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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

American Indian Undergraduate Student Voices
For Student Success

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

in

Educational Leadership

by

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University of California San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

2021

Dedication

I can think of nothing that means more to me through all work that went into the process of developing this dissertation than to dedicate this work to my youngest brother, David Velasquez. I love and miss you!

Table of Contents

Dissertation Approval Page	iii
Dedication	iv
Table of Contents	v
Lists of Figures	vii
List of Tables	viii
Acknowledgments	ix
Vita	xii
Abstract of the Dissertation	xv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
<i>Purpose of Study</i>	5
<i>Research Questions</i>	6
<i>Assumptions</i>	7
<i>Significance of the Study</i>	7
<i>Context of this Study</i>	8
<i>Organization of the Study</i>	9
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	9
Chapter Two: Literature Review	12
<i>Demographics of American Indians</i>	12
<i>Historical Perspective of Education for Native Communities</i>	13
<i>Student Development Programs</i>	18
<i>Critical Paradigms</i>	24
<i>Cultural Paradigms</i>	31
<i>Identity</i>	38
Chapter Three: Methods	51
<i>Positionality</i>	51

<i>Framework of the study</i>	53
<i>Research Design</i>	56
<i>Research Setting, Confidentiality, and Participants</i>	59
<i>Data Analysis</i>	66
Chapter Four: Results	70
<i>Major Themes</i>	75
<i>Cultural Identity</i>	76
<i>Student Experiences</i>	83
<i>Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC)</i>	90
<i>Mentorship</i>	94
<i>Family</i>	96
<i>Student’s voice</i>	99
Chapter Five: Discussion	102
<i>Review of the Conceptual Frameworks</i>	103
<i>Implications</i>	118
<i>Conclusion</i>	119
<i>Limitations</i>	121
<i>Future Research</i>	122
APPENDIX A: Study Flyer	123
APPENDIX B: Informed Consent	124
Appendix C: Interview Guide and Questions	127
Appendix B: Focus Group Facilitation Guide and Questions	130
References	132

Lists of Figures

Figure 1. Three-Dimensional Model of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Model With the Chronosystem Depicted as the Third Dimension.....	44
Figure 2. Three-Dimensional Conceptual Model of the Chronosystem and Macrosystem in Relation to the Other Levels.....	46
Figure 3. Study Data Collection Efforts in Four Phases.....	63

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Characteristics.....	61
Table 2. Themes and Sub-Themes from Individual Interviews and the Focus Group According to Research Questions.....	76

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Thank you to UCSD and CSUSM for providing a program that aligned with my educational aspirations. I look forward to seeing the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership grow and continue to develop leaders interested in social justice in educational spaces. Thank you for your supportive student programming and for offering the Tribal Membership Initiative. I would not have pursued my doctorate without this support.

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Vita

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Gilder, D. A., Luna, J. A., Roberts, J., Calac, D., Grube, J. W., Moore, R. S., and Ehlers, C. L. (2013). Usefulness of a survey on underage drinking in a rural American Indian community health clinic.

Lee, J. P., Calac, D., Montag, A. C., Brodine, S., Luna, J. A., Flores, R. Y., Gilder, D.A., Moore, R. S. (2011). Indian Student Involvement in Tribal Community-Based Research: Underage Drinking Prevention among Rural Native Californians.

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Paper presentation titled “Involving community members in shaping environmental prevention strategies to prevent underage drinking in nine Southern California reservations,” presented by Juan Luna, Roland Moore, Jennifer Roberts, Sergio Quintero, Daniel Calac at the 24th Annual Native Health Research Conference, Seattle, WA, July 2012

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Abstract of the Dissertation

American Indian Undergraduate Student Voices
For Student Success

by

Juan Antonio Alvino Luna

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2021
California State University, San Marcos, 2021

Professor Rodney Beaulieu, Chair

Access to higher education is believed to be one of the most important factors to promote social equity across diverse segments of the U.S. population, including American Indians. However, little has changed in terms of key metrics for success regarding retention rates for American Indian students in higher education. What is often debated regarding higher education and American Indian students relate to notions of meritocracy, colorblindness, student social integration, and maintaining one's ethnic identity. American Indian students can add value to these discussions by providing a counternarrative that may differ from mainstream narratives. Results from this study indicate that using a blended framework that draws on critical, cultural, and identity paradigms can properly engage American Indians in an important discussion on their voice for student success and has

implications for educational support systems. This study engaged American Indian undergraduate students to explore research questions on 1) how they define their cultural identity, 2) how they define their experience in higher education, and 3) how do American Indian students experience the Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC)? Using a case study design, I engaged American Indian undergraduate students intending to hear their voices for improving the experience of Native students at a major university. Student development was found to be influenced by feelings of imposter phenomena, racial discrimination, a mutual support system, mentorship, and program support. SCTCRC was cited as a beneficial resource for support and growth of the students. Findings indicate a holistic approach is needed to serve American Indian students in higher education.

Keywords: American Indians, higher education, identity, cultural values, integration, merit, equity, sovereignty, self-determination, transformative

Chapter One: Introduction

Indian education is somewhat unique in that it has always been premised upon the idea of assimilation without regard to socialization. From the very beginning, first missionaries and later government teachers sought to erase the cultural backgrounds of Indian children with the naïve belief that once a vacuum was created, Western social mores and beliefs would naturally rush in to replace long-standing tribal practices and customs. (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, p. 80)

Introduction

Vine Deloria, Jr. highlights the struggle that American Indian individuals and Tribal Nations have faced throughout the history of the United States of America in maintaining their ancestral values and beliefs while attending learning institutions that have a different philosophy for education. As an enrolled member of the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, who has completed a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in Psychology, I am aware of the tensions of maintaining cultural identity while participating in a system of education that has remnants from a colonial history. In this qualitative study, I argue that American Indian student voice and participation can drive much-needed reform in higher education.

Access to and successful navigation through higher education are essential factors for promoting social equity across diverse segments of the U.S. population. During the Obama administration, a White House Report (2016) argued that higher education is one of the most important investments for individuals, countries and one of the most effective methods to move vulnerable populations to the middle class. -A recent study found that the return on investment for a student entering higher education is a bit more complex and is contingent on several factors, including the student's program, the field of study, level of indebtedness, race, socioeconomic status, and gender (Cominole & Bentz, 2018). Although this paper is not

focused on the return of investment in higher education for American Indians, higher education for Native students is an important area of continued study that has implications for American Indian students and other students of color.

Historically, American Indians have been disenfranchised from the U.S. educational system. National data reveals that school enrollment in college or graduate school for American Indians is at 21.8% compared to 40.0% for Asians, 27.7% for African Americans, and 27.1% for Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019d). One report narrowing in on college enrollment rates for American Indians found fluctuation over periods of time at 16% in 2000, going up to 41% in 2010 and dropping to 24% in 2018 (Hussar et al., 2020).

Recent national data reveals that American Indians receive bachelor's degrees at 10.4% compared to 30.8% for Asians, 21.3% for Whites, and 13.9% for African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). In terms of completing a bachelor's degree within a longer period of 6 years in a public institution, American Indians is at 39% compared to 74% for Asians, 64% for Whites, 40% for African Americans (de Brey et al., 2019). However, the graduation rate for American Indians appears to jump to 49% when attending a private nonprofit institution. The graduation rate becomes lower when looking at the graduate or professional degree level completion rate at 5.7% for American Indians compared to other racial groups at 24.7% for Asians, 13.2% for Whites, and 8.6% for African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b).

As a whole, Native students in higher education have a lower success in attaining bachelor or graduate degrees; however, outcomes change when narrowing on specific fields of study. In fact, American Indian students are awarded bachelor's degrees at a comparable

rate as other groups in fields of study for business, social science and history, and psychology (de Brey et al., 2019). American Indians also complete doctoral programs at comparable rates to other groups for fields of study in education, psychology, and biological and biomedical sciences (de Brey et al., 2019).

Some have argued there is a problem with education as a system, including its reliance on standardized testing to predict American Indian student success (Forbes, 2000). Although standardization has been used as a tool that promotes equal opportunity, it has further marginalized American Indians (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). Standardized testing feeds into an achievement gap narrative that is not helpful to people of color. It does so in a shallow way because it relies on the myth of meritocracy, i.e., students should only be admitted into a school based on the narrow focus of their scores on standardized tests (Love, 2004).

William Ayers (1993) points out that standardized tests can only measure the least important learning elements, such as content knowledge, specific facts and functions, and isolated skills. Ayers contrasts what is not measured by a standardized test, namely: creativity, imagination, curiosity, ethical reflection, to name a few. A dangerous outcome of standardized testing is that it reinforces social inequality and fails to capture higher-order thinking, high-level conceptual- and procedural knowledge, and negatively impacts students of color (Lomax, West, Harmon, Viator, & Madaus, 1995). Instead of focusing on standardized testing, Lomax et al. (1995) suggest that curriculum, instruction, and testing should be mindful of students from diverse backgrounds and should consider cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds to help facilitate educational success in minority students.

Review of learning styles of American Indian students reveals that there are stark cultural values of Indigenous values than mainstream values, including the role elders play in tribal communities, being okay with not seeking to speak first in the classroom setting, and patrimonial/matrilineal clans. Learning is rooted in the elders' teaching, in which cultural values play a role in the teaching and learning process (Pewewardy, 2002). The cultural conflict relative to the mainstream culture has been cited as a leading barrier for some Native students while pursuing higher education in a mainstream institution. Swisher and Deyhle (1987) explain that educators assume American Indian students will easily adapt their learning style to fit the institution's expectations; however, a better process is for an educator to adapt their teaching style in a culturally responsive fashion--leading to positive outcomes without sacrificing a quality education. Reorienting the college environment in ways that support faculty to the learning styles of students will lead students to feel welcome and to a better educational system (Tierney, 1991).

The pressure to conform to an education system that is not likely to incorporate cultural values places American Indian students in a difficult position. Recognizing these pressures on Native students echo the need for strong leadership to promote social justice in education, making this issue both about equity and social justice. Promoting equity in education is to provide culturally appropriate education and being cognizant of how groups have been oppressed, including Native people. In his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire argued traditional education can oppress vulnerable groups and that a more humane approach promotes "co-creation of knowledge" (Freire, 2011). Freire recognized the oppressive dynamics in education and called for empowering Native people to take action to reform education. If higher education institutions continue to ignore the unique

needs of Native students, their enrollment will continue to remain low, and if support systems are not in place, their drop-out rates will continue. There has been little investigation on American Indian student success, learning, and development using culturally relevant and inclusive modeling (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). The role of culture is discussed further in Chapter Two as a general theme of importance in terms of the underpinnings that helped shape my dissertation.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this case study was to understand the role of cultural identity in contributing to the experience of American Indian undergraduate students on the campus of a competitive university in California. I was also interested in understanding what their student experience has been during their time in school, including support programming specific and nonspecific to Native students on campus using a lens from the integration of critical, cultural, and social identity paradigms. The value of information contributing to the research findings comes from the stories of those who lived the experience. For this study, I was interested in hearing the voices of American Indian undergraduate students, particularly as it relates to their real-world experience, their perspectives for supportive programming and services, feedback for making improvements at higher learning institutions. By soliciting the voices of American Indian students who engage with the Native community on campus, as well as Native focused programming and services, my goal is to generate data that will be useful for students, the institution and for specific programs like the Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC) in enhancing the services and programming specific to helping Native students. Giving a voice that is reflective of the undergraduate Native student is a method that democratizes the research process. The SCTCRC currently seeks to

provide supportive community space, academic support services, mentoring/leadership development, co-and-extra-curricular programming, and non-academic support.

Understanding American Indian undergraduate students' thoughts and experiences can help develop effective approaches for supporting Native students attending college.

I insert my own experience as a Tlingit student to add information and breadth to certain discussion points related to my higher education journey in pursuit of a doctoral-level degree. For this study, I sought to add to the existing body of research in the unique approach by integrating several leading paradigms: critical, cultural, and identity paradigms.

Integrating the paradigms in a blended model that I call the Critical Integrated Cultural Identity Framework (CICIF) creates a stronger and more holistic analytic tool for understanding the experiences of American Indian students at a competitive learning institution. Historically, American Indian students have been disenfranchised from participating in higher education, so this study is intended to lead to insight for improving their educational experience.

Research Questions

My research questions draw from a blend of critical, cultural, and social identity paradigms as a lens for the development of the following research questions:

- How do American Indian students define their cultural identity?
- How do American Indian students define their experience in higher education?
- How do American Indian students experience the Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC)?

Assumptions

A blended conceptual framework of critical, cultural, and social identity paradigms I call the Critical Integrated Cultural Identity Framework (CICIF) informed the research design of this study. Including several paradigms provides a holistic approach for understanding complex dynamics in a research process that is often politicized. CICIF provides a conceptual lens for viewing the structural systems from the vantage point that is not part of the mainstream perspective, but rather from the student's vantage point providing important information for improving education for American Indians at a competitive university.

Critical and cultural paradigms derive from a critical epistemology that posits that multiple realities are situated in political, social, cultural contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 12). The purpose of this epistemological perspective is to emancipate research from doctrines for the status quo toward a direction that promotes investigation toward improvements in education that are more socially equitable.

Significance of the Study

Explaining the achievement gap with deficit models to understand differences in retention between American Indian and other groups is flawed. Deficit models are used as a narrative to reproduce the oppression of Native students (Gilbert, 2000). A critical review of education systems suggests that counternarratives informed by stakeholder voices can provide insight into how to change inequitable social systems. Research interested in the student's voice supports students to understand social issues affecting them and provides the space for them to suggest solutions (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Counternarratives, as explained by Critical Race Theory provide a voice for action to transform education that will serve the needs of students of color (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011).

The study's significance is to gain insight into Native student voices informed by the Critical Integrated Cultural Identity Framework (CICIF). Using the CICIF informed the development of research questions and the methodology for this dissertation. More research is needed that uses a blended approach that is holistic and capable of providing a robust and comprehensive approach to understanding the experience of American Indian students. My study aims to provide information in a comprehensive approach to understanding American Indian students' cultural identity, educational experiences, and student support programming.

Context of this Study

Research reveals that it is important for any college student, including American Indian students, to have a sense of belonging as a way to stay engaged in their studies while on campus, yet it is often the case that American Indian students feel disconnected because of a cultural distinction from the institution (Tierney, 1992). Ecklund and Terrance (2013) and Shotton, Oosahwe, and Cintrón (2007) believe it is important that there are specifically identified community places on campus for American Indian students because they can foster a sense of belonging. The study's context is situated in understanding the American Indian experiences and understanding where students find support in navigating their educational pursuits.

Native-focused community resource centers are essential as they provide a space to help American Indian university students successfully navigate their educational experience. Often, they are places where students can connect with a support program that reflects the student's cultural background and is a space where students can meet other Native students with a similar background for mutual support (See chapter two, section Student Development Programs for further information).

Organization of the Study

In Chapter One, I articulated the problem of low enrollment of American Indian students in higher education, retention problems, and the need for a culturally sensitive curriculum, followed by this study's purpose. In Chapter Two, I present current literature on American Indian students and why critical, cultural, and social identity are important in understanding student success for this population. Chapter Three describes my approach to examine a case study through qualitative methodology. Chapter Four provides the study findings as they are. It lists seven American Indian undergraduate students as they share their perspectives and experiences while in school. Lastly, Chapter Five discusses the findings in the context of the research questions, the blended framework of the CICIF, existing literature, and highlights implications for educational practice.

Definition of Terms

- Colonialism: Often used interchangeably with imperialism, colonialism is a policy in which a country exercises its control over territory or material belonging to another group.
- Critical Paradigms: Reflect “theoretical foundations promoting the deconstruction and critique of institutions, laws, organizations, definitions, and practices to screen for power inequities” (Guido, Chávez, & Lincoln, 2010, p. 9). These paradigms include Critical Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Tribal Critical Race Theory.
- Cultural Paradigms: Reflect one's reality is socially constructed, based on culture, tradition, practices, customs, environment, and system; May be used interchangeably in this paper. These paradigms include Culturally Relevant Education and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

- The ethnic nomenclature for indigenous people in the U.S. varies widely. For this paper, I use American Indian, the preferred term for most Native people in the continental U.S. The terms Indian, Native American, Alaska Native, Native, indigenous, or Tribal are often included in much of the literature that is reviewed in this dissertation.
- Identity: Is used in the social sense as the development of the person as their experiences shape them in their environment, whether it is at home, school, or in their general community. Social identity, cultural identity, racial, and/or ethnic identity may be used interchangeably.
- Sovereignty: “A Western concept...bound up with specifying the essential character of the territorial state...[it] is the conviction that the state is the ultimate arbiter of its own fate in relation not the outside world. Each state is ‘sovereign’ in international society, a law unto itself” (Wilkins & Stark, 2011, p. 312).
- Student Community Centers: Student community centers are campus programs to support students, staff, and faculty on educational and social activities. They are also resources to aid in the development of the student both academically and socially. The centers are often Multicultural centers or specific to a group of people, such as American Indian, African American, LGBT&Q.
- Student Enrollment & Recruitment: Enrollment and recruitment are the effort of an institution to actively engage and recruit students of diverse populations in enrolling into their learning institution.
- Student of color/Minority: American Indian, African American or Black, Latino(a), including those who identify as Hispanic who originate from or whose family

originate from a Latin American country. Students of color and minority may be used interchangeably. However, it should be noted that American Indians as a political group is not a minority as they are citizens of their respective tribes that are sovereign entities.

- **Student Retention & Persistence:** Student retention and persistence refer to the effort to retain students year to year leading to successful graduation. Both terms may be used interchangeably in this paper.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review and present an analysis 1) of several important paradigms (critical, cultural, and social identity) that make up the Critical Integrated Cultural Identity Framework (CICIF) and that can inform institutional systems in higher education. I provide a rationale that situates the purpose and methodology of this study with past literature.

Demographics of American Indians

The Bureau of Indian Affairs lists 574 tribal entities in the most recent notice on the Federal Register (U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2020). Among the most populace tribal entities, the Navajo and Cherokee have the most registered tribal members (DeVoe, Darling-Churchill, & Snyder, 2008). The Native population is expected to grow 54% between 2000 and 2050 from 2.1 million to 3.2 million individuals. Currently, the population is comprised of 2.9 million American Indians who identify as being Native only, while 1.6 million are Native in combination with one or more races.

There are clear disparities in the state of affairs for Native communities on and off reservations. Reservations are regions of land in which some Indians occupy that is held in trust by the United States and were established by treaty or statute, with 326 (see BIA.gov) separate reservations across the nation, and most American Indians living off the reservation (60%) and a majority of urban American Indians living in only 16 cities (Wilkins & Stark, 2011).

When looking at the general situation of Native America, there are significant gaps in income when compared to other racial groups. In fact, current unemployment rates are shared with African Americans at a higher percentage at 4.4% compared to the shared percentage of Whites and Asians at 2.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019e). Unemployment goes up severely

depending on if an American Indian person lives on a reservation. In fact, unemployment ranges from 20 - 80%, with an average of 50% for those who live on the reservation (Miller, 2012).

The most recent Census reports reveal that poverty rates for American Indian families are among the highest at 20.3%, followed by African American communities at 21.2%, 9.6% for Asians, and finally 10.3% for Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019c). The economic situation in American Indian communities has historically been complicated due to various factors related to exploitation of the dependency status and the natural resources of the tribes by corporate entities and federal and state governments, with a good portion of the appropriated funding never reaching American Indians or their communities (Wilkins & Stark, 2011).

While Native communities may face high unemployment, poor healthcare, and poverty, many believe education is the best avenue for individual and community development. Dr. Joely Proudfit, director of the California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center (CICSC), California State University, San Marcos, in the latest report of the State of American Indian Education in California, shares that "The motivation for me to fight the good fight always boils down to the byline for the CICSC – Education is the path to self-determination and this is true for all of us - Indian and non-Indian alike" (Proudfit & Gregor, 2016, p. 4).

Historical Perspective of Education for Native Communities

Before contact with European explorers to the early formation of the U.S. government, many Native people experienced a much greater level of autonomy and self-determination as the policy between governments was one of the international-to-international sovereigns

based on the Northwest Ordinance Trade and Intercourse Act Treaties (Wilkins & Stark, 2011). As time went on, there was a shift in policy that moved tribal nations to dependent nations. Starting with several Supreme Court cases in the 19th century, a shift in policy affected the U.S. actions in recognizing the full sovereignty of tribes. *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823) gave legal titled land belonging to Indian nations to the U.S. by painting indigenous people as inferior by race. Using doctrines of discovery and conquest, in this case, were the driving force that made Native landowners into a status of being tenants to the U.S. government (Echo-Hawk, 2016). The following case of *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), only several years later and arising from the Indian Removal Act of 1830, began during the Andrew Jackson administration, which forced many tribes from their traditional homelands in the South westward of Mississippi (Echo-Hawk, 2010). Chief Justice John Marshal wrote that the Unities States would take on the paternal form to tribes as they would become “ward to its guardian” (Wilkinson, 1991).

Meanwhile, educational systems during this period had moved from religious and classical academia to a simple instruction on becoming a Christian in a vocational style approach (Carney, 1999). Of nine colonial colleges established between early contact and the revolutionary war, only three (Harvard, William and Mary, & Dartmouth) expressed explicit support for educating Native people in their mission statements. The higher education of these colonial colleges was to Christianize, and in the aftermath, “civilize” Indians (Wright & Tierney, 1991). The strategy in this era of the federal government was moving from genocide to cultural genocide by “killing the Indian to save the man” through an education system for American Indian youth (Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

Boarding schools would become prevalent through implementing of the Peace Policy (1869-1870), providing a way to speed assimilation by tying American Indian education with Christian denominations (Smith, 2004). The Carlisle Indian School (also known as the United States Indian Industrial School or the Carlisle Indian Industrial School) founded in 1879 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and funded by the U.S. government and under the leadership of Captain Richard Henry Pratt, was touted as the model for instilling Euro-American values and thought into American Indian students (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). During this time, many were not allowed to practice their traditions, nor were they allowed to speak their Native languages (Duran & Duran, 1995). Additionally, many students experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in these schools (Smith, 2004).

Students returning from college had issues reintegrating into their tribal communities. Benjamin Franklin reported that the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy said their young men returning from the College of William and Mary did not help maintain their nations' traditional values. The concept of reintegrating into one's tribe is a complicated issue for both the student and their tribe. The returning students listed by Franklin would be an interesting case study as they may be early individuals who experienced living in two worlds. While in school, they lived in a world influenced primarily by Western values and practices at the College of William and Mary. At the same time, they must have felt the influence of their cultural identity linked to the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy's traditional values and practices.

In 1887, the United States Federal government implemented the General Allotment Act (Dawes Act), which would further erode the sovereignty of Tribal Nations by further reducing their land to allotments held in trust and surplus land were opened for sale or lease.

Overall, there was a reduction from 140 million acres to 50 million acres of land lost for tribal communities (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The relationship of tribes with the federal government moved to “Trust Relationship” and remained there until today.

The Meriam Report, published in 1928 and led by Louis Meriam, detailed the state of affairs for Native people and the caustic effect of the previous policy of forced assimilation, including: “high infant death rates and high mortality rates in general, poverty, horrendous health conditions, inadequate education, poor housing, and the problem of migrated Indians” (Wilkins & Stark, 2011, p. 129). It was not until the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934 that there would be a halt to the allotment of Indian lands, and tribes were allowed to reorganize their governments with the approval of the federal government, leaving tribes as quasi-sovereign (Wilkins & Stark, 2011).

Shortly after World War II, there was a fresh renewal of policies toward terminating recognition of tribes deemed as sufficiently acculturated. The federal government was looking to cost-cutting measures and noted that both the Klamath of Oregon and the Menominee of Wisconsin met these standards and then terminated the two reservations’ federal trust status (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Overall, 41 reservations and rancherias were terminated during this period, and there was a termination of quasi-sovereign status for the tribes.

It was not until the 1960s that there was a semi restoration of strength to tribal communities, starting with the Indian Civil Rights Act (ICRA) of 1968 (Wilkins & Stark, 2011). During this period, political activism by Native people led to an end of the termination policy, and other acts that promoted self-determination of tribal people followed, including the Indian Education Act of 1972 and the Indian Self-Determination and Education

Assistance Act of 1975. However, it should be noted that ICRA has been considered another intrusion of the U.S. law upon the sovereignty of the tribes to exercise authority in determining their own laws.

Themes of forced removal and assimilation may be underlying factors that play a part in how American Indian students interact with education systems. Considering that many of their ancestors experienced very unjust treatment in early colonial America, Native communities have not forgotten interactions with early Federal policies. Moreover, to make things worse, our public institutions often celebrate themes related to Christopher Columbus, the Pilgrims, and the Doctrine of Discovery. One could speculate that when schools ignore these points, American Indians can be left confused and resentful.

Cognitive dissonance can occur for Native students when looking at the material taught in class with what they have learned from home, ultimately leaving them struggling to find relevance in what they are learning. One example that is often cited in many history courses is that Native people lacked complex communication forms, like the written word, conflicting with substantial evidence that Native people have many types of complex human communication, including oral history to forms of language, never experienced by Europeans. In fact, in his book *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, Charles Mann (2005) explains, "...the Inka developed a form of writing unlike any other, sequences of knots on strings that form code reminiscent of today's computer languages" (p. 71).

Native nations have complex forms of communication, but they also maintained intricate educational systems. In fact, Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas all had advanced institutions of specialized training for leadership and religion (Carney, 1999). It is important to note that

mainstream education does not provide a comprehensive historical outlook that is balanced and includes the historical narrative of Native people.

The great scholar, Vine Deloria, Jr., explains a long history of ignorance toward American Indian knowledge (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Deloria cites several historical examples, like Ponce de Leon ignoring American Indians concerning his quest for the fountain of youth or the Swedish immigrants that settled on the Delaware River and imported food for thirty years as they believed food would not grow in that area. One could argue that providing a more balanced narrative and the opportunity to share knowledge would change the conflict that exists for many American Indian students when it comes to learning and doing well in their schooling.

Student Development Programs

Student development programs are in a unique and important position to help American Indian college students successfully navigate their educational experience. Although not all student development programs are the same, common goals usually include enrollment and retention of diverse students, and intellectual and social development. Many programs are built on the student development theory that has a strong human development component. Jones and Abes (2010) explain student development as “some kind of positive change occurs in the student (e.g., cognitive complexity, self-awareness, racial identity, or engagement)” (p.153). Others have gone as far as saying that it is a philosophy that guides practice and is concerned with developing the student as a whole person (Rodgers, 1990).

Cross-divisional collaboration among college and university offices of student affairs with partners like cultural or community centers is a strategic process by which an institution can increase student success. Centers that reach diverse populations are great for promoting

belonging, self-expression, and leadership development. Centers specific to American Indian students are often spaces to decolonize higher education. Many include student-centered programming that is culturally appropriate and relevant to Native students (Springer, Davidson, & Waterman, 2013). A Native focused center provides a space to engage students academically, culturally, and socially throughout the school year.

Native focused community centers also foster a sense of social connectedness to the university environment that promotes success because the individual can relate to an on-campus subunit similar to that of the student's background (Murguia, 1991; Shotton et al., 2007). Also, the center can provide a space for peer mentoring through structured social support systems, ultimately creating an environment that fosters academic achievement for American Indian students. An important feature of these centers is that they are led by Native administrators, supporting self-efficacy and culturally sensitive mentoring. Encouraging involvement with the Native community is often the first sense to fostering a sense of belonging that is a characteristic for students to persist. As a Native student reported in the Shotton et al. (2007) study,

...she [mentor] really, really did help me out a lot with different questions that I had and stuff like that. And then, she just introduced me to other people and, um, got me more involved and kept me updated on all that was going on and everything. So, she really made me feel at home and comfortable with, you know, with her and the program and everything” (p. 94).

Through this qualitative study, the investigators found that having a mentor similar in the background can help students better understand the future challenges and how to move through them successfully. Regarding the guidance his mentor provided, one student said:

I looked up to him because I knew he had went through these experiences and he also had experience in the kind of leadership position I was put into. You know, I asked from his experiences what he did or how he handled the

situation, and that's how I went about a lot of circumstances last year—was basically getting advice from him (p. 95).

Structured social support in American Indian campus-based clubs and multicultural centers provide the backing that many students need for academic persistence (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003). They also provide a great social support system for incoming and current students, connecting them with opportunities to engage and participate in cultural events, such as pow wows or cultural meetings. Overall, centers can engage the students' families, communities, and culture to promote a holistic approach to student success and engagement of the educational system (Jackson et al., 2003). Centers can provide programming that supports self-determinate needs for the local tribes in the school area the student's Tribal Nation (Springer et al., 2013).

Several dissertation studies (Dela Peña, 2009; Toya, 2011; Welch, 2009) have evaluated campus-based community resource centers in a large and reputable university in Southern California, looking at how centers can promote student retention. These studies have studied how cultural centers on campus engage and support students. Although these studies varied in focus among students and center staff, a salient theme found in these studies is that the centers provide a sense of belonging and connection for students, inspiring students to continue their education, reducing their drop-out potential. Other related findings included social identity development, feelings of safety, access to resources, and the importance of social justice in education.

One study investigating the influence of ethnic identity for Hispanic and American Indian college students on social integration found that ethnicity is important for one's social identity (Murguia, 1991). The authors point out that having a sense of ethnic identity produces pride and security in a campus setting. Subunits or enclaves within a campus can

help produce the social connection that is important for students. Moreover, social integration is not necessary for connecting to the campus but can happen when a student associates with an enclave.

Connecting students through student organizations. Finding connection and being involved with campus events is important for students. According to Alexander Astin (1984), involvement occurs along a continuum for students, where students participate at different times in different activities. The involvement has quantitative (how much time spent) and qualitative aspects (how focused the time is). Astin (1993, 1996) explained that an important aspect of involvement occurs with the peer groups students interact with on campus. Such interactions are easily seen in student organizations, such as culturally specific student clubs or associations like a Native American Student Association. A study looking at the effects of student involvement in clubs and organizations for first-year students at a mid-sized public university found that students who were more involved developed better outcomes (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006). Involvement was operationalized as student involvement in a student organization by attending a meeting, joining, or leading an organization. The study revealed high psychological development (educational involvement, career planning, lifestyle management, cultural participation, establishing/clarifying a purpose) for participants when they were sophomores and seniors (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006).

Mainstream Views on Student Retention

Closing the achievement gap for American Indian students is no easy matter and remains a challenge for Native communities and higher learning institutions. A few key themes persistent across the literature have to do with campus life, faculty-student interaction, financial support, and the student's readiness and prior background in academic disciplines

that can be quite rigorous. Perhaps the most visible framework that most student retention research is built on is that of academic and social integration proposed by Vincent Tinto. This tradition argues that students, whether American Indian or those from any other ethnic/racial group, need to integrate, socially and academically, into their institution's environment to gain a sense of belonging on campus (Tinto, 1993). Tinto argues that students must integrate into the society of the institution to promote persistence in their education. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) writings on student departure are among the most cited bodies of work and are often touted as a framework to understand attrition in vulnerable populations. He reviewed variables related to the college environment, student-faculty interaction, peer group interaction, and student involvement in extracurricular activities.

Tinto believes that grades, personal development, living on campus, and valuing one's major were key indicators around *academic integration*. Additionally, aligning with the institution's value as measured by peer and faculty interactions could help identify if students were *socially integrating* into the school. Thus, according to this line of thinking, integration at both the academic and social levels with the institution creates a stronger commitment to the school and is believed to lead to academic success (Bean, 1983).

In the conclusion of his 1993 book *Leaving College*, Tinto summarizes that effective retention lies in the institution's commitment and the student's commitment, respectively. He lists several important factors regarding the commitment of the institution, saying, "In accepting individuals for admission, institutions necessarily accept a major responsibility to insure, as best they can, that all students without exception have sufficient opportunities and resources to complete their courses of study should they wish" (p. 205). While he argues that institutions need to commit to their communities, he also argues for the prerequisite for

institutions to be aware of their mission as an institution. The mission of educational institutions must be aligned to recruitment and efforts and retention goals. Tinto explains institutions should not take in “unsuitable” students if they are not aligned with their said mission, saying, “A research university, for instance, should not have the same sort of commitment to its students as a liberal arts college.” This means a research university should seek students that are oriented around their mission. For example, technical colleges should recruit students with a targeted interest, community colleges should seek students who are not yet prepared for a four-year school or prefer a focused two-year degree that other institutions cannot offer, research universities should recruit students with an interest in conducting research, and so forth. The argument has overtones of promoting merit-based admittance based on the type of school focus, yet Tinto’s argument is about achieving a compatible fit between the institution’s mission and the student’s goals, plus providing the appropriate services.

Tinto’s work on social and academic integration is important structurally as they provide discussion and analysis that future research can tailor, modify, or improve. Murguia (1991) argue that the scope of the model on social integration of the student could occur with “enclaves rather than the campus as a whole.” Meaning, student’s social development could occur with a group similar to the student’s ethnic identity. However, that would mean the institution would prioritize diversifying the student body, faculty, and program staff to ensure an enclave or subunit exist on campus for the student. The current state of affairs suggests that schools need to increase the enrollment of Native students to their schools.

It is uncertain what the level of responsibility should be between the institution and the student. The answer to this question largely depends on weighing factors related to the

parties. On the one hand, we have some students who may have little to no experience with higher education, such as first-generation students. Some of them will drop out and those who persist might need an additional semester or year to complete a degree. Some will leave with an enormous student loan. On the other hand, we have public education systems that have years of practice and resources that are often paid by taxpayer dollars, such as public universities. They depend on regular enrollment numbers to maintain budgets and must compete with other schools to attract students; they operate as businesses that must be sustained.

Although Tinto does not clearly delineate the weight of responsibility, some have argued that institutional admittance practices and retention efforts are built on an old system that is not friendly to students of color, including Native peoples. Native scholars dispute aspects of the integrationist framework as it appears to support an assimilationist viewpoint. Given the historical context of tensions between the U.S. government and Native Nations regarding boarding schools and sovereignty issues, Native people are reluctant to trust institutions that stem from colonial systems as described by Tribal Critical Race Theory, described below. Some scholars have suggested that the more Native students remain established in their cultural identities, the better they will do in higher education (Huffman, 2001; Okagaki, Helling, & Bingham, 2009). Huffman (2001) found that culturally traditional students who actively preserved their ethnic identity were more likely to have a successful college career.

Critical Paradigms

There appears to be a temptation by some to blame students of color, including American Indian students, for not living up to their potential in a system of education that was

not created for them. Such arguments lend to the idea of meritocracy, as described by Zamudio et al. (2011). Meritocracy pertains to the conception of a level playing field for everyone in society. It assumes that doing well in school is contingent on one's work ethic, values, aptitude, intelligence, and drive. Thus, one could use this lens to argue that the high levels of attrition among American Indian students must be because they are not trying hard enough. However, critical theorists argue that poor educational performance is much more complex. For example, Freire (2011) argued that schooling is designed to serve an elite class of citizens, which was echoed by Bertrand, Perez, and Rogers (2015) arguing that policy in schools uphold systematic racism and classism in education. MacLeod (2018) argued that students feel hopeless in an educational system that reinforces their social status, with other structural inequality theorist suggesting that classism (Fussell, 1983) and racism plagues education outcomes of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ogbu, 1979) and American Indians (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Ledlow, 1992).

Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory (CRT) maintains that inequality pervades all sectors of American Society, including education. CRT has roots in Critical Legal Studies and is grounded in the idea that a racialized society continues to promote inequality across many institutions in the U.S., including the legal system and education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical Race Theory posits that racism is endemic in American society, and poverty and educational success is directly related to “institutional and structural racism” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

A central theme for CRT is its critique of liberal ideations of color-blind objectivity of a racially just society in the United States, i.e., the idea that treatment of all people is the same across the general population (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). However, CRT posits that race is

a social construction created and beneficial to early European colonists that racialized property by conquest and were written into our laws. In fact, historical events are steeped in a tragic set of events from which the U.S. was established and strongly visible in the Representation Clause of the Constitution, which contained a mixed category of including humans as both property and recognition of their humanity as being “three-fifths” of a person (Harris, 1993). Although many would like to think of the U.S. as the land of free, CRT scholars argue that institutional systems were founded on stratification of early social inequities that promoted Whiteness as property (i.e., color of skin being valuable like property). race used to justify the slave trade, and it was used to exterminate American Indians from their land through manifest destiny (Zamudio et al., 2011), the notion that dominance is the natural order of life. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why desegregation programs during the civil rights era did not go far enough and, in many ways, were ineffective in implementing successful change (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Ladson-Billings (2006) explains that we need to look at the "education debt" accumulated over time. This debt comprises historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components and views historical events as markers. The author draws an analogy with the concept of national debt -- which she contrasts with that of a national budget deficit to argue for the significance of the education debt imposed on students of color. Ladson-Billings (2006) quotes a conversation she had with Robert Haveman, economist and Professor Emeritus from the University of Wisconsin's Department of Economics, in which he describes education debt as “the forgone schooling resources that we could have (should have) been investing in (primarily) low-income kids students, which deficit leads to a variety of social problems...that require on-going public investment...you need to reduce one (the

education debt, defined above) in order to close the other (the achievement gap)” (p. 5). The solution would be to invest in low-income youth to reduce the deficit of education debt and other social debts of sociopolitical, moral, and economical. Thus, the implications of addressing this debt can lead to tangible movement toward equity in academics across racial groups.

Another central theme of CRT is to provide counternarratives from marginalized groups, including students of color. The counternarratives give voice to individuals who have been historically oppressed and have had their experiences negated by a master narrative that promotes meritocracy and color-blind objectivity (Zamudio et al., 2011). These challenging accounts provided by counternarratives have been used in case studies, using thick descriptions and interviews to challenge racially-biased institutional leaders and discriminatory practices (Parker & Lynn, 2002), and a tool for examining classrooms that promote inequality (Zamudio et al., 2011). Along with unifying the various themes in CRT, counternarratives can 1) challenge mainstream ideology, 2) highlight the importance of lived experience and the knowledge that comes with it, and 3) promote real change and social justice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Research using the theme of counternarratives from CRT as an analytic tool has examined campus climate for African American college students (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), and classroom interactions for racially diverse students with a White teacher (Chapman, 2005). Additionally, counternarratives using fictional characters have been used to illustrate a CRT perspective on *Brown v. Board of Education*'s impact on African American students (Saddler, 2005). Fletcher (2010) used loose associations of friends and family to provide a fictitious counternarrative to various interactions for American Indian

students with institutions of education, providing a method to critique colorblindness and meritocracy for American Indian students.

Patton (2006) explains that for African American students, Black Cultural Centers (BCCs) emerged as a safe space where they could escape the racially charged climate on campus. The BBC was also a place where Black students could share counterstorytelling or counternarratives. Patton (2006) explained, “Thus, in considering BCCs from a Black student perspective, these buildings, their programs, and services tell the Black story” (p. 631). In the same fashion, native-focused community resource centers can be a space that is welcoming, safe, and educational for American Indian students.

Tribal Critical Race Theory. There are several variations to Critical Race Theory, including Latino Critical Race Theory, Asian Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism, and Tribal Critical Race Theory (Zamudio et al., 2011). Specific to Native communities, Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) extends and emphasizes the CRT framework by explaining that racism is endemic to society since the onset of colonization (Brayboy, 2005a). TribalCrit offers a way to braid the relationship of culture and knowledge to provide power to the individual and American Indian communities by promoting their ways of knowing and their voice (Brayboy, 2005a). It also extends what tribal people have wanted throughout their relationship with Europeans, all the components of tribal sovereignty, including autonomy and self-determination.

For its importance to American Indian education, it is important to highlight the tenants of TribalCrit framework, described by Brayboy (2005a), within the family of critical paradigms used in this study because of its specificity and importance to indigenous research. The tenants that make up the framework of TribalCrit are (Brayboy, 2005a, pp. 429-430):

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

TribalCrit values a historical context that understands what has led to the development of the status quo, where American Indians and other ethnic/racial group are disproportionately represented. It is concerned with understanding that there is a long history of discrimination that has plagued almost every level of society, including education. Brayboy writes:

The primary tenet of TribalCrit is the notion that colonization is endemic to society. By colonization, I mean that European American thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate present-day society in the United States...In this way the goal sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, of interactions between the dominant U.S. society and American Indians has been to change (“colonize” or “civilize”) us to be more like those who hold power in the dominant society...This process of colonization and its debilitating influences are at the heart of TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005a, pp. 430-431).

Importantly, TribalCrit recognizes that the onus of high attrition should not lie solely on Indigenous students and the institution. Besides, Indigenous students need autonomy and should not be pushed toward assimilation because this can negatively affect one's identity.

Using a combination of CRT counternarrative and ethnographic methodology, Brayboy (2005b) found that two American Indian students, John and Heather, developed strategies grounded in their cultural traditions to resist assimilation at the ivy league schools they attended. For these students, their goal was to gain greater skills in their own fashion to help their communities ultimately. The skill that John learned was critical thinking and the ability to debate. He was able to add depth to discussions that were over-generalized. A strategy that Heather used was the ability to ask the right questions to show she understood the topics in a fashion that was culturally appropriate for her.

Tlingit professor, Caskey Russell, provided an exemplary counternarrative when challenging the master narrative that there is a huge pool of money for American Indians to go to college for free (Zamudio et al., 2011). Russell points out that although the tribe did what it could to help by providing a scholarship, it was not enough to help pay for his college tuition. Although funding is allocated because of treaties signed between the federal government with American Indian tribes, less than 30% ever reached the reservation (Wilkins & Stark, 2011). Beaulieu (2017) also found that K-12 school districts in California with the highest proportion of California Indians did not get more per-pupil funding than districts

populated with the highest proportion of white students. (See “On Indian Ground, pages 195-209.)

Critical race theories have been criticized for their use of counternarratives. In his critique of CRT, Posner (1997) argues that we already have a just society that is objective and democratic. Notwithstanding the idea of a just society, Posner also argues that counternarratives and storytelling are not part of Western rational inquiry values. Additionally, Darder and Torres (2004) criticize counternarratives for a tendency to exaggerate, over-homogenize people of color and White people, and romanticize the marginalized experience. However, these critiques of CRT are the crux of the debate in that CRT scholars argue that it is both the perspective and vantage point of who is telling the story. Differences in perspective likely is because people from different races have different experiences as they go through life. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) explain that master narratives spun in history books, case law, and even church sermons are homogenized. The issues become a “clash of stories” when counternarratives providing alternative viewpoints. What is clear is more discussion is needed to explore the basis of educational disparities, and cultural centers are well-positioned to invite these discussions.

Cultural Paradigms

A discussion regarding culturally responsive schooling (also called culturally responsive education) is important when looking American Indian education. Brayboy and Castagno (2009) explain two approaches that have shaped areas of American Indian education: assimilation and Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS). As mentioned above in the section of Historical Perspectives, assimilationist approaches are well documented going back to boarding schools where American Indian students were forbidden to speak their

Native language (Duran & Duran, 1995), subjected to abuse (Smith, 2004), and had limited educational skill-building. However, the CRS's other path is a more promising approach that acknowledges differing learning styles that affect academic outcomes (Huffman, 2010; Pewewardy, 2002; Swisher & Deyhle, 1987). CRS has shown that academic development in Native students increases in the classroom where the student's cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives are included (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Demmert & Towner, 2003; López, Heilig, & Schram, 2013).

In reviewing the literature of CRS, cultural context is relevant because of its meaning to marginalized students. Brayboy explains that to connect to youth, one should look at contextual clues for aligning the curriculum and teaching style with the student's style of learning (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). Cultural values are intricately tied to the formation of the American Indian student's identity and especially critical for inclusion in the classroom (Lopez et al, 2013).

It is important to note that similar to acknowledging the diversity in American Indian identity, it is also important to avoid generalizations of American Indian learning styles (Pewewardy, 2002), while also acknowledging that there are often cross-cutting similarities in education across tribal communities. In his chapter called American Indian Epistemologies, Gregory Cajete (2005) suggests that there are seven foundations on which the context of American Indian education is situated, which are the Environmental, the Mythic, the Artistic, the Visionary, the Affective, the Visionary, the Affective, the Communal, and the Spiritual, saying that the foundations are so interrelated that are in motion "relativistically at all levels of their expression" (p. 7). A summary of these foundations are: (adapted from Cajete, 2005, pp. 73-76)

- The Environmental foundation connects the land to its original inhabitants and forms the context through which the tribe had knowledge of the natural world. There are a reciprocal relationship and knowledge of the environment that is sophisticated and elegant.
- The Mythic foundation describes the process that facilitates the tribes' worldview through the structure of storytelling using metaphors to guide and promote learning.
- The Visionary foundation is situated on the individual level in terms of one's psychological and spiritual experiences.
- The Artistic foundation are situated in the way one can express "the meaning and understandings we have come to see" (p. 74)
- The Affective foundation forms the context in which the emotional response for individual in terms of learning, living, growing, and understanding our place in relation to the self, to others, and to the world as a whole.
- The Communal foundation that reflects the social and communal dimension and is "the process for teaching and learning tribal cultures are tied through history and tradition to some of the oldest and most instinctually human-contexted mediums of education" (p. 75).
- The Spiritual foundation "forms not only the foundation for religious expression but the ecological psychology that underpins the other foundations" (p. 75).

Although this is an abbreviated version of the foundations, Cajete's chapter is a good source for understanding American Indian education in the context of student needs, curriculum, and pedagogy.

Pewewardy (2002) highlights important points instructors should be informed of as American Indians differ from other groups. First, Native students are field-dependent; that is they learn in a holistic way rather than linear or hierarchical fashion. Importantly, field-dependent learners are contextual, i.e., looking at parts-and-whole-together, making it difficult for them to separate from the environment. Additionally, American Indian students are perceptual learners and learn best when incorporating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning. Lastly, American Indian students tend to be more reflective than other groups, which is to say that they may take more time in responding to questions in the classroom (Philips, 1992). Pewewardy (2002) explains that the student “is more open-oriented, delaying decision-making until all the evidence is collected before coming to a conclusion or acting in response to a situation” (p. 30).

Discussions on student success across the entirety of schooling for American Indian students are typically associated with culture and tradition. Culture plays a role in how students align within the classrooms. For American Indian students, two cultural patterns of communication and interaction styles they learn from home accompany them to school (Huffman, 2010). Concerning communication style, many American Indian students tend to value quiet reflection than immediate responses to an instructor's questions, who often assume that the behavior displayed is one of disinterest or having little motivation (Pewewardy, 2002; Philips, 1992). In her study on the Warm Springs reservation, Philips (1992) found that Native students had very different communication and interaction styles than that of their teachers, which ultimately led to uncertainty for the student and the instructors. Another study found that Native students in a college focus group expressed frustration in their experiences with their instructors, saying, “It is beyond my comprehension why people don’t

want to learn about the population they're teaching. These people have forgotten about Indians," while another student added "Some faculty put us down...And they don't realize they're doing it" (Tierney, 1991, p. 38). Describing phenomena related to subtle forms of racism known as microaggressions, Sue et al. (2007) explain that many people do so often unconsciously. Sue et al. (2007) defines the students' experiences above in terms coined as microinsult and microinvalidation. Microinsults are remarks or comments conveying rudeness or insensitivity to the student's racial background or identity. A microinvalidation is a comment or behavior that negates the experience and voice of the student.

Learning content should include metaphors and stories, as they are powerful tools in the learning process that provide a framework that Native students are familiar with or understand and have played a central role in their tribal communities for generations. For example, there are numerous symbolic constructs to consider, such as the Mother Earth, Sacred Twins, Trickster, and the Tree of Life. Teachers should tap the powerful myths that tie cultural, ecological, and spiritual values into a holistic approach to learning that is familiar and engaging to American Indian students (Cajete, 2005).

One's tribal language in education is a powerful tool in American Indian education (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Demmert & Towner, 2003). Brayboy and Castagno (2009) explain that American Indian students should have the opportunity to use their culture and language to develop and retain their Native identities. Demmer and Towner (2003) say that language and culture promote traditions and knowledge as a starting point for growth and new ideas for the Native student.

A consistent theme across the literature for CRS literature is the inclusion of family, elders, and community in the learning process (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Cajete, 2005;

Demmert & Towner, 2003; López et al., 2013; Pewewardy, 2002). This inclusive education promotes the idea of a two-way interaction where both the home/community culture and the school culture dynamically inform each other. It addresses both student success and promotes their “cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 469). The classroom could be adapted to reflect the community's values and communication style by having parents, family, and community members participate. Strong involvement of these stakeholders in learning could be implemented with proper planning and operation by educators (Demmert & Towner, 2003).

An inclusive education promotes the idea of a two-way interaction where both the home/community culture and the school culture dynamically inform each other. It addresses both student success and promotes their “cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 469). Thus, having students’ cultural centers can be a powerful site for students to share ideas and reaffirm identity.

Culturally relevant education also includes the frameworks of both critical race theory and one’s social identity. One study found that teachers who have used language interaction patterns similar to that of the American Indian students they worked with had more successful student academic performance (Irvine, 1990). Grande (2004) believe that it is not enough to tailor the curriculum to learning styles of American Indian students adding that pedagogies need to move toward radical change that disrupts current systems toward equality.

Adding further to beneficial educational practice, Proudfit and Warner (2017) offered promising high impact practices for American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) education in California that can be tailored to communities across the country, suggesting:

- Formalizing educational relationships that support tribal sovereignty and self-determination through tribal-university memorandums of understanding or other means using place-based tribal community needs, regional needs, and Native Ways of Knowing.
- Tailoring coursework for AIAN students based on the student’s specific educational strengths and areas in need of assistance, such as earlier intervention in the K-12 system to spell out the A-G requirements for college entry – for example, a “4-3-2-1 Go to College” campaign – to educate tribal students and parents that four years of English, three years of math, two years of language, and two years of lab science, plus one college elective is needed to get into college in California.
- Creating a sense of “kinship” to strengthen communication between faculty, staff (advisors), and students, again by assessing the local, regional, and tribal community needs (place based).
- Building specific AIAN “gathering grounds” for students and the community (on and off campus) to meet, study, and network, and plan around the dynamic and vibrant community events happening on local tribal lands.
- Designing, offering, and delivering courses to directly serve the needs of AIAN community (at tribal sites when and if possible).

- Create a tribal advisory board that provides consultation on over-arching administrative or fundraising plans, but also listen to this group's need and advice for curricular plans for academic master planning.

Identity

In this section, I review literature related to cultural identity as it is often cited as an important factor for American Indian students. In order to understand cultural identity, I briefly review concepts in identity related literature looking at how multifaceted and complex the construct is, looking at the dimensions of ethnic and racial identity development as they are key influences on the development of cultural identity formation. I also review the controversial topic of acculturation and the notion of living in two worlds.

Identity is one of the most ambiguous constructs to understand and one of the most studied by social scientists (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). In fact, it is one of the most common terms that appear in educational research (Côté, 2006). Therefore, it is no surprise that there is growing support in further developing scholarship in identity studies and providing a space for the construct in social science (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). Additionally, few models exist that understand the holistic development of students in the university setting (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007).

Early work on understanding personal identity development began with Freud's ideas on id, ego, and superego. These ideas were further developed by Erik Erikson (1968) on ego identity in developmental stages. He described this process as occurring during identity crises or periods in which an adolescent encounters a crisis and grows when he or she resolves it in a meaningful way--spurring growth into the next stage and entering "identity achievement." Erikson's work was commonly applied to adolescent identity development (Erikson, 1968)

and subsequently the college student population. James Marcia (1980) would later suggest that it was not a crisis that spurred growth in identity but rather the exploration and commitment to an identity in a variety of domains. However, these theorists did not fully develop ideas related to the complex experience of students of color. William Cross (1978) and Janet Helm (1984) built models that could help explain how identity issues are resolved in their models of Black identity development.

An important aspect for student development in university settings is to understand the construct of identity is multifaceted. In fact, sociocultural perspectives support understanding identity as a multidimensional phenomenon instead of single entity (Verhoeven, Poorthuis, & Volman, 2019). In their review of adolescent identity development in the context of middle school through high school, Verhoeven et al. (2019) explain that along with personal and social identity, there are also school-related identity dimensions¹. Such as, a student oriented to science might have a science identity and a reader identity (literacy identity) in which after merging them becomes a more general identity of a particular learner identity (described by Verhoeven and colleagues, 2019 as a process of “self-identification” for the person). With the construct being multifaceted, it is important to understand the role of ethnic identity in people of color.

Ethnic Identity

Cokley (2007) explains that ethnic and racial identity are among the more popular topics researched in multicultural counseling literature. However, the constructs of racial and ethnic identity are among the most controversial as there can be some conceptual confusion

¹ The focus of Verhoeven and colleagues (2018) was to conduct a literature analysis on identity development for adolescence.

between both constructs (Cokley, 2005; Helms, 1996). To help distinguish between the two, Cokley (2007) defined race and ethnicity as:

- *Race* refers to a characterization of a group of people believed to share physical characteristics such as skin color, facial features, and other hereditary traits.
- *Ethnicity* refers to a characterization of a group of people who see themselves and are seen by others as having a common ancestry, shared history, shared traditions, and shared cultural traits such as language, beliefs, values, music, dress, and food (p. 225).

Phinney (1990) describes *ethnic identity* as having an ethnic component, having a self-concept of his/her membership of a social group (or groups), self-identification, sense of belonging, cultural aspects (language, values, understanding of ethnic collective history), and has a dynamic aspect to development. Whereas *racial identity* is more the encompassing identity of any group that has been brought to think of themselves as a racial group (Helms & Cook, 1999). Despite these distinctions, Phinney and Ong (2007) explain that for self-identifying as a member of a particular group, the label of ethnic group or racial group does not matter as it should be understood by context. For my study, I use cultural identity interchangeably with ethnic and racial identity.

Phinney's model of ethnic identity formation integrates the work of Erikson (1968), Marcia (1980), Cross Jr (1978), and Helms (1984), to describe ethnic identity development that occurs in minority adolescents and college students in three stages: unexamined ethnic identity, ethnic identity search/moratorium, and ethnic identity achievement. At the unexamined ethnic identity stage, one does not make the distinction of ethnicity or racial

identity and may adopt mainstream identity of the majorities commonly held values and attitudes. The next stage of ethnic identity search, a person may encounter a significant encounter (such as an experience with racism or discrimination) that spurs reflection of one's cultural or ethnic background. At this stage a person may seek out more information on their ethnic group. The last stage of ethnic identity achievement is summed as having a strong understanding of one's ethnic identity in the larger social context of the mainstream culture.

Ethnic identity development is important because it plays such an important role in feelings of self-esteem (Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990), and can help a person adjust when faced with instances of prejudice and discrimination (Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Phinney, Chavira, & Williamson, 1992). Given the value that ethnic identity plays for an individual's wellbeing it is helpful to further examine the process and context of its development.

The Role of Process and Context

To understand how the development of identities can occur, it is helpful to look at the process of development using an ecological approach as suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model has been used in understanding development in diverse populations (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Renn, 2003), and more recently the modified version has been reconceptualized for Native students. Bronfenbrenner's work accounts for individual differences in various contexts, illustrating how environments can help promote student development. He describes his early model as the "person-process-context model (1983)" that would later become the "person-process-context-time model (1987)." The primary difference in the models was a shift from focusing on how the environment shapes development to a focus on how *processes* and *context* are important in understanding

development. This is not to say that the environment was not important, but there was a shift in the relationship among the components from a more static model to a more dynamic version, highlighting the interactions between each component—the process. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) explained:

...this construct [Process] encompasses particular forms of interaction between organism and environment, called *proximal processes*, that operate over time and are posited as the primary mechanisms producing human development. However, the power of such processes to influence development is presumed, and shown, to vary substantially as a function of the characteristics of the developing *Person*, of the immediate and more remote environmental *Contexts*, and the *Time* periods, in which the proximal processes take place.”

Characteristics that affect the proximal processes of the *Person* include dispositions (temperament, motivation, persistence), resources (emotional or mental resources like skills, past experiences, intelligence), and demand (physical appearance, gender, or age). The disposition characteristics include one’s physical appearance, gender, or age. The levels of context include:

- *Microsystems*—where interpersonal relationships are experienced by the individual in their immediate environment (bi-directional relationships that are mutually influenced by the person and their peers, parents, siblings, teachers).
- *Mesosystems*—“comprises linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person. Special attention is focused on the synergistic effects created by the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting” (p. 22). *Exosystems*—are the systems outside (external) of the individual that affect them in the interactions of the microsystems (e.g., mass media, neighborhood, workplace).

- *Macrosystems*—are the outermost level that affects the individual through culture, such as socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity, public policy, or macroinstitutions like the federal government.
- *Chronosystems*—this system includes changes in the environment that occur over the lifetime, including by the influence of major historical events and life transitions (e.g., beginning school, divorce of parents).

Time was referenced in early iterations of Bronfenbrenner's work since his original model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)(see Figure 1) and become more prominent in his later work.

Bronfenbrenner would include successive levels of time, including: microtime, mesotime, and macrotime. Microtime refers to what is occurring during proximal processes influenced by continuity versus discontinuity. Mesotime refers to the proximal processes occurring between longer lengths of time, such as days and weeks. Macrotime refers to what is occurring at a broader level in society that affects the norms of the mainstream culture and happens across generations influencing proximal processes across the individual's lifespan.

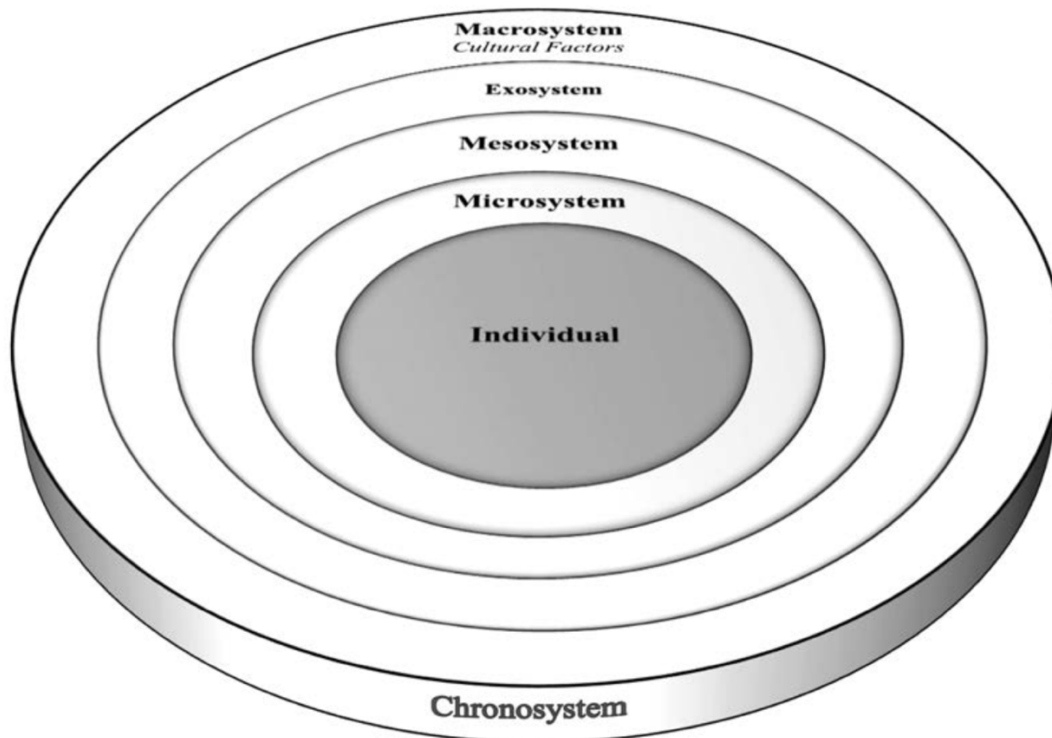


Figure 1. Three-Dimensional Model of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Model With the Chronosystem Depicted as the Third Dimension

What is helpful of the ecological approach is that it accounts not only for individual of interest, but also the world that shapes that individual. The interactions that occur throughout the systems can reveal important environmental aspects that are supportive of the student in both academic and social development. The approach allows one to take a snapshot of an individual's development in time on which one can map where it is occurring across several domains.

Jillian Fish and Moin Syed (2018) have offered a reconceptualization of the model that moved the emphasis of the model to the chronosystem. Their change of focus to the chronosystem as a starting point to understanding a Native student acknowledges a powerful force surrounding the experience of many American Indian people—historical trauma. They

explain that having a historical perspective is important because of the negative legacy of boarding schools and early assimilation policies on Native people. In turn, historical trauma from colonialism can affect the self-continuity of Native students². Fish and Syed (2018) offered further explanation:

The ability to connect past selves with future selves to form a coherent sense of self can be difficult when an individual's culture has been oppressed, because culture is foundational to developing a sense of self. (p.392)

Reconceptualizing the model to account for a historic perspective, they created a framework that was contextually focused, developmental, and strength-based, starting with moving the Chronosystem and Macrosystems to the center (see Figure 2). It is important to recognize how culture and history are inextricably linked in ways that affect all other aspects of a Native person's development (Fish & Syed, 2018).

² Self-Continuity as explained by Fisher and Syed (2018) refers to "...the ability to form a self-conception that extends backwards into the past and forward into the future." (p.392)

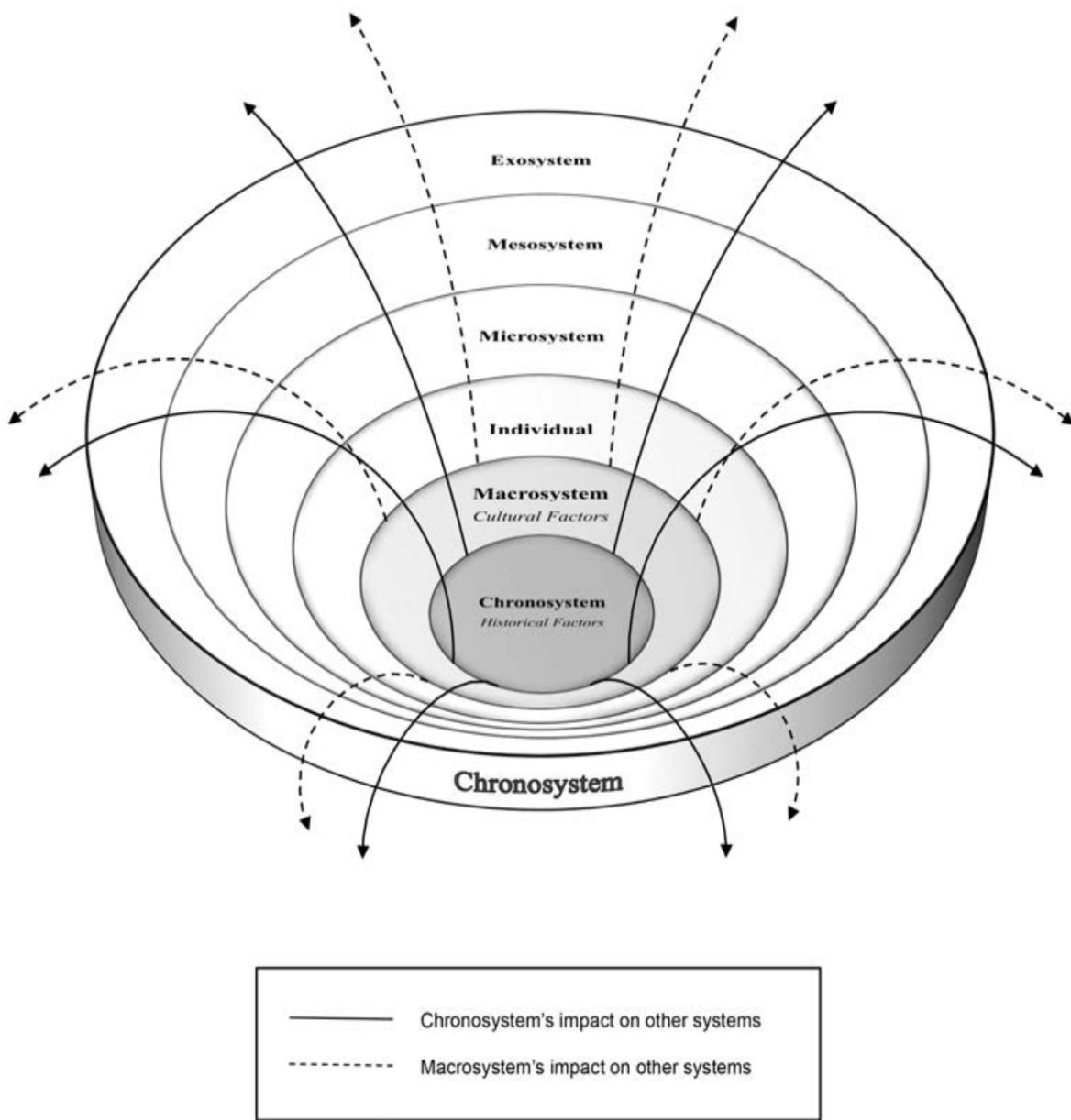


Figure 2. Three-Dimensional Conceptual Model of the Chronosystem and Macrosystem in Relation to the Other Levels

Acculturation. The metaphor of the “melting pot” was used in the early 20th century to describe the cultural integration of immigrants migrating to the United States (Atkinson, 2004). However, there would be an extreme shift by pushing immigrants and minorities to relinquish their culture toward assimilation of American culture, which was strongly

influenced by Northern and Western European values and mores (Fairchild, 1926). The assimilationist model was not unfamiliar to American Indians as has been noted above in discussion of boarding schools in the section on historical perspectives. Mainstream culture has historically made attempts to assimilate Native people and in the process have affected American Indian families, clans, tribal sovereignty, traditional practices, and religious and spiritual beliefs (Deloria, 1969; Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

Although acculturation has negative connotations for many people of color, it should be noted that some have explained that it is quite possible to walk in both worlds of one's culture and the mainstream culture. Garrett and Pichette (2000) described an acculturation continuum on which American Indian's may self-identify, ranging from *Traditional*, *Marginal*, *Bicultural*, *Assimilated*, and *Pantraditional*. At the traditional end of the continuum, the person identifies only with Native values, beliefs, practice, and worship. At the other end is Assimilated where the person identifies with American cultural behaviors, values, and expectations. At the middle point is the bicultural person, who is enculturated with traditional American Indian worldview and values but has also acquired values and behaviors from the mainstream culture.

Terry Huffman (2001, 2010) developed a theory he coined transculturation theory³. The theory "evolved as an attempt to specifically explain the way in which Native students encounter, engage, and ultimately persist in mainstream education" (Huffman, 2010, p. 163). Features of the theory to note are the importance of maintaining one's cultural identity and navigating the mainstream. Using a quantitative approach, Okagaki et al. (2009) found

³ Huffman (2010) described his transculturation theory as unique in that it was not borrowed from an existing model, which he explains often occurs in educational research.

support for the theory's explanatory power. Specifically, the investigators found that a strong American Indian ethnic identity was related to understanding education's value. The theory allows for ongoing cultural transformation, including the ability to take on aspects of mainstream's cultural values. In contrast to ideas that the individual would have to give up his/her identity and assimilate to the mainstream culture, transculturalation says:

the reflective and rational individual is capable of retaining intact Native cultural ways, views, and beliefs of a new culture. The point is that the transculturation process has not required the relinquishing of former cultural ways to make room for new ones, as implied in the notion of biculturation (p. 176).

American Indian Identity. Salient characteristics associated with American Indian identity include cultural values, community, racial attitudes, and legal and political standing. American Indian identity has been found to serve as an emotional anchor during difficult situations in navigating higher education (Huffman, 2001). Peery G. Horse, a leading scholar in the discussion of American Indian Identity, describes five influences that shape an American Indian person's consciousness on the topic (Horse, 2005, p. 65):

- The extent to which one is grounded in one's Native American language and culture, one's cultural identity.
- The validity of one's American Indian genealogy.
- The extent to which one holds traditional American Indian general philosophy or worldview (emphasizing balance and harmony and drawing on Indian spirituality).
- One's self-concept as an American Indian.
- One's enrollment (or lack of it) in the tribe.

Horse explains that identity begins with a connection to one's family, whether it is immediate or extended, kinship or clan affiliation. One needs to understand their genealogical roots that

are Native. A key influence on identity for American Indians is the ability to speak their tribe's language. In fact, speaking one's Native language is important in preserving one's culture and can help translate one's unique background by revealing one's culture more fully (Gregor & Rodriguez, 2017). Knowing one's Indigenous language can also support passing on traditional stories that are not understood in the same way unless they are spoken in that language (Horse, 2005). Language nuances across groups cannot be understated and are an important point to consider as language does not always translate from one language to the other. An interesting illustration of this point was made between the way Tlingit and French people named the dandelion. According to Olson (1997):

The term comes from the French "dent de lion," or "teeth of the lion." The Tlingit name for this plant translates into "Raven's basket." The difference is due to the fact that English-speaking people look at the plant when it is in bloom and the petals of the flower look like the lion's teeth. The Tlingit look at the plant as it goes to seed, and the cluster of seeds appear like a basket which the Raven left unfinished. Both groups are looking at the same "reality," but from different points of view. This one example shows that to really understand another culture, a person must understand its language and way of seeing the world. (p. 21).

This example of how perception and language are intimately connected serves as an important reminder for higher education institutions to consider that language differences may also mean different ways of thinking about the same object or construct of focus. These connections between language, culture, and ways of thinking were also asserted in the education literature by Vygotsky (1986).

Summary

Increasing student enrollment and retention for American Indian students remain a challenge for Native communities and higher learning institutions. A few key themes that are persistent across the literature have to do with campus life, faculty-student interaction,

financial support, and one's readiness and prior background in academic disciplines that can be quite rigorous. Perhaps the most visible framework that most student retention research is built on is academic and social integration that is sensitive to cultural differences. Situating the historical context of systems of power, such as the federal government and their treatment of Native people, calls loudly for an approach to research that acknowledges more is needed for social justice, including changes in educational systems. Critical paradigms (like Critical Race Theory or TribalCrit) argue that reform should be driven in collaboration with Native communities on campus to preserve cultural identities instead of promoting assimilation. The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 was a monumental step forward for reform, but the bleak educational practices and poor student learning outcomes continue to reflect ineffective measures by assimilationist attitudes. Supportive relationships can be achieved on campus through connections promoted through more community engagement, greater sensitivity toward students of color, and support for cultural centers and student associations where students can express and learn about their cultural identity.

As a Native student enrolled in the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, an important aim of this study was to engage American Indian undergraduate students' voices to reveal their educational experiences. My goal was to better understand: 1) how students define their cultural identity, 2) how they define their experience in higher education, 3) how do they experienced the Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC). The chapter describes my methodological approach.

Chapter Three: Methods

This single case study relies on what I call the Critical Integrated Cultural Framework (CICIF) that integrates concepts from critical, cultural, and identity paradigms into the research process. This design can reveal a strong model for improving higher education for Native students. Educational systems need to change and need to be more responsive to the voices of American Indian students. Fostering cultural and traditional Native values in developing the student's sense of self in the school setting can empower American Indian students to draw from cultural knowledge to excel. In this chapter, to frame my methodological approach, I first define my positionality as a American Indian researcher, the frameworks that supports my approach, describe the study design, research setting, confidentiality dynamics, participants, data collection procedures, and the analytic method.

Positionality

I am a 40-year-old individual, who along with being of Mexican descent, is also an enrolled member of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, working on a dissertation for the fulfillment of a doctorate in educational leadership, and with experience in promoting American Indian health. I identify as an urban Indian who was born and raised in Southern California. I cannot speak for all American Indians or other Tlingits because there are many differences among the groups (American Indians are not a homogenous cultural population), and I am committed to exploring ways to improve the educational experience. I am proud to be Tlingit and of Mexican descent and think my experience should be not viewed as a blanket illustration of other American Indians or Tlingits. I honor the diversity of American Indians and want to preserve voice of participants in this study as they intend. I am also honored to

have met many tribal people both on reservations and in urban settings. I gratefully acknowledge the original people from the area in San Diego, the Kumeyaay people.

It is important that I share a bit about me to know what drove my interest in this work. I started working as a caseworker in Indian Country after I graduated with a B.A. in Psychology from California State University, San Marcos. Through my professional training, I learned much from my Indigenous mentors about the Native children who entered Child Protective Services were removed from their homes to non-Native homes and how the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was a way to ensure American Indian children stay in American Indian homes. Removing children from the home has consequential effect on the development of protective factors, namely the development of a strong cultural identity. I would later move to work on a couple of public health-related initiatives on underage drinking and prescription pain medications. From the feedback of tribal leaders regarding these initiatives, I learned they wanted to see more action for promoting healthy communities through culturally informed education. Fortunately, I worked with a strong group of people who collaborated with tribal afterschool programs and Native clubs on local public schools' campuses in health-related education, so I developed an applied understanding of working closely with young Natives and their families in the area. What seemed to be the most effective support for Native youth and their families and communities were activities like bird singing, pow wow dancing, smudging, storytelling, and language revitalization programs. It was in this exciting array of cultural expressions that I became more interested in learning about the role of cultural identity as a protective factor on student persistence in higher education. I enjoy working with school-based events where speakers promote accurate

historical narratives, engage in culturally-relevant themes, demonstrate Native resilience, and emphasize the connection between educational practice and tribal identity.

My positionality as the researcher is as an outsider with insider experience. I am a fellow Native student who completed coursework at a campus where only a few American Indian students attended. I participated in programming and events with other Native students and expanded my lens on the local tribal cultures. While I sought to be unbiased while conducting the interviews, my own identity as an American Indian student fostered emic insight on how the participants in this study experienced their own education. Maxwell (2012) points out that qualitative research is tied to the investigator's assumptions, values, and expectations. My experience as a Tlingit student inspired my decisions in selecting the framework and design of the study that include critical research. I believe that change is needed for higher education that incorporates the students' voices and that a bottom-up approach is much more helpful than a top-down approach that ignores the finer details about student identity. Given the nature of my study as being informed by critical paradigms (Critical Race Theory, TribalCrit)⁴, it was appropriate to add my own experience as an insider to the study findings. As suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) regarding researcher reflexivity in critical research, the study findings are primarily drawn from the study participants with careful inclusion of my experience to add additional insight to the findings.

Framework of the study

The voices of students of color are an essential component of the blended framework I call the Critical Integrated Cultural Identity Framework (CICIF) used for this study.

⁴ Critical paradigms like Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005a) are built on the assumption that world is informed by structured power relations based on race and occur in both education systems and in research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Counternarratives from students of color provide a different reference source than the dominant culture and need to be heard (Delgado, 1995). In fact, American Indians have a strong tradition of providing voice through storytelling that uses history and myth to continue cultural ties among the community (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit; Braboy, 2005a) looks to provide counterstories that challenge the status quo and inequitable structural arrangements. It has been argued that people of color can provide insight that is not readily available to others because the perspective is different (Matsuda, 1987).

Cultural paradigms (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Cajete, 2005; Demmert & Towner, 2003; López et al., 2013; Pewewardy, 2002) reveal the different values and worldviews that influence interaction and learning styles of American Indian students. These paradigms, such as Culturally Responsive Schooling and Culturally Relevant Education provide insight into best practices for faculty and student support service staff in understanding the cultural assets of American Indian students and promotes the importance of cultural competence.

Critical and cultural paradigms contextualize social identity development of students of color provides, providing schools a tool they can use to support American Indian students. W.E.B. Du Bois (2008) appropriately extends our understanding of identity using a critical lens by what he described as double consciousness. He suggests that double consciousness is the capacity to see oneself through the eyes of society. The concept of double consciousness developed by Du Boise over a century ago, resonates with tenants of Critical Studies and Critical Race Theory. The concept of biculturalism for personal identity development borrows from Du Bois double consciousness of walking in both worlds of the mainstream and one's ethnic/racial identity.

Lastly, Fisher and Syed (2018) provided reconceptualized model of Bronfenbrenners (1979) ecological theory. Their reconceptualization places the chronosystem (historical factors) and macrosystem (cultural factors) as key influences that affect American Indian student development. Like critical and cultural paradigms, the reconceptualized model by Fish and Syed (2018) acknowledges the unique historical and cultural factors that affect the American Indian people. The model contextualizes the environment around the Native student to their development that promotes self-continuity. It can provide a lens for understanding how to best support their development in the college setting.

My case study design drew from critical, cultural, and identity development paradigms to form a blended framework I call the Critical Integrated Cultural Identity Framework (CICIF). It draws from tenants of critical, cultural, and identity paradigms in the following way:

- Raises historical consciousness,
- Incorporates experiential knowledge and values of students,
- Promotes student voice,
- Promotes cultural identity as a central feature to one's educational experience,
- Promotes an ecological view to understand the process and context of development,
- Enables a holistic view of Native students' schooling experience.

A blended framework can be broad and complex, as a holistic lens for researching American Indian experience. It can also be applied to alter a system by providing multiple views on race, ethnicity, gender, and class (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). A blended work that incorporates critical and cultural paradigms is innovative, specifically for student affairs programs (Guido et al., 2010). They are a strong analytic tool that promotes equity for groups

who have been marginalized. The potential outcome of using the Critical Integrated Cultural Identity Framework include providing: counternarratives that explain the values and beliefs that are important to Native students while they are in school, explanations of where and how personal identities develop, explanations of how cultural identities provide support during challenging times in school, the importance of family and community for Native students while they are in school.

Research Design

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that the purpose of qualitative research is to understand how people make sense out of the things going on in their lives in focusing on the process rather than the product. (p. 15). They suggest the researcher describe meaning-making process that the reveals how people interpret their experience. This transformative orientation invites student participants to engage in the research process actively, described as an advocacy/participatory approach (Creswell, 2003). The axiological belief related to this study is influenced by Native values and counternarratives to inform change. The assumptions follow a critical paradigm that acknowledges the political power and identity of Native people, with an emphasis on diversity in cultural values and tradition. The method is grounded in the participants' feedback focusing on a community engagement process in the research. Several key features of a transformative framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018) including a recursive focus on change using an action agenda. The approach also promotes the student's self-determination in their schooling and looks to change the status quo. For me, the work is more collaborative in nature and is looking to work "with" participants rather than "on" or "to" them.

Research questions. The research questions for this study were: How do American Indian students define their cultural identity? How do American Indian students define their experience in higher education? How do American Indian students experience the Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC)?

Qualitative data methods, data collection, and interpretation are complex and powerful approaches to gaining insight into an area of research interest. Qualitative research can make a researcher and participant more perceptive of the world around them. This qualitative research aimed to provide a vivid description of how American Indian students define themselves, how they experience higher education, and how they experienced the SCTCRC.

Primary data were collected using seven individual interviews and one focus group. Individual interviews are the most common data collection method in qualitative research. They can provide in-depth descriptions of a participant's thoughts, perceptions, knowledge, and beliefs related to a given phenomenon (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008).

A one-time focus group was conducted with 5 of the 7 participants from the individual interviews to further the lines of inquiry in a way that is different from individual interviews. The goal of using a focus group method for this study was to 1) collect interaction data where participants can question one another and comment on the experience of others in the group, 2) to delve into deeper inquiry (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). The focus group also encouraged the participants to modify or change their earlier responses from the individual interviews.

I collected data using structured and unstructured interview approaches for the individual interviews and the focus group. Lofland and Lofland point out the benefits of approaches, where structured interviews can help a researcher understand how often

preconceived things occur, while unstructured interviews help generated new knowledge about a phenomenon (1995, p. 18).

Interview discussions were 1) recorded, 2) transcribed, and 3) the data were organized into units coded and synthesized into themes that were analyzed for their meanings. Sub-themes were extrapolated from the larger categorical themes. I audio recorded the interviews and journaled them to help preserve the responses of the participants. Qualitative data were collected sequentially with a focus on the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of students.

I believed it was important to formulate questions that were engaging and meaningful to the respondent. A good practice I followed was to:

...ask for concrete details of a participant's lived experience before exploring attitudes and opinions about it. The concrete details constitute the experience; attitudes and opinions are based on them. Without the concrete details, the attitudes and opinions can seem groundless" (Seidman, 2013, p. 88).

Using this approach, I tried to have interviewees connect meaning to their responses by reconstructing their personal stories to what is being asked. The goal was to move toward the "I-Thou" where the interviewee is highlighted and comfortable by the questions and with the interviewer to share and be careful not to move into the "We" level. "I-Thou" refers to the experience being true to the participant, whereas the "We" level refers to too much of the investigator's insertion in the interview process influencing participants' responses to that of their own. While I sought to be unbiased and distanced from the research questions while conducting the interviews, my positionality in the research is intermingled with the participants. Maxwell (2012) points out that qualitative research is tied to the investigator's assumptions, values, and expectations. My experience as a Tlingit student affected my decisions in selecting the framework and design of the study. I believe that change is needed

for higher education that incorporates the students' voices and that a bottom-up approach is much more helpful than a top-down one.

Research Setting, Confidentiality, and Participants

As described in the Chapter One, SCTCRC is a space where American Indian students can socialize, get support, and have a sense of belonging. Established in 2016, the Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC) is a Native-focused community resource center at a public university in Southern California and was created in response to address underrepresented and marginalized American Indian students at the local university. Other community centers on campus that have addressed other marginalized students were created to meet the needs of all students to address diversity and social justice issues. These centers include the Cross-Cultural Center, Women's Center, LGBT Resource Center, Latino Resource Center, Black Resource Center, and the Asian American Programs & Services. The Principles of Community that guide the university are:

- Providing fair treatment for faculty, staff, and students
- Encouraging a climate of fairness, cooperation, and professionalism
- Fostering inclusiveness, respect, and a welcoming environment
- Promoting collaborative attitudes and actions

In 2018, the university reported the enrollment of ~30,000 undergraduate students and ranked in the top 10-best public research institution in the United States. Although the school has increased the representation of African American/Black, Latino, and American Indian students over the past few years, like many other public universities, there is still a need for more diversity in the selection process. American Indian student's make up less than 1% of

enrollees in this university report, yet California has the highest number of Native people living in the state.

The SCTCRC aims to provide resources that create a sense of place and community and support for American Indian students on campus. The center also aims to develop positive relationships with the local tribal communities. The SCTCRC currently provides supportive community space, academic support services, mentoring/leadership development, co-and-extra-curricular programming, and non-academic support. The center provides support to 121 self-identified American Indian undergraduate students.

A convenience sampling approach was used for recruiting study interviewees who met several criteria for study participation. First, the students needed to identify as being American Indian undergraduate students who have used the Native-focused Center two or more times a week. Using a convenience sampling allowed for flexibility for Native students with no pressure on the student to participate.

The recruitment efforts began by discussing the purpose and research questions of my proposed study with SCTCRC director. The program director supported the study's efforts and placed a recruitment flyer (See Appendix A: Study Flyer) at the center's entrance. The director also introduced me to the chairperson of the Native American Student Association. An email was sent to the chairperson requesting attendance at an upcoming Native American Student Association (NASA) meeting. I later attended two separate NASA meetings to discuss the study participation. A total of seven American Indian undergraduate students participated in individual interviews, and five of these interviewees participated in a follow-up focus group. All self-identified as having a tribal affiliation. There were five female and two male participants between the ages of 18-20 years old, with three of the seven living on campus.

Grade levels ranged for participants from Freshman to Senior with different focuses for their respective majors, which included: Communications, public health, clinical psychology, human health psychology and neuroscience. Two of the seven participants were the first in their families to attend college. Table 1 represents a profile of the participants.

Table 1.
Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Gender	First in family to attend college	Major	Minor
Mary	F	No	Not recorded	
Elle	F	No	Communications	Ethnic Studies
James	M	Yes	Public Health	Linguistics
Jacob	M	No	Psychology with Specialization in Clinical Psychology	Cognitive Science
Jessica	F	No	Psychology with Specialization in Human Health	General Biology
Sarah	F	Yes	Neuroscience	Ethnic Studies
Jennifer	F	No	Public Health	

Confidentiality. Avoiding unethical research should be at the forefront when designing any research study. History is riddled with examples of unethical research that has negatively impacted vulnerable communities, leading to a mandate for Institutional Review Boards by the United States for human subject studies (Katz, 1987). One example of unethical behavior occurred with researchers that collected blood samples from the Havasupai tribe. In turn, they used the collected blood samples to look at topics that were not originally consented to and were very different from the originally agreed upon diabetes research (Smith-Morris, 2007).

For ethical reasons, research conducted in tribal communities needs to have protections against unethical practices. Some tribes have developed Tribal Research Review Committees or Tribal Scientific Review Boards to protect their communities (Smith-Morris, 2007). This approach leads to the protection of individuals who participate and controls potential negative perceptions that can negatively affect a community in damaging ways.

There was no Tribal IRB to submit my study to, so I only submitted my study to the UCSD IRB. I was keenly aware of creating a study that was mindful of good practices when working with a sample of American Indians. I also participated in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative program course for Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research before data collection began.

To protect the identities of participants, pseudonyms were given for all individuals, including the name of the participant, institution, program, and outside individuals listed in the interviews. A one-time consent form included information on the purpose of the study, the benefits and risk of participation, the study incentive amount, and the contact information for the investigator and the Institutional Review Board (See Appendix B: Informed Consent).

Data Collection Methods: Research Phases of the Case Study

I used a single case study design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018) of a group of undergraduate American Indian students for my unit of analysis, with the individual students as subunits. The study included several phases of data collection, which in the first phase, data were collected through individual interviews, the second phase included an opportunity for participants to review their transcripts for editing and further comments as a form of member checking, the third phase included a summary of the individual interview data, and the fourth phase included a focus group discussion for a second round of member checking and further discussion on themes from the initial individual interviews. Figure 3 illustrates the phases of data collection efforts for the study.

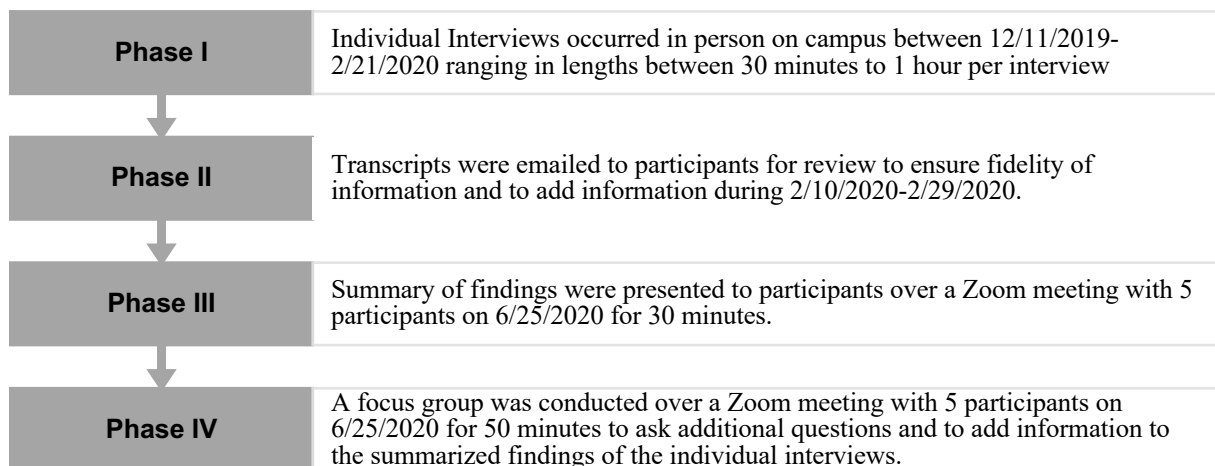


Figure 3. Study Data Collection Efforts in Four Phases

A critical feature of my design is the “human-as-instrument” through interviews using an iterative process that started at the moment of first collected data and continued for the study duration. I collected data during the Winter quarter of 2019 through the Spring quarter of 2020 at the university. Individual interviews conducted in the first phase were conducted separately to facilitate open discussion and preserve confidentiality. After analyzing data and

summarizing the results from the individual interviews, I presented the findings to the participants for feedback in a focus group setting, as a member-checking process to ensure the fidelity of information collected, to provide another opportunity to add information that was not brought up in the initial individual interviews, and to ask additional questions in the setting that brought the dynamics of group interactions to increase the depth of inquiry.

Phase I. Individual interviews were collected from 12/11/2019 to 2/21/2020 and ranged in lengths between 30 minutes to 1 hour. All individual interviews were conducted in person in a confidential setting on the campus of SCU. Interviews were conducted in rooms where only the interviewer and interviewee were present to preserve confidentiality and promote free-flowing dialogue. Rooms for the interviews were used in the institution's central library, a study room in the student center, and in an empty room during after-hours of the SCTCRC.

The interview began with informal questions typical of American Indian greetings, such as "Where are you from?" "What tribe do you belong to?" "What kind of things are you interested in?", etc., as a way to familiarize ourselves and to increase trust between the participants and me. After a warm orientation, the research goals were described, and a review of the informed consent was discussed. General demographic questions were posed, including 1) what is your age, gender, and tribal affiliation, and 2) follow-up contact information was provided in case anyone wanted to talk more about the study.

Next, the formal interview began with the open-ended questions (See Appendix C: Interview Guide and Questions for the full set of questions):

- How important is education to your family?
- How strongly do you identify with your Native culture?

- How connected do you feel to your cultural identity?

To dig further into the meaning of responses, unstructured follow-up questions were posed, such as “What do you mean by that?” My goal was to treat the interview process as a discussion. The positive and negative aspects of the student’s experience, self-cultural identity, and suggested center improvements could be identified and discussed.

Recommendations for making improvements could also be explored collaboratively.

Phase II. During the second phase, copies of transcripts were given to each individual interviewee for their respective interviews to provide feedback on transcriptions’ accuracy as a member checking system. Transcripts were emailed to the participants to review for several weeks and offer feedback on the content. The presented transcripts were constructed from the participants’ original voice to capture their responses from the interview questions to reflect the research goals. One goal was to ensure the fidelity of information-oriented around the research questions and add to or modify their responses.

All participants agreed that the transcripts accurately represented their responses. Two participants decided they had no further feedback to offer. Five participants volunteered further to investigate their responses in phases III and IV.

Phases III. The third and fourth phase of data collection was conducted as a group on 6/25/2020 with 5 of the 7 original interviewees. Given the limited options presented by the Covid-19 epidemic during these two phases were conducted using a Zoom online meeting. During the third phase, I presented the summarized findings from the individual interview transcripts and asked for the participants to scrutinize them. This was an animated period where participants acknowledged their own interview responses, grew interested in the other participants’ responses, and excitedly talked to each other to reflect on their college

experience. This was a time for them to talk to each other over the findings, which led to a more formal controlled discussion leading to the fourth phase.

Phase IV. The fourth phase is a continuation of the focus group discussion from Phase III, which generated new questions about understanding the American Indian educational experience. Participants informally chatted about their career goals, the Southern California University Scholars Program (SCUSP), their tribal identity, their struggle with imposter syndrome, and what it takes to be a successful Native student. The free form discussions inspired several questions, including some of the following (See Appendix D: Focus Group Facilitation Guide and Questions):

- What do you plan to do after you graduate? (i.e., start your career, go to graduate school, take a gap year, etc.)
- Are you a SCUSP student? How was SCUSP helpful for you?
- How does a Native undergraduate student's identity change due to experiences while in college?
- Are there any expectations on your identity while you've been here?
- What does a successful Native undergraduate student look like?

These questions led to a more robust set of responses that contributed to more insight on the main research questions associated with student cultural identity, student experiences in higher education, and student support programming on campus. Findings are reported in Chapter Four.

Data Analysis

I collected and analyzed data using an iterative process starting from the moment of first collected data and continuing through the study's duration (Stake, 1995). I conducted an

analysis of documents related to support services/programming and retention efforts for Native students. Using multiple sources of data (observations of the space of the SCTCRC, individual interviews, focus group, document analysis of websites and supporting documents) to help triangulate data is a principle strategy toward building construct validity and reliability of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

All individual interviews and the focus group transcriptions were read and reviewed three times. The initial review was conducted to help develop the data's general sense, including how they relate to research questions. The second review of all qualitative data through the transcripts and notes was to understand and highlight important quotes (excerpts). A third review of all study transcriptions was done to develop a coding system for finding major themes in the data. Interview responses were coded by examining interview and focus group transcripts that were transcribed from audio-recorded data. Coding families were then analyzed for emerging themes across the data and examined by intersecting data to allow for a critical interpretation by looking at instances of contradiction. Looking at these codes and themes helped further develop my understanding of American Indian student's experience and shaped.

The process of synthesizing data to form codes was done chronologically and by participant characteristics (gender, age, current year in school) to help create and shape coding families. I used a mix of descriptive coding, process coding, and structural coding. I also used value-based codes using a critical lens and were then synthesized and sorted into coding families along with related topics. This coding focuses on excerpts that reflect the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Overall, the data were coded by reading across participant data by type of recurring patterns and themes, connecting

statements and events within the school context to look at meanings true to the participants' responses. To that end, I searched for words or phrases that reflected specific events or observations repeated throughout the data.

To further develop reliability in the study, I implemented "peer debriefing". Peer debriefing incorporated having peers playing devil's advocate in the development of interview questions, data collection efforts, data analysis, and data interpretation (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). Peers that volunteered for some of these activities, included Drs. Rodney Beaulieu, Elena Hood, and Theresa Ambo.

A member-checking approach was implemented to validate the findings accuracy by asking participants to review their own raw data (a transcription of the individual interview), analytic interpretations through a presented report on the emergent themes. They were also asked if they would like to clarify and expand on the information presented. Making sure that stories of participants are told correctly through member checking is an important feature of ethical research (Stake, 1995) and help increase the internal validity of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking involves allowing participants to review rough drafts of the interview write-up and interpretation of the final report. As highlighted by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011), researchers need to make sure that they are true to the participants' meaning. Emerson et al. (2011) explain it is important to construct questions properly to obtain the proper depth of information and reduce the potential for ambiguous meaning in the information collected.

The students' personal experience is valuable knowledge to examine the "how" and "why" of the social phenomenon related to student experience, as informed by critical, cultural, and identity paradigms. Using an approach that is informed by students who have

personal experience with navigating the complexities of higher education is beneficial in understanding their perspectives on how to improve the system for new student. The exemplary quotes presented in the study were condensed for readability by omitting stutters, restarts, incomplete sentences yet maintained participants' meaning. The respondents approved minor modifications.

For this study, I included best practices from well-regarded sources on proper qualitative methodology, including by Stake (1995), Yin (2018), Merriam and Tisdell (2016), and Creswell and Poth (2018). I journaled throughout the duration of the study. Journaling allowed me to reflect on later analysis of my positionality's role in developing themes and meaning from the data. It helped me in reflecting on my own biases to evaluate the trustworthiness of my interpretation. Reflecting on one's own background, culture, and experience is important in interpreting data (Creswell, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also created analytic memos to reflect on coding, categorization, and to help develop themes.

Chapter Four: Results

In this chapter, the data collection process is reviewed, study participants are introduced with a brief biography, and summaries with some exemplary quotes of the three major themes associated with the research questions and two major themes not directly associated with the research questions are presented according to the individual interviews and the focus group. Individual interview results are presented first, followed by the focus group results. Using the focus group format in the study allowed for member checking and a springboard to further explore the emergent themes in a dynamic format, allowing participants to interact by commenting on each other's experience and questioning one another.

The three major themes associated with research questions are cultural identity, student experiences, and the Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center. The two other major themes are about mentorship and family. These six major themes are outlined in Table 2, along with the subthemes derived from the individual interviews and the focus group discussion. The subthemes of mentorship and family reflect a special interest that the participants asserted as important factors in their success. In this chapter, I present the six major themes along with the related subthemes.

Data Collection Process

As described in Chapter Three, data collection efforts were completed in four phases learning about personal experiences in a confidential individual interview setting (Phase I), then offer participants a chance to review their transcript to offer a chance to fix anything that could be misconstrued or that needed more context (Phase II), then to present the summarized findings of the individual interviews (Phase III), and lastly to conduct a focus group for

feedback to the summarized results and to further explore themes that emerged in the individual interviews as a group (Phase IV).

Participants

Because a central topic in this study relates to how students define themselves and how they experience a university experience, I begin the findings with a brief description of each participant. To reiterate details from Chapter Three, a total of seven American Indian undergraduate student participated in individual interviews, and five of these interviewees participated in a follow-up focus group. There were five female and two male participants, with three of the seven living on campus. Grade levels ranged for participants from Freshman to Senior with different focuses for their respective majors, which included: Communications, public health, clinical psychology, human health psychology, and neuroscience. Two of the seven participants were the first in their families to attend college.

To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were given for all individuals, including the name of the participant, institution, program, and outside individuals listed in the interviews.

Mary. Mary is one of the first in her family to pursue college. Her mom and grandmother have been her greatest champions to pursue higher education. When asked why she chose Southern California University (SCU), she said she was not too familiar with the school. However, she chose it because of the full ride through Southern California University Scholarship Program (SCUSP). She also liked the campus and programs and having the campus in close proximity to her family. She feels comfortable and connected to the graduate students in the Native American Graduate Student Association (NAGSA). The Southern California Community Resource Center (SCTCRC) is a place that she feels comfortable. She has struggled with some of her coursework because of not attending some of her classes.

Elle. Like other students, Elle struggled when she first started school; however, her grades seemed to have improved her along the same time that she began to involve herself with the SCTCRC and Native American Student Association (NASA). In reflection, she admits feelings of conflicts with her identity during a staying abroad in Ghana. She explains that the SCTCRC and NASA have helped create a sense of belonging. She also says that Native identity, both for her tribe and Natives in general, is important, where traditional practices facilitate strength and healing. She gave an example of how beading helped with insecurities. She also said learning one's tribal language is important and conducting land acknowledgment is important.

James. James grew up on the reservation and is confident in his Native identity. He grew up learning traditional practices from his tribe (and in fact prefers it to intertribal practices), which has helped him dispel misconceptions regarding American Indians to other students. James holds a personal interest in knowing about his tribe's history and their beliefs. As for school, he has not had much support directly from his family but does mention that his tribal community has supported him through resources like his tribe's education center. Early on at SCU, he did feel lonely. However, the SCTCRC and NASA have helped him feel a sense of community, saying "I think it's really important to have that community, people who you can relate to, people who know what you've been through, what your people are going through all the time."

Jacob. In his interview, Jacob said he is currently learning more about tribal customs and traditions and mentioned that the SCTCRC has helped learn them. He started his educational career pursuing an engineering path but decided that a psychology major would be a better fit. His family has always been supportive of him pursuing education as they too have

graduated from college. He chose SCU because 1) he wanted to get away from home, 2) SCU has a great psychology program ranking, 3) the institution is a large research school, and 4) it has more learning opportunities. As a SCUSP student, he said that the program had helped him a lot, specifically with the summer program that helped open doors for him and develop research skills. Jacob is very engaged with the SCTCRC and NASA and believes that the SCTCRC has helped him further develop his Native identity.

Jessica. Jessica is an urban Native with a mixed background, as her mother is Navajo, and her father is White. She says that because her mother was adopted, they learn more about their Native cultural identities. She gave an example of a recent experience where she traveled with her mom, sister, and grandma to attend her tribe's pow wow. She shared that it was at that point where she felt most closely connected to her Native side. Jessica said that she shares a similar experience with other NASA students to learn more about their Native cultural identity. She said that SCUSP was where she first interacted with Native students while at SCU. She believes it was at an early SCUSP meeting where she first heard of the SCTCRC. Nevertheless, it was not until her second quarter that she began to attend NASA meetings consistently. She now works as the NASA community retention coordinator for another student support program on campus. The job has been supportive and allows her to plan for NASA programming, like the Decolonizing Thanksgiving event. She also believes that mentorship within the Native community helps incoming students, making them feel welcomed and helping with classes they have already taken. Jessica believes that there is a need for more cultural competence because of how much misrepresentation there is in the media. She would like to see a Native studies department at SCU. Overall, she would like more voices of students heard regarding the

student's needs, whether it relates to academics or for more basic needs, like housing or food assistance.

Sarah. The participant grew up in an urban setting with a strong sense of Native traditional cultural values. She was the first person in her family to go to college, with her parents being supportive. Her mother would foster her interest in school by placing her in science clubs and school activities. However, her older sibling has given her a hard time saying "You're never home. You don't help out." She chose SCU because its program in marine biology is world-renowned. However, she would later switch to health with an emphasis in neuroscience once her little brother was diagnosed with neurodegenerative epilepsy. She would come to realize that she really loves the medical side of neuroscience. Now she plans to pursue either medical school or a physician assistant program. She learned about the SCTCRC when she met the program director at a college visit during her senior year in high school. However, she did not get involved with the center or NASA until the end of her sophomore year, which happened to correspond to when she switched majors. At this point, she started to do much better in school, learn more about her culture, connects with other Native students, which ultimately led to stronger feelings of happiness. She also acknowledged the support and mentorship she received from the Center for American Indian Research (CAIR) program. Now she is the NASA chairperson and juggles multiple responsibilities with work as a student intern, school, and event planning for NASA. She picked up ethnic studies minor because she feels that it is important to stay informed of issues affecting Native communities because of the past negative history with the United States. Jessica emphasized a need for Native student voice, representation, and leadership on campus. She also said that the school's current effort toward

the Native community on campus needs further development, citing an example of miscommunication of school leadership key stakeholders.

Jennifer. She was SCUSP student and chose SCU to avoid school debt, as she received a full-ride scholarship through the program. She plans to continue with graduate school in public health with a specialization in epidemiology. She came into school very nervous and had some early struggles with school, which was initially difficult for her to accept as she did well during high school, saying “I ended up finishing with a four-point three GPA. So school was never very hard.” Jennifer mentioned that the difficulty with the first-year challenges with school eventually led to depression. Like other students, she did not really get involved with the Native community on campus until her second year, which coincided with school performance improvements. She was very appreciative of the early mentorship that a previous NASA student provided, as she was welcoming and promoted a sense of community. She felt like other Native students provided some exposure to navigating higher education by guiding their early school experiences. Jennifer was also very appreciative of the mentorship that the CAIR program provided. She felt strongly that the program helped open more doors in terms of career paths.

Major Themes

Six major themes emerged across data from the individual interviews and focus group. This chapter reviews the six major themes – cultural identity, student experiences, Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center, mentorship, family, and student voice. Additionally, 21 sub-themes emerged from the data. Themes are summarized below with exemplary quotations from both the individual interviews and focus group. Using exemplary quotes can preserve the student’s voice.

Table 2.

Themes and Sub-Themes from Individual Interviews and the Focus Group

Major Themes	Sub-Themes
Cultural Identity	Diversity among Native People Ongoing Cultural Identity Development Strength in Cultural Identity Culture is Healing Speaking one's Native language Living in Two Worlds
Student Experiences	Imposter Syndrome Campus Climate Institutional Support SCU Scholars Program (SCUSP) Community Involvement Supports Student Success
Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center	Space Events Program Support
Mentorship	Native American Student Association (NASA) Center for American Indian Research (CAIR)
Family	Family Support Family Dynamics Family and Community Expectations
Student Voice	Native Studies Department Tribal Liaison

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is a theme that emerged from the data and addressed the first research question. For the students, culture was a central theme that helped shape their identity as unique individuals and provided a sense of strength as they grew into it. They all described an experience of growth and learning of their Native identity as they continued their time at the university. They cited distinct differences between their Native identity and the dominant

culture as some felt that they walked in two worlds. Among the six subthemes that emerged from the data regarding cultural identity are: Diversity among Native people, ongoing cultural identity development, strength in cultural identity, culture is healing, speaking one's Native language, and living in two worlds. A summary for each is described below.

Diversity among Native people. Several students listed misconceptions about American Indian people concerning universal values, traditions, and identity. All the students in this study described themselves as being from a unique tribal culture yet sharing similar experiences with those from other tribes. American Indian students do not view themselves as a single homogenous people. Instead, they recognize their heritage is distinct from other groups, including other Indigenous people. There was diversity among the participants in several categories, including differences in tribal affiliation, home location, and coming from mixed backgrounds that included multiple races/ethnicities. In explaining differences among tribal people, Sarah said:

I have a sense of our culture, and my background, and my family traditions, but that is different from another tribe; obviously...everybody's history is so different in the Native community.

It is not unusual for some American Indian individuals who have a mixed background, including my experience, to express conflicted views of themselves for having a mixed racial makeup. Mary felt early experiences of her identity being pulled in several directions, as she is Latino and Native. She could not play with other Latino's because she felt the strain of not speaking Spanish well enough. She also felt outcasted from other people of color because her skin color was lighter. Although Mary seemed to have some conflicted feelings of ethnicity, she explained that she felt a sense of comradery with graduate students who are American Indian on campus saying, "It's pretty small. I mean, I feel connected to the graduates." Feeling

welcomed and connection is cross-cutting theme and will be explored further in the theme of mentorship.

Ongoing cultural identity development. Many students described their cultural identity as a growing process that appeared to develop increasingly during their time in school. Several students cited that it was not until they spent time with the Native community on campus that they began to understand the importance of cultural identity in their life. Although most grew up away from their tribe's location, one of the seven participants grew up on their reservation. For one participant, her tribe is not on a reservation. Many explained that they became more interested as they have gotten older. Jacob explained:

I feel more connected; I think now that I am older. When I was younger, and I did not really understand, I guess what it meant. As I got older and especially being here with all the SCTCRC and the other Native undergrads, it has helped me identify with that side of my family.

Jessica said:

At this point, I feel more strongly connected to it [cultural identity] than I have previously, which I am happy about. It is a work in progress, but I mean more so than I have [before], I feel more connected to it. I guess I am also learning more stuff because that kind of stuff is not often taught in school.

Note that Jessica touched on how her identity was reinforced by being with other American Indian students and that her earlier schooling did very little to recognize her identity. Other students claimed that it was often the interaction with other American Indian peers and experiencing a sort of kinship over shared experiences that played a part in developing one's cultural identity. Jessica said, "... being around other Natives in NASA is really nice just to see shared experiences and see how everyone else has grown up." The ongoing developmental process of learning more about one's cultural identity was echoed across all interviews.

Participants cited parents, aunts, peers, mentors, SCTCRC staff, tribal community members as sources that have helped shaped the development of their cultural identity.

Strength in cultural identity. Despite how distressing expectations can be on one's cultural identity, many expressed how their cultural identity challenges would bring about personal strength. In fact, a deep discussion arose in the focus group regarding this point. Jacob began by saying:

It is challenged in a way, but it [cultural identity] gets stronger. You identify more and especially the more involved you are, you meet other people going through similar things and have similar experiences. It helps you to remember that you are not alone in it. It is hard, and it is a tough fight, but you can get through, and it feels better afterwards

Elle described growing strength and a healing aspect that occurs through challenges to one's cultural identity, information she did not receive in high school:

I definitely agree with that. ...It was really relieving to study things that high school would have never mentioned, ever. To finally be getting this information that you longed for your whole life feeling something was missing...I do agree that once you challenge it, or not you challenge it, but it [cultural identity] gets challenged, you get a little insecure, but then once you get over that, once you do start getting yourself more involved you feel even stronger, and it is more healing you did go through that process.

Jessica added that she was not raised in her traditional tribal background and believes her identity has gotten strong over time. She and her immediate family have been going back to learn and participate with family on the reservation. In her story, she said:

At least my identity has gotten stronger as a Native--identifying with that part of myself because my mom was adopted, so she was not raised knowing the culture and customs or the language or anything. I was not because she did not know it. That is something that we are trying to fix now, she has got in touch, and she is talking with her biological siblings now, so it is really cool. Because growing up, I did not really have that...being on campus here with NASA and SCTCRC has just been really nice to surround myself with other Native people. It is really nice.

Jennifer had similar feelings regarding the development of her cultural identity. She explained that she is interested in learning more through her tribe's language classes using an online format. It was through challenges to her identity that she grew more secure in answering questions regarding it. Jennifer shared:

I have to agree with all the sentiments that my colleagues have shared. I think it has been interesting. In some respects, it [cultural identity] has grown a lot stronger in college, and it inspired me to know my culture, especially with the tribe a lot more. I learned that my tribe has language classes that I can do online, so I was thinking about working on that over the summer, and just getting more in touch with my culture and learning more about it and my family. So, I am really excited to do that because I just felt like I did not quite have the time to fully immerse myself in my own culture [during my] undergrad. I learned more about the Native community as a whole. Especially at SCU then just in general. My belief has gotten a lot stronger because of the challenges, especially having people question [my] Native identity. I have gotten a lot more secure with answering those questions... realizing that I do not have to answer people's [questions]... I know who I am.

Culture is healing. Participants gain an appreciation as they learned more about their culture, language, and some found that it brought spiritual and emotional healing with the kinship felt within the Native community on campus. Elle succinctly articulated this perspective. She said, "Doing traditional practices is healing and important and reviving the language is important...we use humor a lot for our healing tactic." Elle went on to say:

With NASA...it feels more like a group of friends. In the back of your head, you know that you are not the only Native, and you have that same understanding of how cultures are being taken from us. There is something really healing about the connection that you all have.

Jacob described this cultural connection through humor as inside jokes that only other Natives understand because of their shared experiences. He says:

Just as a Native, there's small like inside jokes and stuff that you can understand with each other and it's different if you try to do that with people outside of that community because it's really niche. So it is like being with people that understand you a little more.

Several students echoed Native humor as a special feature and collective experience for the Native group at the university. Understanding each other through Native humor illustrates a more profound sense of community that was a positive factor promoting kinship and support on campus for the Native students.

Speaking one's Native language. Although most of the students cited certain aspects of their cultural identity, two participants emphasized the personal importance of their tribal language. Specifically, Elle and James spoke about learning one's tribal language in the individual interviews. Elle explained that along with participating in traditions, "reviving the language is really important." She explained that learning the language personally is a way for her to preserve her tribes' culture. James reinforced this idea. He said he grew up pretty intertwined with learning his tribe's language, which he linked to learning traditional songs and storytelling. He went on to say that although he feels pretty connected, he wants to continue to learn the language, which he tied to having a stronger cultural identity. James said:

I want to help pass on traditions because there are many youth my age who do not partake. I feel it is pretty important that somebody does it, and I am willing to be one of those who helps to keep [my tribe's] culture alive and keep it going.

Living in two worlds. It is common for American Indians who participate in higher education to feel that they live in two separate worlds. Sarah, James, and Jacob acknowledged that it could be complicated for them because there can be a duality in identity. These two worlds contrast between one's school identity vs. Native cultural identity. School identity was crucial in being a good student by investing time in doing well in one's classes and ultimately completing one's degree. This tension expressed by the students has to do with the investment of time to be a good student, which may conflict with the time to develop one's cultural identity further. Sarah explained:

Being a Native student is complicated because you are partaking in a colonized idea, but how can you not? There is a constant duality. On the one hand you are focused on being a good student to get your degree to make your career, but at the same time, trying to also hold onto your culture's traditional values.

James explained his experience of separate identities in the focus group that he learned to develop both equally by investing time in being a good student and his Indigenous identity. It was a learning experience for him to develop both identities by investing time in both, which led him to feel stronger in school. James said:

... becoming stronger was because when first coming to SCU, I was really more focused on the college aspects and all that goes with it. It really was in my head all the time, so my Native identity was really put on hold for a while. I realize now these are two separate identities, but they are both me, and I need to focus on them equally. They are both equally important. I have grown more to appreciate my Indigenous identity; I feel I have become stronger. Strongly attached to it since coming to college.

They could also draw on the mentorship of other Natives on campus to learn about traditions and practices that are sources of strength. Jacob cited the mentorship of a Native graduate student named Ashley, who has helped him learn how to navigate the two worlds of academia and his Native identity. He said:

Dealing with those while also growing and becoming more comfortable in that identity helped a lot to have Ashley there to just talk to and help navigate working in both worlds. Working with SCU as an institution and also working culturally.

In many ways, the students had a similar experience in how their cultural identity grew over their time at school with gaining more confidence and a sense of belonging the more involved they became with the Native community on campus. The sense of cultural identity would develop into a source of strength during challenging times and was also a source of healing too. In comparing the experiences of the students for their identity, the student that grew up on the reservation felt strongly connected to his traditional upbringing, but like other

students, felt the pull of living in two worlds. All students in the study valued the experience of developing their cultural identity.

Student Experiences

It was apparent that there were both unique and shared student experiences on campus for participants. Presented in this section are sub-themes that challenged students, such as feelings of imposter syndrome and an unfriendly campus climate. Other emergent sub-themes from the data show institutional support for students in services, programming, and faculty support that students felt were helpful. Lastly, students provided their voice in explaining what institutional support they believe is important for American Indian students.

Imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome in the context of schooling occurs when a student feels like a fraud and doubts their skills and talents to do well in school. The phenomena of imposter syndrome initially appeared in a couple of the interviews. Jessica had described feelings of imposter syndrome when she first started school, while Jacob explained how helpful programs on campus were in educating first-year students imposter syndrome. Because of how imposter syndrome can contrast with feelings of belonging while at school, I thought it would help to have a deeper discussion in the focus group. Several participants chimed into the discussion, citing their own ways of dealing with it and others' process to deal with it. Jessica said:

I personally have almost always felt imposter syndrome...I have had to learn not to care about it. I have to focus on myself because that is how will get past it. There is nothing that anyone else can do to help me really in that sense. I have to focus on myself, find my own worth and know that I am proud of who I am and that everything that I have gone through has helped get me to this point...It is still a process but it is going a lot better.

Jennifer added:

I do not think I can say it any better. It is a process. I agree imposter syndrome is just one of those things I personally never fully got over, but I have come to welcome my own weaknesses and my own strengths at the same time. I am good where I am, and it is fine that it might be different for someone else.

Adding to the discussion, Jacob said,

Yeah. Many people experience it too. I have heard from PI's [Principle Investigators] working at SCU say, 'Oh yeah, I still get it.' They are still thinking about their papers and whether they are good enough to be compared with what is already in the literature. It is just a process that you have to work through, and I think it is tough, especially being at such a competitive university where very smart people surround you. It can definitely get to your head a lot. It also helps you recognize your weaknesses and either get back up from that or let it take you...It is a process, and it is hard to pick yourself back up and get into it. You realize that things tend to work out too.

Campus climate. Like other sensitive topics discussed in the interviews, the campus climate toward cultural diversity varied in terms of the participants' experiences. These experiences occurred on campus in different settings. Mary said she came across intolerant attitudes from patrons she helped in her part-time job on campus, explaining:

When I was at work, I heard much racist stuff, not from the employees but just from the customers. I do not know. There are many incidents on campus that they had to have a program dedicated to the incident.

Jennifer expressed feeling of a hostile campus:

I remember my first year when Trump was elected. I remember being pretty terrified of being a brown woman here on campus. I remember not wanting to leave the dorms too late because I would hear of all these stories of some of the students that would be on buses, and a student would say go back to the border.

In his interview, Jacob thought certain departments on campus have less culturally competent professors:

I have heard some bad things about certain professors here. A little more so in some public health classes or global health and also ethnic studies. I have not taken any of the classes myself; I have heard from students who are global health, public health majors that they [professors] have brought up different topics to the class that has to do with Native students or just Natives in general

and have not had good responses. I have heard bad stories, but I have heard good stories too.

A couple of participants believed there is a widespread misrepresentation of Native people. Elle and Jessica explained that mainstream perceptions of American Indians are skewed in history classes. Both explained that Native people are homogenized by the mainstream culture. Jessica added there is a lot of misrepresentation in the media portraying Native people negatively. She said, “In films, it is always the Western Plains [Indians], and we are all wearing head dresses, running around, and pillaging villages. So, it is not often a good representation, and that is what leads into the whole stigma.” Jessica and Elle both explained that misrepresentation of Native people by the mainstream culture has led to the belief that Native people are extinct. It is because of this issue that Elle is interested in making a documentary to change the narrative of the disappearing Indian by highlighting contemporary issues of Native people.

Besides some examples of challenging experiences on campus, some participants listed positive and supportive interactions with their upperclassman and professors. In fact, Elle explained, “One professor that I actually had last quarter put me in connection with at least two different amazing opportunities. I actually want to thank him for that.”

Jennifer weighted the mix of experiences with the level of cultural competence on campus in saying, “I think it depends on the demographic as well because when I think of some institutional programming on campus and all the communities that are involved within it or the cultural centers, I would say they have a very high competency level.”

Southern California University Scholarship Program (SCUSP). Southern California University’s recognition to include programming to address imposter syndrome appears to be a supportive topic for Native students. The specific program that provided supportive

programming and activities was the SCUSP. All participants made some reference to the program in some form or another. The perception of the potential benefits of programming varied from person to person; however, financial support appeared to be a powerful support element for everyone. In fact, it was often cited along with strong school programs as one of the main determining factors for many participants in deciding to attend SCU. Elle said:

I actually chose it [SCU] because of SCUSP, I am not going to lie. I really wanted to go to Emerson on the East coast in Boston. I was so close to committing. It was May 1st, and it is commitment day that I actually did commit to SCU instead of Emerson. I was waiting to the very last minute actually to decide. I was telling everyone that I was going to Emerson. I was already set on it. Then we looked into the financial package from SCU, and it was basically a full ride. And then also the communication department. I was still talking to my advisor. My advisor had actually worked at this communication department before. The communication department was one of the only things that he likes about SCU pretty much.

Similarly, Mary said:

I had offers [from other schools] in November and in February because I applied many [schools], but they were not full rides where they covered everything. Some of them covered tuition. Some of them covered housing and stuff. This one covered everything. So, I just took it.

Aside from the tuition support, SCUSP also offered programming for getting new students acclimated to the university environment. In his interview, James said:

They [through SCUSP] helped me, and they provided me with a lot of different resources in terms of workshops for classes, tutoring, things like that, community organizations, and stuff, then they had a lot of that for me... I had many mentors to going so far, peer leaders who would do one to ones with me, almost like a counseling session where I could go and talk about what I have been up to, how I am doing in class, and just a way to sort of keep up to date with myself. They were really a good support system.

The SCUSP theme appeared in all individual interviews, so I felt it was important to have the participants discuss it in the focus group. The subthemes that emerged from the focus group discussion appeared to focus on priority enrollment and its association to completing the

proper sequence of courses on time when certain courses might be impacted and in a fashion that allows the student to take a combination of courses that fit their schedule. Starting the discussion, Jessica said:

The most helpful thing that SCUSP has done has priority enrollment. That has been really nice, so you do not have to fight everyone for the really impacted classes, and everyone needs to take them. That personally has been really nice, and I have not had to worry about not getting into a class or anything.

When asked if she knew someone who was affected negatively because of no priority enrollment, she said:

One of my friends does not have priority enrollment and for our college course writing sequences. Writing is so hard to get into for just stupid reasons. They limit the number of seats, and you can easily have more people in the classes, but they do not, and she has been trying to get into the class every quarter since coming here...She got into the first course this last quarter, so she is trying to get into the second one, but this was the first time she could get into it.

To follow up, I asked:

I imagine that would make it difficult to layout your schedule if that is the case. I wonder if that would affect someone's progress, or they just probably have to be more diligent about how they set things up.

Jessica responded by saying:

Yeah, it has been...she has had really bad luck with classes. She would have been doing fine, but she was supposed to take the first writing course in the fall quarter, but her section got completely canceled out of the blue. They did not say why. She finally got in ...it has been a mess. She has had many other problems with not being able to get into the classes she wants or needs. She is having to load up her last two years because she has not been able to get into many of the classes she wants. On top of that she is thinking about changing her major, making it even worse and harder, as she has to take all these other courses.

Jacob added:

I never really realized it. It is something I took for granted. I did not think about how easy it was to get into my classes, and I could plan a schedule and not worry about not getting one of the classes. My roommates, too, plan one quarter, and they add a bunch of classes just in case they need to switch things

around...they had to work with it a lot more, but I could just set one and then be like, all right, that is the plan.

Further review of the focus group's discussion reveals that some participants had points in time of their college experience where they did not have priority enrollment. In discussion with several participants, Jessica explained that in order to get priority enrollment, one had to attend the summer program:

There are two or three summer course things that you could have done to get priority, but I did not know summer bridge was a thing until I got back to school. A few of my roommates had done summer bridge. I did not even know that was a thing. If I had known, I would have done it.

The discussion later evolved into anecdotal statements regarding the participants' respective experience with SCUSP and priority enrollment. There appeared to be some confusion on what must occur to ensure priority enrollment as there seemed to be gaps for using it. Jacob asked other participants if the SCUSP program selected those who attended the summer program, followed by Jennifer saying that she saw many people who attended the summer program that did not appear as they belonged to the program. Jessica responded by saying that it could be because of a different program, although she was unsure.

Community involvement supports student success. It was important for students to have a sense of community on campus, which is well documented in the literature on the importance of students' belonging. Students found a relationship with various subgroups within the Native community on campus with the Native American Student Association (NASA), Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center, and at intertribal events on campus like the annual pow wow. Sarah said:

I will happen to see someone in NASA or like a community member that is here for a meeting. If I see you, I am like, 'Okay my fellow Native, yay, we are here!' The biggest moment I feel that sense of community is when I can see

someone that I recognize, and I can say hi and have a normal conversation, whether it be about Native issues or not.

There appeared to be an apparent relationship for several participants between becoming more involved with the tribal community on campus and doing better in school. In fact, Sarah explained:

When I started getting more involved is when I started to notice a difference in my grades, and now Gina helped me a lot too with CAIR [Center for American Indian Research], so she helped me narrow things down, encouraging me to think, ‘Okay, you can do this.’

Being more involved also seemed to correlate with increasing feelings of strength with one’s cultural identity. Jacob said:

...you identify more [with your cultural identity] and especially the more involved you are, you meet other people that are going through similar things and having similar experiences. It helps you to remember that you are not alone in it. It is hard, and it is a tough fight, but you can get through and feel better afterwards.

It was clear that the students shared common experiences when it came to be American Indian undergraduate students on campus. They were all SCUCSP students that listed how important the SCUSP was to them. For many, it was the reason they chose SCU to begin with as it was a “full ride” that included covering the costs of tuition, a \$10,000 stipend each year for four years, guaranteed housing, a summer transition program to orient incoming students, a SCUSP weekly learning community to review college resources, and a mentoring program. For Jacob, the mentorship facilitated through SCUSP created meaningful relationships that helped expose him early to college life’s realities. The SCUSP also provided seminars that exposed the students to imposter syndrome phenomena and how to deal with them. Another important feature of the SCUSP that was discussed extensively and was important to students was priority enrollment. Almost all students in the study chimed in regarding its importance to them.

Students also shared feelings of a hostile campus climate with experiences of discrimination and racism. However, they also shared experiences that were positive with other students and faculty. Many had faculty that were interested in providing guidance and resources to students.

Lastly, several students described the importance of “getting involved” with the Native community on campus. For several participants, it was when they got more involved that they began to do better in school. It also appeared that getting involved created support during challenging times on campus.

Participants discussed several memorable moments of community involvement on campus. Some NASA-related community activities included Frybread making night, playing Decolonization Against Humanity, movie nights, and having guest speakers at NASA meetings. Students were also key stakeholders in event planning for the school’s annual pow wow on campus.

Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC)

In this section, I review the theme of student experiences with the SCTCRC and subthemes of the space, events, and programming. The benefits of the center was a topic that was important for students because the space provided a place to study, relax, and meet with other American Indian students. The center connected incoming students to the Native community on campus through the events it hosted. The center was an important resource that promoted culturally relevant programming that supported students’ social development.

Space. The Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC) is one of several Campus Community Resource Centers at SCU. It has an aim to, “leverage existing resources to create a sense of place and community and provide an important support system for

American Indian/Alaskan Native/Indigenous students on campus and to develop positive relationships with our local tribal communities.” The SCTCRC also provides supportive community space, academic support services, mentoring/leadership development, co-and extra-curricular programming, and non-academic support. On their website, SCTCRC also says the center is “rooted in a student movement that sought to increase the presence of Native American students on campus and to provide a resource on campus to meet the unique and diverse needs of Native American students.” The features of this statement, along with the program’s aim, were discussed by participants.

The first feature to mention is the space that holds the program. The center is located in the main student center building on campus. It is located on the second floor of the building in a small space approximately 10 feet by 20 feet. The director’s office is in a room adjacent to the larger community space.

From my own observations, when walking through the entrance, guests are greeted by the program coordinator, who has a desk that faces the entrance. To the left of the coordinator’s desk are two computer stations that are on the same desk. A couch and a couple of tables are behind the computer stations along the long wall. On the couch are two small pillows that are renditions of Dr. Seuss’ cover art for “Fox in Socks” and “Green Eggs and Ham.” For the first, the rendition is with the difference being in the title to “Fox in Mocs.” The second is “Fry Bread and Spam.” Next to the couch is a refrigerator, where students and center staff can store food and drinks, along with a water station and a Keurig Brewing machine. At the far end of the room is a large screen television that is mounted on the wall. There are a couch and a couple of tables that are facing the television. The general atmosphere is warm and welcoming, and the décor gives a sense of familiarity.

When describing the space, Mary said, “I guess one thing that I was interested in was they had a bookshelf with books by Native American authors about [Native] culture, and that was really interesting to me.” Elle said the space was welcoming and provided a sense of community to Native students. She said:

People are always really welcoming...Other people from NASA are sometimes there when I go. That is always a plus. It is nice to see fellow Natives there and talk to them, even if I did not necessarily go there for that.

In his interview, Jacob echoed a similar sentiment:

I think they are really welcoming. There are many small things, like the pillows on the couch, like the Fried bread and spam, and then they have Native artwork up. They also have a map that you can pin where you are [Native background is] from. The space, especially for Native students is welcoming, and then reminds some of the people that might have grown up on the reservation or something of home.

The SCTCRC was also a space that provided a sense of community. Sarah explained:

I like being able to go there and run into people that are Native. It is a unique thing I can think about it. I sit there, and it is not weird for another Native to come here [SCTCRC space]...I can go in there and just freely be myself too, and I do not have to worry about anything.

Events. The sense of developing deeper community ties on campus was facilitated at the center and the events that the SCTCRC coordinated. Attending events was often a starting point for students to become more involved with the Native community on campus. Elle said:

I recently started using SCTCRC more since I went to the dinner and connected to the Native community on campus a lot more. I now go to the NASA and Powwow meetings, and I try to go to these meetings as much as I can...the dinner was really what moved me into more involvement to SCTCRC.

Jacob explained that connecting through SCTCRC events helped in facilitating growth in his cultural identity:

Coming to the first events initially gave me a push to get more connected to my heritage. My dad had always stressed the importance when I was younger, but as I said, I did not really understand until later. I think just learning more through

the SCTCRC and NASA that it is important for me to be more connected to that part of myself and advocate for that.

Program support. A programming aspect that was listed as helpful was the initial outreach to incoming American Indian students by the SCTCRC director. This outreach was influential in the then prospective student in choosing SCU for her undergraduate education.

Sarah said,

...we came and visited [the campus], and Elizabeth [SCTCRC director] spotted us at SCU Day and pulled me aside with my mom...She said, "Hey!" and just started talking to us, and then she offered to take my mom and me out to lunch. She showed us the SCTCRC, and that was her first year there. It was like everything was still in boxes and everything. She said, "Just wait, this is going to turn into something" And, I said, "Okay." That is honestly why I chose SCU, just because of that experience.

The overall program itself helped encompass feelings of connection and emotional support.

James said:

It is important to be connected to them [SCTCRC] because personally, having that community was a lifesaver for me. I do not know where I would be now. I probably would have dropped out, honestly, because they were here to support me when I was really not feeling it anymore, and I was really down, and depressed, and coming here, they helped guide me into getting out of that space. It is really important to have that community, people whom you can relate to, people who know what you have been through, what your people are going through all the time.

The SCTCRC was important to all students interviewed and was cited as important for the Native-themed space, culturally tailored events, and for the role of the center's programming. Sarah said that she was strongly influenced to choose to attend SCU because of the outreach efforts of the center's director in welcoming her at SCU day. James and Jacob listed the support they received from the director. James said he was experiencing a low point, and it was the encouragement of the SCTCRC that helped him through the challenging time. Jacob cited the mentorship of the center's programming in helping him develop a stronger

cultural identity. The Native-themed space and programming made students feel welcome on campus.

Mentorship

Mentorship was a reoccurring theme that appeared heavily in the individual interviews. Having a mentor and getting professional support added to the students' educational experience, and this was expressed repeatedly throughout the interviews. This section highlights some of the responses that substantiate this theme from the participants. Subthemes in this section include the Native American Student Association (NASA) and the Center for American Indian Research (CAIR).

Mary said that the Native community is small on campus but had feelings of connection to the graduate students. She said "It's pretty small. I mean, I feel connected to the graduates."

Jessica, expressed a similar thought related to upper-division students as being helpful:

...everyone I have met has just been super nice and welcoming and super helpful. They have offered help with classes if I need it. If they are upperclassmen, who have taken the classes already. They have been really nice and supportive, and honestly, they are a good bunch of people...

Participants also expressed the value of peers. For example, Jennifer said that other American Indians had provided guidance in an environment that was new and oftentimes scary:

The campus is so big that you can get really lonely -- just wanting to know that I was not alone. I was not the only Native student on campus is nice, especially since there is such a small group of us here. I think like 0.47%. I think that got in my head a lot too my first year of feeling like, 'Oh, only a few Native Americans here.'

Native American Student Association (NASA). The benefit of having NASA was repeated numerous times throughout the individual interviews and in the focus group. There are overlaps and intersections in themes; NASA was cited quite often by participants that were

centrally important in their educational experience. Often, discussion regarding NASA overlapped with a discussion about the SCTCRC. NASA meetings were held at the SCTCRC space, and there were coordinated in the planning and programming of NASA events. Additionally, a couple of participants worked at the center. For most American Indian students, mentorship overlapped with support from NASA and SCTCRC. In addressing support from NASA, Elle said:

Pretty much every NASA meeting is when I feel connected... We do not specifically talk about how we are Native, but it is just being with a Native group of friends. It is really comforting, and I felt like I belonged really quickly.

Jessica also expressed a similar sentiment about NASA:

Through NASA, it is easier to get involved with other Native people because we are so few in number here on campus. It is a good way to get involved and get to know other Native people and through the Powwow community.

The focus group discussion was lively in discussing mentorship. Many examples of how relationships with American Indian peers and more experienced students who served as mentors. To illustrate this sentiment, Jacob offered this summary of his mentorship relationship with a graduate student, saying:

Mentorship has been a really important part of the experience -- both academically and culturally. I see Ashley, a graduate student, as a mentor. Especially getting involved with NASA so early I think there were expectations placed after getting more involved and my own expectations of myself.

Center for American Indian Research (CAIR). A commonly cited program in the interviews is the Center for American Indian Research (CAIR). The program's mission is to: "...increase the number of American Indian/Alaska Native scientists and health professionals; and reduce health disparities in Native American populations." The program has office hours weekly out of the SCTCRC space and coordinates with the center in programming. Sarah

described her early interaction with the program coordinator, who she said provided educational career guidance:

Gina is the one that got me into that [CAIR program] in my junior year, beginning of my junior year. She is the one that first told me about SACNAS [Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science] and was trying to get me to go to that [conference]. They helped me out with my research, because I got to the point where I was trying to finish up my research, to get it published, but I needed another job...She helped me figure that out so that I could finish and get published. They have been a great help. I have nothing but good things to say about CAIR.

Jennifer had a similar experience saying, “Gina, Robert Gomez, and Doctor Ruiz [all part of the CAIR team], they have all been pretty instrumental in helping with my success here, especially my second year.”

In comparing responses from participants, everyone expressed having some experience with feeling lonely on campus during their first year of school. This seems to align with feelings of the theme of imposter syndrome discussed in the individual interviews and the focus group discussion and living in two worlds. Almost all students had listed either upperclassman, the SCTCR director, CAIR staff, Native graduate students as mentors that helped them feel welcomed and supported. Students felt welcomed by students who invited them to NASA meetings, and attending Native-focused events on campus. They also felt social support through cultural development and moral support they received by the Center’s programming and leadership. These interactions help foster a sense of belonging and support for students that often face the challenges of a large life transition in moving from home to a new experience on campus at an academically competitive school.

Family

Details about family support was discussed at the onset of individual interviews to build rapport during the interview process. For American Indians, family and tribal support are

central to overcoming challenges while in school. Family and the tribal community have high expectations for their children to succeed in school. The participants in this study sensed that their family and their tribal community were sensitive to the schooling's challenges.

Family support. All students had someone from their immediate, extended family, or tribal community that supported them in their pathway to attend college. As one of the first in her family to pursue college, Mary explained her mom had been her greatest champion in pursuing higher education. She said that her grandmother wanted more for her -- holding school as a path to self-determination. Like Mary's family support, Sarah's mother recognized her daughter's motivation to pursue school and was very supportive of following that path. Another student, Jennifer, shared that despite the challenges of her upbringing in a single-parent household, her mother always strongly prioritized education for her. She explained that her mother was a young parent who was determined and supportive to finish a higher education degree. Similarly, Elle said, "My mom was extremely supportive, always pushing me. But knowing not to push me too hard because she knows that I am really self-motivated."

Most participants grew up away from their tribal community, with one exception, James. Growing up on the reservation appeared to be a strength for James as he had committed individuals on his reservation that helped him learn more about his tribe's culture and language.

James said:

I agree with how it is made my identity stronger because of growing up. I was very fortunate enough to have the opportunity to learn my culture head-on...I did have people who were committed to helping me learn my language and so I was very fortunate.

Family dynamics. Although all had some level of support for attending school from at least one family member, a couple of students shared they had family dynamics that did not always foster positive support. Sarah explained that although her mom supported her attending

college, her sibling wanted her to spend more time at home to “help around the house.”

Whereas for Jessica, she said there were some sibling rivalry dynamics with her sister that stemmed from a young age, which ultimately led to her putting lots of pressure on herself to excel in school. She said, “I always felt like I was not doing enough...she was always getting better grades than I have.” She explained that she is cognizant of these internal pressures and has gotten better about not putting so much pressure on herself.

Family and community expectations. The American Indian students in this study expressed considerable pressure over unusually high expectations from their peers and family members. Most felt that they were expected to serve as exemplary representatives of educational achievement and professional development by their family and their community on some occasions. Expectations appeared to vary for each person, yet it was common for them to feel challenges associated with their cultural identity. Jennifer said:

I plan on working in the hospitals [and] I have found a lot of, ‘Oh so you are going to solve all the Native problems, the systemic problems,’ and things like that. I went, ‘Why is it only on my shoulders?’...I was not the one that started that problem. I think that takes a lot more people than just one Native who cares to fix the problem. I feel like I get that a lot, and it makes me feel really nervous. I guess people have these expectations. I agree that there need to be more Natives in general in higher education, but it just feels very stressed. At the same time, I realize why people are thinking [this way], oh, there is someone who cares.

Jennifer continued by explaining that she experienced high expectations from her grandmother:

I used to want to go to med school, but I do not want to anymore, and I am fine... that was my own choice, and that took time to get there. Even now, my grandmother always mentions “med school” when we talk, and I am like, no.

Similar to what had been mentioned for participants feeling pressure to do well in school by their parents or grandparents, James felt pressure by his tribal community:

There have been some expectations put on me because within the community, [I am] put on some pedestal because I could go to college. There are not many

Native youth in my community who go to higher education, so the few of us who do are really placed as role models. It is amazing to be a role model for other kids who want to do the same or show them what it's like to go onto higher education. It also much pressure because you have to be some star student on the good path and doing all the good stuff. Not that you want to be a bad person, but you feel the pressure of who you are, and that defines you, and “it's just that good kid who does all the good stuff.” You kind of feel like you are put into a box sometimes with that. That is my experience with expectation.

Students mentioned some key people recognized how stressful expectations could be for the students. In discussing her parent’s expectations, Jessica said that her parents recognized how much pressure she would put on herself and would say calmly “just do your best.” Others cited mentors on campus that helped them learn to balance the pressures of succeeding in school with having a social life on campus by being involved with the Native campus community.

Student’s voice

Students also felt it was important for Native students to have more voice on campus, such as establishing a Native Studies Department and hiring a tribal liaison. They expressed the desire for services to engage them in a collaborative way, rather than treating them as passive recipients of the services. Elle said it is important for Native students to have a say in the program support they receive, saying “I feel that it is important for Native students to have input on what happens – like surveys for feedback.” Regarding Native students’ participation on hosting community events on campus, Jacob expressed his appreciation to participate but would like to see students take more responsibility for them saying:

...letting the student groups have their own events...it is important that everyone is part of and feels like they are part of the community. But it is also important that the students have their own voice and that they can get what they want done as well, without having to go through hoops or anything like that.

He went on to say that these events should include more local tribal community engagement saying, "...having more events that bring in outside community...making it easier to have community members outside of SCU come to our events."

Two participants said they would like to see a greater focus on American Indian affairs by adding a Native studies department at SCU. Jessica said:

I think a Native studies department would be cool. I would be interested in taking classes just for myself since that does not really fall into my career plans, but that is something that I think would be interesting to do for myself.

Sarah explained that having a dedicated position for American Indians, such as a campus liaison, would be helpful for SCU by engaging tribal communities. She said, "I think right now we just really need a tribal liaison because most colleges do have a tribal liaison, and I do not know how we have gone this long without having one."

Students offer a unique voice as they could provide feedback based on their lived experiences. The students wanted to see a Native studies department on campus, have a tribal liaison position for the school, and have a larger campus space for the SCTCRC. Sarah and Jessica were sure to cite the importance of establishing a Native studies department for the school. Sarah mentioned that having a tribal liaison is important for any school serious about engaging tribal communities. Although the SCTCRC director conducts community engagement, she has many other responsibilities and needs support. Sarah believes it is important to have a dedicated position similar to other schools with a tribal liaison.

Summary of Study Findings

Participants in the study provided particular experiences that were both unique and shared among each other. Cultural identity was a dynamic experience unique to the student. For many it was an ongoing process supported by their family and Tribal community, the

Native community on campus, both peers and graduate students, along with supportive programming and leadership from the SCTCRC, SCUSCP, and CAIR. The focus group meeting revealed many shared experiences unique to American Indian students and their tribal communities. Most students described feelings of strength and healing in their cultural identities, along with feelings of living in two worlds with their cultural background and the mainstream culture on campus. Participants also talked about many of the challenges they have faced on campus, including feelings of imposter syndrome and an unfriendly campus experience with low cultural competence by some peers and faculty. Despite challenges, the students felt supported by faculty mentors, more experienced students, and the institution in support programming and services, especially the SCU Scholarship Program and the Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC). The SCUSP was often listed as a reason the participants chose SCU to pursue higher education. SCUSP supported students financially with stipends, tuition support, and supportive programming like academic advising and priority enrollment. Participants also explained that the SCTCRC was very important in providing a space for studying, relaxing, and meeting with other Native students. They also talked about how the SCTCRC helped provide supportive programming that helped their social development. The mentorship was also important for students and occurred with other students in the Native American Student Association (NASA) and the Center for American Indian Research (CAIR). Lastly, students discussed family support and dynamics and the expectation to excel in education by family members and their tribes.

Chapter Five: Discussion

There is an overgeneralization of Native American people because there is not a whole lot of education surrounding the whole Native life and how we are because in history and everything, we are always talked about in the past... – Jessica (study participant)

The study explored the lived experiences of seven American Indian undergraduate students at a university in Southern California. The students provided their voice as American Indian students attending a competitive school that can often be difficult to navigate without the proper support. The students delivered their perspectives and lived experiences to help answer the study's three research questions: How do American Indian students define their cultural identity? How do American Indian students define their experience in higher education? How do American Indian students experience the Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC)?

I developed a blended framework called the Critical Integrated Cultural Identity Framework (CICIF) drawn from critical, cultural, and identity paradigms to address the three research questions. The study occurred in a four-phase process by conducting a round of individual one-on-one interviews, providing an opportunity for participant review of their respective interview transcripts, a review of the individual interview findings, and a focus group to allow adding further comments to the study findings. This chapter reintroduces the blended framework called the CICIF that situated the research questions and interview protocol, a summary and discussion of the study findings related to the research questions, and the findings situated to existing literature. Lastly, I will summarize the overall findings and present recommendations for further exploration and development.

Review of the Conceptual Frameworks

Critical Integrated Cultural Identity Framework blends concepts from identity, critical, and cultural paradigms in an integrated framework to challenge the status quo and offer a tangible counterapproach understand higher education for Native students better. Given that American Indian students have not historically fared well with traditional Western educational systems, student perspectives are vital for improving their experience. Furthermore, educational institutions need to understand the importance of inviting Native student voices for planning, implementing, and evaluating student experiences and support programs.

Although aspects of critical and cultural paradigms can be broad and complex, they may provide an effective avenue to alter a system by providing counternarratives on race, ethnicity, gender, and class (Patton et al., 2016). An integrated framework that incorporates critical and cultural paradigms is innovative, specifically for student affairs' programs (Guido et al., 2010). A blended framework of critical, cultural, and social identity paradigms can provide a strong analytic tool that promotes equity for groups who have been marginalized. The integration of these concepts can help transform views by our educational system's dominant culture that historically has not been friendly to voices that challenge the status quo.

My study provided an opportunity for the American Indian undergraduate students' voices, which I believe enriches our perspective of American Indian students' identity and experiences. It contrasts with the reference sources promoting meritocracy and color-blind objectivity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). It also contrasts narratives like Johnson, Okun, Benallie, & Pennaks' (2010) study that suggest their findings reveal American Indian students were not academically prepared for entering into Predominately White Institutions (PWI). In response to this oversimplification, Fish and Syed (2018) suggest that the environment at the

PWI may be incompatible with American Indian “ways of being” instead of students not being prepared. They suggest a better understanding of cultural and historical factors for understanding ways to support Native students.

The voice of students of color is an essential component of the CICIF. Lived experiences are influential in shaping meaningful and impactful change in systems. American Indians have a strong tradition of providing voice through their specific cultural lenses tied to unique American Indian activities, practices, and beliefs. CRT looks to provide counterstories that challenge the status quo and inequitable structural arrangements (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). American Indian students can provide insight because Native people may have unique experiences that their counterparts have not experienced.

Additionally, critical and cultural paradigms provide a lens through which individuals can understand their identity development while in school. I believe that this lens can help individuals see themselves through the context of a very tumultuous societal history built on racism and discrimination. Thus, ethnic identity development can be a period in one’s life becoming critically aware of societal inequality in many different systems, including higher education. Research using Fish and Syeds’ (2018) reconceptualized ecological model is a tool that can help researchers identify environmental factors at different levels that affect identity development in Native students. Overall, critical, cultural, and identity paradigms naturally integrate well on the spectrum of their respective dimensions and overlap across some areas between these paradigms. It was my interest to pursue a framework that resonated with my own experience with higher education. Pulling from several paradigms in developing the Critical Integrated Cultural Identity Framework provided a powerful analytic tool that was

comprehensive and holistic in understanding the cultural identity development and student experience of a group of American Indian undergraduate students.

Central Research Findings

Research question 1: How do American Indian students define their cultural identity? The research question was framed to understand cultural identity formation in American Indian students. In asking this question, it was quite clear the diversity and complexity among Native people regarding background, family traditions, and history. A participant highlighted the diversity among American Indians, yet many explained everyday experiences that American Indians share.

Diversity is prevalent with 567 sovereign tribal nations (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2018), not counting non-federally recognized tribes or state-recognized tribes, with their own political, economic, social, and cultural systems and differential relationships with the states and the federal government (Wilkins & Stark, 2011). Among other areas that tribes differ are according to tribal membership affiliation through enrollment standards that may vary by residence or blood quantum, or federal recognition vs. state or no recognition status for one's tribe. My experience is that it is seldom the case that any person would proclaim to be a spokesperson for their tribe or Native people in general. Common sense would lead one to avoid generalizations of another group's ethnicity or race and avoid the mistake of misattributing a group's characteristics. It is a mistake to homogenize any group, given the diversity we see in America today.

Layers of complexity reflecting the diversity of Native peoples' identities were revealed in some participant's mixed ethnic/racial backgrounds. Some were from more than one tribe,

and some had family mixtures that included non-tribal backgrounds. Most participants described an ongoing cultural identity development as they continued through their college experience. For many, it was not until college that they began to identify more with their tribal cultural identity describing development in terms of experiences learning about their cultural identity. Although all identified with their tribal cultural identity, participants seemed to vary how closely they associated with these identities. The variation in identity appears to fit into the model's stages described by the Black identity model developed by William Cross called Nigrescence (1971). Although the model describes identity development for black individuals, there are striking similarities in identity development for other disenfranchised groups as they encounter similar experiences of discrimination. Adams (2001) explains

This interdependence of fate (or "historical consciousness," as Marable calls it) grows out of a group's shared and acknowledged experience of social inequality and oppression, the salience of which hardly rest on whether race or ethnicity is the more accurate term to explain the visibility that allows for persecution based on difference (p. 210).

One study found that students at the internalized stage are more likely to stay in college (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). Relatedly, most participants displayed confidence in their ethnic identity similar to the Ethnic Identity Achievement stage described in Phinney's (1990) model of ethnic identity development, which is a more universal model for ethnic groups in general⁵.

It appears that most participants were at the internalized stage of the model, where students reported security and strength in their racial identity. A couple appeared to be at the next stage of the model in that they were interested in providing concrete actions to improve support for students, namely having a Native studies department on campus, having a tribal

⁵ Phinney (1992) developed a standardized questionnaire to measure the process of ethnic identity development called the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), which can be used with adolescents and adults.

liaison, land acknowledgment, and having representation at key high-level decision-making meetings for the institution. Educational leaders must listen to these suggested changes to create lasting improvements in retention and enrollment for American Indian students.

Another participant described the interrelationship of cultural identity and involvement with providing support against loneliness. Having a low enrollment of Native students on campus leads to a smaller community from which one could draw support from during challenging times. Most of the students in the study relied on each other for emotional support as they identified common backgrounds and experiences.

Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995) explain that in their study, there appears to be an association with ethnic identity and the student's participation with club activities and faculty/staff interactions that ultimately lead to student persistence. For all of the participants, they had attended at least one Native American Student Association meeting. Many were currently working on hosting a pow wow event on campus or had helped in previous pow wow events on campus. A couple of students listed how they improved academically when they became more involved with the Native community on campus.

A couple of participants also discussed preserving their respective tribe's language. They felt responsible for teaching younger people in their communities their tribe's language as many did not know the language. Language is important because it is a way to preserve one's culture and share traditional stories that cannot be understood in the same way except in the original language (Horse, 2005). Having the ability to speak one's tribal language was listed by Horse (2005) as being essential in shaping a person's consciousness toward their American Indian identity. Similar to Horse's description about the tie between language and traditions (2005), one student notes that knowing his language was an essential way of passing on

traditional songs and stories. If Vygotsky (1986) was correct about the intricate relationship between language and thought, maintaining one's tribal language is paramount for maintaining and developing one's cultural identity.

Living in two worlds, i.e., being able to navigate higher education and maintaining a strong cultural identity, was a sub-theme that emerged from a couple of interviews. Being transcultural is beneficial in many respects for navigating higher education (Huffman, 2001, 2010) and in helping students in the face of challenging events like racism and discrimination (Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Phinney et al., 1992). Being able to navigate in both worlds align with research by Okagaki et al. (2009) who found students who believed more strongly of their ability to function in the mainstream culture while maintaining their American Indian Identity found a pragmatic purpose for education in their lives.

It is also important to understand that cultural identity for American Indians is not an individualistic construct, but is a shared cultural practice in the form of life cycle rituals within their specific tribal community (Markstrom, 2011). Professionals working with Native students should consider the ways in which their institution supports the students and how that affects their ethnic identity development (Flynn, Olson, & Yellig, 2014). Correspondingly, Fish and Syed (2018) suggest that higher education professionals should consider how their institution's *environment* facilitates the identity development of their American Indian students. They also suggest helping students regardless of their developmental level of identity formation.

Caution should be taken when addressing students identifying as multiracial. It can be difficult for most people to see past discrete definitions of race and understand that a person can acknowledge that they belong to more than one race (Root, 2003). This refusal to accept

individuals as being multiracial occurs not only among Whites, but also by non-White persons (Renn, 2012).

Research question 2: How do American Indian students define their experience in higher education? Imposter syndrome or imposter phenomena was a theme that emerged in the findings of my study. The students provided a detailed description of their experience with imposter syndrome, which usually occurred early in school but could reoccur later. However, the phenomena in the right measures can be helpful for individuals by building their own awareness and supporting others. Some participants described imposter syndrome as something they learned to overcome and cited helpful programming on campus that provided education on the topic. Parkman (2016) and Cokley, McClain, Enciso, and Martinez (2013) recommend that institutions implement imposter programming through counseling, workshops, and at school orientations. The school associated with this study provided programming on the topic that participants identified as a beneficial education program.

Despite knowing about the imposter phenomena from my time as an undergraduate student, I have had to deal with the nagging feeling throughout my college career. Research suggests that imposter syndrome is common at all school experience levels, including for undergraduate students (Ferrari & Thompson, 2006) and doctoral students (Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008). It is also likely to continue beyond schooling.

One student discussed that a principal investigator he works with on campus had admitted he still deals with imposter phenomena. Despite the negative connotations associated with imposter phenomena, revealing how one deals with it can provide powerful learning opportunities. Research has shown that faculty who are cognizant of their own feelings of

imposter syndrome are more likely to excel in engaging students in the classroom and advising relationships (Brems, Baldwin, Davis, & Namyniuk, 1994).

A program on campus that appeared in most of the interviews and was further discussed in the focus group was the SCU Scholarship Program (SCUSP). The SCUSP was identified early often as a primary reason the student initially elected to attend SCU over other colleges. The program was supportive at multiple levels, including tuition costs, a yearly stipend, and supportive programming. The findings support research on the importance of holistic and comprehensive student support programming (Magolda, 2009), including financial support. Francis-Begay (2013) suggests that “Recruitment scholarships, both merit-and need-based, may also contribute to increasing enrollment” (Francis-Begay, 2013, p. 83). One study found evidence for increased academic performance through support for community college students who participated in a scholarship program (Barrow, Richburg-Hayes, Rouse, & Brock, 2014).

Participants expressed mixed experiences with feeling support and discrimination from the environment on campus. There were many instances where participants felt supported on campus. The context of these experiences occurred with peer support among Native and non-Native students, support from a faculty member, mentorship, support from programs (SCTCRC, SCUSP, CAIR) and program staff, support from counselors, and from family and community. There were also instances where students did not feel supported on campus. First, feelings of discrimination are real to those who experience it and should not be overlooked. One student shared her experience with racism in working with customers in her part-time job on campus. Another student shared feeling scared to walk alone on campus at night because of what her friends experienced on buses where students told them to go back to the border. Research has

emphasized that racial microaggressions are the evolution of overt racism of the past into more subtler forms (Sue et al., 2007).

Institutions must be aware of the current political climate and have ways to assess it on campus to support students. Safeguards should be set in place to help address student's concern on campus who may feel like victims of discrimination. Offices to prevent discrimination, student centers on campus, or specific support programming can help develop a coordinated response supported by policies and reporting procedures. A specific task force might be needed for groups still in the early onset of developing student support programming or services to address victims of discrimination or harassment. For those working in student affairs, it is helpful to look at modified ecological models like Fish and Syed (2018) that center historical and cultural factors as key to understanding student development.

Two student's also mentioned misrepresentations of Native people in mainstream culture that either portray Native people as aggressive or as being a remnant of the past or extinct. Their insights are warranted as it has been well documented that curriculum resources frequently misrepresent or degrade American Indians (Stanton, 2014), including for developing adolescents with common core (Bickford & Hunt, 2014). Bickford and Hunt (2014) explain that some publishing companies avoid providing any mention of the aspects of violence that would diminish *American Exceptionalism*, which they attribute partly to publishing companies wanting to avoid controversy in their aim to sell more books. The use of language by writers can direct the narrative of historical actors in history textbooks despite their validity, the consequence of which can be patronizing and affect future agency of American Indians (Stanton, 2014).

Two students cited the importance of having a Native Studies Department on campus with faculty that provide curriculum that promote a more accurate representation of American Indians and account of historical events. Although there has been a rise in American Indian Studies programs to over 100 of them that have developed since the early 1970s, they are usually interdisciplinary programs instead of departments (Champagne, 2016). Champagne (2016) explains that most are organized in this interdepartmental model to save on the money by using faculty interdepartmentally. The disadvantage to this model is that the faculty can be distracted in the process of seeking tenure in their respective departments and they pay less attention to the American Indian Studies program. Prioritizing proper development of American Indian Studies programs to American Indian Studies Departments can lead to more promising intellectual and policy development for universities as there is rich promise in Indigenous intellectual developments (Champagne, 2016).

Research question 3: How do American Indian students experience the Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC)? Research reveals that it is important for American Indian students to connect with the Native community on campus to provide a sense of connection for students (Shotton et al., 2007). For students in my study, the SCTCRC was a centralized location on campus where students could connect with the Native community. The participants echoed a common theme of inclusion, support, and development from the SCTCRC at multiple levels, including the center's physical space, events hosted by the center, and program support and mentoring. Students in the study explained that the SCTCRC created an environment where they could obtain student resources in a welcoming environment with other American Indian students.

In my observations of the SCTCRC's physical space, it appears to have included a living-learning program (LLP) with programmatic themed living. The center's physical layout, with Native inspired items like a bookshelf with Native authors and artifacts that promote Native creativity like the pillow renditions of Fox in Mocs and Fry Bread and Spam. Research observing living-learning programs (LLP) on campus found they facilitate a sense of belonging in both the student's residence hall (D. R. Johnson et al., 2007) and at culturally focused centers (Patton, 2006). Those who have participated in LLP reported a stronger sense of belonging, which translated to smoother academic and social transitions in college (D. R. Johnson et al., 2007).

Jones and Abes (2011) suggest that in the process of student development, student affairs professionals have an opportunity to help create awareness for students regarding self and racial identity. They add that one should use theories for student development specific to the characteristics of the student they are helping. In properly understanding and applying appropriate theory to the context of the student, a student affairs professional can gauge and encourage a student's development.

Many of the students in this study learned more about themselves, in their developing cultural identity. This was facilitated by participating with the community associated with the SCTCRC, whether it was from the staff at the center, from other undergraduate or graduate students, or at community events. Because six of the seven participants did not grow up on a near their tribe, the center appeared to support these students' cultural learning in intertribal practices. Campus events that celebrated Native culture or had a cultural aspect were described as a fond experience for the students. Many cited specific activities held with other American

Indian undergraduate students who were a part of NASA, with events hosted by the SCTCRC, or in collaboration with the center.

Culturally relevant events help students engage more fully and provide a more comprehensive support system that students can rely on in school. In a chapter reviewing the First-Year Scholars Program at the University of Arizona, Tachine and Begay (2013) talk about report on the importance of a service-learning project in which students, with the support of the Native-focused center's staff, affiliated faculty, and mentors, work with a neighboring Native community on a project to "give back." This giving back approach provides students with an understanding of the value of civic responsibilities that students have as developing members of the community and as future leaders. One way to reinforce civic engagement and cultural identity according to Ecklund and Terrance (2013) is to examine current and previous campus relationships with local tribes. They explain that it is important to acknowledge that where the campus is situated once belonged to a Native people. One participant in my study suggested that the chancellor conduct a proper land acknowledgment, which she felt has been largely ignored.

Shotton et al. (2007) explain that Native cultural centers help develop students' growth culturally and academically. Structured social support through multicultural groups like the SCTCRC is important for American Indian student persistence while in college (Jackson et al., 2003). The SCTCRC was listed in many ways as a hub for students in culturally relevant programming and student support. For participants in my study, it was a place where students learned more about their own cultural identity and where they could socialize and connect with students with a similar experience. Research supports the relationship of the Native student

with their tribal community because it can encourage persistence intentions in the student (Thompson, Johnson-Jennings, & Nitzarim, 2013).

Clearly, there is an underrepresentation of American Indian students in higher education, with the lowest enrollment compared to other racial groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019d). Having programming that is focused on outreach is important for building enrollment. Nevertheless, it is also important to develop collaborations with high-Indian-enrollment institutions to increase enrollment of Native students (Pavel & Padilla, 1993), and have dedicated American Indian representatives who do the outreach. The outreach and welcoming approach of the director of the SCTCRC was listed as one of the primary reasons a student decided to attend SCU over another competitive institution.

Interviewees specifically mentioned that they could relate to other American Indians' backgrounds and experiences. The events and services provided by the Native American Student Association (NASA) was clearly a central experience that stood out for the participants and was often spoke of fondly. Along with cultural centers, research has shown that student associations are also an important resource that promotes a strong cultural identity which ultimately leads to student persistence for Native students (Jackson et al., 2003). Activities listed in my study within the NASA community involved Native-themed activities, like the Frybread making night, playing the card game of Decolonization Against Humanity, watching American Indian influenced media together, and event planning for events like an on-campus pow wow, which incorporated involvement with the local tribal community members.

Across the data, participants described the value of mentorship they received at multiple levels. The sources of mentorship provided for students included the director of the SCTCRC, the staff of the CAIR program, peers, upperclassmen, American Indian graduate students,

faculty, and SCUSP advisors. Research has shown that having a mentor with a similar cultural background can aid Native students in better adapting to the challenges they face as they move through college (Shotton et al., 2007). In terms of the relationship with a faculty member on campus, a couple of students said they benefited tremendously from having a faculty mentor. Their account fits with research from Swisher, Hoisch, and Pavel (1991) who, in their metanalysis study, found a positive effect when faculty care about their students and encourage them to persist.

Public universities must make greater strides in recruiting from their diverse communities, particularly the American Indian people in their area. Worthington (2008) explains that a monocultural environment is not conducive to the student body's growing diversity. Among other educational goals, institutions must prioritize diversity and work to create an atmosphere that is inclusive of American Indians. Although there were a couple of students from tribes in California, enrollment was low. There are many opportunities to create partnerships with local tribes, many of whom have a tribal after school program or education center.

Additionally, it is important to have faculty members reflective of a student's background, including American Indian faculty. Recruiting more American Indian faculty can provide mentorship to students looking for people with a similar background. Currently, diversity of U.S. faculty is much lower than the U.S. general population (Stout, Archie, Cross, & Carman, 2018). The number of American Indian faculty has consistently been low in higher education (Garcia, 2000; Turner, 2002). There was only a slight increase from 0.3% to 0.4% from 1981 to 1991 (Pavel, Swisher, & Ward, 1994) to 0.9% in 2010 (Stout et al., 2018). A

recent study found that all underrepresented students of color were positively affected when there was increased diversity of their faculty (Stout et al., 2018).

The value of American Indian faculty members could not be overstated, as they can provide the leadership needed to grow a Native presence on campus, including creating a Native studies department. They can also serve as mentors and role models which has shown to influence self-concept and self-esteem in Native students (Pewewardy, 2013). I believe that Native faculty can also help engage the local community in greater participation with the university toward greater Native student enrollment. Engaging the American Indian community can create a productive and lasting relationship that aligns with social justice initiatives an institution is seeking to enhance.

Another way to support Native students is through a Native-focused fraternity or sorority. Historically Native American fraternities and sororities (HNAS) can promote membership and camaraderie among peers with similar backgrounds and beliefs as the Native student (Oxendine, Oxendine, & Minthorn, 2013). In fact, HNAS promotes cultural ties to Native traditions using “ceremonies, calls, strolls, dances, icons, colors, plants, jewels, and even hands signs based on certain tribal belief systems”(Oxendine et al., 2013, p. 71). Additionally, HNAS engage the students’ families, communities, and culture to promote a holistic approach to student success and engagement of the educational system (Jackson et al., 2003; Oxendine et al., 2013).

Implications

The implications of this study reveal that it is possible to integrate several theories to take a holistic perspective for understanding how to better support American Indian students. Critical paradigms like Critical Race Theory and Tribal Critical Race Theory look at systematic issues affecting higher education for American Indian students at the larger structural level. As these theories point out, racism and colonialism pervade higher education and it is important to listen to the voices of American Indian students to help address problems of discrimination. American Indians as has been shown in this study can provide valuable information regarding their experiences in higher education in a critical and informed way that can help institutions understand what support systems help them navigate school. Critical paradigms integrate seamlessly with cultural paradigms like Culturally Responsive Schooling or Culturally Relevant Schooling. Cultural paradigms acknowledge the importance of cultural differences in learning styles and values that American Indian students and their communities, which may conflict with Western approaches to education.

This study reveals that cultural and ethnic identity was essential to many of the student participants at the individual level. Developmental and sociocultural theorists have acknowledged the importance of ethnic identity in maintaining one's self-esteem while in school. Several students spoke of the importance of their tribal identity during difficult times. The implications of these findings for counseling services and student affairs professionals are the importance of promoting ethnic identity development in American Indian students.

Working with staff and faculty from a Native-focused community resource center on campus or Native Studies Program or Department can help coordinate appropriate support programming and services for American Indian students. Beginning with a task force can be a first step toward developing a referral process that leads to a comprehensive student-centered support system. Stakeholders from a Native-focused community resource center can provide helpful information in further developing culturally appropriate programming and services. Students in this study were very grateful for their Native-focused community resource center on campus, often citing the center in helping them develop their cultural identity and providing a sense of belonging on campus.

Conclusion

Some have criticized higher learning institutions' enrollment and retention for students of color as reflective of a wider social problem of inequality and argue that it is not accessible for all people (Brayboy, 2005a; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Although this is likely the case, those in higher education should push for social equity and steer away from the ideology that promotes meritocracy or colorblindness. Reviewing the timeline of events in U.S. history, it would be a mistake to blame socially disadvantaged groups for not trying hard enough. As Brennan and Naidoo (2008) have explained, "The internal processes of higher education...have implications for the shape and cohesion of societies and for the quality of life of individuals"(p. 288).

Students are growing individuals that need support that does not ask them to give up their cultural identities. Those working in roles that promote student development can help orient students to activities and literature that promotes the importance of cultural identity for American Indian students. Some urban Natives may not understand traditional values in the

same way as Natives brought up on the reservation. Therefore, we should not assume that all Native people are the same, but rather that there is a rich diversity in Native communities (Waterman, Shotton, & Lowe, 2012).

Schools should be cognizant of the importance of diversity on campus as it should reflect the diversity of the U.S. population. It cannot be stressed enough that diversity is needed in schools, whether it is a liberal arts or research-oriented university. Culturally diverse students bring unique experiences and bring new ideas that can further develop the arts and sciences.

Student voice are often missing in research for improving student success while in college. Acknowledging the tenants in critical, cultural, and identity paradigms in a blended framework like the Critical Integrated Cultural Identity Framework promotes democratization in higher education by providing people of color a stronger voice that can help fix a broken system. This study reveals that students have a voice that can provide feedback regarding the type of support they need on campus. Several listed that they wanted their voices heard to important policy and governance at the school. Specifically, students would like to see a Native Studies Department, a tribal liaison, and a proper land acknowledgment by institutional leadership.

Dr. Proudfit's statement that higher education is the path to self-sufficiency and self-determination for Native and non-Native people alike (Proudfit & Gregor, 2016) is an optimistic view if Native communities and educational intuitions work toward a common goal of increasing Native student success. Proudfit and Warner (2017) provide a good model of promising practices for American Indian education in California that I believe can be extended to other parts of the country. The points listed are supported by the literature

presented in this paper. The implications for making higher education more accessible to Native students is there will be a stronger presence of diverse perspectives in leadership across different sectors of society, including in STEM fields and social and political arenas. Additionally, a more highly skilled workforce can handle the movement toward a more global and technologically advanced society.

Limitations

Along with the CICIF, I relied on personal experience to examine the “how” and “why” of the social phenomenon related to student experience in higher education. Using an approach informed by students who have personal experience with navigating the complexities of higher education is beneficial in understanding their perspectives on improving the system for new students. The drawback to this study’s design is that the results do not have the same generalizability as other research designs. Specifically, a convenience sampling method, i.e., recruiting participants based on American Indian undergraduate students’ availability, is a non-probability design and is limited in the extent of generalizability. Although generalizability is limited, a case study design can be a great start for exploring alternative knowledge-generating approaches.

As a Tlingit, I may be too close to the participants’ identity to the present results to be unbiased. On the other hand, my background may have enabled American Indian participants to speak more freely and less inhibited. Participants did not appear reluctant to share their experiences or provide feedback for institutional support. It is also worth noting that subjectivity is inevitably tied to everyone, whether you are a researcher or participant. Any investigator should understand how “one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both research and nonresearch aspects of our life”

(Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). Therefore, researchers need to be aware of the personal assumptions and know how they can affect methodology and interpretation of data, which ultimately affects the study's validity.

Future Research

Although not directly the study's focus, family support was a central theme that appeared in the findings. All participants had at least one family member who supported them while they attended school. Family is an important source of strength for Native people, especially in challenging times. Research has shown more student success with more inclusion of the family in the school process while students are in college. In fact, there is the Family Education Model created primarily by Iris HeavyRunner invites family members to participate in cultural and social activities on campus (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). Although the model was primarily used in Tribal Colleges, some mainstream universities are currently using it (Huffman, 2010).

APPENDIX A: Study Flyer

Southern California University

The purpose of this study is to understand attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors AI/AN students have toward the support they receive in helping them navigate higher education. The goals of the study are to engage undergraduate AI/AN students at the Southern California University, in: 1) understanding their experience in higher education, 2) how they define their AI/AN cultural identity, and 3) how they feel that the Native focused Community Resource Center helps define their experience.

Who is Eligible?

- American Indian/Alaska Native undergraduate students
- Ages 18 +

What will you be asked to do?

- Participate in a one-on-one interview for 30-60 minutes.
- Participate in a follow up focus group approximately a month later for 60-90 minutes.
- Will be given an opportunity to learn how to code and interpret interview data following action research principles

Compensation

- You will receive up to \$20 in gift cards (\$10 for interview & \$10 for follow up focus group) to Target.

If interested, contact the lead investigator, Tony Luna, at (760) 580-8052 or email jal351@ucsd.edu

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent

Consent to be a Research Participant

J. Antonio Luna, a student in the joint doctoral program at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and California State University, San Marcos is conducting a study to explore the supportive relationship between campus support programs and American Indian undergrad students. You are being asked to participate in an interview for this study because you are American Indian undergrad student that has unique experiences that can help provide insight that can lead to improved school experiences for future American Indian students at Southern California University. There will be approximately 17 AI/AN undergraduate student that are expected to participate in this study.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this study is to understand attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors American Indian students have toward the support they receive in helping them navigate higher education. The goals of the study are to engage undergraduate American Indian students at the Southern California University, in 1) understanding their experience in higher education, 2) how they define their cultural identity, and 3) how they feel that the Native focused community resource center helps define their experience.

B. Procedures

If you agree to participate in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked several questions about your background in a conversational style with other American Indian students in a focus group.
2. You will be asked about your experience in college and with the Native focused community center.
3. You will be asked about how the program can increase your success in navigating your college experience.

HOW LONG WILL YOU BE IN THE STUDY?

The session will take approximately 30-60 minutes to complete. The interviewer will be available to answer any of your questions. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can skip any question or stop at any time without any consequence.

A follow up focus group will be scheduled approximately a month or two after this interview in which summarized results will be provided to participants to discuss the major thematic findings from the previous interviews. This follow up focus group will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The total time of participation will vary between 30 minutes and 2 hours 10 minutes, depending on if you participate in the individual interview and the focus group.

If you decide to withdraw from the individual interview, you will not participate in the focus group. Only participants who have participated in the individual interviews will be invited to participate in the focus group. Additionally, the data that had been collected up to the point of withdrawal will not be used in the study.

C. Risks/Discomforts

1. Answering questions about your personal experience may make you feel uncomfortable, but you are free to decline to answer any question or to stop participating in the interview at any time. If you are not clear about the instructions or questions, you can ask the interviewer for additional clarification at any time. If you decide to stop the interview, the interviewer will take
2. Potential breach of confidentiality. Because this is a research study, there may also be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable. You will be informed of any significant new findings. Electronic data will be secured in a password protected laptop and printed data will be locked up in a filing cabinet. Research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Research records may be reviewed by the UCSD Institutional Review Board.

D. Confidentiality

All information about you will be maintained without using your name. Your individual identity will not be used in any publication. Your information will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Pseudonyms for the school, students, and center will be used to minimize the risk of identification. Your verbal responses will be recorded with the intent to be private and will be deleted after the final analysis; no later than August 31, 2020. You will be given the opportunity to review to modify or delete comments you feel were not recorded correctly or maybe identifying information.

What is the alternative to participating in this study? The alternative to participation is to not participate in the study.

E. Benefits

Participation in this study does not directly benefit you. Your information, along with others who participate, may help us learn about improving institutional support for Native students. Another anticipated benefit of these procedures is the future development of effective transformative practices that empower participant engagement in the research process. Students will be offered the opportunity to learn how to code data and to code their own interview transcript. However, you will not code the transcripts of other participants. Also, you will be given the opportunity to modify or delete comments you feel were not recorded correctly or may be identifying information.

F. Costs:

There will be no costs to you for participating in this study. You will receive \$10 Target gift card for participating in the interview and another \$10 Target gift card for attending the focus group. You will receive a \$10 Target gift card for participating in the interview. If you agree to participate in the focus group, you will receive an additional \$10 Target gift card. If you decide to withdraw from the individual interview, you will not participate in the focus group and will only receive the \$10 gift card.

G. Questions:

If you have questions, you may call J. Antonio Luna at (760) 580--8052 or email jal351@ucsd.edu or contact Dr. Rodney Beulieu at (760) 750--8251 or email rbeulieu@csusm.edu.

If you have any questions or comments about participation in this study, you should first talk to the investigators. If you do not wish to do this, you may contact the UCSD Institutional Review Board by calling (858) 246--4777 or by submitting inquires using: Attn: Human Research Protections Program (HRPP), University of California, San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive, Male Code 0052, La Jolla, CA 92093-0052.

H. Consent

Can you choose to not participate or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits? Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw or refuse to answer specific questions in the interview at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the researchers will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used and you will receive the study incentive(s). You will be told if any important new information is found during the course of this study that may affect your wanting to continue.

Can you be withdrawn from the study without your consent? The PI may remove you from the study without your consent if the PI feels it is in your best interest or the best interest of the study. You may also be withdrawn from the study if you do not follow the instructions given you by the study personnel.

Your Signature and Consent

You have received a copy of this consent document.

By signing this form, you are attesting that you are 18 years or older and have understood the information explained to you and that you agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (Please Print)

Participant's Signature

Interviewer's Signature

Date

Appendix C: Interview Guide and Questions

One-On-One Facilitation Guide and Questions

Hello. My name is [name]. I'd like to start off by thanking you for taking time to participate today. We'll be here for about 30-60 minutes.

The reason we're here today is to gather your feedback about issues related to your experiences with higher education, on how you define your American Indian cultural identity, and how the Native-focused community center on campus helps you navigate higher education.

We will be working together to improve your experience at school and in the program. We will be holding a follow up focus group where we will share the summarized results from the interviews in a focus group with you, if you are available, and other interviewees, to make sure we got your responses correctly.

I want to remind you that everything that is said is confidential. And feel free to skip any questions. Responses will be unidentifiable, and pseudonyms will be used when the results are presented.

Tell me a little about yourself – What is your tribal affiliation? Where did you grow up? How strongly do you identify with your native culture? Do you participate in your tribes traditional practices or in intertribal traditional practices (ex. Pow wows, dancing, drumming, etc.)? How connected do you feel to your cultural identity?

What was school like while you were growing up? What kind of things are you interested in? What was your family like? How important is education in your family? PROBE: Have they been supportive of you going to school?

Why did you choose this University?

1. Many universities have a lot of different resources and support services for students. What are types of resources/services/programs you have used at the university?
2. Could you tell a little more about how these services have supported you?
3. What other resources are important? (ex. Tutoring, summer programs, writing centers, cultural centers)

I am also interested in better understanding how a Native community resource center supports the experience of college students (Support can mean different things to students,

4. How did you first learn about the Native focused community resource Center here?
 - Probe: How did you get involved?
 - Probe: Why did you decide to get involved? Would you say your pretty involved on a consistent basis?
 - Probe: How do you utilize the center, the space, the programming, etc.?
 - Do you feel comfortable using the center? How is it that the space makes you feel comfortable?
 - Do you feel connected to the Native community on campus? Could you tell me about a time you felt connected to the Native community on campus (ex. Participating in NASA, hanging out at the center, attending an event, helping as a volunteer at an event).
 - Tell me what a typical NASA meeting is like? In terms of common activities. What are you doing at the meetings?
 - Why is being around Native students important to you?

What do you enjoy most about your experiences at the center (or “in the space”)? *Some Native students have said their cultural identity was important...and for some it is not an important part of their experience at school. What factors are important for your success?*

Could you reflect back and maybe tell me a story or a time where your Native identity was important for your success at the university?

5. What is it like being a Native student? What were some experiences being here?
6. Is there enough cultural sensitivity and competence for students and faculty? Are things things okay in terms of the way that teachers interact with Native students?
7. What do you think is unique about the Native centered space?
8. What if you were director of the Center? What would be your top priorities to support other Native students?
9. *Thinking about how the center operates now, is there anything you would like to see different? What do they view as not being helpful from the Center?*
10. In high school, were you involved in a Native focused center or club?

If so, how are is the high school center/club different than the university center?

Do you have any Native friends or family that attend a university that doesn't have a Native focused center or space? How do imagine your experience might be different without a Native centered space on campus?

11. That was my last question for today - is there anything you would like to add or anything that you've been thinking about that I didn't ask?

Do you have any questions for me or anything you would like to share before we close? I want to invite you to participate in the research process. You are welcome to help in the interpretation of the data.

Appendix B: Focus Group Facilitation Guide and Questions

Focus Group Facilitation Guide and Questions

Hello. My name is Tony Luna. I'd like to start off by thanking each of you for taking time to participate today. We'll be here for about 60-90 minutes. At this point, are there anyone who has not already completed an informed consent form?

The reason we're here today is to follow up on the interviews you all participated in a month or two ago. As you recall, I was asking your feedback about issues related to your experiences with higher education and how the Native-focused community center on campus helps you navigate higher education.

I'm going to lead our discussion today. I will be asking you questions and then encouraging and moderating our discussion. We want to make sure that what we have summarized from the interviews accurately reflects what you all said in the interviews.

Protocol – Group Debrief of Study Findings and Focus Group

- I. Introduction (5 min)
 - a. Welcome –
 - b. My background. I am Tlingit from the Juneau area in Alaska.
 - c. Quick introduction: name, tribal affiliation, and major.
- II. Personal History (5 min)
 - a. Background: Tlingit and Mexican. Grew up with dad but was always interested in my Tlingit side. I personally struggled with my identity, both my Hispanic side and my Native side.
 - b. In fact, I did not feel connected while I did my undergraduate work. I wasn't a part of MECHA and at that time, there was no AISA at CSUSM.
 - c. Wasn't until I started working in Native country at IHC that I began to learn about community and some local Native practices and then some intertribal Native practices. And I had some good mentors that knew I wanted to learn.
 - d. I got involved in CAIR...
 - e. I went on to do my master's degree in experimental psychology at CSUSM
 - f. I became interested in higher education after reflecting on my experience while doing my undergrad. So, I found this JDP in educational leadership and wanted to look at student retention in higher education for Native students.
- III. For my research, I drew on several theories for a meshed or integrated theory. These included (10 min)
 - i. Critical Race Theory – specifically TribalCrit
 - ii. Cultural paradigm – Cultural Relevance, Cultural
 - iii. Social identity paradigms
 - b. Review the research questions for my study:
 - i. how do students define their cultural identity?
 - ii. how do students define their experience in higher education? and
 - iii. how do students feel that the Southern California Tribal Community Resource Center (SCTCRC) helps define their experience?
 - c. Single embedded case study design
 - i. Group of Native undergraduate students that use the SCTCRC.

- ii. Subunits were the individual students & my own experience
 - iii. Interviewed 7 undergraduate students (5 female and 2 male students)
 - iv. All were from different tribes
 - d. Several Themes and sub- themes emerged from the study <Show slides of themes>.
 - e. Excerpts from these themes are...
- IV. Key Findings (30 min)
- a. Is there anything that surprised you from the findings?
 - b. Is there anything you'd like to add? What would you recommend to improve services at the center?
- V. Additional Questions (20 min):
- a. What do you plan to do after you graduate? (i.e., start your career, go to graduate school, take a gap year, etc.)
 - b. Are you a SCUSP student? How was SCUSP helpful for you?
 - c. How does a Native undergraduate student's identity change due to experiences while in college?
 - d. Are there any expectations on your identity while you've been here?
 - e. Have you struggled with imposter syndrome while you've been here? If so, what helped you in dealing with it?
 - f. What does a successful Native undergraduate student look like?
- VI. Are there any points that were not covered that you'd like to discuss?
- VII. Closing (10 min)
- a. Will finish write up adding our discussion today
 - b. Gift cards. Where should I send it?
 - c. Thank you!

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