviews to ensure the questions were effective in eliciting data but found instances where examples and stories provided by participants warranted occasional expansions from the preestablished interview questions and probes and their order to further explore participants' experiences in greater detail. Outside of the occasional expansion, interviews were mostly structured according to the protocol with questions being asked in the same order using similar probing questions.

All interviews concluded by asking participants if they had anything they wished to share not already covered in the interview. Most participants had some concluding remark to share. One participant sent an electronic message several days after the interview to share a new thought they had regarding one of the questions asked during their interview. I sent each participant a copy of their interview transcript for validation and asked each to provide feedback on any errors or omissions. Only two participants responded with both noting their transcript accurately reflected their interview and did not request any modifications. I assumed the lack of response from other participants indicated they were satisfied with the transcription of their interview.

Recruiting participants for the study was considerably difficult with fewer students offering to participate in the study than I expected. Approximately 2 weeks passed between the first recruitment communication and the first student agreeing to participate. Recruitment for the study consisted of flyers posted in permitted academic buildings, handouts delivered to the American Indian student association campus office, and a one-on-one meeting with a Cherokee language instructor. Also, targeted emails were sent to students fitting the study's inclusion criteria by a staff member within the

division of student affairs on both campuses as they were not permitted to provide me with the email addresses of students due to limitations imposed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. I also recruited a participant after reading an article published in a trade journal she had written related to Native American students interactions on college campuses.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included open coding and thematic analysis to determine themes in participant responses. I began by reading each transcript to familiarize myself with participants' answers and develop an overall context of the interview data. After the initial reading, I reread each transcript highlighting sections I felt related directly to the study's research questions. I made the decision to highlight sections to focus on the relevant data while minimizing attention paid to unnecessary background information. The highlighted transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 12, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, which allowed me to organize data based on the study's research questions. The highlighted sections were assigned short descriptive phrases which became the initial codes. The initial coding process produced 63, 61, and 11 codes for Research Questions 1-3, respectively. The initial codes were then reviewed to remove duplicates or codes no longer applicable. The secondary review reduced the overall number of codes to 33, 29, and 11. Ongoing analysis resulted in a minimal reduction in some codes as some were closely related and are adequately represented with a single code.

The next step in the analysis process involved examining the developed codes for potential similarities or differences. Similar codes were grouped to form categories with each receiving a descriptive name. This process continued until all codes for the three research questions were grouped in a category. A total of 12 categories were developed. The categories were examined for similarities and differences with like categories grouped to form overall themes. Grouping of categories resulted in the development of seven overall themes, each associated with a research question and each of which were given a descriptive name. I call the categories subthemes under the seven themes.

The themes identified for RQ1 were embracing heritage in a White world, experiences in a new setting, touting diversity but no seat at table, and cultural competencies and sense of community. Themes identified for RQ2 include feelings of isolation and minimized sense of belonging and importance of family and campus involvement. The one theme identified for RQ3 was need for structures for increased inclusion.

Subthemes were not identified for the themes of embracing heritage in a White world, experiences in a new setting, and cultural competencies and sense of community because the codes all related to the overall theme. However, subthemes were developed for the other four themes developed for the study. The subthemes for touting diversity but no seat at table were minimizing Cherokee culture and unwillingness to accept Cherokee culture. The subthemes for feelings of isolation and minimized sense of belonging were factors limiting academic ability and feelings of isolation. The subthemes for importance of family and campus involvement were family involvement in education, personal

attributes encouraging persistence, positive attributes of campus environment, strategies

to persist in academic program, and support systems. Finally, the subthemes for need for

structures for increased inclusion were curriculum changes, increasing non-academic

support, and modifying academic programs. An overview of the thematic structure is

provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Overview of Thematic Structure

	Theme	Subtheme	Codes
RQ1	Embracing heritage in a White world		Cultural pride, cultural responsibility, cultural traditions, culturally active, desire to learn more about culture, do not feel Native enough on campus, importance of language, importance of nature, increased identification, personal beliefs
RQ1	Experiences in a new setting		Multiple cultures on a single campus, outward facing culture
RQ1	Touting diversity but no seat at table	Minimizing Cherokee culture	Cultural oppression; misunderstanding culture, we are the minority, White culture, Cultural disconnect, feeling of isolation, feeling tokenized, felt like an outsider, reactive response to culture
		Unwillingness to accept Cherokee culture	Double standard for Cherokee students, institutional racism, seen as a prop or quota, unauthentic desire for diversity
RQ1	Cultural competencies and sense of community		Positive experiences on campus; promoting cultural competencies, promoting diversity, provides support systems and programs, sense of community, sense of family, supportive faculty
RQ2	Feelings of isolation and minimized sense of belonging	Factors limiting academic ability	Discrediting experiences, feelings of needing to defend culture to others, non-Native faculty, cultural suppression in curriculum, feeling oppressed on campus
		Feelings of isolation	Cultural ignorance; feeling as if I do not belong, going from majority to minority, underrepresented on campus, being underrepresented in most campus groups, feeling like a diversity quota

Table 2 (Continued)

RQ2	Importance of family and campus involvement	Family involvement in education	Desire to make family proud, family encouragement and support, family expectations to succeed, upbringing of individuals
		Personal attributes encouraging persistence	Campus involvement; feeling of responsibility to tribal nation, preexisting friendships, sense of belonging, sense of pride
		Positive attributes of campus environment	Campus housing communities, feeling valued on campus
		Strategies to persist in academic program	Becoming involved on campus, develop mentor relationships, developing connections with individuals with similar backgrounds
		Support systems	Academic support services, developing support networks, importance of support systems, personal or health support services
RQ3	Need for structures for increased inclusion	Curriculum changes	Decolonizing existing curriculum, develop curriculum designed for Native students, incorporating indigenous methodologies
		Increasing non-academic support	Dedicated space for Native students, greater emphasis on Native culture across campus, greater support for Native students, increase mentor relationships, increase the use of study halls
		Modifying academic programs	Increase Native American cohort classes, increase number of Native faculty and instructors, increase or create Native language courses

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers must take measures to ensure the trustworthiness to help ensure the validity of their work. Four criteria help ensure the trustworthiness of the study including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following section describes each of these criteria and their applicability to the study.

Credibility

Credibility is the process of ensuring the study accurately represents the phenomenon under investigation. Study development and implementation included several methods to ensure credibility including adapting interview questions from previous studies examining similar phenomena while also seeking feedback from subject matter experts, including the dissertation committee, during study development. I conducted three test interviews with students who did not meet inclusion criteria for the study to ensure both the clarity of the interview questions and to ensure the questions provided data which answer the associated research question. The use of transcript checking was also used to enhance the credibility of the study. I informed each participant they would receive a copy of their transcript a few days after the interview. Transcripts were sent electronically to each participant's university e-mail account. Only two participants replied to the messages, and they both thanked me for sending the transcript and noted that they did not have any corrections or additions. I contacted each participant a second time when they received their gift card for participation and none mentioned needed changes to their transcript. I made the assumption the lack of response indicated they were comfortable with the transcription of their interview.

Transferability

Transferability includes presenting enough detail when describing the study that others can visualize if the methods and results may apply to their setting (Patton, 2015). The primary method of ensuring transferability including providing rich descriptions of the settings, methods, and data analysis associated with the study. While I included rich

data when describing elements of the study, care was taken to maintain the confidentiality of participants and the research sites. The sample used in the study was considerably homogeneous with all participants being formal citizens of one of the three federally recognized Cherokee Tribal Nations and being from a limited geographic area. Nonetheless, the rich descriptions provided may allow future researchers to develop an understanding of the methods used within the study when designing their studies examining the persistence rates of Native American students or similar phenomenon.

Dependability

Long and Johnson (2000) noted that increasing the dependability of a study occurs through the use of detailed descriptions of the processes used in the study. As with transferability, the study sought to increase the level of dependability using rich descriptions of the methods used to develop and execute the study as well as the methods used during data analysis. The goal of providing rich detail was to allow future researchers to replicate the study with the potential of obtaining similar results. Many of the results included in the findings section came from a few participants. I focused on these responses as they provided the greatest detail of participants' interactions with campus.

Confirmability

Confirmability focuses on ensuring the results of the study are an accurate reflection of the data collected and not the views and bias of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Including an audit trail showing the evolution of the various decisions made throughout the study also increases confirmability (Shenton, 2004). I used a reflective

journal to document my thoughts and feelings as I conducted the study. I used the notes in the journal to ensure the conclusions drawn during the study represented the data collected and not personal bias or preconceived notions. I made sure to make notes on the interview protocol during each interview of areas where I had questions or non-neutral feelings towards a participant's answer. I often used the notes to ask for clarification from the participant or flag the response as evoking an emotional reaction to ensure the reaction did not result in improper conclusions during the data analysis process.

Results

Seven themes emerged from data analysis which are summarized in Table 2. The seven themes include: embracing heritage in a White world, experiences in a new setting, touting diversity but no seat at table, cultural competencies and a sense of community, feelings of isolation and minimized sense of belonging, importance of family and campus involvement, and need for structures for increased inclusion. Twelve subthemes are included within the themes including: minimizing Cherokee culture, unwillingness to accept Cherokee culture, factors limiting academic ability, feelings of isolation, family involvement in education, personal attributes encouraging persistence, positive attributes of campus environment, strategies to persist in academic program, support systems, curriculum changes, increasing nonacademic support, and modifying academic programs.

The seven themes and their respective subthemes address the three research questions of this study. In the following section I provide an overview, organized by research question, of the themes and subthemes developed during data analysis. Each section includes data obtained from interviews conducted during the study. I used the

responses of Peter, Rhonda, and Jacqueline more often as they provided the greatest

detail of the interactions between themselves and their institutional environment during

their respective interviews. Peter is also the only graduate student in the group and it is

likely he has had more chance to reflect on the questions of culture and identity. The

other five participants did not provide the same level of rich detail during their

interviews. The three participants providing the richest answers were heavily involved in

their tribal community and stressed their Cherokee identity during their interviews. The

other participants did not identify themselves as Cherokee as strongly with some such as

John and Cindy describing themselves as Cherokees practicing White culture.

Theme 1: Embracing Heritage in a White World

The first theme focuses on the cultural characteristics of participants and does not

have any subthemes as all codes related specifically to these individual cultural

characteristics. An individual's cultural heritage contains many personal attributes. For

example, Beth described her culture as "what I believe and just why I do what I do, why I

believe what I believe." Jacqueline provided a detailed description of culture:

> [Culture is] something that's inside you, that it's hard to define because each,
>
> each person belongs to a culture, their culture within themselves is different
>
> because they have their family culture, and they have like their, their, like just
>
> overall culture, and then they have like school culture and all that other stuff and
>
> that all kind of slowly accumulates inside [a] person.

When asked to define culture, Peter stated culture was a "way of life." He went on to say,

It's a way of being, so it's how we think, how you come to have knowledge, how

you come to know that knowledge, how you come to know how you exist with

the world around you and the people and the life around you. It's a way of, a way

of being.

While discussing the culture of Cherokee students on campus, Peter noted that

Culture is [not] something that they can put on and take off, but culture is

something that is fluid. It is almost in and of itself, a being. Something that

represents who you are and that is tied to your identity, that's composed of

multiple things, composed of multiple existential things, internal things. Culture is

all [inclusive] from the perspective of who they are.

When asked which aspects of her culture were most important, Rhonda noted

events and cultural aspects such as Green Corn ceremonies, traditional foods, and the

respect paid to elders. Jacqueline focused on the passage of information from one

generation to the next and the importance of tribal elders while Beth discussed the

connection with the land including the knowledge of how to use plants and other natural

resources. John focused on the historical significance of his tribal nation as a significant

aspect of his culture while Peter stressed the importance of balance. When discussing the

concept of balance, Peter stated,

You know, growing up, my grandparents always taught me balance. Everything

that we do, even if you look at it from a cultural perspective, you know, we live in

the center of the world, we live in this world. We live in this world where there's

chaos and there's harmony. We live in a world that balances out the world above

or below, and that's how we're supposed to be as [Cherokee] people. From the moment we wake up in the morning to the moment we go to sleep, the moment we are born and the moment we are laid to rest, we're to seek balance, we're to seek out and understand for every good there's going to be a bad, and for every bad there is going to be a good. You know, there's, there's beauty and there's ugliness and even people, even people have those two sides to them and as [Cherokee] people we have to walk that balance, we have to come to understand that good things are gonna happen. We also have to understand that there are going to be bad things that happen, and we have to find that balance in our life, whether it be in school and work, sports, the arts. We've got to find that balance and we fall out of balance. That's [when] things be[come] hectic for us. When we fall out of balance, that's going to go wrong. We begin to get sick. We begin to start losing our way.

When asked whether significant aspects of participants' culture increased in importance during their time at the institution most participants agreed they had a greater appreciation and sense of importance since arriving on campus. Beth noted, "Yes...when I was in high school...I did not care about my culture and…I hate that I can say that, but that's just how it was." She went on to note,

I just feel like I'm much closer [with my culture] now than I ever have been before...It's changed everything about who I am and how I'm doing and how I'm going to continue to progress as a Native American.

Jacqueline stated she "substantially increased [her] cultural involvement" since being on

campus after "[I] was given more opportunities to kind of incorporate [my culture] into

[my] own being."

While most participants agreed their connections with their tribal culture

increased during their time on campus, Beth and Jacqueline noted that they did not have a

full understanding of their cultural heritage before arriving on campus but quickly

developed a desire to learn more. Beth noted, "I did not care about my culture" when

asked about her cultural identity when entering her undergraduate program. However, she

clarified she came to want that identity,

> My friends that do have culture, [they] know who they are, [they] know why they
>
> believe what they believe, and you know, why their traditions are set in stone this
>
> way. That was so important. Like, I did not have that and I, I want that.

Jacqueline's desire to learn more about her tribal culture was based on her earlier

inability to engage culturally because of her family's decision to follow traditionally

Whitestreamed values while she grew up. When asked why she chose to learn more about

her culture Jacqueline noted, "I was willing, and I was thirsty to learn about this culture

and this part of my family that I never got a chance to learn about." However, while

Jacqueline desired to learn and engage more fully with her tribal culture, she initially had

difficulty because as she described, "I wasn't super knowledgeable, and I don't, I didn't

feel Native enough."

Several participants noted a sense of duty to their tribal nation to earn a degree as

a way of giving back to their community. Beth noted, "it's my duty now to show the

younger generation that you can get through a higher education program, that you can get through college." Cindy spoke of how "Cherokees work to better the lives of their people" while Rhonda explained, "I know that I'm here on campus representing not just myself, but my tribe" and continued,

> I know I finally come [sic] to the realization in my life that I was born for a reason as a full blood because, you know, I'm going to be an elder one day and I'm gonna, you know, I need to be, I need to be educated on the topics that I've selected it, you know, for Native American studies and sociology to help our people to have more confidence to build people up and use myself as testimony, as an example, that yes, it's a Cherokee person, and know you can, you can do what you want to do.

Participants provided rich descriptions of their tribal culture and a sense of pride of being Cherokee was in many responses. When asked which aspects of their tribal culture were most important, many participants noted the deep-rooted traditions and sense of community. However, not all participants entered their academic program with the same level of cultural awareness and participation as they exhibited during the interview process. Some gained an understanding and appreciation after arriving on campus. A common theme among most participants was the sense of duty owed back to their tribal nation and community. Only John and Roger did not mention their larger community at some point during the interview session.

Theme 2: Experiences in a New Setting

The second theme focuses on participants' perceptions of the culture of their college setting. As with the first theme, there are not any subthemes as all codes related specifically to cultural characteristics of the higher education institution. Participants were asked to describe the culture on campus. Beth described the culture on campus of being family oriented and "kind of similar to, you know, the Native American, the Native American culture as far as, you know, small things." Cindy also discussed the family-focused nature of campus culture while also including the importance placed on community service and student success.

> Cindy perceived the campus as a multicultural environment explaining,
> Like we're just kind of like a big melting pot of different cultures, of different ethnicities, and we're all, we all get along. I mean, you don't really see a whole lot of fights breaking out on campus because of color or because of different beliefs.

Peter also perceived a multicultural environment stating, "there are multiple cultures, and there are some cultures I will never experience, just like there are cultures that I am part of that ninety percent of students will never experience." Peter believed an individual's perception of campus culture was directly related to individuals' experiences and where people go to find areas of comfort on campus. While Peter believed it was difficult to provide a singular definition of campus culture, he attempted to describe the culture on his campus by noting,

I don't think I could describe it in one [word] because being here so long; this

institution has multiple cultures. There's the culture and the personification that

the institution gives. This is, this is, South Central University...you know, this is a

pristine university…it's a very Eurocentric culture that's, that's given off from the

institution. But, if you step on campus, you go to different parts of campus that

culture changes.

Most participants perceived a campus environment with multiple cultures.

Jacqueline went so far to state a "huge cultural divide" existed on campus noting many

students "never encountered someone of a different color or race or ethnicity." While

multiple cultures exist, a majority of those interviewed perceived a Eurocentric or

Whitestreamed overall cultural presence on campus. Jacqueline noted that the campus

was "very much still very White…culturally" with the presence of "institutionalized

oppression and racism." She went on to state, "just a lot of ignorance" when describing

the interaction of Native and non-Native students. A few participants noted the

importance of family and giving back to the community including Cindy who explained,

"they're big on community service and enriching the community for, you know, things

that you can do and that is something that, SCU is very big on." Overall, those

interviewed had difficulty providing a clear and concise definition of the culture found on

their respective campuses. While they struggled to articulate the cultural dynamics on

campus, when asked to describe one's tribal culture, most participants had little difficulty

providing numerous examples and attributes of their culture.

Theme 3: Touting Diversity but no Seat at Table

The third theme focuses on the differences between participants' tribal and institutional culture with several participants noting differences between the two. Many participants mentioned the difficulties of being Native American on a primarily Whitestreamed campus with Peter specifically noting, "the White students, faculty, and staff here say, 'oh my God, there's so much stuff here' but they don't have to deal with being brown, they don't have to deal with being Native in a White space." The exploration of differences between tribal and institutional cultures lead to the development of two subthemes, minimizing Cherokee culture and unwillingness to accept Cherokee culture.

Minimizing Cherokee culture. Several participants discussed subtle ways institutions minimized their Cherokee culture. One of the first ways involved preventing Cherokee students from engaging in traditional cultural practices. Rhonda described the difficulties of Cherokee students at SCU related to conducting traditional Cedaring ceremonies after a recent tobacco ban on campus. When discussing the ceremonies, Rhonda stated, "they were comparing it to allowing tobacco, [after implementing] no smoking on campus, which is something totally different than a Cedaring ceremony for the [graduate] students that are graduating. [The ceremony cannot] really be compared to smoking cigarettes." Rhonda went on to explain campus administration interpreted the ceremony through a Whitestreamed lens and noted, "it's not the same thing as using cedar as a ceremonial and a cultural practice to enhance the self-identity of the graduates."

Another example of an institution minimizing Cherokee culture can be found in the inability for Cherokee students to sell traditional foods as an organizational fundraiser. Many campuses have established partnerships with third-party organizations who are often not required to consider certain student needs. One such instance was described by Jacqueline when she talked about a fundraiser organized by the student organization representing Cherokee students on campus. Jacqueline noted:

> So we can't hold fry bread sells because the, the contract that we have with a catering business, something, um, they make fry bread, which here, we have an event and they try to serve fried bread and it was not, we had to call it something else because it was an embarrassment and it was frustrating for me because … if we serve the people bad fry bread, they have full grounds to get up and leave, no questions asked because that is how culturally insensitive it is to serve bad fry bread … it was just very frustrating for me because that's a cultural food that they should not really be doing because they don't know how to do it properly whatsoever.

There are moments when it appeared to Jacqueline Cherokee culture was being lifted to prominence on campus only to be minimized once the benefit of recognizing Cherokees ended. Jacqueline detailed an event at SCSU which had a Native focus. The Native American student group was asked to help present the flags of the local federally recognized tribes. However, once the group completed the request, there was a feeling they were discarded by the organizers. Jacqueline noted,

during [event planning, campus staff] were like, we really need you. And then

afterward they're like, good job, thanks for your help. You know, kind of like a

pat on our back and then like a kind of push out the door, like thank you for your

service now go do what you've been doing.

Jacqueline went on to note she and her Cherokee friends "felt we're almost tokenized"

from the experience.

Participants noted that some Cherokee students feel a double standard exists on

campus where non-Native students can minimize their culture whereas they receive

criticism for standing up for their cultural beliefs. Peter discussed the campus

environment around Halloween where students freely dress up as Native Americans.

Peter believed a double standard exists on campus where impersonating Native

Americans is acceptable but impersonating other races is not allowed. When discussing

Halloween, Peter said, "I still got people who've been dressed up as me and it's okay, but

damn if I try to put blackface on, I'm going to be yelled at. Damned if I try to make a

comment, I'm going to be called over-sensitive." The tendency to imitate things of value

from another culture was limited to those pretending to be Native American in Peter's

eyes.

Participants also felt Cherokee culture is minimized in course assignments and

curriculum. Jacqueline described an instance where a professor assigned a Cherokee text

written by a non-Cherokee author who was also a known member of the Ku Klux Klan

which had inaccurate and oppressive information towards the Cherokee people.

Jacqueline felt the professor should have been more sensitive and said, "if she had

actually done a little bit more research on [the author], I wouldn't have had to read something that I later found out was just complete falsehood, like this was supposed to be my culture." The experience in Jacqueline's class was described as being "hurtful," and as a result of the experience there are now "these people walking around that have a wrong idea of what our culture is and there's no way that I can, or the teacher can fix that." The use of an improper text led, she thought, to a further minimizing of Jacqueline's culture.

Minimizing Cherokee culture within the curriculum also was felt to occur when Native Americans are routinely left out of history texts. Rhonda was especially vocal on the omission of accurate indigenous history in course texts noting,

> In the non-Native American studies classes, [the] subject of indigenous history is totally left out. And so I think that contributes to, you know … the forced assimilation right there, that's just an example of [what] I would perceive it myself as the mudding of a culture.

Rhonda believed omitting Native history from texts was a purposeful decision to minimize the contributions and standing of Native people. She further believed it served to oppress Native students on campus.

Unwillingness to accept Cherokee culture. Participants provided examples of where their institution attempted to be more inclusive of Native American students but often noted that the attempts fell short of providing a safe and inviting environment in which to learn. I asked participants to describe the diversity programs on their campus. Peter stated,

One good breath and it's all going to fall down....I've said this since I was a sophomore. I've seen it then. It's not, and this isn't just for Native people. This is for all diverse peoples, multicultural students, multicultural faculty and staff who are on this campus. I think a lot of us see it. South Central University waves this flag of diversity. It has this flag of diversity that stands up in the air, 'oh look at all of our culture and diversity we have here,' but at the end, there's no institutional backing behind it.

The observation among some participants was of an outward facing desire to increase diversity on campus without a strong institutional push to provide resources and programming to achieve the desired diversity. Jacqueline detailed a story of an offensive mural on campus which the Cherokee student organization on campus requested be removed several times. She said, speaking of institutional responses to diversity issues, "when we do kind of bring up problems there, it's very slow steps unless something big is happening and the focus is on the [administration] to get stuff done, that's not just with us, just with diversity across the board." Roger described the campus culture of being "reactionary" to diversity problems where he felt the administration did not take any proactive steps to increase the overall inclusiveness of the campus.

Several participants noted that events promoting cultural diversity, especially when it came to Native American culture, were routinely organized by individual students and Native faculty and not by the institution as a whole. When discussing events on campus, Peter stated,

It's the Native faculty and staff or the Native department or the Native

programming department that I see. For example, there was recently an event

centered around Native music that was done because it was important to the

Native music faculty.…A lot of the events you see, it's really because there's

either a group of Native students or Native faculty and staff there pushing for the

event to happen. I really can't think of any events or programming that the

institution [has organized].

Jacqueline also noted the student focused organization of cultural events stating, "it's

definitely the student groups" when asked who was currently taking the initiative to

bridge the cultural divide on campus. Roger continued the trend of participants noting the

lack of institutionally planned cultural activities stating, "I wish SCSU provided more

opportunities for non-Native students to be exposed to our culture."

The unwillingness to accept Cherokee culture is not limited to institutional

administration and faculty. Peter told a story of when he was standing outside the student

recreation center after exercising with friends. Peter explained, "this car pulled up in front

of me with a whole bunch of White boys pulling up and yelling at me, prairie nigger, go

back to where you came from." While Peter admitted this could be an isolated incident,

he said other Cherokee friends had similar experiences on campus.

Theme 4: Cultural Competencies and Sense of Community

Not all experiences of Cherokee students on campus were negative. The fourth

theme focuses on the positive experiences of Cherokee students on campus. As with the

first and second theme, there are not any subthemes as all codes related directly to the

overall positive experiences of participants. Several participants noted having positive experiences on campus including Beth, Jacqueline, John, and Rhonda. John provided the most glowing review of his campus experience noting, "I've had a very pleasant experience thus far, I haven't experienced anything I would consider problematic" whereas Rhonda noted that she has had "a positive experience for the most part." A couple primary factors related to the majority of positive experience described by participants including finding a sense of community or family on campus and the role of faculty.

Many of the positive aspects on campus expressed in the interviews were directly related to a sense of family or community on campus. Cindy, Peter, and Jacqueline all noted the importance of their institutional family and community. When describing the people on campus with which she was most close Cindy said, "we may be from different places in the world, we may be of different religious beliefs or different ethnicities, but we all have something in common." Finding a community of peers with common traits or interests was not as important for many Jacqueline who noted, "I wasn't really looking for like a Native connection, I was just looking for connection period" and continued with, "there is a sense of community and togetherness when people are involved."

Many times, a sense of community or family was found within organizations specifically targeting Native American students. Jacqueline described the benefits of these organizations noting they,

> Provided [Cherokee students] the connection that they wouldn't have otherwise
>
> had because especially Native students raised in a Native community come to

this, this school and they see all these White faces that then just disappear and then they don't have anybody that looks like them or who can connect with them. Jacqueline believed these types of organizations were most important for students who transitioned from being a part of the majority to the minority after leaving their hometowns. John also described the transition from the majority to the minority as it relates to being involved in Native organizations on campus. John explained, "being a part of the Native groups on campus, it's more about I can actually be myself. I don't have to be on all the time." Developing a family or community on campus allowed Cherokee students to focus more on being students and less on being Cherokee.

Faculty were a significant positive aspect for many participants. Rhonda noted the helpfulness of faculty members in her academic program while Beth told a story of a particularly influential faculty member who invited her to attend a study abroad trip shortly after arriving on campus. She explained,

> I got to go to Ireland and I got to spend 2 weeks with a Native American college professor. And in those 2 weeks...he taught me more than any, than any I think, any other professor could teach me. And I felt like that's really, really important just because if it wasn't, if it wasn't for him, you know, taking the time to ask me...I wouldn't have got to see a lot of things.

Beth continued,

> I just think that's amazing that, you know, one, one professor sought me out and helped me and I think that after, you know, and it not just being a Native American professor but just the professors in general just say, hey, I know that

you can, you know you can go, you can broaden your horizons and you can go on

this trip. And he showed me how I could do that. And I just think, I just think

that's, I just think that's amazing.

Beth felt she would have never had the opportunity to grow and become involved on

campus without the support of the faculty member described in her story.

While most participants noted some form of oppression of their Cherokee culture,

they also noted instances where they had positive experiences on campus. The majority

of these experiences occurred when interacting with students like themselves in self-

made families or communities. Participants also noted the importance of facility,

especially Native faculty, to having a positive experience on campus.

Theme 5: Feelings of Isolation and Minimized Sense of Belonging

The fifth theme focuses on the impacts of incongruent tribal and institutional

culture as perceived by participants and is the first of the two themes related to RQ2. The

two subthemes developed during data analysis include factors limiting academic ability

and feelings of isolation. Participants noted that feelings of isolation and a minimized

sense of belonging effect how they interact with their campus environment. When

discussing his sense of belonging at his institution, Peter explained, "you come to live

with it, come to understand that's the way this institution works. If you don't fit a certain

mold, act a certain way in certain places, [you don't belong]". Fitting the mold described

by Peter may be difficult in some situations, especially in the environment described by

John as being "primarily White with some outliers."

Factors limiting academic ability. Participants noted several ways in which institutional factors limited their ability to succeed academically. Several of those interviewed noted that faculty did not understand their unique needs as Cherokee students which often led to frustration. Based on participant responses, it appears non-Native faculty have difficulty understanding the needs of Cherokee students. Peter told a story of tension he experienced with one of his teachers regarding needing to be away from class after the death of a family member. Peter explained,

> Non-Native faculty, oh yeah, they don't understand … there's things I have to go
> back and do, those things I have to do, for example, if my uncle dies, I have to be
> out there to dig the grave, you know, I'm not going to make my other uncles do it.

While telling me about his commitment to family, Peter explained non-Native faculty do not understand the familial structure of Native communities. Continuing with the story about his responsibility after a family member death, Peter continued,

> I've had to pick and choose with, especially with funerals and I think it was my
> senior year and me and this one professor went round and round because I had a
> grandma pass away. [My professor] clearly [didn't] understand. I said, when I say
> grandma, I'm talking about that. That's like my great aunts, my grandma. She
> [Peter's professor] said, 'you have too many grandmas, we're not gonna let you
> go for this.' But that's fine, I'll fail your class. That's fine with me.

Peter's story of his interaction with a non-Native faculty member appears to demonstrate the need to decide between participating in his tribal customs or succeeding as a student. Peter made mention during his interview that he always offered to take work with him

and wanted to participate in class as much as possible but always felt he needed to be with family. Peter ultimately made the choice to stay in class noting, "there's been things I've had to skip, you know, funerals. I've had to skip people's deathbeds." Peter's body language changed when describing having to miss family commitments, appearing to become upset. Peter took several pauses (of 5-10 seconds) when explaining his absences from these important events.

Not understanding the needs of Cherokee students is not the only way non-Native faculty may limit Cherokee students' academic ability. When discussing how differences between tribal and institutional culture may impact persistence rates Rhonda noted how non-Native instructors' lack of understanding of indigenous history can negatively impact Cherokee students. Rhonda stated,

> You know what, I think [cultural differences] can [impact persistence rates], I really do, because it depends, you know, the professor has a lot to do with that too. If the professor is not as understanding or basically, I won't say uneducated … if there's like in any kind of indigenous history of North America, then they don't understand at all what, what our name is...I can tell you that some students might give up, you know.

Rhonda felt Cherokee students might not stay in their academic program if they felt their professors were misrepresenting their culture. Rhonda added they might suffer from a type of "oppression" as a result. Peter also discussed potential lack of understandings of indigenous history and noted that he interpreted it as the tendency to "discredit or discount [Cherokee students'] experiences."

Participants' responses to interview questions suggested they perceived the lack of understanding of Cherokee culture was not restricted to non-Native faculty. Participants noted difficulty being around other students who had misconceptions of their indigenous history. Peter told a story of a having to explain his Native upbringing to a non-Native student in a class discussion. He said,

We were just talking about the [Native] suicide rates and things like that. There was a frat boy and he raised his hand and said, 'why should we care about the suicide rates of Native people? What makes them so special? Everyone has suicide rates; everyone commits suicide.' My hand went straight up...[the professor] finally called on me and I remember I just lost it....I said, I'm telling you until you have been called, until you have been kicked out of a restaurant because you're brown. I said, 'until you've been stopped at gunpoint outside of a town in North Dakota and told you can't go through that town because you're brown and until you've been shot at up north'...when you've experienced that, then we can talk about how we're all the same and how [we] are equal.

When asked if these experiences affected Peter's ability to learn he explained they did not but instead affect how he engages with the classroom. Peter explained,

[there is a] lot of ignorance and I think as Native people we, we try our best to tolerate the ignorance and teach, you want to do that, but at some point in time it just gets too much and that's why they [don't] take it. It doesn't affect how I learn but more how I engage.

Peter's description of how the interaction affected his ability to engage and not his ability

to learn may be limited to few students like himself who are strong-willed and dedicated

to their education. Theories such as engagement theory describe experiences opposite of

those noted by Peter.

Jacqueline noted feeling solely responsible for Native students on campus.

Jacqueline stated, "I'm cognizant because people know I'm [highly involved in the

Native community] which for some reason automatically makes me the spokesperson for

Native Americans everywhere....I can't speak for all Native Americans because there

[are] so many more tribes." Despite knowing she's not a representative for all Native

students, the expectation is still there within the campus community. Jaqueline explained

the expectation puts pressure on her,

> I feel responsible not just for the Cherokees, but for Natives in general on
>
> campus...that makes me have to carry myself a little bit more and I almost have to
>
> put up like an armor because I know that and a lot of the situations that I talk
>
> about, like experiences or knowledge or history, people might be against it.

An added pressure seemed to exist because Jacqueline is expected to represent Native

people but at the same time is expected to maintain a delicate balance between being

Native and participating in the Whitestreamed campus culture. The added pressure may

be a result of Jacqueline's status within a Native student organization on campus.

Feelings of isolation. Differences between tribal and institutional cultures led to

feelings of isolation for some participants. When discussing the origins of these feelings,

Peter noted that some Cherokee students do not feel a sense of community on campus.

When asked if his institution attempted to create a sense of community Peter explained,

> I think they try to create a sense of community. I think it's hard even for Native
>
> students to connect with that community and I think maybe it's more because how
>
> I was raised because I wasn't, I was raised, I was raised born to a Native school. I
>
> was raised being the majority. I was raised in my culture.

The sudden shift from being around people just like themselves to struggling to find those

with common characteristics is problematic in Peter's opinion. Jacqueline described a

similar problem,

> It's sometimes a culture shock to them because they, like my friends, they went to
>
> [a Native high school] … so they grew up around Native students and …White
>
> people were their minority. Now that they come to SCSU and they are very
>
> visibly the minority. Not only… just on campus but within the minority sector
>
> itself and they are not use to that.

> Feelings of isolation were often coupled with feelings of not belonging. These

feelings were elevated when participants attempted to integrate into certain campus

groups. Cindy discussed attempting to make friends with students highly active in the

institution's Greek system. She noted,

> There were several times where I knew people here, but I didn't have any classes
>
> with them because I was behind, and it was definitely hard to make friends and to,
>
> to integrate myself into like these little groups, especially with like the big, the
>
> Greek life here, like I'm not in Greek Life. It's not my personality and it seems

like 90% of everyone here is Greek life … you get into the class with 30 people

and 15 of those might be part of the same, you know, same group. So, it's hard to

find your spot per se when Greek life is that prominent.

Feelings of isolation and lack of a sense of belonging were also outlined by Peter when

discussing his involvement with a scholars' program on campus as he explained, "it just

kind of felt like I was, oh, 'I'm the diversity quota'." The experiences in the scholar's

program did not provide the benefit intended and may have had the opposite effect.

Being involved in campus groups did not always lead to the elimination of

feelings of not belonging or isolation. Peter noted several groups in which he participants

yet stated, "yeah, feelings of isolation, I still feel it here in certain places." Peter's

experiences may demonstrate that it may not be the quantity of the activities but the

quality that matter.

Theme 6: Importance of Family and Campus Involvement

The sixth theme focuses on two primary factors participants identified as helping

them persist in their degree program, family and being involved on campus. Peter

described the importance of family to his ability to persist,

[they hold] me accountable … every time I packed up to leave those people that

hold me accountable here and those people who hold me accountable at home,

those are the things that stopped me. 'Cause if it was my choice, I wouldn't be

here. I wouldn't be at a place that doesn't believe I exist'."

Family involvement in education. All participants discussed the importance of

family involvement during their interviews. First and foremost, family provided

encouragement for participants to finish their academic program. Beth stated, "they just encourage me…they encourage me to stay in college...they do encourage me to stay every time I come home, they're very, they're very happy for me. They're very proud." Cindy stated, "my family has always pushed education first" whereas Peter stated, "[my family], they've been there since day one to support me as emotional support." Marissa believed her family was heavily involved in her education, "my family asks about my school work every time we talk on the phone and when I go home to visit."

Jacqueline's family was also involved in her education providing emotional support when needed. Jacqueline said,

> My parents are very supportive…they can't necessarily help me because they stopped being able to help me with my education in like sixth grade and so I've been pretty much on my own, but they, they support me. They don't really, they're not really involved with my schoolwork or like with my classes and stuff. They do occasionally ask me about my grades…they're there for me when I need them and if I need them.

Rhonda also noted the "moral support and encouragement" provided by her family specifically noting the encouragement provided by her family "that I was worthy enough [to go to college]."

Rhonda explained she was motivated to complete her academic program due to a desire to make her family proud. While describing making her mother proud, Rhonda stated, "I thank my mother now, you know, all throughout the years, she always told me, you know, to go to college … [now] she's going to have two, two children with college

educations." Peter also discussed wanting to make his family proud, "I'm [getting my degree] to get a seat at the table [to better represent my people]."

While family generally motivated participants, Beth, John, and Peter described difficulties experienced due to family involvement in their educations. While discussing family involvement, John stated,

it's definitely a distraction, and I do envy those, that, you know, parents, they just send them off to college and don't really care and then are, they can get C's and everything else, but I guess I do credit my parents for they are the ones helping me, giving me that motivation to try to do the best I can and they're not ridiculous. Like if I do my best and I get a C, but my dad will ask me, 'did you do the best you can?' and I say, 'yeah,' and you know just get on with it.

Beth feels pressure from her family to hurry home after completing her degree program but feels conflicted. She explained,

My dad … he always asks every time I come home for the past 4 years or 5 years, he said, 'when will you be done? When are you coming home?' And … that's kind of hard to, um, answer because I don't know if I'm coming home after college … I think he just expects that I do come home, but … I feel like they're supportive in ways … but then I feel like they want me, they want me home … when I graduate, I don't know if I want to go home, but it does, it does put stress because they expect me to come straight home. And so, I don't know … it's a little stressful.

Commitments to family cause stress for Peter as well, as he noted,

They've been that support system. It's hard though because I feel like I've missed

my oldest niece's life because she was born when I was a junior, sophomore, and

it's hard for me because, especially in our ways, their uncle serves as their

teacher. I am responsible for their upbringing … I'm the one that's responsible for

[teaching]. I think that's been hard for me because, especially with my nephew,

you know, not being there all the time, that we'll be able to see [each other only]

once or twice every couple of weeks.

Even though Beth, John, and Peter noted difficulties due to family responsibility all noted

the importance of family and the benefits provided by their involvement in their

respective educations.

 Personal attributes encouraging persistence. Participants identified several

personal attributes they felt helped them persist in their academic program. Personal

connections are important to Cindy who noted "another driving force was the majority of

my friends were here" when asked why she chose SCU. Jacqueline also stressed the

importance of connections,

I know not only from statistics but from my own friends' personal accounts

[stories]...connecting on campus really helps [Cherokee students] stay and persist

because it gives them something to hold onto and to hope for...because Natives

don't really like asking for help, but like they have something that they know that

they can count on and like a community that they know that they can go to and

relate with.

Having connections appears to be integral to Beth's ability to persist, "if I didn't have connections on this campus...I don't feel like I would be here, you know, at all. There's just great people on this campus...they encourage you to stay and do whatever [you] need to do."

A feeling of personal responsibility to finish their degree program for the betterment of their tribe existed in Cindy, Jacqueline, and Peter's interviews. Cindy discussed the desire to give back,

> I want to help people and in order to do that I have to get through [my degree program] and I think that's something that's really pushed me forward is just knowing that in order to do what I want to do, I have to get through it and that just makes me push myself that much further.

Peter stated, "the best way that I can serve my community [and] the best way I can serve those around me is to be educated." Responsibility to others was a central theme in Peter's interview with many decisions originating with how they would impact not himself, but his family and tribal community. When discussing personal responsibility, Peter explained, "it's made me accountable because the times that I've wanted to give up, I think that's one of the things that as a [Cherokee] person, that's been drilled into me, especially by my grandparents, that I never come first." Jacqueline's contributions focused on preserving her Native language, "I'm trying to learn the language, to help preserve the language and maybe teach language later on and um, so I feel like I've contributed to the community in those small ways." Jacqueline showed great pride in

taking Cherokee language classes on campus and noted that she was unable to learn the language growing up.

Beth, Cindy, Jacqueline, John, and Roger all described having a sense of belonging on campus. When asked if they had a sense of belonging John replied, "yeah, yes, I do" and Robert said, "I believe I belong here." A sense of belonging did not always develop automatically. Cindy noted that she initially did not feel as if she belonged, but now feels more comfortable, "I feel like ever since I kind of got over that initial first couple of weeks here...I just wasn't sure kind of how to integrate yet." Developing a sense of belonging sometimes occurred through participation on campus. When discussing her development of a sense of belonging Jacqueline explained, "especially since I'm part of the board [of her student organization] and I've been involved in, and I've gone to these different meetings and have been involved on campus and like administrative people recognize me." Beth also commented on the importance of being involved with campus groups to developing a sense of belonging,

> I've never felt isolated on [sic] this university. Um, they go out of their way. The faculty [and] staff go out of their way to make sure that I'm, you get [to do what] you want to do and it's completely, it's completely ok...I would never say I felt isolated on this campus. There's so many, there's so many things that you can do and if … there's something that isn't on campus that you want to start, they want, they want you to start it, so they want to give you so much opportunity and leadership opportunities as well. So, I don't think, I wouldn't say I...ever feel isolated.

A sense of pride appeared to motivate participants to persist in their academic program. Cindy stated,

There was [sic] definitely times where I just wanted to quit, but I think the way that I was raised, I was raised to be competitive. I was raised, you know, to see school and school first. I think that's helped me persist...I just don't want to become a statistic … my main fear is just I don't want to be that statistic that doesn't make it.

Jacqueline also discussed the importance of pride noting,

Those aspects of the culture of being proud of where you came from and who you are, who your people are, and how you are, a path on a journey that your family has, you know, helped you get to this point and now you need to take it to the next point. So that way your ancestors can take it to the next point. Um, is something that I'm not necessarily always aware of but has gotten me this far that I am both; I'm important, but also just a stepping stone for the next generation.

Positive attributes of campus environment. Campus dynamics such as size of institution was important to Jacqueline who noted,

The class sizes are so small if, uh, you know, by the middle of the semester, the professor definitely knows who's missing...that's why SCSU was, like probably the best fit for me because I don't think I would've been able to handle, had just been a face out of 100 within a single classroom.

Jacqueline described not feeling comfortable in large classrooms. Marissa had a similar viewpoint noting, "I feel like I get lost in the crowd" when describing experiences in larger classes.

Cindy, Jacqueline, and John discussed the benefits of living on campus during their first year on campus. Jacqueline said, "developing that connection and kind of being forced to develop that connection was pretty nice my first year because I was naturally kind of socially shy and awkward." Jacqueline lived in a cohort-based community where students lived together and were enrolled in a similar course track each semester. While living on campus had benefits for Jacqueline, she cautioned,

> there is definitely a community that lives on campus and the community that lives off campus. Like there is a difference that I noticed because they do like housing and dining for only their own little events that only housing people who live in the dorms know about.

Cindy described a positive experience with on-campus living noting that her cohort would "get together at least once every couple of weeks just to say, 'hey, how are you doing," let's chill out. Not do homework for once in our lives.'" The social benefits of campus housing described by Cindy were also noted by John:

> We'd all come together maybe once a week, watch a TV show together that would come on or if any of us needed help [in one] of our basic classes we would study together...being a part of the dorm from the very beginning gets you into the culture at your college because you know when, when everyone moves in, I mean if you're like me, you don't know anybody, you know, your friends either didn't

go to college or went to a different college, so being put in a dorm with people who are most likely just like you and that they don't know anyone. It's very nice to be able to experience that together and you know, you get a strong support base just to start out with and then they kind of get you used to branching out and meeting other people.

Strategies to persist in academic program. The discussion of ways participants persisted in their academic program included being involved on campus. Roger noted, "I think being involved on campus has helped me stay connected at some level, but I am less involved now than [during] my freshman year." Cindy also described reduced involvement as she progressed in her academic program, "I got older [and] started getting into heavier … course loads and my involvement definitely, definitely went down." Involvement also fluctuated for Beth who said her level of involvement did "fluctuate throughout my whole career, my whole college career, just because, you know, some semesters were definitely harder than others. I wasn't able to handle my workload on top of being a part of organizations." Rhonda also expressed a decline in involvement, "I've decided to kind of scaled [sic] back a little bit so I can focus on my grades because I want to be able to graduate with honors." While Roger, Cindy, Rhonda, and Beth described reductions in their level of involvement, Jacqueline described an increase: "freshman year me probably wouldn't recognize senior year me, you know, because I'm so involved in, busy in different ways than what I was back then and how I'm more...just how active I am."

Developing a mentor relationship with campus administrators was an important persistence strategy for Beth,

> Someone took me under their wing in the administration office and helped me throughout the whole process and any time since then I've ever needed help with things other than financial aid, he was there to help me. He was there to make sure that I was okay and that I could, you know, I didn't have to worry about this struggle and I could get through school. He just wanted me to completely focus on school...I feel like creating those connections on campus has definitely helped me persist and get through.

Mentor relationships were not always with faculty and staff, Marissa noted, "I signed up for a mentor program offered by the institution and was paired with another Native student who was a few years older than me. She helped me during those first few difficult years."

Support systems. The use of campus support system varied among participants. Beth and Cindy utilized services such as career services, the food pantry, and wellness center. Beth described the importance of having these support systems to her ability to persist, "I've used the food pantry, you know, during the summertime I don't get scholarships, but I still have to come...I struggled a little bit during the summer, but I eat [sic], the food pantry was always there." Other campus resources available to Cherokee students include counseling centers where they can talk with professionals about difficulties that may affect their ability to persist. Jacqueline told a story of struggling with anxiety when it came to grades,

I get intense anxiety about my grades. Um, and so going to the counselor and kind

of talking with them and getting some introspection about why, why [I was]

immediately going into panic mode for something like this or you know, just

talking about experiences and insecurities of habit really kind of helped me

prioritize and be okay with not necessarily being a perfect student...learning to be

okay with that and accepting it and kind of maybe still having those moments of

panic, but letting it kind of wash off...that was something I [had] to learn and so

those support services definitely have helped me just become a student that wasn't

just overwhelmed with everything.

Cindy also described the importance of academic support systems,

Being able to go to the math center for free math tutoring very, very much helped,

and one more, the action center tutoring that got me through human physiology

and human anatomy...those action centers very much helped. Without those, I

don't know that I would have pass[ed] the course.

While some participants such as Beth, Cindy and Jacqueline found campus-based

support systems helpful, Peter did not feel comfortable seeking assistance in a

Whitestreamed environment. Peter described not feeling welcome in the campus-based

groups such as those organized by student affairs, "[I] realize[d], [I] don't belong...I'm

comfortable with [other Natives], I've never felt comfortable around the majority of

[White students]". Rather, Peter relied on Native specific support structures, "Where I

find my support system, I came here, and I joined [several Native based organizations],

all these different Native groups. That was my community, that's my SCU." Jacqueline

had an opposite viewpoint noting, "I try to get involved across campus where I can because I feel that's important."

Theme 7: Need for Structures for Increased Inclusion

The seventh theme focuses on the modifications participants would make to their learning environment to increase persistence rates of students like themselves and is the only theme related to RQ3. Three subthemes were developed during data analysis including curriculum changes, increase non-academic support, and modifying curriculum programs. A common answer among all participants was the need to increase the overall cultural knowledge of non-Native students on campus. Peter noted that it is important to teach "students about the state that they're getting educated from" so they have an understanding of the cultural dynamics of the area. Several participants also noted the need for a dedicated space for Cherokee students. The importance of constructing a dedicated space became important as Cherokee students might not know organizations dedicated to helping Native American students exist on campus.

Curriculum changes. Curriculum on campus was thought to minimize the contributions of the Cherokee people resulting in a form of oppression. A way to reduce the oppression may include increasing the visibility of indigenous culture and history within the curriculum. Changes to the curriculum might also include the topics covered in various courses such as history and geography. Peter noted that future courses should "[include] a couple lessons on Native people, indigenous land, indigenous bearings … I think a lot of curriculum changes would have to occur within those 1000 level [entry level] courses." Peter believed students needed a strong foundation in cultural awareness

in their general education classes before starting major specific courses. Rhonda also believed curriculum changes were needed noting the need for courses focusing on the "importance of [the] indigenous culture of North America, basically the importance of what's the source talking about federally recognized tribe[s], Cherokee people and others." Rhonda's concerns came from attending classes where indigenous peoples were mischaracterized in course texts. When discussing incorporating more indigenous content into the standard curriculum, Jacqueline noted she "would love to see that implemented just like across campus so that people can get different perspectives other than the whitewashed one that's just kind of like standard curriculum."

Modifying academic programs. Traditional Whitestreamed ways of instruction may not provide Cherokee students with the learning opportunities needed to persist in their academic program. Beth described cohort classes designed and taught by Native American instructors that forgo the traditional lecture style format noting "the Native American population is more hands-on" and having courses focusing on student participation and hands-on activities may lead to greater learning. The key to increasing learning according to Beth is "decolonizing the curriculum."

The topic of support systems came up throughout many interviews conducted during the study. Peter believed academic support systems were imperative to increasing learning opportunities for Cherokee students. Peter noted the need to "create a cohort in classes with those living-learning students where they all take Comp 1 together, they help each other, and they create bonds." Having a group of Cherokee students who attended

similar classes may benefit from shared experiences which could be used to help each other persist in their academic program.

When discussing class structures, Roger mentioned difficulties dealing with non-Native instructors who often "don't understand my needs leading to tension when I need to miss class for cultural activities." Peter also discussed the difficulties of non-Native faculty and noted,

> I'm constantly explain[ing] myself as a [Cherokee] person. Explain why I go outside with that eclipse [that] happened last year. There was a certain prayer I have to pray. Why, when there are certain things happening in the natural world there are things I have to do. It's not making coursework difficult, but instead, it makes it difficult to engage.

Peter believed having more Native instructors on campus would help Cherokee students persist in their academic program. The same issue described by Peter were noted by Jacqueline who also noted the need for "more Native faculty and staff teaching Native subjects."

Increase non-academic support. While the need for modifications to curriculum and academic programs were important to participants, many discussed the need for the development of non-academic structures. The most commonly cited non-academic support structure mentioned in interviews was the creation of space specifically for Native students. Peter described the desired space as a "living-learning center for Native students." When describing the type of space needed, Jacqueline noted the importance of having

a space where they know … if [students] need tutoring and like be like, 'hey, how

are you?' You know, just that causal personal connection that they might not get

otherwise and they probably don't get because you know, sometimes they're not

even aware that we're on campus.

Developing an established space for Native students allows new students to know where

they can turn to for support services. Cindy noted that she did not know about support

services when she first arrived on campus. She stated, "I had no idea that there was a

Cherokee organization here until actually this semester, this is my third semester at SCU

and I had no idea. I think either having a better opportunity to like advertise things and to

say, 'hey, we're here' [would help increase visibility]."

A second non-academic support structure mentioned during the interviews was

the need for mentor relationships to help build one-on-one connections between

Cherokee students and other faculty, staff, and students. Beth noted that these

relationships provided an avenue to "talk about things such as, you know, what are you

struggling with, why are you struggling with it, how can we change that way it's not such

a struggle." Mentor relationships were seen as an avenue to minimize factors which

might limit Cherokee students' ability to persist before they became so great students

leave their academic programs.

Participants noted modifications to their learning environment which may help

students like themselves persist included making modifications to curriculum, changing

academic programs, and creating support structures such as dedicated student centers and

mentor relationships. Each of these were designed to create a learning environment where

Cherokee students felt they belonged, had support, and could flourish academically. The common theme among all of the recommended changes was the need to understand, support, and respect the unique culture of Cherokee students. Participants believed doing so provided the best opportunities for students like themselves to persist.

Summary

Seven themes emerged from data analysis: embracing heritage in a White world, experiences in a new setting, touting diversity but no seat at table, cultural competencies and a sense of community, feelings of isolation and minimized sense of belonging, importance of family and campus involvement, and need for structures for increased inclusion. Developing an understanding of Cherokee students' ability to persist within their academic program may be possible using these themes.

Many participants noted a strong sense of cultural heritage and described the increasing importance of their culture while on campus using their time on campus to become closer to their tribal culture. When asked, several participants noted a duty to their tribe as their motivation to attend college and the driving force behind their decision to remain in their academic program. The responsibility of bettering themselves to better their community was a foundational element for many participants.

Describing the institutional culture found on their campus was difficult for many participants. Several stated the campus was multicultural with the feeling of being in a cultural melting pot. While multiple cultures may exist on campus, the primary culture experienced by participants was White or Eurocentric. Some felt their campus culture was oppressive and racist toward them as a Cherokee student. The differences in culture

led to the desire to leave school before completion, but participants described their decision to stay was a result on individually created support systems.

A few participants noted that a huge cultural divide exists on campus where students may never interact with someone with non-Whitestreamed cultural values. A double standard exists in some participants' minds where the institution touted the importance of inclusivity, but they were not allowed to participate in cultural activities freely. The commitment to cultural diversity was seen as superficial by participants as their institution did not provide the resources perceived as necessary to increase diversity. Participants also described feeling oppressed by non-Native students on campus.

While there were several negative aspects of their campus culture described by participants, there were also positive attributes. Participants stressed the importance of the various Native groups available on campus. Faculty, especially Native faculty, were seen as a positive aspect of campus. However, most participants stressed the need for more Native faculty.

Incongruence between tribal and institutional cultures caused academic difficulties for many participants. According to participants, non-Native faculty do not understand the needs of Cherokee students and often discredit their needs and experiences. Participants described having difficulty engaging with their learning environment as a result of the limited understanding and compassion of non-Native faculty. Participants felt a responsibility to represent all Native peoples which caused additional undue stress in an already stressful environment. Participants described feeling isolated and as if they did not belong on campus.

Despite the negative effects of incongruent cultures, participants were able to persist within their academic program. Family served as a primary motivator to remain in school by providing emotional support. Participants also had the desire to make their families proud which also served as a motivator. However, while strong family convictions helped participants persist, in some cases they also caused stress, especially when discussing the topic of returning home after college. Two participants noted the internal struggle when deciding whether to return home after college or begin their adult lives on their own.

Developing connections on campus also helped participants persist. The connections served as a form of support system participants could use to help navigate themselves through their educational journey. Campus housing served as an important support system for many participants where they developed the initial connections which helped them throughout the difficult first few weeks of their freshman year. While institutionally created support systems exist, some participants felt more comfortable self-made Native support structures.

Participants provided several ideas on the types of modifications to their learning environment they felt would best serve Native students like themselves in the future including increasing the prevalence and stature of Cherokees in institutional curriculum, creating dedicated spaces for Cherokee students to gather and receive support, developing better support systems and opportunities for mentor relationship, and decolonizing the methods used in instruction.

In Chapter 5, I will interpret the findings within the contextual framework guiding the study as well as the empirical literature examined in Chapter 2. The study's implications and limitations, as well as recommendations for future research, will also be discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Cherokee students perceive how their tribal culture affects their ability to persist within their academic program at mainstream institutions of higher education within primarily Whitestreamed campus cultures. The study sought to answer three research questions:

RQ1: What differences, if any, do Cherokee students perceive between their tribal culture and the culture found at a predominately White institution of higher education in the United States Midwest?

RQ2: How do Cherokee students perceive these differences influence their ability to persist in college?

RQ3: What changes to their educational program do Cherokee students perceive would increase their own and other Cherokee students' persistence in college?

Seven themes emerged during the data analysis process, including four themes regarding RQ1, two regarding RQ2, and one regarding RQ1. The themes for RQ1 were (a) embracing heritage in a White world, (b) experiences in a new setting, (c) touting diversity but no seat at table, and (d) cultural competencies and sense of community. The themes for RQ2 were feelings of isolation and minimized sense of belonging and importance of family and campus involvement. Finally, the theme for RQ3 was need for structures for increased inclusion.

Four of the seven themes included subthemes, whereas in three themes the use of subthemes was not needed. The two subthemes for touting diversity but no seat at table

were minimizing Cherokee culture and unwillingness to accept Cherokee culture. The two subthemes for feelings of isolation and minimized sense of belonging are factors limiting academic ability and feelings of isolation. The five subthemes for importance of family and campus environment were family involvement in education, personal attributes encouraging persistence, positive attributes of campus environment, strategies to persist in academic program, and support systems. Finally, the three subthemes for need for structures for increased inclusion were curriculum changes, increasing non-academic support, and modifying academic programs.

In the following chapter I provide an interpretation of the findings of the study. Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are also presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications this study may have for positive social change for Cherokee students in higher education.

Interpretation of the Findings

The themes emerging from data analysis and subsequently presented in Chapter 4 are consistent with the studies and theories related to persistence rates of Cherokee students reviewed in Chapter 2. Theorists and researchers examining persistence rates found students' ability to persist in their academic programs often relied on key attributes of the student and their institution, such as those reflected in all of the themes in this study: embracing heritage in a White world, experiences in a new setting, touting diversity but no seat at table, cultural competencies and sense of community, feelings of isolation and minimized sense of belonging, importance of family and campus involvement, and need for structures for increased inclusion.

Interpretation of the findings of the study occurs in the following eight sections. In the first section, I reflect on the theories guiding the study including providing quotes from participants applicable to the tenets of the theory. The subsequent seven sections interpret each of the themes and relevant subthemes in the context of the articles included in the literature review. Interpretations of each theme occur in a different section.

Theories Guiding the Study

In his cultural compatibility theory, Tharp (1989) explored the relationship between cultural incongruence and persistence rates noting achievement levels of Native American students were lower than students from the dominant culture on campuses of predominately White institutions of higher education. The fundamental tenet of Tharp's theory is the improvement of learning outcomes when instructional methods are congruent with students' cultural backgrounds. Most participants in this study noted a disconnect between their tribal culture and the culture found on their campus. Many mentioned having difficulty learning and engaging in the classroom environment because of these differences. As noted in Chapter 4, Peter described his experiences with an incongruent learning environment noting, "it just frustrates me, it goes back to the fact that I'm constantly on, I'm constantly having to explain myself as a Native person." Cultural incongruence led to feelings of isolation for many participants including Jacqueline who noted that she felt "very isolated" at times on campus. When asked how they would improve their academic program many mentioned the development of programs aligned with their cultural values such as dedicated support spaces for Cherokee students and relationships with mentors.

All participants in this study were either juniors or higher with six anticipating completing their academic program within the current academic year including one with his doctoral degree. Cindy, Beth, and John did not perceive incongruence between their tribal and institutional culture whereas Peter, Jacqueline, and Rhonda perceived many areas where incongruence existed between cultures. The academic persistence of Peter, Jacqueline, and Rhonda despite perceived cultural incongruence may be a result of participation in groups and activities which have congruent cultural characteristics. As noted in Chapter 4, Jacqueline described being involved in numerous student groups on campus while Peter described his organizations as, "that's my community, and that's where I found that balance. That's where I found that balance with the individualistic nature that this campus feeds off of and that this campus promotes." Cindy, Beth, and John discussed participating in organizations related to their academic program such as the undergraduate business association but did not note participation in Native based groups. The culturally congruent learning environment discussed by Tharp (1989) may not necessarily have to be within the classroom environment if students find this type of environment in other places on campus such as student groups. However, it appears a culturally congruent environment is a critical component to persistence rates of Cherokee students regardless of where it is found.

Astin (1984) discussed the relationship between students' level of involvement and persistence rates in his student involvement theory. Astin incorporated factors such as students' background, experiences, environmental interactions, and beliefs into his theory noting the interaction of these variables contribute to a student's ability to persist

in their academic program. Most participants in this study discussed some of these variables during their interviews, and it became clear the interaction between such variables was significant in their individual persistence stories. For instance, Peter felt his connection with nature, family, his upbringing, and experiences on campus affected his ability to persist on campus while Jacqueline perceived current experiences on campus and interactions with her learning environment as helping her persist.

As noted in Chapter 2, scholars often rely on the work of Tinto (1975, 1988) when examining the relationship between involvement and persistence rates with several authors (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Metz, 2004; Rovai, 2003; Tachine et al., 2016) describing shortcomings of Tinto's (1975, 1988) theory as not being generalizable to diverse student populations. The potential limitation of Tinto's theory may minimize the effects of culture, which may impact the effectiveness of student engagement on Native American persistence rates. Based on the results of this study there appears to be support for these critiques of Tinto's theory. Involvement on campus did not appear to be enough to overcome incongruence between participant and institutional culture. Participants found involvement opportunities which provided a level of cultural congruence helping them persist. While some participants such as Cindy, Beth, and John did not perceive incongruence between their tribal and institutional culture, all participants described some level of involvement on campus. Based on the data collected it appears being involved on campus is an essential factor in students' ability to persist within their academic program.

Embracing Heritage in a White World

Jahoda (2012), Singer et al. (2016), and Tams (2013) noted how components of Native American culture differ among students, especially those from different tribal nations. Throughout the study participants provided several different definitions of the characteristics and attributes of their tribal culture with only a few repeating features offered by other participants. The inclusion criteria for this study only required participants to hold formal Cherokee tribal citizenship but did not stipulate a specific Cherokee tribal nation. There are three federally recognized Cherokee tribal nations in the United States with participants in this study representing two: the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians. I observed differences in the perception of culture between participants from these two groups. Participants from both the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians and the Cherokee Nation discussed the importance of family, but participants identifying themselves as being from the Cherokee Nation did not place as much emphasis on the role of nature as their Keetoowah peers. Participants identifying themselves as Keetoowah seemed to have a deeper passion for their culture compared to other participants.

Yet differences in the viewpoint and definition of culture also occurred with students from the same tribal nation. Guillory and Williams (2014) examined culture and noted that individual views of culture, especially in groups such as Native Americans, are often characterized by personal experiences such as family dynamics and engagement with their community. Participants from the same tribal nation noted varying degrees of participation in tribal activities both at home and within the committee. Those who did

not routinely engage with others culturally were unable to provide the same rich

descriptions of culture as presented by those who were more culturally active. Only one

participant noted engagement with his native community each week with some engaging

less frequently and others engaging seldom. Those who occasionally participated in tribal

activities were not able to provide a detailed description of their tribal culture such as

John who rarely participated in tribal activities describing tribal culture as an "attitude

and I guess you could include like food [and] music."

Experiences in a New Setting

Participants described several new experiences when interacting with the campus

environment including being in a multicultural environment where some felt a sense of

racism existed and in one case, a feeling of oppression was identified. Some of those

interviewed discussed how the differences between their tribal culture and the culture

found on campus presented difficulties for them as they attempted to complete their

degree program. Greene et al. (2008), McKinley and Gan (2014), Schudde (2016), and

Torres (2017) discussed how incongruences between two cultures might result in adverse

outcomes for students. One such adverse outcome might be a sense of isolation on

campus as noted by Charbonneau-Dahlen (2015). While the potential for developing a

sense of isolation existed for participants, very few outright noted routinely feeling

isolated on campus with most noting they found support networks with other students

experiencing the same type of incongruencies in culture. Most participants only identified

feeling isolated on campus after I asked probing questions asking specifically if feelings

of isolation ever existed. Further, most participants did not describe a sense of loss of

hope or decreased engagement in activities consistent with the self-destructive behavior possible when incongruent cultures exist as described by Charbonneau-Dahlen in their study using anonymous surveys.

Touting Diversity but no Seat at Table

A theme prevalent in the interviews with the majority of participants was the feeling their campus promoted diversity and inclusion but did not invest the resources required to create and maintain an environment where they felt accepted. Jacqueline, Rhonda, and Peter noted that they did not believe their institution valued their existence nor wanted to increase the prominence or importance of indigenous peoples on campus which resulted in a problematic relationship with their campus community and made all of them feel as if they did not belong. As discussed in Chapter 4, Jacqueline described her experiences at an event on campus where the Native American group was asked to participate noting,

> It was like right before, like we could have been just another student organization and during that time [they] were like, we really need you. And then afterward they're like, good job, thanks for your help. You know, kind of like a pat on our back and then like a kind of a push out the door, like thank you for your service, now go do what you've been doing.

In a quantitative study with 116 diverse participants, Wells and Horn (2015) found students who perceived a positive relationship with their campus environment felt a stronger sense of belonging. Wells and Horn noted that a strong sense of belonging

originated with a positive outlook at the campus environment with those developing

negative feelings having a difficult time persisting.

One way participants felt their campus did not live up to their pledge of increasing

diversity on campus was through the minimization of their Cherokee culture. Peter

provided several examples of cultural minimization by faculty such as when family

members died, or he needed to take time away from class during a recent solar eclipse.

Peter felt he was not supported during these times leaving him frustrated and feeling as if

he did not matter. Ceglie and Settlage (2016), Cavazoes et al. (2016), Brooks and Allen

(2016), and Techine et al. (2017) all explored the importance of spirituality to Native

American students and the consequences of prohibiting students from participating in

spiritual activities. The implications for students outlined by these researchers are similar

to those felt by Peter as a result of his professors not valuing his spiritual needs. Peter

noted that his experiences did not affect his ability to learn but instead his ability to

engage with his learning environment.

Another example provided by Peter was the perceived double standard

experienced by Cherokee students. Peter discussed the seemingly acceptable behavior of

non-Cherokee students imitating his culture but the grief he would receive if he attempted

to imitate someone else's culture. If he expressed his displeasure with the treatment of

himself and other Cherokee students on campus, he felt he was portrayed as being overly

sensitive. As a result of these experiences, Peter did not feel engaged with the campus

community and routinely did not participate in campus events unless they were organized

by Native groups. These experiences are congruent with the findings of Lundberg (2014)

who noted that supportive campus environments led to a higher individual effort by Native American students, especially when they did not perceive feelings of marginalization.

A feeling among more than half of participants was the lack of institutionally provided programs for diverse students specifically those from Native American backgrounds. Many of the programs described by participants were developed and implemented by either Native American student groups themselves or by native faculty. Participants' feelings are similar to those detailed by Bucchianeri et al. (2016), Graham et al. (2016), and Ly and Crowshoe (2015) who explored prejudice and discrimination experienced by minority students when excluded from campus events and programs. While a feeling of discrimination existed among some participants, they did not describe any disruptive behaviors on their part as outlined by Arria et al. (2015), Fuller-Rowell et al. (2012), and Mallinckrodt (2015).

Cultural Competencies and Sense of Community

Mosholder and Goslin (2013) and Strayhorn et al. (2016) discussed the importance of developing relationships with faculty for academic success among Native American students. Four participants described negative experiences with faculty who were either unaware or insensitive to their cultural needs. Those who had negative experiences with faculty described negative feelings toward their academic program while those who described positive relationships noted the perceived importance of the faculty member to their educational journey. Mosholder and Goslin noted that the benefits associated with faculty relationships only occurred within a traditional academic

setting which was the case for many of the participants interviewed during the study. However, one participant, Beth, described positive experiences with faculty outside of the classroom during a study abroad trip and noted that the faculty member helped her with non-academic issues such as finding ways to participate in campus activities. Developing relationships with faculty appears to be crucial for persistence among Cherokee students as these relationships may not only allow Cherokee students to gain access to non-academic resources as was the case with Beth, but the relationship may help faculty provide more support within the classroom environment.

Feelings of Isolation and Minimized Sense of Belonging

All but two participants described some period of feeling isolated on campus or as if they did not belong during their academic program. Some participants, like Peter, even considered leaving campus on multiple occasions because they did not feel as if they belonged. Johnson et al. (2007) conducted a study examining sense of belonging among various groups and found underrepresented populations, such as Native Americans, often experience a lower sense of belonging compared to their White peers. Underrepresented populations also noted feeling as if they did not belong in their academic setting in studies conducted by Guillory (2009), Larimore and McClellan (2005), and Mosholder and Goslin (2013) with some going as far as feeling they were "minorities among minorities" (Keith et al., 2016, p. 699).

Morrow and Ackermann (2012) noted that a significant relationship existed between students' perceived sense of belonging and their decision to persist in their academic program. Those who chose to stay often found significant relationships with

students and faculty (Booker, 2016; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Nearly all students interviewed during this study discussed their participation in some form of a peer support group where they engaged with other students with similar cultural backgrounds. Their decisions to engage in these groups, coupled with the results of Booker (2016) and Morrow and Ackermann (2012), may explain why these students remained in their academic programs and did not withdraw from school.

Increases in participants' feelings of isolation often occurred through various factors limiting students' academic ability including non-native faculty who did not understand the unique needs of students. Peter and Jacqueline were both vocal on the topic of non-Native faculty and their inability to understand and support Cherokee students. Peter focused on his cultural needs while Jacqueline discussed improper teaching styles and inaccurate content regarding indigenous peoples in the United States. Bingham et al. (2014) described some of the experiences of Peter and Jacqueline noting indigenous students are often required to live in two distinct worlds where they have to balance their culture with the culture on campus leading to a sense of belonging uncertainty (p. 621).

Having to balance these two worlds may become troublesome for students and lead to their eventual departure. Peter mentioned considering leaving because of the need to balance his culture with that of the campus but ultimately decided to stay because of his dedication and perceived sense of responsibility to his family and tribal community. However, Peter did note his level of engagement decreases as a result which is similar to the findings of Sánchez et al. (2016) and Schwitzer et al. (1999) who noted that students

who did not feel as if they belong on campus had the tendency to isolate themselves and limit their engagement on campus which may lead to greater negative results especially when they develop feelings of being unwelcomed, perceive themselves as being inferior to other students, and feel they are being tokenized.

Importance of Family and Campus Involvement

Several participants described the importance of family both to themselves personally and the ability to persist in their academic program. The importance of family to academic success for underrepresented student populations is well represented in literature with Bingham et al. (2014), Jackson et al. (2003), Ortiz and Sriraman (2015), and Thompson et al. (2013) all noting higher persistence rates among Native American students with robust family support systems compared to those who did not. Many of the participants who noted the importance of family described the sense of motivation and support received by those back home. Peter explicitly noted that he would have left the institution within the first week if it had not been for his family and they were the reason he decided to persist. The importance of family to persistence emerging from study data contradicts the results presented by Wilson et al. (2016) who found students reporting strong familial ties often had difficulty connecting with the campus environment and subsequently persisting in their academic program. While many participants noted the inability to connect and the subsequent feelings of isolation and lowered sense of belonging, none of the participants described their family as a prohibitive factor to engaging on campus or persisting in their academic program.

While one's family was a decisive factor for many participants in their decision to persist, there were a few who noted additional stresses because of family expectations to succeed in higher education and then return home once they earned their degree. Beth described her father asking her often when she would be returning from school, but she did not know if her future included returning home. Beth felt a sense of pressure from her father which may have had adverse effects on her ability to persist. Foltz et al. (2014) and Grebennikov and Shah (2012) both described the potential negative outcomes of high levels of family involvement in students' lives. Foltz et al. (2014) specifically noted that families who are intimately involved with a student's education might sometimes put down their dreams and aspirations.

Family involvement was not the only factor participants identified as helping them persist in their academic program. Participants noted that personal connections and engagement in campus activities were beneficial and helped them persist. Kilgo et al. (2015) stressed the importance of being active on campus noting students who participated in high-impact activities such as being involved in social groups or campus organizations had higher academic performance scores to those who did not participate in activities. Participants who noted high levels of involvement on campus noted that they rarely felt a sense of isolation since joining their respective peer group or organization. The benefits of participation included access to support network where participants could go when they began to feel disenfranchised on campus.

Campus housing provided mixed results for many participants who noted that they often felt isolated because they were the minority in a group full of mostly White

students while also noting they eventually found students like themselves and developed beneficial relationships helping them persist through their first year on campus. Many of the participants who developed these relationships noted that they still socialize with students they met while living in campus housing years after moving out of their residential communities. Johnson et al. (2007) noted that residence halls provide an environment where students can interact with others with similar backgrounds forming beneficial support networks. The participants who lived on campus all noted the development of such networks during their time in campus housing. Participants also noted the importance of these relationships as the community activities facilitated by the institution were geared toward their White peers and they did not feel as if the activities provided an opportunity for them to interact comfortably with other students.

Being involved on campus was a common theme among participants' answers with some increasing their involvement throughout their academic program while others decreased how involved they were with the campus community. Reasons for decreased involvement were related to needing to focus on academic work as their coursework increased in difficulty. Vaccaro and Newman (2016) noted how campus involvement was one of the three underlying themes contributing to students' sense of belonging. Being involved on campus provided a sense of safety and respect for students as they were able to be themselves around others without the fear of judgment and ridicule. Changes in levels of involvement were described by Flynn (2014) who discussed how involvement varies over students' tenure. Flynn found students who did not limit academic and social engagement experiences to their first year were more likely to persist compared to those

who limited these activities to their first year on campus. While some participants decreased their level of involvement as they progressed through their academic program, they maintained some level of participation if only in a small way.

Need for Structures for Increased Inclusion

Participants were asked to describe any changes they would make to their learning environment to increase persistence rates of students like themselves. Some participants noted the need for better educational structures where instruction did not rely on the traditional lecture style methods currently used in many college classrooms. The need to move away from lecture-based learning and towards a more active learning model was described by Lundberg (2014) who observed the development of educational structures that place focus on independent learning may lead to educational environments where Native American students do not feel safe to express themselves culturally thus limiting the chances of academic success. Dushputra et al. (2014) also explored the importance of congruent learning methods noting students typically performed better academically in educational structures which provide robust support systems with those who do not receive adequate support typically becoming dissatisfied and experiencing overall lower academic achievement.

Additionally, Lumpkin et al. (2015) examined the benefits of active learning environments. Students perceived the active learning environments allowed them to better engage with their educational environments resulting in enhanced learning opportunities and a better understanding of course content leading to a more enjoyable academic experience with traditional lecture-based classroom environments limiting

student involvement resulting in frustration and eventual withdraw. Wilcox (2015) provided the greatest example of the importance of congruent learning methods while describing a school that created a separate learning curriculum for indigenous students based on their cultural needs. Students who completed the new indigenous based program had higher academic scores compared to those who went through the traditionally Whitestreamed program.

Increasing the availability of non-academic support structures was also noted as a way to improve persistence rates for future Cherokee students. These support structures included access to campus resources such as counseling, writing centers, and health and wellness facilities. Many of the non-academic support structure needs outlined by participants in this study are similar to the needs of underrepresented students described by Ballen et al. (2017) and Zamudio (2017). The need for access to mentoring relationships was also discussed which was outlined by Sánchez et al. (2016) as providing a means to help overcome cultural barriers experienced by Cherokee students during their academic program.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations associated with this qualitative study. Study participants attended one of two institutions in a relatively small geographic region both of which outwardly emphasizes cultural engagement as part of the overall first-year student experience. The institutional characteristics of the research sites may not allow full representation of the dynamics impacting persistence rates of Cherokee students at other campuses in other regions.

The sample criteria also serve as a limitation for the study. First, the study sample did not include Cherokee students who elected to withdraw from their academic program before obtaining a degree. Omitting Cherokee students who left their academic program before completion may limit the ability to understand the various factors affecting persistence rates fully. Students who remained in school might have either developed some coping mechanism allowing them to overcome the adverse outcomes typically associated with differences in culture or did not experience the same magnitude of cultural incongruence during their time on campus as those who withdrew.

Participants' ability to self-select served as a limitation to the study. Students selected to participate in the study were those who volunteered after receiving an email invitation to participate in the study or viewed a flier or handout on campus. Students responding to these types of invitations may have similar backgrounds and experiences. The resulting omission of students who are sophomores and those from the STEM majors may limit the richness of data.

The decision to allow participants from multiple Cherokee tribes may also serve as a limitation. Participants from the two tribes represented in the study noted different experiences with their campus environment. Results of the study are a combination of participants from both tribes which may indicate issues related to cultural incongruence are of greater or lesser magnitude for one group or the other. I considered restructuring the study to separate the two tribal nations but there was a concern with maintaining the confidentiality of participants as one of the tribal nations is more represented on campus compared to the other.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study serve as an introduction into the possible adverse effects of incongruent culture within an academic setting for Cherokee students. Based on the results, it appears Cherokee students perceive their tribal culture is not congruent with the primarily Whitestreamed culture found on their campus. As a result of this incongruence, many reported feeling isolated and as if they did not belong on campus. Cherokee students overcame these feelings through engagement with support mechanisms such as family involvement and participation with an organization with other students like themselves.

While I asked students to describe their experiences on campus, the interview questions were limited to interactions with their environment and did not emphasize the academic competencies of each participant. White and Ali-Khan (2013) examined the relationship between academic preparation and persistence rates of Native American students. White and Ali-Khan found students who were not prepared academically for the rigors of college not only had to overcome cultural incongruence and a sense of isolation but also struggled to meet the academic requirements of their degree program. A majority of participants described themselves as strong students with two completing coursework in their respective institution's honors program. A strong academic foundation may explain the ability participants included in this study had to persist. Future studies should examine persistence rates of Cherokee students with consideration of the factor of academic preparation.

Future research should also include Cherokee students who left their academic program before completion. Developing a study comparing the experiences of students who chose to both remain and forgo their degree program may provide better insight into the dynamics affecting persistence decisions. Results may help develop an understanding of the specific factors resulting in low persistence rates of Cherokee students.

The sample for this study included students who had completed their sophomore year or higher in their degree program and were enrolled mostly in degree programs considered as social sciences. None of the participants were enrolled in STEM degree programs. Future research should include participants from all levels of degree completion and contain a greater diversity of degree programs.

Finally, future research should explore the types of diversity programs offered by institutions, especially those institutions with an outward facing commitment to increasing diversity on their campuses. The exploration should include factors such as types of programs offered, attendance numbers of cultural or racial groups of students, and the overall perception of underrepresented students regarding how well the programs increased acceptance of diversity on campus. A sentiment existed among some participants that their campus promoted diversity but did not provide the programmatic resources necessary to increase acceptance of non-White students. This type of study may allow researchers to develop a better understanding of the potential disconnect between institutional priorities and students' perceptions of the institution's actions in achieving an environment more accepting of diverse populations.

Implications for Social Change

Implications for positive social change based on the results of this study include a greater understanding of the perceptions of Cherokee students regarding cultural incongruence and possible adverse effects experienced on primarily Whitestreamed campuses. The purpose of this study was never to imply Cherokee students needed to modify how they interacted with their campus environment. Instead, the goal was to provide institutional administrators with information related to how Cherokee students interact with their campus to help determine ways the educational environment could be more supportive of their academic needs. More supportive environments may include additional programs aimed at increasing the overall diversity competencies of all students, creation of dedicated spaces for Cherokee students where they can obtain needed support, and the development of cohort class groupings where Cherokee students can learn using ingenious techniques compared to traditional lecture style systems common in Whitestreamed environments.

Based on the results of the study it appears non-Native faculty need additional faculty development to develop a better understanding of the importance of the spiritual practices of Cherokee students such as family requirements, ceremonies, and connection with nature. Faculty development might include a better understanding of the educational needs of Cherokee students including using indigenous teaching methods in their classrooms.

It also appears institutions need to place a greater focus on creating an environment where the community embraces cultural diversity. Suggestions provided

during by participants included the creation of more culturally diverse programs at the

institutional level receiving greater publicity to all students. Participants also noted not

knowing about all support services provided by the institution. Developing a central

location such as a website or campus building where Cherokee students can view all

support services available on campus may help increase their ability to persist.

Finally, institutional administration must adopt a proactive outlook towards

creating a safe and inviting environment for Cherokee students and move away from

reactionary policies. Three participants noted the tendency for the administration on their

campus to react instead of proactively create a more inclusive environment which

diminished their sense of importance. The main implication for social change from this

study is providing information on Cherokee students' perceptions which may be helpful

to those trying to increase the students' opportunity for academic achievement while also

creating a more diverse environment on campus through the increase of differing

backgrounds and experiences

Conclusion

The introductory statement for this study noted that persistence rates of Native

American students in U.S. four-year colleges are lower than other populations with less

than half of Native American students earning a bachelor's degree 6 years after starting

their academic program (Jackson et al., 2003; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017; Strayhorn, Bie,

Dorime-Williams, & Williams, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). With this

dissertation, I wanted to explore potential reasons for the low persistence rates compared

to other underrepresented students. My interest in exploring potential reasons for

persistence issues among Cherokee students increased after discovering many Native American students possess similar academic competencies as other underrepresented groups when entering higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). I believed there must be some factor unrelated to academic ability preventing Cherokee students from completing their degree program.

Based on the results of this study it appears the dynamics affecting Cherokee students' persistence are complex and specific to individuals based on their upbringing and engagement with the community. All but two participants noted discomfort in their educational environments and chose to seek shelter in organizations comprised of students in similar situations. How are persistence rates of Cherokee students going to increase if their only option for support is within sometimes self-created groups? Institutions need to take an active role in creating supportive learning environments for Cherokee students. The pressures of attending college are already immense and adding the burden of having to navigate through a different cultural environment places additional pressure on students.

This study is an additional step in a long journey of scholars and practitioners examining ways of increasing persistence rates of Native American students in higher education. Institutions can no longer be spectators in Cherokee students' educational journeys and must take an active role in providing needed support mechanisms. It is my hope the results of this study combined with future studies as noted in the recommendations section will lead to conducive learning environments for Cherokee

students. Developing these environments is not only beneficial for Cherokee students but

also increases the overall diversity on campus which is a benefit for all.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about a few of your most memorable experiences on campus. Have any of these experiences stood out among others? If so, how?

2. What might you include in a definition of culture? What aspects of your tribal culture are important to you?

   Probing questions:

   a. Are there some aspects of tribal culture that used to be important to you that are less so since you started college?

   b. How often do you participate in tribal activities?

   c. Has your participation in tribal activities changed since arriving on campus?

   d. How closely do you identify with your tribal culture? Has this identification changed since arriving on campus? If so, how and when?

   e. How has your ability to identify with your culture helped you persist, if at all?

3. How would you describe the culture on campus?

4. Are there elements of your tribal culture that are similar to the culture you find on campus? Can you tell me about them?

5. Do you think elements of your tribal culture differ from elements of the culture found on campus? If so what?

   Possible probing questions

a. Have these differences affected your learning in any ways now or in the past? Can you tell me?

    i. Are these differences problematic for you in any way now or in the past? If so, how?

    ii. Do they benefit you in any ways now or in the past? If so how.

b. Has the impact of these differences changed over time? Can you tell me how? Was your learning affected more at one specific point in your college years so far compared to others?

c. Have differences resulted in any feelings of isolation? Can you tell me about them? If so, how did these feelings affect your ability to learn?

6. Have aspects of your tribal culture been helpful while on campus? Can you describe how these aspects helped?

Probing questions:

a. Has your family been involved in your education? Can you tell me in what ways?

b. Are members of your tribal nation outside of your family involved in your education? Can you tell me in what ways?

7. How have your interactions on campus affected your ability to persist, if at all?

Probing questions:

a. How involved are you on campus? How has your level of involvement changed while on campus? Can you tell me more?

b. What campus support services have you used? How have they helped?

    c. Have you lived on campus at any point? Describe your experiences.

    d. Do you feel a sense of belonging on campus? How would you describe it? Can you tell me how a sense of belonging might have affected your ability to persist?

        i. Have you ever joined an organization or attended an event and left because you felt you did not belong? Can you tell me about the experience?

8. How do you feel your experiences on campus might differ from students from other tribal nations?

    a. Do you routinely interact with Native American students from other tribal nations?

9. If given the opportunity, how would you modify your learning experiences to help students like yourself?

    a. How could the curriculum provided on campus be modified to better meet the needs of Native American students?

        i. How about ways the curriculum depicts Native American history?

    b. What culturally based programs could be created or expanded to better the needs of Native American students?

    c. How can support services provided to Native American students improve?

Questions adapted from Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003).