

AMERICAN INDIAN WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION:  
IS TINTO'S MODEL APPLICABLE?

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## Abstract

Higher education degree completion for American Indians has remained virtually unchanged for the past three decades. American Indians, both female and male, continue to have the lowest percentage of terminal degrees completion of any ethnic population in the United States.

Numerous studies have been completed to examine the barriers that prohibit American Indian success at the postsecondary level. However, there remains a lack of critical information concerning the personal experiences of those American Indian females who have persevered and have completed first, an undergraduate degree and then matriculated through the systems to attain a terminal degree. The purpose of this study is to survey a sample of American Indian women who have acquired a terminal degree and elicit their personal perceptions of the process and reasons why they were successful.

This study is descriptive in nature and utilizes an analysis of both survey and interview data. A total of 71 women were contacted with 31 survey/interviews being completed for a completion rate of 44%. The battery of questions was divided into two categories. The first category addressed demographic information and academic background, including area of study and dissertation title. The second category assessed personal reflection and their response to various barriers as documented in the Tinto Model, such as investment in traditional American Indian culture, academic, emotional, institutional, economics, committee and other influential people.

Conclusions were drawn as to the degree to which these respondents caused a failure to prove the effectiveness of the Tinto Model in predicting success or failure for American Indian women entering the post-secondary system with the desire to attain a terminal degree. The testimony of these successful holders of the terminal degree clearly reveals that many of the barriers identified by Tinto were to their perception strengths that assisted their success.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 1994 the United Nations (UN) announced its “first international decade of the World’s Indigenous People.” In May 1995 a resolution was passed, creating the UN’s “Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.” Various issues are addressed in this declaration, including the right indigenous people have to education. Part 4, Article 15 of this declaration states: Indigenous peoples have the right to an education in their own languages and cultures, using indigenous teaching methods. Unfortunately, there has been limited progress made towards this goal, internationally or within the United States (US). Although, the official policy within the US is that of a guaranteed equal education to all, in practice, research shows that the public education system continues to hold a century old bias that benefits the middle to upper class Amer-European male over women and minorities.

Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, European based norms controlled educational and public policy in the US. However, according to a number of post-colonial, feminist and Pacific scholars, the world-wide economic and political restructuring following the Second World War created an environment where today, the US holds an imbalanced influence over world policy and economics. To illustrate this weighting towards US influence and policy, the contemporary social science term “Amer-European” is used in this study to describe the dominant non-Indian majority population of the US. Also, because of the vast diversity found in the indigenous communities of North American, the term American Indian will be used to encompass both American Indian and Alaskan

Native populations.

The American Indian experience with European-based education has often been described as a clash of cultures that places American Indians on a deadly collision course between their traditional cultures and contemporary American society. America's societal norms have historically been based primarily on the European concept of a White, Protestant, male superiority that originated with the Greeks. The resulting hierarchy, social stratification and belief in European male supremacy, along with the perceived right of their dominance over non-White populations evolved into an epistemology that even today continues to favor upper-class, white, males. The result is an outcome that produces an enduring policy of assimilation, deculturalization, and marginalization of American Indian people.

### Women in Higher Education

Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century few women were admitted into careers that demanded a university education. In the broadest sense, women's education was limited to producing caretaking or domestic outcomes. As noted by Ruth Hubbard, "Through the nineteenth century, when women tried to get access to higher education, scientists claimed women could not be educated because their brains were too small, and studying would divert energy from their reproductive organs and leave them sterile" (Hubbard, 2001, p. 46).

Without consulting women to determine their true feelings, male policy makers and educational administrators proceeded with the commonly accepted sentiment that "women feel alienated in academic settings, and find formal education peripheral to their

lives” (Belenky & Pollard, 1986, p. 41). It is only in the past 50 years that it has become “unremarkable” for a woman to enter into higher education and matriculate through the system to complete the terminal degree. Unfortunately this advance has not been equal for all women in America. For American Indian women the completion of a terminal degree, for the most part, does remain “remarkable.”

### Indian Women in Higher Education

Ethnicity, culture, and gender continue to play an important role in the successful completion of a degree program in higher education. In the case of American Indian women the history of higher education does not reflect a political, administrative or academic policy of support or understanding.

When American Indian women were first forced into the Amer-European education system the official governmental philosophy assumed that because of perceived racial and gender limitations these females could only find success as domestic help. As Dr. Bea Medicine points out, “The picture of Native women as gatherer, drudge, and human pack animal abounds in American literature” (Medicine, 2001, p. 93). This created a self-fulfilling prophecy where Native women were denied the necessary academic training and skills needed to continue beyond high school far into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. During the off reservation boarding school period American Indian women’s education and training was limited to those skills believed necessary for future employment as domestic help in Amer-European households. Even today, many American Indian women who drop out or stop out of college indicate insufficient or poor

academic preparation as one of their primary reasons for their lack of success.

According to current enrollment data there continues to be a gender divide for American Indian students at the postsecondary level. Enrollment and exit data collected in the past ten years indicates that a majority of the American Indians students enrolling in undergraduate programs and eventually attaining four-year degrees are women. However, the majority of those enrolling in and eventually graduating with terminal degrees continue to be male. Perhaps not so surprisingly, as the positioning as a double minority often makes the transitioning from Bachelor's degree to Master's or Doctorate degree considerably more difficult for the American Indian female than her male counterpart. It is a response to these conditions that has created the opportunity to categorically investigate the process of American Indian women completing the post-Baccalaureate degree.

To date, attrition and withdrawal from institutions of higher learning continues to comprise the critical mass of the research compiled on American Indian students in higher education, both male and female. Although there are a number of theories to explain this phenomenon, the most commonly referenced in the literature is the Tinto Paradigm of Cultural Dissonance or the Tinto Model.

#### The Tinto Model

A significant amount of research on the American Indian experience in higher educations deals with barriers and withdrawal. Although emphasis is also placed on other barriers, cultural discontinuity or the effect of oppositional cultural values remains the

most commonly accepted rationale for American Indian failure to persist (Carroll, 1978; Dehyle, 1992; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Huffman, Sill & Brokenleg, 1986; Lin, 1985, 1990; and Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988). These studies, and others, have concluded that many American Indian students, like other ethnic minorities, " have developed an insecurity and ambivalence about the value of their own cultural identity as a result of their interactions with the dominant [society]" (Cummins, 1986, p. 112). This discourages engagement in those activities that are closely associated with mainstream American cultural values. Included in this is the attainment and utilization of a degree in higher education.

The "Tinto Paradigm of Cultural Dissonance" or "Tinto Model" has been widely accepted as a key foundation in American Indian retention in secondary and post secondary studies. This theory was developed by Vincent Tinto, professor of education and sociology at Syracuse University and the author of, Leaving College: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition (1987). The Tinto Model, which seeks to explain minority departure from institutions of higher education, is largely based on the 1970 study by William Spady. Both Spady and Tinto have had a widespread influence on philosophy regarding minority student attrition.

The Tinto model suggests that it is the student's cultural and social values that, to a great degree, determine their post-secondary educational intentions, goals, commitments, and eventually, degree success. The framework of the model is constructed on the belief that student perceptions of their experiences and assessments of their time spent at college will determine their success. These perceptions are shaped by a wide range of personal background factors. According to the Tinto model, the most important

factor to educational success is the student's value set as it is expressed within their home community. Further, that departure from the university most frequently occurs when there is incongruence between the student's cultural value set, pre-entry attributes, intentions, goals and commitment and the Amer-European-dominated college culture and environment. The distance the student feels they are from the mainstream society's norms, or the greater the degree of alienation and dissonance the student feels, the less likely they will find success at the university.

The Tinto Model also addresses the relationship between the student's personal background and the future assessment of their college experience, and relies heavily on the Van Gennep theory of a three stage process of incorporation (Van Gennep, 1960). Following the Van Gennep theory, a fully-successful college student would typically pass through a three-stage process of separation, transition, and finally, incorporation before they are totally integrated into the university community. As Tinto states:

College students are, after all, moving from one community or set of communities...to another. Like other persons in the wider society, they must separate themselves, to some degree, from past associations in order to make the transitions to eventual incorporation in the life of college. In attempting to make such transitions, they too are likely to encounter difficulties that are as much a reflection of the problems inherent in shifts of community membership as they are either of the personality of individuals or of the institutions in which membership is sought. (Tinto, 1978, p. 442)

According to the Tinto Model, in the typical American institution of higher education, one would expect a person from a minority background and/or from economically deprived families, older adults, or from very small rural communities to be more likely to experience identity problems than other students. Therefore, the more

assimilated an American Indian student is into the values and mores of the American middle- or upper-middle class, the smoother the transition through stages will be, and the greater success the student will find in the process to attain a bachelor's degree and transition on to a terminal degree.

### Problem Statement

Over the past thirty years a wealth of data has been compiled to, 1.) determine why American Indians fail to persist in higher education and 2.) assess those barriers that prevent American Indian degree completion (e.g. Astin, Tsui & Avalos, 1996; Tijerina & Biemer, 1988). American Indian higher educational achievement has traditionally lagged behind other minority groups and understanding the reasons why has been enigmatic to researchers (Astin, Tsui, & Avalos, 1996). Most of the studies compiled have focused primarily on non-completion and on the American Indian male. However, solid statistical data concerning American Indian drop-outs, push-outs and/or failures to complete are difficult to define. Different studies develop different results based, primarily, on the criteria determining who is being included or excluded in the study sample. Ultimately, there remains a lack of critical information about the personal experiences and perceptions of those American Indian women who have persevered and have completed an undergraduate degree. Moreover, there are few studies that have investigated the success factors affecting American Indian women who continue their educations and earn the terminal degree.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study is four-fold. Each purpose helped formulate the research problem and served as a guide to conduct future inquiry and analysis. This process promulgated this researcher to:

- 1) identify a cohort of American Indian females who hold a terminal degree;
- 2) compile a demographic profile consisting of educational history, family status, and family educational history of the cohort group;
- 3) analyze the responses of the cohort group in respect to their educational experiences in their pursuit of the terminal degree; and
- 4) compare findings from the survey data to the Tinto Model.

### Research Problem

This study investigates the personal perceptions of barriers and success factors effecting American Indian women who have completed the terminal degree. The definition and scope of this research problem was not developed to generate taxonomy.

The study of the successful educational experience of American Indian women has often been perceived as an anomaly compared to any non-Indian cohort; this study prompts further research into this topic.

Information obtained through survey research and personal interviews is analyzed and compared to the Tinto Model of cultural dissonance. The research questions used for comparison were: 1) What accounts for the success of those American Indian women who consider themselves deeply vested within their cultural identity, values and ceremonies? 2) What are the ramifications of the Tinto Model to the cohort group in this

study? 3) In what ways can the experiences of the Indian women in this study be replicated to foster further success and completion of the terminal degree as a model for other American Indian women in higher education?

### Significance of the Study

The findings and recommendations of this study can impact higher education officials such as diversity officers, recruiters, retention specialists, and administrators. Also, American Indian community leaders and educators stand to benefit from information generated in this research. American Indian students, in general, may be positively influenced by the success factors documented in this work. American Indian women, specifically, can utilize information from this study to empower themselves and matriculate through institutions of higher education.

### Limitations of the Study

The findings in this study are not generalizable to all women in higher education. Furthermore the findings of this study are only applicable to the cohort group studied. This data does not constitute an assumption of parametric inference to all American Indian terminal degree holders, male or female. Because of the way most education research questions are constructed they become value laden. Therefore attention has been placed on questions where similar responses were received. However, greater importance is not placed on model responses over solitary responses. Previous social science research indicates that key response terms used in this study such as culture or traditional are, by

nature, ambiguous and subject to individual interpretation and negotiation for self empowerment. It was sufficient for this study to ascertain respondents own perception as to their degree of importance and vestment in these concepts. Therefore these key terms were not assigned specific definitions for the purpose of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Historic Realities of American Education

Many educational theorists such as Foucault, Freire, Giroux, Gramsci, and others have stated that education is seldom, if ever, value neutral. They assert that education is created with a political hegemony and methodology that is designed to create the ideal citizen who will conform to, support and replicate the chosen societal norm. Roger Smith states in his widely recognized and acclaimed study of American democratic philosophy, that while the official philosophy of American education and society is one of equality and freedom, in reality the Republican form of democracy is frequently projected as state supported racism and cultural intolerance (Smith, 1979).

The European philosophy of racial and religious superiority was imported to North America by the English colonists who immigrated to New England in the 17th and 18th centuries. The English strictly adhered to a belief in the superiority of their race, Protestant theology and culture. It was this official and unofficial doctrine which was imported to North America by the English colonists that formed the foundations for the policy of Manifest Destiny, or their god's plan to guide them to absolute control of the North American continent and all of its wealth. Manifest Destiny was not only seen as their god given right, but anyone or anything that stood in the way of this progress was in direct opposition to God's will and therefore, subject elimination. The myth of the United States as a land of opportunity for all, in practice was only true only for the select few. One of the historic realities in the history of the US is that much of American higher education policy has an implicit intent for the promotion and benefit of the socially elite.

According to Richard Takaki, “The English first developed their concepts of racial and cultural superiority during their conquest of Ireland. The English considered the Irish inferior savages who could only find redemption by adopting English culture” (Takaki, 1993, p. 28). This philosophy of cultural superiority continued throughout the English colonial experiences in North America and was eventually used by the newly developed US to justify the subjugation, expropriation, and exploitation of indigenous lands and people. American Indians were seen as little more than an impediment or imposition to Manifest Destiny and the god given right for the Amer-European US to expand their philosophy “from sea to shining sea.”

From its inception, US public school education was developed as a political schema, with the unspoken goal of restricting access and success for non-white males and all females (Takaki, 1993). In his study of minority education Spring also states that, although Benjamin Franklin idealizes the Haudenosaunee and admits to using the Iroquois Confederation as a template for the Articles of Confederation and the creation of the American Constitution, he also writes of his concerns over the growing number of minorities in his native Pennsylvania. He states that it is his belief that the US should, “be a principal body of white people”, and recommends that the “Sons of Africa and Tawnys be limited or eliminated” (Spring, 2001, p. 6).

Early on, US public schools were designed to protect and promote Anglo-American Protestant culture and values. State supported or public schools were also known as the Protestant Schools. It was the stated official policy to “create schools that were dedicated to installing political and cultural values that centered on Protestantism, republicanism, and capitalism” (Kaestle, 1989, p. 127). According to Kaestle, these were

and continue to be key elements inherent to the US education system.

Some educational policies that are credited with continuing to create barriers for many American Indian students include: the heightened importance placed on standardization, the importance paid to the promotion of the majority policy, and the transmission of an ethic of competition and personal gratification which down plays the importance of cooperation.

Few of these values are encouraged in many American Indian communities, which has historically caused US policy makers to declare the American Indian to be lacking of viable social norms, and therefore subjugated to a lower class. Smith suggests that, “The American dream is based on the concepts of individual achievement and monetary success, while many American Indian cultures and traditions are founded in collective terms with sharing more important than accumulating” (Smith, 1979, p. 60). In short, “this (American Indian value set) raises all kinds of hell with the American ethic” (Ortiz, 1979, p. 64).

Noah Webster, often called the Schoolmaster of the United States, worked and wrote prolifically to create a unified Anglo American culture and nationalism. Part of this effort was his creation of a standardized dictionary, an American Bible, and a national school curriculum which included his spelling book. Webster and others advocated education as the preferable policy to assimilate American Indians into, or more accurately, parallel to Amer-European society. Officially, few within the ruling power structure promoted inclusion of American Indians into mainstream society. However, it was felt that a moderately educated, deculturized, Christianized Indian population that was geographically removed from the proximity of white society would be politically and

economically sound. It was also decided that the educated Indian would be easier to subjugate, and, as Webster said, “it would be less expensive to educate the savage than to wage war against him.”(Spring, 2001, p. 9). Not all tribes resisted this principal and by 1800 some American Indian groups had begun to turn to European-style education as a method of interacting with the rapidly expanding US. This was especially true for those originating in the American southeast.

Removal and education as solutions to the Indian problem were first promoted during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. However, it was not accomplished until the presidency of Andrew Jackson. During Jackson’s presidency Congress passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the southeastern tribes were removed and forced into the Indian Territories. Once in the territories the tribes quickly reorganized and established tribal school systems. The success of these tribal schools is legendary. By 1852 the Cherokee and Choctaw Nations of Oklahoma had a more efficient common school system than the two neighboring states of Arkansas and Missouri. Also during this time the Indian school system was producing a graduate bilingual literacy rate that was almost 100%, which is significantly higher than literacy rates in the United States today (Reyhner & Eder, 1989).

### History of Indian Education

The history of the relationship between American Indians and the US education system has been well documented (Havighurst, 1972; Haymond, 1982; Lomawaima, 1994; Szasz, 1974, 1988; Wright, 1985, 1988; Wright & Tierney, 1991). These studies establish that American Indian students and the communities they originate from have historically been subjected to numerous oppressive and discriminatory policies within the higher educational system, many of which continue today. Unfortunately, a majority of these studies have themselves added a layer of discrimination by the silencing, dismissal, elimination, or isolation of an American Indian female voice.

Within a decade of the first permanent English settlement at Jamestown, plans were underway for an Indian college. Similar designs and plans continued periodically throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Indian education offered the impetus for establishing and maintaining some of the US's most prestigious and enduring institutions of higher education, such as the universities of Harvard, Dartmouth, and William and Mary.

Caleb Cheeshateaumuck, an Algonquian male from Martha's Vineyard, graduated from Harvard College, class of 1665. An outstanding scholar, Caleb could read, write, and speak Latin and Greek as well as English, not to mention his own native language. Although fully able to meet Harvard's rigorous academic demands, the young native scholar did not escape the dangers associated with life in an alien environment. He died within months of his college degree, victim of a foreign disease to which he had no immunity. (Wright, 1988, p. 158)

The founding of Dartmouth was the work of Eleazar Wheelock with the assistance of his Mohawk student, Samson Occom. In 1766 Wheelock sent Occom to England to raise money for the founding of Dartmouth College, expressing the purpose of the institution for the education of Indian youth. The Dartmouth charter clearly states this

intention, “for the education and instruction of youth of the Indian Tribe...Christianizing Children of the pagans...and also of English youth and others” (Reyhner & Eder, 1989, pp. 20-22).

Regardless of the stated intent, the money gathered was never used for the education of young Indian men, instead the university became the domain of the sons of the powerful White leaders of the community. Mission statements of various other colonial institutions of higher education also included provisions for the education of young male Indians, however, females, Native and non-native both, were excluded and frequently expressly prohibited from attaining an college education.

In the rare instances where women were provided a higher education, the degree and schooling was segregated from male studies, and focused on inquiry that was classified as social or domestic, rather than scientific. Many Euro-American males, especially those in positions of social influence and power were offended by the political power exercised by many American Indian women. This was especially true in the area of education. Women were acknowledged as the cultural brokers of the indigenous groups and were known for a nurturing educational style. The intent of the Euro-American education for American Indians was to accomplish total assimilation, and the method demanded, “the replacing of a peaceful, non-punitive, non-authoritarian social system wherein women would wield power by making social life easy and gentle with one based on child terrorization, male dominance, and submission of women to male authority” (Allen, 1992, p. 112).

Between the 1666 and 1930 few American Indian students tried to enroll in institutions of higher education. Although there were isolated instances of success, very

few found success in education. Universities failures to educate indigenous students was attributed to the student and the, "great resistance of Indian culture [to education], the conflicting values between white and Indian cultures, and the prevalent racial prejudice" (Szasz, 1990, p. 4). Even today, failure to persist is frequently attributed to limitations, both personal and cultural, of the student.

The basic premise of white education was for all persons to be assimilated into white middle class values and behaviors, which was antithetical to tribal desires to preserve some of their culture...This longstanding conflict of educational objectives was the primary impetus for the significant changes in Indian higher education. (Szasz, 1990, p. 31)

The educational-de-culturalization (reculturalization) process was designed to remove American Indians from any aspects of their original culture (Bowker, 1993). Since the late 18th century, the US federal government has provided limited funds for Indian higher education. These funds were legitimized either by negotiating treaties with Indian tribes or passing congressional and legislative enactments. Ironically, few American Indians ever received any noticeable benefits from these appropriations.

Prior to late in the 19th Century Indian education usually fell under the watchful eye of various religious institutions, but with the increased separation of church and state in the post-Civil War years, the federal government began assuming most of the responsibility for Indian education (Smith, 1979). However, academic opportunities for both male and female Indian students were critically limited well into the 20th century. As late as 1932 there were only 395 Indian students enrolled nationally in institutions of higher learning, and only 52 college graduates could be identified (Wright, 1992). Almost all of the graduates identified were male.

By the 1950s for various reasons the doors of higher education were beginning to

open for all minorities, however, there remained a significant disparity for American Indian students. This was impacted by the fact that only five colleges nationwide offered any scholarships or funding for American Indian students. Further, American Indian women were virtually excluded from these as the wording indicated a preference for male students.

In 1952, with the establishment of the Higher Education Grant Program and benefits available under the GI Bill, American minority education saw its first substantial increase in enrollment into institutions of higher education. The GI Bill monies remained most beneficial for the male student, as the participation in the armed forces was predominantly male.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs education data indicates that by the late 1950's American Indian enrollments in institutions of higher education had risen to approximately 2,000 students, or an increase of 175% over enrollments documented the previous decade. Although both male and female enrollment continued to climb, degree completions did not increase at an equal rate (Tierney, 1992).

In the 1960's, several societal conditions created opportunities for major changes in American Indian higher education. Many American Indians, encouraged by the civil rights movements in other communities, began voicing their dissatisfaction with the education provided by the states, federal government, and private agencies. As Szasz states, "The 1960's witnessed the beginning of self-determination in Indian education" (Szasz, 1974, p. 156). National data compiled during the Kennedy Administration indicated that American Indians were the most underrepresented group in higher education and were shown to have the highest attrition rate of all minorities within the

US. While much has been done to combat this, it constitutes a problem that continues today (Astin, 1982).

In 1961 Indian enrollment continued to increase and there was a total enrollment of 2,400 American Indians in post-secondary programs nationally. However, only 66 American Indians completed the requirements for a bachelor degree in this same period.

Throughout the following decade enrollment continued to increase and by 1966, American Indian enrollments had risen more than 200% over the 1935 rates (Tierney, 1991). Unfortunately, program completion rates and enrollment into graduate programs continued to lag behind. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, of the total fall 1970 enrollment in graduate programs, American Indians still remained less than .01 of one percent.

The late 1970s and early 1980s did usher in a period of higher awareness of the issues and problems associated with American Indian recruitment and retention into four year institutions. As available funding was increased during the seventies, enrollment and completions experienced a significant increase, and in 1979 1,539 American Indian scholars receiving their Bachelor Degrees and 434 received graduate degrees (Chronicle of Higher Education 2001 Almanac).

By 1990 American Indian females were entering college at a higher rate than their male cohort. This higher enrollment rate for American Indian females is remarkable, since American Indian students represent the only ethnic group in which females drop out from high school more often than males (National Education Association, 1991).

Over the past 500 years many policies have developed that have changed the relationship between American Indians and the public school system. Education policy

has swung like a pendulum from assimilation to exclusion and back to assimilation again. As Dr. Bea Medicine states, “Cultural change, to become assimilated or, at least acculturated to the dominant society has been the basis for an educational system for all Native groups” (Medicine, p 94). Although significant amounts of data has been compiled on this issue, little consensus has been gained and there remains significant differing opinions of the degree of inclusion or assimilation that is faced by American Indians in attempting to attain a terminal degree.

### Education in Two Different Worlds

The central foundation of all US public education was to assimilation or deculturized all non-English populations. For American Indian communities this included the forced replacement of their traditional family structure, gender roles, child-rearing practices, sexual attitudes, economic relationships, and governmental organization.

Education and child-rearing attitudes were significantly different between the Euro-American-English system and American Indian customs. The Amer-European-English church and school emphasized discipline, authority of the father or ruling male, and memorization of rote information. The school and church believed that it was important to “break the will of the child” to assure the obedience to, in ascending order; the mother, father, government, church, and god (Spring, p. 16).

The indulgence and status that American Indians dealt their children appalled the Puritanical New England colonist. For the Protestant system, dominance, control and corporal punishment were important “acts of love” in the civic process to produce a responsible citizen. This administrative philosophy of corporal repression was promoted

and continued throughout the history of American education for the Indian student. Because of the belief in the superiority of the English tradition and policy, it was difficult for educators embedded in the Amer-European system to acknowledge the proficiency of, or even existence of, a successful indigenous education system. However, American Indians did have a historically successful system that had for millennia created viable, socially responsible citizens that were culturally competent. One problem for the dominant society was that this American Indian education did not take place in the physical confines of a building, did not use authoritarian teachers, and relied heavily on oral history. Therefore it did not conform to the Amer-European paradigm of a functional or “real” education.

As with many small scale societies the pre-contact American Indian education system encouraged all adults to act in some way, as instructional professionals. This system allowed for the selection and training of adults who then facilitated a seamless transfer from student to competent social actors. In one way or another all adults became integrated into the social and economic life of the tribe, which is not to say that all members held equal or uncontested status. As Dr. Bea Medicine asserts, “The politics of social capital and power are elements that are forever, and have forever been present in Native social systems”(Medicine, p. 14).

Within the Protestant based educational system the focus was on what has become known as the “Protestant work ethic”. This ethic stresses the importance of solitary individualism, hard work, the accumulation of property, and devotion to church and state. In contrast, many Native societies placed a high social status on community identity, divesting of personal material goods, responsibility to a personal spirituality and

cooperation and sharing within their communities.

It was equally troubling to the male dominated US power structure that American Indian women were often accorded varying degrees of shared voice with the men in their communities. Therefore to become civilized, American Indian communities were required to be completely restructured. Unfortunately, based on skin color, even those communities that converted were segregated from Amer-European societies and placed into what were known as “praying towns” (Spring, p. 11).

Despite the provisions of the First Amendment, which calls for a separation of church and state, the provisions of the Civilization Act subsidized Protestant missionary work within the American Indian communities. As Amer-European settlers moved into the western lands the attempts to “civilize” (Christianize and subdue) the indigenous tribes accelerated. Removal of Indian children from their cultural residency base had been suggested as early as the late 1700s, but did not become federal policy until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This removal was inherent in the education provision within the Fort Laramie Treaty (Reyhner & Eder, 1992). The embodiment of this policy was found in the founder of the Carlisle Indian School, Richard Pratt. Pratt attacked the tribal way of life as socialistic and antithetical to the goals of “capitalistic civilization.” It was Richard Pratt that promoted the concept and philosophy that, “to save the child, you must kill the Indian”.

Between 1879 and 1905, 25 off-reservation schools were opened. The physical location of the stated “off-reservation” is important because of the mission of the program was to separate Indian children from their families and culture. The off-reservation boarding schools created a legacy of abuse that continues to haunt native

communities into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The boarding schools were predominantly, “penal institutions where little children were sentenced to hard labor for a term of years to expiate the crime of being born of their [Indian] mothers” (Szasz, 1974, p. 22). Inherent in all educational efforts by the federal government was a missionary zeal to force assimilation of Indian people into the dominant society (Boyer, 1989).

For many years, the limited or virtual non-participation of Indian adults in mainstream American post secondary education was the rule and not the exception. Olivas observes that, “Attempts to provide post secondary education to American Indian adults can be summarized as being a pattern of majority dominance, paternalism, religious evangelism, and neglect” (Olivas, 1981, p 134). Eventually change in traditional American Indian ways of educating their youth did come about, and the Native populations, through acquiescence or intimidation, adapted to the educational methods promoted by the US government.

### Demographics of Indian Higher Education

Programs ranging from the GI Bill to Indian scholarships and fellowships and an increased emphasis placed on higher education by tribal governments allowed an increasing flow of American Indian students to test their success in institutions of higher education. This is an extremely encouraging trend, but when compared to the increases in university enrollment and graduation rates currently documented for Latinos, African American, Pacific Islanders and Asians, American Indians continue to exhibit a drop-out or “failure to persist” level that is greater than all of their non-Indian cohorts. The current state of Indian education is evident in the following statistics: (a) only 9% of American

Indian adults have completed four years of college compared to 20% for the total U.S. population, (b) 53% of American Indian students enrolled in colleges/universities leave after their first year, (c) 25% complete their college degree program, and (d) American Indians have the longest time lapse from baccalaureate degree to doctorate (14 years) compared to all races (American Indian Research Opportunities, 1993).

The National Center for Educational Research reports that as of the fall of 2003, over 130,000 American Indian students were enrolled in America's institutions of higher education. This center also indicates that slightly over 59% of these currently enrolled post secondary students are women, which is a 97% increase over the female enrollment in 1970. Although women currently attain the majority of undergraduate degrees received by American Indians, completion numbers still do not equal improvement when compared to enrollment numbers.

The National Center for Educational Research (NCER), reports that American Indians continue to have the lowest degree attainment ratios of any ethnic population within the US. Statistics from NCER indicate that when examining attainment rates beyond the Associate or Bachelors degree level, the numbers of American Indians completing Masters Degrees and higher have remained virtually unchanged over the past 20 years. They also indicate that as of the fall 2000 there were only 2,130 self-identified American Indian candidates enrolled in PhD programs within the US.

### Barriers to Higher Education

In the 1930's male American Indian students, slowly began to enter and explore the domain of higher education. By the 1950s both male and female American Indian

students were trickling into higher education. This inclusion of America's first citizens into an arena that is strongly disposed toward the dominant culture represents a modern social movement. A majority of these students reported then, and continue to report, that they must contend with a multitude of adverse social conditions and cultural issues while attempting to empower themselves and their home communities through expanded educational opportunities. As a collective group, American Indian students epitomize a catalyst of change in Indian lives, federal policy, and social issues that effect Indian communities.

Numerous studies have been conducted to provide documentation that illustrates the difficulties and barriers that have burdened and continue to inhibit American Indian educational success (Astin, 1996; Benjamin, Chambers & Reiterman, 1984; Duda, 1987; Ogbu, 1978, 1982, 1985, 1987; Tierney, 1991, 1992, 1995). The largest portion of this data has focused on those barriers that restrict entrance and completion. The examination of these, "known barriers to completion," comprises a major theme of scholarship in American Indian educational research. Most commonly documented barriers include, but are not limited to: poor preparation at the secondary level; lack of personal motivation; lack of defined goals; economic difficulties; perceived low value on education by self; lack of family or community support for education and the result of education; different cultural values; and community/family separation anxiety. Although not specifically cultural, retention specialists and retention studies continue to indicate that one of the primary barriers to success remains a critical lack of funding (Bowker, 1993; Carroll, 1978; Dehyle, 1989; Falk & Aitken, 1987; Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Lin, 1985, 1990).

Similarly, Indian students have historically experienced conditions such as high drop-out or push-out rates of 10%-30%, lower than national average movement through curricula, poverty, and language barriers—all of which tend to limit participation of American Indians in postsecondary education. In addition to financial hardships and cultural differences, "the nature and quality of previous education, discrimination, and the lack of role models are problems to post-secondary student dropout" (McDonald, 1978, p. 73).

Based on statistics provided by the Congressional Information Services of the US Department of Education, 75% of the American Indian students who enter an institution of higher education fail to complete the requirements for a bachelor's degree within 10 years of initial entrance. Slightly over 70% depart prior to the completion of their first semester.

Older female American Indian students indicate that for them both age and gender present a number of challenges. Boyer reveals that many older American Indian female graduates indicate that they had to relearn basic academic skills in situations where they had not performed any study since high school (Boyer, 1987). Primary in this concern were those knowledge areas in the hard sciences centered around math and science. Conversely, many of these same American Indian female college graduates indicated that they felt their age and gender provided certain life skills and characteristics that enabled them to overcome the obstacles of poverty, poor academic preparation, and family responsibilities. Maturity and life experiences were seen as important positive factors in most of these student's perceptions of their educational success.

### Unique Considerations for Women in Higher Education

According to the seminal Sadkers gender studies, the European concept of the negative affect of education on the female reproductive potential extended from the time of Aristotle into the 20th century. Aristotle believed that allowing women to learn to read, write or analyze would lead to their becoming infertile and in Aristotle's words, without worth to their fathers and husbands. Since public education in the US can trace its formal foundations backwards to England then to Greece, it cannot escape the internal patriarchal domination of women. Euro-western society, which was male-dominated, based the hierarchical structure on a replication of the ideal family and community which was patriarch-based. Women in this system were considered property of their father or husband, and existed to provide care, comfort and children, preferably male (Hubbard, 2001).

Institutions of higher education responded to these philosophies and the resulting policies limited female education in various restrictive ways. For example, the history of Stanford University's admission policy indicates that prior to 1960s women were only admitted on a quota basis. Policy restricted entry to one woman admitted for every 20 males.

Prior to 1950 many Ivy League universities restricted women's access to sporting events, libraries, and to specific events. Access was allowed only when escorted by an appropriate male chaperone or escort. In a large part, as a result of women entering the work force during the deployment of men during World War II, women began demanding a greater degree of autonomy, freedom and independence. Change was not immediate and continuing widespread gender-based discrimination effectively eliminated

any minority female acceptance into many institutions of higher education. Moreover, for American Indian women the process has been complicated by being a double minority.

Data on American Indian women who are successful in the academic pursuit of the bachelor degree indicate they are, on average, significantly older than their non-native cohort. According to the Center for Educational Statistics, the average American Indian college graduate today is; female, 35 years old, and the single parent of three children. These women, on average, have started and withdrawn from their university programs an average of seven times over 10 years (Havighurst, 1972; Tierney, 1992; Wetsit, 1999). During their educational careers most American Indian female graduates have also worked full-time, experienced the responsibilities of parenthood, and understood the advantages of post-secondary education. In university exit interviews they state that they knew what was needed to get a better job and realized the improved financial status and increased feeling of self-worth that comes with acquisition of skills and/or knowledge not possessed by their peers (Aitken, 1982; Tierney, 1992).

Based on student perception studies, altruistic employment goals are indicated as a strong motivation for a majority of American Indian students, especially the female students. The national data also shows that a substantial number of American Indian college graduates are not only parents, but most indicate a career plan to return home with their families to live and work on their home reservations (Bataille, & Sands, 1984). Both American Indian men and women show greater percent of “responsibility to community” when questioned about higher education motivation. For many American Indians, concept of self is rooted in a sense of moral connection to community and a deeply held concept of responsibility to their home communities (Huffman, 1998).

Between 1990 and 2000 associate degrees earned by American Indian women rose by 13.6%, Bachelor's degrees rose 9.0%, Master's degrees rose 20.6%, and PhDs rose .8%. (American Council on Education, 2000). Despite the significance of these figures, it is apparent that American Indian females continue to drop out at greater rates than their non-native cohorts. Many of these American Indian women indicate that they feel that the social and academic culture at a predominantly Amer-European university is distinctly alien and unfriendly. They have also indicated that they feel the subtle message that they are receiving from their non-Indian cohort, professors and administrators is one of not belonging at the university and not being capable of the required work (Hoover & Jacobs, 1992). As one student reported, "When I asked for assistance from my professor, he told me not to worry about the class, I was doing good—for an Indian" (Taylor, personal communication, 1989). Many American Indian students report that the message they receive is sometimes subtle, but clear: "you are not capable and not welcome here."

Frequently, these women face equal misunderstanding and resistance to their academic goals within their home communities. Lena Sooktis states, "My family thinks that a woman is supposed to be able to stay home, take care of their kids, and take care of the household, and to be able to carry on what they learned from their mother" (Wall, 1989, p. 56). Additionally, it is frequently observed that Indian students, like other ethnic minorities, "have developed an insecurity and ambivalence about the value of their own cultural identity as a result of their interactions with the dominant [society]" (Cummins, 1989, p. 112). Many students of color who attend senior institutions indicate that they feel that they are typically faced with the choice of either assimilation, cultural pluralism, or separation (Brodkin, 2001). Additionally, female Indian students (including potential

students and former students) feel they are confronted with a difficult decisions about their perceptions of what a post-secondary experience is or should be.

Clearly, the academic and non-academic needs for American Indian female students are as diverse as the students themselves. The issues faced by Indian college students today are also found in the general American Indian and Alaskan Native population. Some of the more pressing concerns are self-esteem, self-image, abuse and neglect, suicide, substance abuse, assessment, and, community/school relations (Wetsit, 1994). All of these contribute to retention and completions issues faced by American Indian women.

Research indicates that American Indian women in higher education are confronted with a plethora of self-limiting barriers, including psychological issues such as fear of failure; fear of success; frustration; uncertainty; negative peer pressure; fear of community consequences when returning home; low preparatory skills; anxiety; feelings of loss of balance in life; self-doubt; racism; gender discrimination and sociological economical issues including transportation; housing difficulties; financial burdens around self and extended families; negative influences from friends or relatives; and domestic difficulties ( Brown, 1981). Women in post-bachelor programs tend to feel more alienated from the system than their male cohort and see the process as peripheral to the important issues of their lives...female minority status, can exasperates this alienation .

## CHAPTER 3

## RESEARCH PROCEEDURES

This study is descriptive in nature and utilizes an analysis of both survey and personal face-to-face interview data. Gay asserts “A descriptive study determines and reports the way things are. One common type of descriptive research involves assessing attitudes or opinions towards individuals, organizations, events or procedures” (Gay, 1981, p. 8).”

Survey instrument distribution was limited to those American Indian women who have successfully completed the requirements for a terminal degree. The respondents were solicited in three ways. Initial contacts were made through face-to-face contacts at the American Indian and Alaskan Native Professors’ annual conference and that organization’s list serve. A second set of surveys were administered by referral from participants who had already replied. Finally, site visits and face-to-face interviews were conducted at universities that have a reputation for their American Indian Studies programs and inclusion of American Indian faculty. Significant assistance was given by the administrative staff and director’s office at the University of New Mexico.

The battery of questions on the survey instrument was divided into two separate batteries (see Appendix A). The first category in the survey was created to assess demography and educational background information and was also divided into two separate criteria. The Tinto Model indicates that students who are not English as a first language are at an additional disadvantage over those who are seemingly more vested in the dominant language, therefore, the first question concentrated on the language spoken

as a first language and additional languages if any. This section of the first battery also requested information on the respondent's educational history, including pre-university schooling, attendance at a tribal college if any, universities attended, area of study as an undergraduate, area of study as a graduate and dissertation area and title.

The Tinto Model also states that a student's perception of the distance the cultural norms and values accepted within their community of origin's falls from the accepted norms of mainstream society, indicates the probability that student will find success at the university level. Based on key categories as identified by Tinto, the respondents were asked to share their personal perceptions of the barrier to their success each of these categories posed to them as an individual. The Tinto Model is plagued by a lack of depth in its analysis and definition of the cultural dimensions and diversity found in all cultural communities, and specifically those inherent to American Indian communities. It is implied in the Tinto Model that American Indian culture is first; universal and homogenous, and second; that culture can be set in stone both in time and in personal perception. Therefore key categories presented to respondents were designed to be undefined and open-ended. All respondents were allowed to utilize personal definitions for key terms and respond in whatever manner they felt appropriate.

A total of 71 surveys were distributed through face-to-face encounters, via internet connection and referral and by mail. Of the 71 distributed, 31 were returned for a 44% completion rate.

All human research procedures, as defined by MSU-Bozeman university policy, were strictly adhered to and participant anonymity was guaranteed. Specific information provided in survey and interview that would potentially indicate specific respondents,

i.e.: committee member names, was not included within the text to protect requested confidentiality. Within the survey instrument was the request for permission to contact for clarification if needed. Fully 100% of the respondents agreed to additional contact.

## CHAPTER 4

## FINDING AND ANALYSIS

Respondent inclusion in this study is based on self-identification as American Indian and/or acceptance by a peer cohort as being part of an American Indian community. Based on the controversial nature of American Indian identity issues, which are peripheral to this study, no attempt was made to verify tribal enrollment status.

The following discussion provides detailed findings of survey results. The results are summarized based on the format of the questionnaire. Although credit should be given to these exceptional women and their stories, actual names of the respondents are deliberately not used to correlate responses to individuals. This is done out of respect to anonymity of the respondents. Instead an alphanumeric identifier, with the letter “R” for respondent followed by a number ranging from 1-31, was used as a generic label for the organization of categorization of individual response from both surveys and interviews.

Barriers of Respondents

The most frequently cited problem for Indian female students was the lack of funding or economical financial difficulties. Family issues rank second; issues ranged from social, political, community issues to the aforementioned economic difficulties. A majority of the entering students also came from lower economic regions, which negatively impacts the school system’s ability to provide the highest level of preparation. Lack of adequate preparation—both academically and socially—led to student frustration

and early exits at all levels from of education from secondary through the terminal degree.

#### The importance of native languages

Among the respondents, 91% stated that they were raised in homes where English was the first and primary language. English was the only language spoken among 20% of these women. Of the 9% who were raised in households where English was not the primary language, there was a diversity of indigenous languages spoken. These included: Lakota; Cherokee with English; Blackfeet; Cheyenne; and Dine'. Those women who stated that they had non-English first or primary languages also indicated that they were exposed to English while growing up. They further stated that most a more important issue with language is the necessary competency of English, not the acquisition of it as a second language. Slightly over 70% of the respondents indicated varying degrees of competency in non-English second languages ranging from fully competent to limited. Of the second languages spoken the most common was Spanish with five respondents indicating Spanish as their second language. Following Spanish with at least two respondents indicating it as their second language are: Cherokee; English; Dine'; Tewa; and French. Those languages indicated as second language by only one respondent were; Tewa, Dakota, Nokma, Oneida, German, Ojibwa, Cree, and Russian.

#### Educational histories

A majority of the respondents received their primary and secondary education some distance from their Indian reservations/communities. Approximately 70.7%

indicated that prior to college they attended school off reservation or away from the community they identify with. Roughly 22% received the majority of their primary education on their reservation, and 7.1% were educated at a border town. Border towns are specified as any town located off reservation, but within 25 miles of the reservation border. One of the respondents indicated that although she was in fact educated on a reservation, it not her reservation of enrollment or cultural affiliation. (her father was a medical professional working for the Indian Health Service and was frequently transferred to reservations other than where he and his family was enrolled.)

Among the respondents, 91% received all of their post secondary education at mainstream, predominantly Amer-European institutions of higher learning. However, 9% did indicate some attendance at a tribal college before attending the mainstream institutions. All of these indicated that they chose the tribal college based on smaller class size, more intense interaction with instructors, and proximity to their tribal communities.

Although disciplines were widespread, the majority (15) of bachelor degrees were attained in those disciplines that are perceived as altruistic: education and health sciences. Other areas of study included: chemistry (3); Letters and Science (2); English (2); History (2); Anthropology/Sociology (2); Music (1); Biology (1); Zoology (1); and Math (1). Universities that the respondents attended were equally widespread with only the states of Oklahoma, Arizona and New Mexico indicating more than one student.

Approximately 50% of the terminal degrees were awarded at four institutions. These were The University of New Mexico (4), University of Oklahoma (4), University of Arizona (3) and Penn State (2).

Terminal degrees were also awarded across a wide swath of degree options and

concentrations. However, fully one third of the terminal degrees were under the umbrella of Education, and include: Adult and Higher Education (3); Administration & Policy Analysis; Technology; School Counseling; General Education; General Administration; Leadership and Policy; Higher Education Administration; Adult and Community Education; and Administration. Other degrees options were: Psychology; American Studies (2); Anthropology; History; Health and Human Science; Social Work; Chemistry; Sociology; Biological Chemistry; and Law – both practice and teaching.

Seventy-eight percent of the respondents were first-generation university graduates; although several indicated that their children and younger siblings followed them through the process. One woman indicated that she received her hooding at the same ceremony where one of her children received a Master's degree and another received their Bachelor of Science. In addition to being first-generation students, many of the women frequently indicated that they were the first member of their families to attain a Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate degree. Three women were the first woman in their communities to attain a Doctorate degree.

For the 22% that were not first-generation students, the majority indicated that it was their mother that held a degree and encouraged them to pursue a terminal degree.

The degree held by these mothers was usually a degree in education.

- My mother has a degree in education. (R5)
- My mother and all three of her siblings have Bachelor degrees.(R7)
- My mother has a teaching degree. (R14)
- My mother has two degrees in education.( R14)
- My mother has her Bachelor's degree in elementary education.(R26)

Respondent, R26 indicated that along with her mother's degree in education, her father was a medical doctor (surgeon). Another respondent, R2, said that one of her

uncles not only had a degree in medicine, but was the first person to receive a medical degree from his community and also the first American Indian to complete the medical program at the university he attended. Some respondents, such as R2 and R7, both had strong and apparently positive family histories with higher education as they stated that parents and all of their parent's siblings had completed degrees. Both R18's mother and father had university degrees, her mother was an RN and her father had a degree in history. She also stated that all her siblings also have completed degree in higher education including, her brothers; with one BS in computer science the other a Certified Public Accountant and her sister holding an elementary education degree.

#### Personal and Family Information

The respondents of this study were equally divided between those who were 25-35 years of age at the completion of their degree, and those over 35 years of age at completion. The largest percentage of these women were married at the inception of their program and divorced during the process (39%). Thirty-six were married without change during the process. Twenty five percent began and remained single throughout the process.

Only six of the respondents did not have children during the educational process. Slightly over 59% of the children were either late high school-aged or adult at the time of completion of their mother's degree. The remaining children were of school age, eighth grade or lower. Approximately 10% had children below the age of five. Of those respondents with children under the age of five, most were either pregnant at the beginning of the program or had a child less than one year of age when admitted to their

program. These figures corresponded with the above/below 35 years of age category.

The second half of the survey instrument was crafted to determine successful American Indian women's perceptions of issues that are inherent to the Tinto model of cultural continuity and discontinuity. The women were asked to respond in their own words, and provide responses based on the directions as stated in the questionnaire:

Please consider the following categories. Please identify and briefly describe something or someone specific from each that contributed to the successful completion of your degree. Please feel free to be as brief or expansive as you feel is necessary.

The categories presented for evaluation were: Cultural; Academic; Institutional; Economic/Financial; Emotional; Influential person/people; what do you feel was the most significant element to your success, what advice would you like to give to other American Indian women who are seeking a terminal degree and finally, do you have any additional comments?

These categories are based on responses received, and each respondent had individualized concepts of what each category indicated to them. The greatest individual interpretation and overlap was between academic and institutional categories, although cultural and emotional also received overlap and repetition of answers.

### Cultural

The Tinto Model suggests that it is the way in which a student, minority or otherwise, perceives their experiences within the university community that will determine their persistence and success. The model suggests that all students entering the university pass through a three stage process, where the student must move from outside the borders of the university's social arena, towards an eventual incorporation at the

center of the social and academic community.

The Tinto Model adopts a reductionist position that creates a singular homogenous American Indian identity and cultural expression. This essentialist philosophy ignores the vast differences and diversity present within and between American Indian communities and societies. The model first identifies some master feature projected within the social manifestations of American Indian society and then reduces all variation into these limited and refined features. Placing an overarching focus on shared traits obliterates all variance of voice within American Indian culture or the, “constant intra-group polarities” (Medicine p.6) that function in American Indian communities. In reality American Indian inter and intra tribal politics and social action are seldom homogenous or without conflict. As one study respondent indicated,

The most emotionally damaging aspect of the process—finding that the other American Indian students—who should have been more supporting to each other—were more competitive than any non-Indians. When they found each other they went “tribal” and would fight and argue, especially over who was “more Indian” and “right.” Indian politics always came up! Indian politics are always very stormy and fraught with *Jealously* (respondents emphasis).

Due to the rigidity of the Tinto Model, the university culture shift is perceived as significantly more difficult for the American Indian student because, as the theory postulates, routine life in minority communities is often so different from the values and norms that are projected within the university community. It is the difference in these values sets and mores that makes the transition “more difficult and potentially creating a negative personal assessment of the university” (Huffman, 1992, p. 2).

The Tinto Model also has considerable limitations in the area of cultural applicability. It does not provide adequate information as to why the American Indian’s transition is more “treacherous and potentially negative” than it is for those of the

mainstream society or other minorities.

It has been documented by social scientists that community life represents the primary cultural socialization influence on a person (Tinto, 1988; Tonnie, 1988). This documentation allows many researchers of the American Indian academic process to accept that the Tinto Model has a degree of intuitive sense. But as Tierney (1992) clearly points out, there is no significant empirical documentation to determine that a shift in community equals a shift in cultural. The assumption that community life is directly linked to individual college recidivism among American Indians has rarely been examined, (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Huffman, 1992; Lin, 1985, 1990).

Perhaps the most limiting factor in the application of the Tinto Model is the lack of acknowledgement of the primary question of the concept of boundedness versus boundlessness of culture (Bhabha, 1994). As many post-colonial, post-modern borderland studies have indicated, all identities are multi-dimensional and multi-positional. This contested space becomes elaborated for those who reside in cross cultural regions of power and action. As Guha, Appadurai, Foucault, and others have concluded, as a person crosses the borderland of culture and enters a new social arena, the projection of power and identity always necessitates a renegotiation of power. However, the renegotiation would not necessarily be greater across cultures than within a culture as all positions are negotiated.

Perhaps a greater problem is created in the reductionist stance that Tinto produces. A number of the PhDs surveyed indicated that one of the most disappointing features they faced in higher education was the continuing perspective and promotion of the, "three costume kit" Indian population. This suggests that the only American Indian

culture(s) is/are: Northern Plains; Iroquois; or Apache. At best these are generic archetypes. Even today, many if not most, primary through post-secondary texts fail to represent the existence of a culturally diverse contemporary American Indian society. Many non-Native professors continue to perpetuate false ideas about indigenous cultures. There is a general tendency to continue to promote reductionism that creates a monoculture for American Indian history and contemporary students. By not addressing the differences between: reservation /non-reservation, male/female, traditional/non-traditional, ceremonially grounded/non-ceremonially grounded, Christian/non-Christian, or cultural areas of origin, the Tinto Model also falls prey to this same reductionism.

Many of the American Indians in this study who responded indicated that they felt that being culturally-vested and grounded only assisted their progress, and that becoming culturally competent in the university community did not indicate a loss of culture or assimilation. They also indicated that during their journey they learned to define and eventually accept what they felt were “irrational” acts of the university community and dominant culture. Several stated that one of their strategies for success was the ability to develop self-understanding and a cross-cultural competency that allows them to operate on a multi-vocalic stage.

Most of the American Indian female PhDs surveyed perceived themselves as multicultural with a strong indigenous identity and cultural foundation. They do acknowledge that in many situations they have feelings of being “encapsulated” within the dominant society and university culture, but that only strengthened their desires to perform competently in their own individual communities. Much of their personal reflection on their success is attributed to perfecting those particular skills and practices

that the higher education community demands in order to master the skill repertoires that are academically and socially required to acquire the elusive “terminal degree.”

According to the Tinto Model, culturally traditional minority candidates feel a fear that approaches apraxia, that success in higher education indicates acculturation and assimilation which demands their complete surrender of cultural values, morals, and community involvement. As PhD R29 states, “I have spoken to many other Indian students who feel that the institution is equivalent to ‘Auschwitz by anomie.’ However, she said that she did not fall victim to this, as she continued to be involved and integrated in her own community and ceremonial schedule. Community acceptance and support is often tantamount to success as cultural dissonance is a very private problem that frequently demands a public resolution.

Many respondents also acknowledge that some or much of their strength comes from overcoming being born into an alien culture that is submerged in poverty. This is remarkable in that contemporary economic systems theory indicates that the “American Culture of Poverty” generally produces low self-esteem, self-deflation, and self-depreciation. Again these respondents indicate that experiencing the American Indian community value set that places a higher value on position within the community than on accumulation of monetary goods gave them the security to strive for their personal concept of academic and personal success.

Environmental scientist, Deanna Benally, indicated that she suffered a great deal of personal discomfort and cultural alienation and discontinuity when she first attended the university. As a child she had learned from her grandmother how to pray to make it rain. However:

At school I learned that there are actual cloud formations and particular seasons in the southwest when rain is expected. But all my life I believed that it rained whenever you prayed. It has been a challenge for me to let go of the prayers and traditions that I have been taught. I wondered, how could I tell my grandmother that the white people are saying that it doesn't rain because of her prayers that it rains because of the cloud formations the time of year? (SACNAS News, p. 2).

Ultimately it was her grandmother's acceptance and support of her education that provided understanding that both concepts could exist simultaneously, if in different spheres of influence.

However, there is also evidence that indicates community acceptance and support is a significant precursor to success. Therefore, culturally diverse people must strive to redefine success and excellence. Dr. Steve Byers (Cherokee) states that;

There can be a major assault on identity when an indigenous student ventures into higher education...the dominant model for excellence is a Euro-centric, patriarchal, competitive, individualistic focus on career and the service of and to self. Excellence is not defined in terms of the communal or collectivist values that many of us are raised with. In fact, our research shows that for indigenous students, higher education and the choice of discipline and future careers are frequently couched in terms of service to community, instead of service to self. (Spring, 2001 p. 12).

Several of the professionals contacted for this study indicated that their pre-university education, especially within cultural context, was at best frequently one of benign neglect. This neglect results in students entering the postsecondary system ill-prepared. This demanded additional discipline and in some cases remediation, but no one indicated that it was overwhelming or a significant deterrent when placed beside the focus they had on their goals. The women respondents indicated that they felt they were successful, not only by becoming a successful university student, but also by remaining culturally competent. No PhD indicated that they felt a loss of culture or cultural competency by becoming successful at the advanced degree level.

According to these women, Tinto, Tierney and others are correct stating that the amount of importance that a person's family places on education and the amount of support given is vital aspect to their success. The importance these American Indian women placed on the extended family, especially the powerful, positive influence of the grandparent is perhaps one of the greatest differences between the American Indian and non-native student.

In a previous gender-focused study completed at MSU-Bozeman in 1998 (Taylor, 1998) the majority of the Amer-European traditional-aged students indicated little or no direct interaction with grandparents as a motivating factor in college. For the American Indian students, however, many credited the influence of grandparents as a major motivational and cultural source of grounding.

The value and importance of the family/extended family is one of the commonly accepted values in many American Indian communities that is significantly different from a majority of the dominant mainstream culture. On average, mainstream American society tends to place a high philosophical value on the nuclear family. In the 1998 undergraduate teaching fellowship study compiled in conjunction with MSU-Bozeman's School of Letters and Science Communications class, students were asked to define their concept of "immediate" family. An overwhelming 92% indicated that "family" included male head of household, female head of household, and the children that reside with them. Mother/Father categories were frequently contested, primarily because of the number of students today that live in conditions that result from the above 50% divorce rates seen in the US today. Therefore there was a high ratio indicating that one parent in their household was a step-parent. This breakdown of the traditional family also created a

situation where grandparents are not seen as “immediate” family. Cousins, by and large, were not recognized as “real” relatives other than in the sense that they are in some way, genetically related.

This is not the perception with most American Indian students interviewed, including the women in this study. A number of these respondents indicated that they had lived at sometime, or were raised by **grandparents**. This phenomenon is not unusual in American Indian society and according to the United States Census Bureau, a higher proportion of minority children, than the national average live with grandparents as their primary caretakers (U.S. Department of the Census, March 2002).

Significant importance given to grandparents, parents and extended family by American Indian students was reported at all degree levels. As R12 replied, “I received my inspiration from my American Indian (Cherokee) grandparents who were very successfully, and showed me how it could be done.”

History has shown that the Cherokee and Choctaw were, as indigenous nations, progressive in their attempts to create an indigenous educational system that was successful in the terms of both worlds. Today the Mississippi Choctaw Nation is listed as having the highest graduation ratio, at all levels, of any group within the US.

Another woman, R6 stated, “I relied on the teachings, love, and encouragement from my Cheyenne grandfather, which he instilled in me as a child...also my Cheyenne cultural groundedness and identity.” **Strong cultural identity was not seen as a detriment for these women, but rather the mechanism to overcome a myriad of complex problems within the educational system.** Many of the respondents indicated the strong positive influence provided by grandparents and their cultural teachings provided a foundation for

success. The importance of the grandparent generation continues with responses such as R8 who says:

My grandparents raised me, therefore, I was brought up with traditional Blackfeet ways and ideals. My folks (grandparents) only spoke Blackfeet in the home, this concept was important, and I always valued it. Rather than seeing this as a problem for me, it was what gave me the strength to go on. I had a secure place, culture, home to seek strength from when things got tough.(R8)

Additionally, as R14 states,

My grandfather believed that as Indian people, we need to be educated in the Indian way and the white way, to have the best possible lives and culture, not only for ourselves, but for people. We are here, they are here, there is no getting around that, so lets do the best we can to provide for ourselves and our communities.

R-3 agrees and continues this theme,

The most important cultural element was my family's support and their encouragement. My grandma quit school in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade due to family obligation and my mom quit when she was 16 because she got pregnant and married. They (both) encouraged me to get an education so I could be strong for myself and my family.

Although a number of the respondents indicated the importance of grandparents other family, both immediate and extended, was also a common theme of encouragement and support. When respondents were asked to, "Please identify and briefly describe something or someone 'cultural' that contributed to the successful completion of your degree," and the response overwhelming turned to the importance of family. Parents and other family members and the importance placed on family alliances through ceremony and cultural events also played an important role. As R5 stated,

I could not have been successful without my family support and wisdom regarding the use of my gifts toward helping others. They encouraged me to give back to Indian communities through education and the skills it could give us. We participated in many cultural activities to strengthen our sense of self. This was continuous throughout my entire college experience, from undergraduate to

terminal degree. My family gave me a strong sense of cultural identity and purpose. Ceremony and prayer have played a big part or my success. It gave me a sense of foundation or grounding.

Other respondents continue and reinforce the importance of family;

- There are four things. Family, of course, my sense of Indian identity, prayer and ceremony. (R9)
- My parents insisted that I get an education. (R10)
- My parents, especially my father—who only completed grades 1-8—believed completely in education and what I was doing (R11)
- Immediate family support, both emotionally and spiritually. which is then also cultural.( R21)
- My mother’s influence and support sustained me.( R22)

A number of women alluded to, without specifying, that the cultural component is deeply embedded in their concept of family. Culture for the majority of the women who responded, is a priori to family. R12 was more specific about this cultural element, saying:

My cultural support came from my family’s support in caring for my children and the spiritual foundation that I got as a member of the Native American Church. Within the Church I participated in Educational ceremonies’ throughout the progress through my programs. I also found a great deal of social support within a close circle of American Indian friends whom I felt, understand me, what I was going through, and who I could socialize with in an “Indian” sort of way.

There remains in the discussion of higher education an historical reminder that the American Indian relationship with public education and federal policy cannot be ignored and continues to impact the student-institution relationship. Within the cultural category there is always a reminder—be it from parents, grandparents, or self—that American Indian students today have faced a cultural genocide. As R13 indicates:

My most important cultural element was the ability to participate in sweats, and to attend ceremonies. These important ceremonies were not even legal when I started my PhD I could not have done it (be successful) without the ability to meet medicine people from the plains, southwest and Amazon. While studying, I also met longhouse faith-keepers and more traditional people from my own tribe. This

support and contact gave me strength and here I am now. I hope that through processes like this survey, I can continue the process and assist other Indians, male and female.

One woman, R1, felt both connected and estranged from the core of her indigenous culture. Education at the university level was her gateway to those ceremonies and cultural manifestations that she felt were once lost to her. As she stated:

I had inspiration from Native American grandparents who ‘walked in two worlds’ very successfully, and also there was my own desire to regain connections with my native cultural roots through my research & experiences. Now I am trying to give back to American Indian communities through this research. This “giving back” is a constant motivation schemata in many research projects within American Indian communities.

Not all family was perceived as contributing or supportive for all respondents. For example, as R4 states,

While, my mother was very supportive, my dad was not supportive at all. He did not feel higher education was necessary for women. He was like many men his age in our community, who believed that a woman should be home taking care of her husband and babies.

Culture and language are closely related to the concepts of success. R2 organized a study group to teach other Cherokee students who did not know their ancestral language. She stated that, “

Teaching other Cherokee students who did not know their ancestral languages how to speak, read, and write Cherokee and Cherokee traditions was my cultural foundation and strength. It gave me a sense of giving back and kept me aware of my center in a society that makes many American Indians feel marginalized.

Many women remarked on the cultural importance of creating an American Indian cohort where none previously existed. For respondent R16 the ability to form a coalition with other American Indian students provided a degree of comfort and personal success. “I was able to join in a cohort for all of my graduate programs with other American Indian people. This made for a level of comfort that I appreciated and enjoyed

very much”. Another woman, R27, also found an important degree of support with her inclusion into a non-tribally specific American Indian cohort and the pan-Indian collaborations. “I found an inter-tribal group of graduate students, and graduates at my undergraduate university.”

A majority of the women interviewed indicated that embracing a sense of “Indianess” was both beneficial and supportive for them personally. Many acknowledged that their American Indian cohort seldom came from a unified tribal identity or even that same cultural region; therefore they found that creating a pan-Indian community was essential to finding a group identity that allowed what was seen as a relevant sub-culture to thrive. According to both Tijerina and Biemer, “Indian people do not speak with one voice any more than all America does, but being “Indian” gives many a sense of belonging to a greater whole” (Tijerina, p 89). This is supportive of the research done by Dr. Bea Medicine who has indicated that it is a failing of much indigenous research to assume a cohesive voice exists within Indian communities, much less between communities.

Various studies, (Astin, 1982; Bowker, 1993; Tijerina & Biemer, 1988). Indicate that while many American Indian women indicate that they feel a certain degree of marginality or social incongruence in most mainstream situations, being Indian provides a sense of belonging to greater whole. Conversely they also indicate that at the same time, “it also heightens sensitivity to being excluded (Tijerina & Biemer, p 89). This was also articulated by R24, who replied that:

Successfully completing my degrees depended on my knowledge of the dominant culture, not of my own. My own Indian culture contributed to obtaining my degree, in that my intent was to use the degree to help people from my culture who are oppressed by the dominant culture. My family has a long tradition of

resisting internalizing assimilation of the dominant culture. This particularly helped me to get through the process with clarity and focus. I knew I did not have to become one of them to succeed in their education.

Her feelings are representative of the desire and overwhelming need many respondents expressed to take the skills and knowledge gained at the university back to American Indian communities where it could be used to the benefit of all. Others responded much the same, in regards to the importance of giving back to their home or other Native communities. Altruistic goals were a commonly repeated theme across all categories, and especially the cultural category.

- I had to think of the needs of my community. (R17)
- I had a strong sense of wanting to give back to American Indian communities. I was very interested in developing tribal communities and literature about politics, culture, and economics as seen through American Indian perspective. ( R23)
- Interest in my people's involvement in this as topic unfolded, aunts who sewed for me, gave me towels, underwear, etc. all of the time. (R19)

One of the tenets of the colonial concepts of education was that American Indians were savages. As savages and as heathens it was agreed that if they should be allowed to continue to live exist in proximity to the Christian Anglo-Saxon ruling class they would require conversion to the Protestant Christian faith.

The Christianization process is another subject that creates a critical mass of interpretations. All agree that for many, conversion was both forced and resisted. This initially forced conversion is seen by some American Indian scholars as an indication of assimilation at its worst. However, other equally vested American Indians are emphatic that their strong Christian belief is not exterior to or in opposition to their "traditions." Rather they see their Christianity as an important element of their traditions. As one respondent indicated, her family had converted to Christianity over two hundred years ago. It must also be remembered that for members of some Indian communities,

especially those found along the eastern regions of the US, the Christian tradition is the only tradition remembered in some communities.

Additionally some respondents reflected on the importance of their spiritual base, but it was not possible to determine if their “spiritual” basis for success was based on a Christian philosophy or non-Christian tradition. R18 stated:

I tried to always remember that my plan is puny and my life plan is in the hands of my elders and the creator. I am just a tool in the hands of something greater, and I am only here to work towards accomplishing good things. Remembering to do my best and try to be happy.

A significant shortcoming of the Tinto Model is the assumption that all American Indian culture is homogenous and shares all key concepts. This became especially apparent when respondents were faced with the question of tradition. The problem of defining cultural tradition is one that frequently arises when American Indian culture is discussed. Many post-colonial, post-modern social scientists believe that by the very act of attempting to codify tradition with a specific form and set of expressions a situation is created where the living culture stagnates and in effect dies. Culture and tradition must remain fluid to be living.

Although a majority of the respondents credited their cultural background, traditions and spiritually as strong motivating factors to their success, this response was by no means universal. Another woman, R7, dismissed the cultural element with:

I received NO [SIC] cultural support – None. Unless you consider growing up in poverty – the culture of poverty, rural, economically depressed during the depression & WWII. This life gave me the desire to succeed. I saw college degrees as a way out of poverty and to be something better.

Respondent R7 was not the only women to not recognize any American Indian cultural support in their degree process. Respondents R15, R20, R26, and R31 all

indicated some level of cultural grounding, but perceived that academically their culture had, “none, little, or no impact on my studies.” R25, indicated that her concept of the cultural belief that sustained her and helped her in her terminal degree process was one that is voiced by many main-stream parents. “My family’s cultural belief was to work hard and to make something of your self. My mother promoted education as a way to succeed and insisted on our always doing our best.” In this context it was implicit that her desire to “make something of one’s self” followed what many would call the “American dream.”

### Academic

The academic arena is especially fraught with difficulties for many American Indian women, both in cultural and gender based discourse. The seminal Sadker and Sadker study on gender bias in the public school classroom indicated that from primary grades on, girls and women are not accorded the same classroom climate as their male cohort. Thus “chilly classroom climate” does not diminish as women enter the higher education pipeline to the terminal degree. In many instances the difficulties increase (Brodkin, 2001). Not only does the American Indian women battle to be accorded equal access as a women but also as a member of a potentially alien culture.

Unfortunately, the standardized tests that are frequently used to determine graduate school potential for success potential, are both culturally and gender biased, which increases the difficulty many minority students face. A considerable number of indigenous students have their culture and intelligence contested within the school system because the standard for excellence is usually based in expertise in English and the

western concept of scientific knowledge. The concept of the scientific knowledge and reason that runs counter to indigenous knowledge is often listed as a barrier to success. As R28, indicated, “it was very difficult to compete in an arena where there was the assumption that all scientific explanations are natural and the only “real” way to explain the phenomenon’s of the world.” Successful American Indian women PhDs tend, in general, to have developed an ability to address these incongruities and find an applicable value and meaning in the dominant culture’s knowledge. It is the resolution of the shifting of borders where one “prays to make it rain’ compared to praying to make a cold front meet a warm front.”

The women who responded to this survey indicated various concepts of what was most influential within the academic arena, but the key tropes remained. Family, support groups, and especially personal responsibility and desire are key elements. As Belenky (1986) indicated in, The Chilly Classroom Climate, women, in general, are more likely to seek an academic atmosphere of cooperation, and connectedness, while men are more likely to seek individual autonomy, attainment and fulfillment.

Many of the American Indian women surveyed, expressed the importance of strong empathetic mentoring and a somewhat invasive advising style. A very “hands-on” approach was apparent in the interaction and reaction of these women and the university. R1, said:

**Mentors!** My primary mentors were the Psychology professionals in my undergraduate and graduate school. There were two in particular during my graduate school. They each believed in me, met with me often individually initiated contact with me and offered opportunities for research projects, oral presentations, at conferences and grant writing help.

Another women, R2 also mentioned her “very good mentoring by PhD advisor,”

and R9 also expressed the importance of her mentors,

Excellent mentors. At the doctorate level my chair of my dissertation committee, who has continued to be a very dear friend and colleague. They all found the time to contact me and keep me focused and dedicated to completion.

R11 also explains that one specific mentor, in particular, provided her with solid goals and the motivation to set very specific goals for her future.

My major professor provided a great deal of assistance. But the initial motivation was as an undergraduate where my psychology/counseling mentor pestered me to get a graduate degree. As an incentive she (my mentor) told me she would take me into her private practice with her when I completed the master's degree, which she did.

Slightly over 1/3 of the women who responded felt that the greatest academic assistance they received was the mentoring received. Most did not make any differentiation between American Indian and non-American Indian mentors, only in the degree of support and guidance provided. While the historic foundation of primary and secondary education was one of public access and classroom structure of authoritarian teacher/lecturer, higher education was based on a philosophy of apprenticeships and training to replace a specific profession. Higher education did not truly become a public domain until after the completion of WWII. The G.I. Bill opened the doors to higher education for many American Indian students, but effectively, a decade after their American-European cohort.

The academic question was open-ended, therefore it was not practical to request ethnicity information of institutional help. During personal contacts and interaction there was an attempt to ascertain if the respondents believed that the process would have been enhanced with the inclusion of American Indian mentoring. For those who had access it was considered a benefit, but in most cases, it was the quality of the interaction that was

more important than the ethnicity of the mentor. As respondents indicated;

- A good non-Indian mentor is a thousand times better than a disinterested Indian mentor. Besides, the likely hood of finding someone from my Pueblo who “really” understood **my** [SIC]cultural issues in the state of Washington was virtually impossible. (R28)
- I sought out American Indian professors, from other universities, as mentors. Since there were none at my university, I also attempted to identified American Indian scholars in my area of study. I attended seminars and conferences focusing on American Indian issues. (R12)
- My chairs (co-) for the PhD degree (My second time around) was an Indian. I believe that made a difference for me. I actually completed the degree and his insights into the convoluted nature of the dissertation process helped me complete the thing.( R15)
- American Indian Doctor/mentor encouraged me to go to college.( R21)
- An Indian professor I had at the University of Tulsa. This was the first time I had an Indian professor and he then encouraged me to become a professor also.( R27)
- My chairperson, who was Jewish. He really supported me.( R13)
- I had support from Non-Indian faculty who were true teachers and who were sincere in their support of my successfully completing my college studies, as well as non-Indian women graduate students who were willing to be mentors.( R20)

One woman in particular indicated that effective support often begins prior to the student’s entrance to the university, and that the preparation at the secondary level is very instrumental to the success found at the university level. At the university level it is often the professor or mentor that takes the extra time and effort that makes the significant difference.

I received a huge amount of support and encouragement when I was in high school from key instructors (science curriculum). I was strongly encouraged to attend college. I also found the same support at the college level. Then when I was in my junior year at college, my primary professor showed me various ways to find a variety of funding sources to make sure I applied for graduate school. He asked graduate program representatives from various universities to come speak to me and other prospective graduate students. He also gave me access to innovative new technologies in the lab, and reviewed and mentored me while filling out applications. (R26)

A majority of the students who attend an institution of higher education leave home to attend. The Tinto Model insists that all students experience a certain degree of

separation from their family of origin. However, a significant number of the American Indian women PhDs indicated that while in many instances they were distant from family, it was the knowledge that the support from the family was in place that provide encouragement to continue.

- My grandparents also valued education. I was told never to give up, but to always try hard. Each time I earned a degree I felt I was doing it for my grandfolks. Whether they were here or not. I learned to apply myself to complete something I started. (R8)
- My father – he worked so hard towards his goal of obtaining a degree in electrical engineering – and since I was his little girl, no matter how difficult my academics seemed, I would think of the academic challenges he faced in his field, along with the challenges of being a single father raising children, working nights, studying for his exams and still tutoring me and my younger brother...well my struggles did not seem so large or overwhelming as a result. (R17)
- My former husband strongly encouraged me to go to school. He also tutored me in math and chemistry. (R4 )

According to various studies (Danzinger, 1996; Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; MCDonald, 1978; Ogbu, 1978;), a significant number of American Indian students enter the university with skill levels that are often lower than their non-Indian cohort and are in need of some remediation or tutoring. For those women who were successful at and beyond, the bachelor level there was a strong personal investment in both the process and knowledge gained. They indicated making an concerted effort to do what ever was needed to be successful.

- My home-school Cheyenne teacher, Also, my left-handed English teacher in high school. (R6)
- I have always liked learning – knowing things – but I don't know why. (R7)
- My love of learning. during my primary and secondary education I went to Catholic schools and learned about discipline.( R10)
- I developed a habit of reading on my own in high school and with a critical eye. That is I learned to read from the perspective of my own cultural and historical background, and this was pivotal to my surviving school. This was a skill developed within my home, where I had a foundational home-schooling
- Life experience, if you will. It was this that carried with me from educational

institution to institution as I advanced in my education. I used the public library a LOT to supplement the one-sided and rather paltry reading available in the Chicago Public schools I attended. Carrying a fundamental understanding that most of what I was reading was from a Euro-centric perspective also helped enormously throughout the process. (R24)

- I developed excellent writing skills.( R14)
- I had a strong interest in the process of change education gives.( R23)
- I learned in my early education to work hard and do my best to compete.
- In my community competition was seen as a good thing and was encouraged at home and in the schools, Not like today, when non-Indians try to tell us that competition is not “our way”. I always wanted to be at the top of my class – always! I didn’t always achieve that, but I always strived for it.( R25)

Contemporary wisdom and research concludes that peer support is often essential to success. While many of the women indicated that they sought American Indian groups to provide support, sometimes, and especially if they were in disciplines where no other American Indian were found, it was more important to have a support group that understood the rigors of their specific education. As R18 indicates;

This answer will apply to other categories too, but my peer group was my most important resource. They were my support. There were three of us admitted together, all very different, but we really supported each other, sat together in classes, went for happy hours together, took notes together, It’s funny, both of the others were old hands at Ohio State, but when they got into the PhD program, they were as lost as I was. They always respected and were interested in me, and I in them.

### Institutional

By the end of the 20th century, few indigenous people, worldwide, have escaped the touch of non-indigenous colonizing, imperializing cultures. One border of contact where the negative effect has been dramatically felt is American education. According to Aubrey Neal (1999), the typical American university culture has traditionally centered around a self-styled benevolent administration, usually headed by an upper-middle-class Amer-European male. He is a product of the system and is dedicated to maintenance of a self-replicating structure. Many higher level administrators indicate, the modern university

is, after all, a market commodity, and is responsible for a highly marketable product. Neal continues, that at one time it was the implicit goal of higher education to assimilate “the other” into a reasonable replica of the idealized norm. Even as the publicized mission of many universities changes to incorporate the philosophy of expanded diversity, the tacit internal message produced by the administration and tenured professors often runs counter to the inclusion of diverse ideas or student populations.

To avoid negative prompting respondents were not questioned as to if they felt that their administration was supportive or not. Their responses to the institutional category could, however, be divided into three sub-categories of institutional support: 1.) None. 2.) support by an individual within the institutional, and 3.) support at an official or administrative level.

Responses to administration could also be broken down to: positive, neutral, and negative. A majority fell towards the negative scale with responses ranged from “no support” from respondent R9, to a negative influence that was perceived as a more malignant and a deterrent to success by R31. Several women who responded at the negative end of the spectrum believed that the institution and those at the highest administrative level purposely imposed barriers. Responses indicated a significant lack of support from the institution and administration, ranging from benign neglect and dismissal, to what some perceived as overt racial and gender domination and attempts to restrict progress. Reaction to the concept of institutional support was frequently expressed similar to R2, who stated, “Institutional support? Ha ! None! – Never!.”

Others agreed with statements that included, R21 “None, at any time” and R22, who said, “My institution was NOT (her emphasis) supportive, at all, at any time.” Lack

of institutional support and understanding was sometimes expanded beyond the post secondary college experience to the entire public education system and policy, as R7 indicated with, “I had no support from the institution, and I certainly did not get any motivation or support from my pre-university public school education.” Slightly over 22% of the respondents restricted their responses to a brief “no support.”

Respondent R19, spoke of an issue that was repeated by others within other primary response categories, which was the widely held belief that even when qualifying within the parameter of “success” as promoted by the university, there was often an overarching personal feeling that they were marginalized within the system and accorded the unofficial status of “the other.” As Janice Accose, states:

My journey towards what I hoped would be liberation and cultural empowerment through education, often left me feeling angry, frustrated, and confused. At numerous times I felt overwhelmed by negative feelings, and confused because of my own ideology—my way of seeing, being, knowing and understanding the world was being assaulted by the White-Euro-Christian-patriarchal ideology. I never did find examples in my school books of the joyously uninhibited, resourceful, adaptable, energetic, beautiful brown skinned, women who taught me about life in the privacy of our communities. Instead I was introduced to and then encouraged to be like the quietly reserved, pleasantly passive and submissive ladies who appeared in the books we were given to study” (p. 28).

Gender bias researchers like Blem, who created the Blem Androgynous scale would argue that this is a non-ethnic response that is perpetuated on all women within the current social educational patriarchy. Accose continues, “As a rule, graduate students have very little power and are too often silenced by the politics of education and the powerfully dominated white male power” (p 32).

It is troubling to her that throughout the Amer-European education system there remains little respect or validity accorded indigenous knowledge. American Indian women indicate that they feel their traditional knowledge base is either dismissed as fake,

or placed in question. Perhaps one of the most disturbing aspects of the Amer-European education system is that this marginalizing of knowledge is now often reinforced and perpetuated by young American Indian students themselves, although it is frequently without conscience thought.

A further illustration of this validation shift was documented during a 2001 research conference that dealt with minorities in higher education where the question arose within a working group of Native students, as to what is considered responsible education. One Master's level woman, who indicated that she felt herself, "traditional, culturally grounded, and responsible" subconsciously dismissed traditional tribal knowledge and practice, as lacking validity. In a discussion of kinship, and who she considered her "kin" she separated those who possessed a "real" kinship relationship with her from those that were "fictional kinship." This was, in her own words, based on the fact that fictional kin were adopted. Those who were "real" were judged as such by the existence of a DNA relationship. The follow-up question was, "although adoptions are based on centuries old traditions, joint participation in ceremony and social actions do you consider those who have been socially adopted as kin?" She emphatically answered, "No! They are not real relatives as there is no shared DNA."

For several of the PhDs surveyed this is an institutional problem that has far-reaching ramifications. Many fear that American Indian students who are successful at the university level, have begun to dismiss or at least diminish the validity of indigenous scientific knowledge by a focus on and acceptance of the ideological collusiveness of Amer-European empirical knowledge system as holding an a priori "truth."

Some respondents saw the institution as first a benefit, as the means to acquire a

more expanded education and wider understanding to social actions, such as Race Studies, Critical Theory, while at the same time, a negative influence on their cultural self-awareness, as the R24, states:

I moved off-campus in the middle of my four years at Wellesley College. This helped to keep me “grounded.” I was married when I attended my program, which I think further insulated me from the corrosive forces at work in this school. I also managed to take a course on Race, Racism, and American Law that helped me immensely in staying grounded. However, the institutions I attended were an enormous struggle for me in general, a struggle for my soul, as it were.

Those respondents who found the institution beneficial, the benefit was most likely in areas of monetary needs. As R23 clearly states;

The funding I received was crucial, because it freed me from teaching as a graduate assistant. It took me awhile to get used to being away from home and family and to quit being homesick. If I had been forced to teach, I don’t think I could have taken care of my own mental/emotional needs, to become strong enough to stay and finish.

Within the sub-category of individuals within the university, respondents indicated that there were individuals at the department or program level who offered important support. This included committee members, and other key figures. The individual assistance and support was not seen as result of official university policy of minority support, but rather internal to the institution and a manifestation of the respective individual’s personal commitment and empathy. For instance, R1 stated, “I found important support within the Psychology Department faculty. They were supportive and encouraging to me personally.” Also included in this category were the American Indian and Graduate student cohort programs such as the one that benefited R5. She indicated:

Perhaps most important at the university level were the native programs offered in

college were important for all. They (the programs) hired me to serve as counselor and mentor of Native undergraduates. We also served as emissaries to the university and community at large.

Within institutions that do not provide official support, some of the women were able to connect with support, albeit from remarkable individuals. R15's response was counted under individual support articulates this gap between institution and individual:

Non-Indian institutions are extraordinarily difficult. Where the institution offered nothing, My co-chair helped me deal with the institutional barriers, as did my other co-chair during my doctoral studies. But these were individuals not university administrators.

Across all categories there was an expression of the importance of a cultural support group that not only provided academic support, but also "understood" the uniqueness of indigenous culture. As R6 writes,

For me, my home provided the support I needed, since my local college was within driving distance of home. At school, the Kitawasa Indian Club in which I was the only Indian student. That kept me in touch with who I was as a Cheyenne student from southwestern Oklahoma.

The support found at Oklahoma schools figured in several responses as R17 states.

For me it was the American Indian Student Associations at OSU. To have mentors, and a group to identify with, and have fellowship with other Indian students at the university was very important to me.

Other women support this saying,

- I found support groups through Native organizations and through Native friends who were mostly female.( R5)

For some the academic support from a cohort group was most important. R11, "I turned to the support from other students who were in my graduate courses. We could work together, when competition did not interfere." Sometimes women felt lost and overwhelmed within the process and it was the mentors and committee members that took an active-proactive approach to assistance. R12 "When I felt really lost I called my

undergraduate advisor, who offered more help than anyone at the graduate level. I also sought out American Indian professors to see how they handled similar situations.”

Another Ph.D., R18, relied on the internet and phone and indicated that, “I had help from my mentor—a great wonderful help in expediting forms and information while I was working over 1,000 miles away.” R20, “I could not have been as successful without my very supportive graduate advisor—especially my dissertation chair.”

As could be expected, influential committee people have the ability to assist success or by neglect, deter it. As William Tierney states:

There are few more significant choices that a candidate will make, than their committee, and the most important member of the committee must be the chairperson. He/she must commit to being your greatest advocate. Remember that they are there to be your primary guide and should run interference for you as needed. They will make or break the process. To be successful you must take charge of your progress. Do your research into programs and professors before the process begins and match your research style preference and research interests to your committee. You must also make sure your committee is compatible. There is nothing more unfortunate than having a committee that breaks down during the defense. (W. Tierney, private conversation during graduate study conference, 1999)

Respondent R16, in particular, agrees with this and offers this advice to graduate students entering the system:

My committee was the most influential—I had three who were wonderful mentors at the Master’s level. However I had a very poor advisor-candidate relationship with my PhD committee, and to be able to finish I had to change midstream to get a supportive one. This was a painful process and one I would caution everyone to avoid if at all possible.

Finally, at the (3.) administrative level, support was varied and ranged from R3 “The university provided important funding” which allows the student to focus more closely on the act of research and study, to the women, R8, who indicated that, “All three institution (I attended) offered me different types of opportunities and support to get me

through. All three allowed me to make my learning relevant to my cultural heritage,” and from R10, “The letters program provided a very good liberal arts education.”

Another PhD, R13, who completed at Harvard University, credited the inclusion of one American Indian professor at the Graduate level, as a positive administrative support. However, other research would argue that a single American Indian professor who may have been a neutral hire, that is hired on past performance and excellence of their vita, does not indicate a positive proactive administrative support. Therefore as a quantitative reference this would be qualified as a non-determinant response. This woman also indicated that, “in the third year of my studies, there began a small American Indian group there at Harvard which I felt was a big help.” It was unclear if this group was organized by these students as a method to build a cohort support, or if this was in fact an administrative response to perceived need.

Respondent R26 stated that:

UNC Pembroke, Formerly Pembroke State University provides an excellent foundation of knowledge, and was instrumental in paving the way for me to attend graduate school. Once I had matriculated into the graduate program at UNC Chapel Hill, I found university level support in various funding opportunities.

The quality of foundational knowledge was seen as a result of top-down administration policy, and therefore was placed into category 3, rather than category 2, which is Department level. Respondent R25 concluded that what the institution or system provided was less important than what the individual student did with it. She replied that:

I feel that every student has the same opportunity. What matters is how it is used and what you do with the opportunity. At the middle school level I had a principal who drove this point home at every chance he got. He empowered us to believe that we could achieve! This was an early lesson that carried with me through my entire educational career.

Perhaps the most interesting answer in this category was from R23, who believed that a high school student that she met through a school sponsored program provided the most encouragement and support.

As a cross-reference, those women who attended the universities that are credited with the highest percent of American Indian graduation success, also indicated the highest support at the highest institutional level. One of the American Indian women who had graduated from Arizona said:

I found a great deal of help administratively. The American Indian programs offered in college were important to all, not just the American Indian students. For me personally, their (the university), hiring me to serve as a counselor and members of the Psychology Department faculty were very supportive and encouraging to me personally.

#### Economic/Financial

Various drop-out/stop-out studies have indicated that one of the most debilitating barriers that effects minority student attainment is the lack of financial support. (Astin, 1982, Danzinger). Also, according to The Chronicle of Higher Education Annual Almanac American Indian students, as a whole have the lowest economic average household incomes of any ethnic group. Inadequate financial support comprises the most commonly reported barriers listed by both those students who are successful in the process and those who withdrew (Falk & Aitken, 1984). Therefore, if adhering to the Tinto Model and contemporary Social Economic Systems Theory, these women should be suffering a gestalt of problems that are produced by poverty, including: low self-esteem; self-deflation; and self-depreciation. All of these should create barriers that are difficult to overcome. However, as one woman, R9, stated in a phone conversation, in her opinion a great deal of American Indian women's success is a direct result of the strength

gained from being born into an “alien” society that is frequently submerged in poverty and alienation.

I think my expectations were less, and therefore I got by with less, and appreciated the funding I got more than some of my non-Native cohort in graduate school. However, I am not sure that I could have finished, or finished as quickly as I did without various funding sources.

This response is consistent with many of the women surveyed.

A strong majority indicated that they were required to apply for funding from various different sources and that without the various sources of funding received they could not have finished. Sources included: loans from tribes and tribal education programs; fellowships; scholarships; second and third jobs; grants; family; teaching assistantships; and self. Approximately 15% of the women received part of their funding from their tribes, through loans or tribal education scholarships. Of these most were supplemented with additional funding.

- My regional (Ahtra) and village (Chitira) corporation scholarships and the US Dept of Ed Indian Fellowship Program for graduate school.( R1)
- I received support from my tribe and many native organizations. My husband and I often worked 2-3 jobs. I also assisted Native faculty through employment as well.( R5)
- I received a loan from my tribe. I also was got a job working in the college library to add to the small loan. I had tribal assistance, scholarship from the American Indian Graduate Center and a student loan from Chase Manhattan Bank following my husband’s death.( R6)
- I had several tribal scholarships along with my student loans.( R12)

The lack of funding is not perceived as a category that is exclusively minority based, However, when the average American Indian family falls farther below baseline poverty, it statistically impacts the average American Indian candidate more than their non-Native cohort (U.S. Department of Education, socio-economic status). One respondent, R8, articulated the difficulties faced by most students who are attempting to

attain a terminal degree. She stated:

Since I first began the process, I've always had to apply for financial assistance and opportunities to help with my education. Had I not received fellowships, I would not-could not have finished. A person cannot focus on their academics if they are faced with hunger, bills, and eviction notices.

Funding is the one area that most respondents agree they have found the university, federal education system are most responsive and supportive in. However, the majority of these are need based and are not related to their cultural identity.

- I received a federal fellowship for my master's degree, and that made the difference between success and failure.( R7)
- I got fellowships that allowed me to finish.( R10)
- Student loans and teaching fellowships, contributions, financially, from my mentor-professor during my graduate school.( R11)

While most fellowships and grants were not American Indian focused some were, including:

- Ford Foundation special grants program for minorities and especially American Indians.( R13)
- Finding funding was the most important element to my success. Getting a four-year graduate award at Harvard was most important.(R23)

Although many of the grants, fellowships and funds were need and academic awards, many of the women did qualify for and receive funding that was American Indian tagged. For example,

R12, indicated:

I had American Indian project scholarships from IHS health professions. I also received scholarships from the American Indian College Fund and American Indian Graduate scholarships, research assistantships, along with my tribal scholarships.

Locating funding is one of the most daunting tasks that face a university student, at any level. However with the increasing demands that occur within a graduate program locating these, or even knowing where to begin the search is often seen as an over

whelming barrier. Many of those who were success also credit the expertise of mentors and advisors vested within the system with directing them through the process. As R17 recalls:

There were several scholarships for Indian students with financial need. This was extremely helpful, but I only found out about them due to a SPECIAL advisor at OSU who guided me in finding resources. There can be many resources, but if you don't know how to obtain them, or even know they exist, they are useless.

Other respondents were equally grateful to those inside the system and their programs that provided time and assistance.

- Again, as in other areas , it was my co-chairs who helped for my dissertation and helped me find funding.( R15)
- Finding financial resources were a challenge, but thanks to a caring professor, he made calls and helped make it happen at the doctoral level. I held part-time jobs throughout my college career to help finance my education. (R25)
- Great graduate assistantship. This led to waived tuition, and fees, plus the healthy stipend. I loved my responsibilities as an adviser to undecided undergraduates. (R18)
- Financial aid and work-study were extremely important for me because, even though my parents were “middle class” they divorced long ago and we were living with my mother.. She was financially quite strapped and eligible for welfare but refused to go on it by the time I entered college. We lived in some real dumps in my childhood and I went to some or the worst schools in Chicago, where violence was the norm. My father was largely not in my life or around for my upbringing, although as I approached my mid-thirties we drew closer.( R24)
- I received funding for graduate school from several sources...the graduate program, AISES, and the Office of Indian Affairs. (I was awarded this money, but never actually received t he funding since UNC Chapel Hill, awarded funding through various avenues.( R26)
- I was recruited to play basketball at my undergraduate institution and it is the sole reason I chose the school, otherwise, I would not have been able to afford school, and would have chosen a less prestigious, more local option.( R27)

Of the women who responded there were a small percentage, less than 7 %, who indicated that they did not seek or receive significant outside funding. For example, R14, who said, “I paid for my education myself!” and R20 who said, “I paid for my own tuition by working plus some very limited help from scholarships—which were greatly

appreciated.” Or for R21 who indicated that her education was paid by family and friends.

### Emotional

The Tinto Model suggests that it is the way in which a student, minority or other, perceives their experiences within the university community that will determine their persistence and success.

As with other categories the respondents were asked to: identify and briefly describe something or someone who provided emotional support that contributed to the successful completion of their degree. Most respondents indicated several factors from a wide range of emotional foundations that they felt were contributive. The most commonly repeated response was **family**, in some form, and was listed by 52% of the respondents. This category broke down to 36% that indicated family as an undefined category: Roughly 29% mentioned their husband: Approximately 14% cited a child or children, especially as a source of motivation. As R2:indicated she wanted the **emotional success** her education would provide and “Knowing my children needed to see me be successful & focusing my anger into achievement.” Education was a relevant economic motivator as R14:indicated when she stated that her education would allow provide a feeling of success by, “knowing that my son’s would have more than I did.” Finally, 21% signified a parent or grandparent., especially those who had also completed a similar goal as stated by R17, who said, “My father has been a true inspiration in this respect, not only did he show me what it was like to go to school while taking care of a family, he also remembering to be true to myself, my instinct and goals.”

Family, and parents were not always the source of support, as R23 “I had no support from my parents—they just did not understand why graduate school. Thankfully, other graduate students were more helpful.

Of the total survey cohort 39% percent were married at the inception of their Program, but divorced prior to completion, It would be easy to assume that the majority of the women who remained married were also among those who indicated that their husband were their primary source of emotional support, however, it was her former husband that R4 turned to for support.” My former husband was my source of emotional support, he was very supportive”. She also credited him with her academic accomplishment, with, “My former husband strongly encouraged me to go to school. He also tutored me in math and chemistry.

Having a strong cohort of friends received the second highest rate of responses ( 39%). This cohort was divided into two groups, first, 68%, which were those friends or cohort who were associated with the respondent based on academia.

- My dissertation advisor was also my friend and mentor. She advocated for me and wanted me to succeed. I did well when I chose her. (R-7)
- My very close “sister-friends”, who were also working on their advanced degrees.(R9)
- friends, especially those also in higher education. (R12)
- My cohort for both of the degrees. I am still friends with many of them.(R27)
- I had a solid cohort - academically from past instructors who became friends and contacted me throughout the academic year and a support group while in school from a American Indian group on campus (NASO). (R30)

Referentially it was noted that the majority of these emotionally supportive friends were also females. However, there is little reference to ethnicity. The strongest ethnic reference in this category was a negative one in which R18 states:

MY COHORT!! (respondent’s emphasis) Without these people I would not have gotten through. My next door neighbor was from Madras India – what a crazy

nut! The most emotionally damaging—finding that the other American Indian students—who should have been more supporting to each other—were more competitive than any non-Indians. When they found each other they went “tribal” and would fight and argue, especially over who was “more Indian” and “right.” Indian politics always came up! Indian politics are always very stormy and fraught with *Jealously* (respondent’s emphasis).

In the second portion 32% of the friends/cohort were those whose relationship was non -specified and ambiguous, therefore could potentially also be academic, such as, R8 who said, “my friends have given me a lot of support in this area and also my family” Several of the women surveyed indicated that education was, for them, a way to escape a detrimental or abusive life. In relation to this 10% reported some level of abuse during their lifetime. “the drive to overcome a physically abusive childhood and later an emotionally abusive marriage. I knew I had to make it on my own. Education was my way to do it” (R-7).

Although respondents did not specify the reasons why, slightly over 20% indicated that part of their emotional support during the process towards their terminal degree was derived from therapy. Also reported as important was mentoring from committee members and other faculty, which was reported by 24%.

### Influential People

William Tierney and others who counsel prospective graduate students are emphatic that: There are few more significant choices that a candidate will make, than their committee. This wisdom was born out by the survey respondents. A remarkable amount of importance was placed on the empathy and expertise of the committee members during the process. Mentors and committee members were mentioned as important to their success in all categories requested, with the exception of culture. In all

other areas, including emotional the committee and mentors were seen as the bastions of success. Responses were gathered on an each response basis, and therefore on account of multiple responses for individual surveys, percentages do not total 100%. (not sure how to say this.) Thirty-nine percent of the respondents indicated that their committee was significant to their success. As R27 states:

My graduate mentor was probably the most influential person for my academic progress. She really understood my concerns with my family, my religion, my culture, etc. In many ways she understood me better than I did myself. She believed in my capabilities, knew my weaknesses, and the methods that I needed to undertake to strengthen those weak areas. I am truly grateful for the impact she had on my life.

Other respondents also reflect the importance of committee members.

- My mentor the late Alfonso Ortiz, my committee. They were great support!( R6)
- My committee chair. He gave me direction and support. Without his support I would not have finished since he was leaving my university. He made research and statistic tasks seem easy and achievable. He always made time for his candidates concerns.( R8)
- My committee members were supportive. At one point I had to decide whether to drop out of the program or proceed with my qualifying exams, and two of them persuaded me to go ahead with the exams.( R10)

A majority of the women indicated the importance of a strong supportive committee, but establishing a positive relationship with all committee members, or finding appropriate support was not always easy or possible. Problems did exist and 17% indicated that during their process they found it necessary to remove and replace one or more committee members.

- My dissertation committee with the exception of the ‘member-at-large’ who didn’t have a clue as to what I was doing and who I finally had to replace.( R11)
- There was none – I had terrible problems throughout.( R16)
- My advisor and co-advisor who helped while my advisor was gone on Fulbright. Rest of committee came and went, I got rid of my 1<sup>st</sup> advisor, a secret redneck.( R18)

Committee members were not the only institutional support the women found and utilized. Other American Indian professionals, especially other American Indian women professors and professionals were often relied upon. Because of the lack of depth of minority professionals in most universities and other areas it was frequently necessary to seek this support long distance.

- Other American Indian women who were in academia – this occurred near the end of my graduate career but has continued since then.( R11)
- My indigenous sister in person or on e-mail.( R2)
- Native faculty helped by serving as role models for me.( R5)
  
- I have a fine circle of Indian and non-Indian friends that have been very supportive to me during both degrees. (Master’s and Doctorate).( R15)
- Those American Indian professionals who I could seek advice from, and who would empathize and provide encouragement.( R12)
- Senator Kelly Haney, Dr. Pete Cozer, my high school counselor and my FATHER. He is a wonderful example of strong Indian people in my life. Especially my grandmother, who overcame great hardships as a young Choctaw woman. (R17)

Other influences stated were variation of self, as the response from R3, who said, “My own stubborn perseverance. I finally wanted to finish what I had started.” Only one person listed a ceremonial person, although slightly over 19% included a family member. Such as: “My mom.”(R11) or, “My father’s expectations and sister’s support.”(R14)

#### Most Significant Elements to Success

As stated earlier, the Tinto Model suggests that it is the way in which the student perceives their experiences and ultimately assesses their time at college that predetermines their success. These perceptions are shaped by a wide range of personal background factors. According to the Tinto model, the most important is the student’s origins value set. The greater the dissonance between the value set of their indigenous

community, and the greater the probability that they will not be successful within the university system. Under this framework, as the student travels through the system to attain a terminal degree, this cultural dissonance will increase.

When asked to define the most significant element to their success slightly over 65% of the women responded with some variation of “self.” The most commonly used term was determination, with 25% listing determination as the primary element. Along with the response of determination, two or more women also used: persistence; perseverance; tenacity; personal drive; hard work; commitment; stubbornness; and energy. The only different single response was from R2, who along with her, “tenacity, and persistence, listed, “a deep fear of failure.”

In conjunction with the previous elements, these women also indicated additional motivations such as,

- I really wanted to finish this thing I had started. (R4)
- I really needed wanted to accomplish something—education is very important to me. (R5)
- Me, my goals, ( R7)
- my sheer stubbornness, which I get from the grandmother who raised me. (R10)
- plus determination, and also my support group. (R11)
- my own determination to succeed and knowing that I had support from family in academic and other support.( R12)
- many caring and helpful friends.( R14)
- a 100% interest in what I was doing and being surrounded by others as interested as I was in higher education. (R18)
- A strong support system and my own commitment. (R23)
- determination to do better than my parents.( R25)

The national average also shows that a substantial number of American Indian college graduates are not only parents, but most indicate a plan to return home with their families to live and work on their home reservations (Tucker, 1979). Throughout the responses women returned to the concept of altruism and the need to return to their

communities with skills and knowledge that would benefit these.

- the belief that what I was studying was important and worthwhile as a contribution to American Indian people.( R20)
- Bringing my study back to the elders. I totally enjoyed my research.( R8)

Again many respondents again mentioned the importance of their family, and also as before the range included, “My children and late husband’s support. a strong commitment to be able to give back to the Native community .understanding my gifts and how they relate to my people and my children’s future.”R24: “My mother and abstinence from drinking and drugs. Frankly, I think it helped a lot that I did not engage in early or casual sex either.”

Various American Indian cultural beliefs were indicated by women in every category. Although many indicated their deep felt belief in the importance of their Native spirituality and cultural beliefs, only slightly less than 8% mentioned cultural and or spirituality as an “essential” element to their success. Even though it is not highlighted within individual categories, face-to-face interviews and responses listed in the advice section indicate that for some spirituality does offer a foundation to build upon. As stated by R5 who stated, “Spiritual and cultural influences assisted me the greatest,” or R13 who says, “Ancestors!!!! Spiritually! Recovering my Native spirituality practices through the American Indian Movement, and the 1978 legalization of traditional ceremonies (American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978).”

The remainder of the women mentioned an investment in their Christian-based faith. For example, R17 stated “God—always keeps me moving day after day, when things are too great, he picks me up carries my problems for me.” And R27 said, “My mentor – I truly believe that I was on a divinely directed path, and that God placed people in my

life to help me through. I strongly believe in Phillipians 4:13-‘I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength’ and I feel that my life has been a testament to this scripture.”

## CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Minority enrollment into programs of postsecondary education is currently at the highest per capita ratio in the history of American education. At initial investigation this statistical increase in access and enrollment would seem to constitute an encouraging progress for diversity in higher education. However, the percent of American Indians entering universities who persist and complete the requirements for their chosen degree, then subsequently continue on to the completion of a terminal degree has not significantly changed in the past thirty years. The US Department of Education data indicates that this lack of parity is especially true for American Indian female students.

Formal and informal education comprises the instrument for the replication and perpetuation of societal norms. To create a cohesive society this is an obvious necessity and benefits both individual members of the society and the society as a whole. Within the structure of American higher education this replication of the status quo has both historically and contemporarily aided the maintenance and continuation of long-standing patterns of inequity and the upper class male bias.

These patterns of inequity have effectively worked to exclude women and most minority populations from a terminal degree. For many years the official American higher educational policy stated that it was inappropriate for women to be subjected to the rigors of the competitive of education. Prior to the necessity of accepting significant numbers of women into the work force during the Second World War women were

socially and politically consigned to a category that prohibited advanced education.

In the nineteenth century when women tried to get access to higher education Scientists claimed that we could not be educated because our brains were too small...and if we diverted our energy to our brains, by studying, our reproductive organs would shrivel and women would become sterile, and the race would die out (Hubbard, p 46).

This logic also included a significant degree of both race and class prejudice.

Only upper class women were thus affected. Minority women were excluded because they were said to breed too much. Because many minority women lived in poverty and produced a number of children they were perceived as being less highly evolved and therefore incapable of higher education (Hubbard p.46). Concomitantly, these historic arrogations have had a significantly negative impact on the relationship American Indian women have had and continue to have with higher education (Blinkdard and Pollar, 1993; Hansot, 1994; Linn; 1989 Sadker and Sadker, 1992, 1994;).

Today, female enrollment exceeds male participation in many programs.

Therefore, as an economic necessity, universities must address the needs of both women and minority populations as potential future students. According to the American Council on Education and the Education Commission for the States (ACE/ECS), universities now face a new sense of urgency in recruiting both women and minorities. Current population projections indicate that in many areas of the US ethnic minorities are rapidly approaching majority status. Not only is the minority population increasing, a higher percent will be of college age. It is estimated that by the year 2020 over 30% of all ethnic minorities will be under the age of 30% (ACE/ECS).

The Center for Disease Control's 2004 data indicates a downturn in birth rates for

Teen-aged girls, with the exception of American Indians, where teen-aged birth rates are not showing a decrease, causing the portion of American Indians that will be of college age in the next 20 years to rise dramatically.

Understanding that the social composition of America is changing offers a reason and opportunity for universities to resolve the current and historic high attrition levels faced by American Indian students. However, the question remains, will university administrators address the attrition issues so that all members of American society will be afforded appropriate opportunity to enter, perform and succeed in higher education?

There has been a long history of university mission statements that are in direct conflict with action on the ground. Benevolent administrators frequently place the blame for minority attrition on characteristics they believe are inherent to the student, the student's culture or even the established system itself. Seldom do they take ownership of the problem. This is one reason that the majority of the studies investigating the American Indian student experience at institutions of higher education tend to concentrate only on those students who do not succeed within the traditional framework of higher education (Astin, Tsui, & Avalos, 1996; Carrol, 1978; Davis, 1992; Loo & Robison, 1986; Munro, 1981; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1988).

Among the most frequently-referenced sources on the phenomenon of college attrition are the studies done by Vincent Tinto (Leaving college: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition, 1987). Although the Tinto Model is supported by numerous other studies, most of these were created to specifically validate this model, not question it.

In general, the Tinto Model maintains that the student is influenced by a wide range of experiences, both within their communities of origin and within the community of the university upon matriculation. If the student cannot make a relatively seamless transition to the core of the university culture they will fail to persist. Tinto believes that the American Indian student's norms and values that they consider traditional, determines the manner in which the American Indian student perceives the university experience. The greater the degree of dissonance the less likely the student is to find success.

Gender research (Sadker & Sadker, 1992, 1994; Blinkard & Pollard, 1993; Hansot, 1994; Linn, 1984, Sadker & Sadker, 1992, 1994; et al) also indicates that women, regardless of ethnicity, also face greater dissonance in the university system. Therefore the American Indian woman, as a double minority, faces increased barriers in her attempt to attain a terminal degree.

The Tinto theory of a three stage integration process, states that all students who are entering the university system face the challenge of first, separating themselves from past forms of association and then incorporating themselves into a culture that is alien to some degree. He contends that those students who do not share the same core values as the dominant society will have additional, if not insurmountable, difficulties in passing through the stages required for integration. University departure will occur when there is significant incongruence between the student's cultural value set, pre-entry attributes, and the Amer-European-dominated college culture and environment.

Tinto asserts that the greater the degree of alienation or distance is from the dominant culture's norm, the greater the probability that the student will withdrawal from the university system. In the instance of the American Indian Student, Tinto creates a

homogenous American Indian cultural whole with limited variation or individual expression. Within this framework, most individuality and variance, both between and within individual Indian communities is negated. Tinto falls prey to the old dilemma which compresses all the indigenous populations into one homogenous entity. By focusing on the values he believes are shared master features by all American Indian students, he ignores the vast diversity and cultural differences within and between indigenous communities and even within individual families. Many of these features he indicates are so general that they can equally be administered to a majority of small scale societies. By constructing a culture without diversity, Tinto effectively obliterates the larger view and individual voices of successful American Indian students. Many of the respondents indicate that their opinions are singularity theirs and not necessarily applicable to other students, women or American Indian women. The desire to not to have their statements appear as co-opting voice for other American Indians was pervasive. Carol Hampton acknowledges this as a common response when interviewing American Indian academics states that,

Darcy McNickle once said, "I can not speak for all Indians. That would be presumptuous. No Indian individual even within their own family speaks for another individual, much less the entire community. No tribe presumes to speak for another tribe. To act otherwise is to act, if not indecently, discourteously" Hampton 1991, p 48

Tinto incorrectly constructs a Pan-American Indian culture that exists as a homogeneous entity that is ossified in direct oppositions to the culture and values of Amer-European society. He also believes that this opposition creates a barrier or frequently insurmountable border for the so called traditional American Indian student to cross. He asserts that this cross-cultural border accounts for the extremely high, over

70%, withdrawal rate for American Indian freshmen. This presents another critical flaw in the Tinto Model, which is the lack of a critical body of research to validate his assumption that the transitioning process across cultural borders is experienced in the same manner as transitioning positions within a culture.

A number of the respondents in this study indicate a reliance on pan-Indian organizations during their studies. However, they also indicate that this pan-Indian community was perceived as a source of social support in lieu of the more tribally specific community support that would be received within their communities of origin. As one woman stated,

It would have been impossible for me to locate a cohort from my own Pueblo who intimately understood my traditions, therefore I sought out those other American Indian scholars who at least share some of my experiences, like attending the AIC pow wow. I know that is pan-Indian, but it feels “Indian”[sic].

Over 60% of the respondents indicated seeking some sense of solidarity with their tradition by participation in events or group activities that were of a pan-Indian nature or that incorporated unspecified cultural/tribal identity.

There are additional shortcomings to the Tinto paradigm. Not only does he not address the diversity present in American Indian society or the cultural incongruence that is frequently found within tribal groups, he does not investigate or acknowledge those differences between urban Indian populations and reservation populations, varying socioeconomic status between individual Indian students, or the differences between tradition aged and over the traditional aged or male and female students. Tinto fails to address the embedded contradictions, different shapes and internal negotiations that are inherent to all living and viable societies.

As many post-colonial scholars indicate, identity and cultural competency within

marginalized communities is frequently more contested than between dominant and marginalized communities. Further, after stating the high significance of, and dissonance caused by American Indian tradition, he does not assess the importance of personal interpretation of this key concept. Many of the key terms used to indicate dissonance, such as; traditional, successful, culturally-competent, or even assimilated remain vague and ambiguous. Tinto makes no attempt to investigate how personal interpretation and attempts to find self-empowerment through individual interpretation of these terms impacts the success of the individual American Indian student.

Other post-colonial studies indicate that contact has irreversibly changed American Indian culture and has left no American Indian untouched by the American-European colonization and imperialism process. Many American Indian scholars indicate that it is impossible to live today without acknowledging both the negative and positive ramifications of contact that all American Indians deal with this in their daily lives, not just when entering institution of higher education. By placing greater significance on the concept of tradition, Tinto weakens his model. Tradition is an ambiguous term subject to personal interpretation. The majority of the respondents in this study indicated that they were, in their opinion—traditional. It is important to remember that tradition is never solid or absolute and if living, is in constant flow and adaptation. Each respondent would then have a self-validating and individual concept of what tradition means to them and to what degree they are traditional. No respondent indicated a perception of any alienation or loss of culture during or because of their education. In fact 8% indicated an increase in tribally specific knowledge, tradition and practice. As R14 stated, “My Ceremony and prayer have played a big part or my success. It gave me a sense of foundation or

grounding.”

Following the Tinto paradigm, the assumption is that the traditional student should exhibit a greater degree of cultural dissonance than the marginal or bicultural student. This is brought into question and would indicate a failure to prove in a number of studies, (Schiller, 1978; Huffman, 1999) that indicate students from a more rural, or what would qualify as the Tinto Model’s traditional background, state that although they originally experienced what they perceived as a greater degree of difficulty than some of their cohort, it was not sufficient to prevent success. They also indicated a feeling of a greater degree of long-term success. Some women indicated that in their personal opinion they believed that they did experience a greater degree of difficulty in academic endeavors, their life skills and culture allowed them a foundation and anchor to allow persistence and eventual success.

It is important to remember that this study is limited to personal reflection and that respondents are subject to negotiation. The women who responded are, on many levels, remarkable. By being women, American Indian women, and recipients of a terminal degree they remain separated from a majority of American society. As women and American Indian women they operate on an uneven playing field where power relationships are uneven and in a state of constant negotiation.

Tinto also indicates that as age increases so will the cultural dissonance. The women responding to this survey were equally divided in age bracket, with half falling into the 35 and below bracket and half falling into the over 35 bracket. This division was created to indicate those PhDs who would be considered of a traditional age of program completion, if they began their college immediately after graduation from high school

and continued through the system to their terminal degree.

Many of the women within the higher age bracket indicated that at specific periods in their educational journey they could have been counted as drop-outs. This adds validity to some researchers' contention that American Indian attrition rates are over-estimated.

Research and history used in the Tinto Model indicates that there are key value sets that tend to be commonly recognized as core to many American Indian societies. Many of these are significantly different from accepted Amer-European values and norms that there is a potential misunderstanding from interpretation on both sides. However, to assume that any value set is universally accepted within a population with the historic breadth and depth of diversity as the American Indian society adopts a flawed and reductionist stance. For researchers or university administrations to adhere to assumptions of a stereotypic idealized American Indian culture produces disservice to contemporary American Indian communities, both urban and rural.

Some of the more commonly recognized values that Tinto Model believes will place students in opposition to the university system are: cooperation over competition; generosity and giving over saving and owning; extended family over nuclear family; spirituality over religion; patience over action; respect and veneration of elders or age over youth; and pragmatics over theory. The Tinto Model does not address how or if these values are restricted to American Indian society and how they would differ from other small scale societies, nor does he address the limitation of assuming too broad a brush to paint this adaptation. While many American Indian societies play down competition within their communities, competition abounds between communities, as is

apparent with reservations validation of high school basketball. Therefore it would seem to indicate that competition at the foreign university would become easier.

Many of the philosophical traditions of American higher education are seen as opposite of many of those honored in a majority of American Indian communities. However, this conflict is frequently over emphasized and is not universal. As Dr. Medicine states (2001) many American Indian societies traditionally incorporated eye contact, lecturer teaching style and other teaching styles commonly recognized as Amer-European, in pre-Columbian education. Huffman (1998, 2001) also disagrees that commonly accepted cultural differences create an atmosphere that prohibits the American Indian student from finding success or acquiring a terminal degree. However, he asserts, it does set up a situation where the student must have strong cultural foundations and pre-attendance awareness of the difference that will be faced.

The concept of culture appeared in two forms throughout the responses: first as a specific category, and secondly as a response across all other categories. As a response category women indicated that culture and expressions of it through ceremony and by living a traditional values set at home was the anchor that keep them on track and pursuing their goals. Slightly over 24% indicated that they participated in some form of cultural ceremony during their studies. Respondents said,

- Our cultural backgrounds can give us support and strength in meeting our educational goals. I guess we learn to take the exact tools that did our ancestors in, and use them to get back what we lost. During my research project I felt like I went on a journey (R9).
- Have a ceremony prior to embarking on this demanding project. Continue to participate on a regular basis in ceremonies when possible to assist you in keeping in balance and to keep you from 'being overwhelmed' Put colonization from the system into perspective and be vigilant to its subtle ties (R17).
- Stay grounded in your culture. If you need to, re-learn it. Always, always, always, stay focused on your ultimate goal (R23).

Categories created from an administrative or university focus, such as academic or institutional, received fewer responses linked to a cultural foundation. However, there were still references to culture and tradition in many of these. As can be expected, categories such as “emotional” or “most significant element to success,” received a higher cultural referenced response. The underlying importance of culture was also noted in the category of influential person or committee member. Here 41% indicated that they actively sought support from an individual or group who, while not of their tribal community of origin, was vested in American Indian culture.

Another response that was utilized across categories was the importance of family, especially mothers, aunts and grandparents, Parental support is not surprising and is important across all cultures, the degree of support and reliance on family follows a socially validated importance promoted in many American Indian cultural arenas. Many of the respondents indicated support from a wide extended family. These women indicated assistance from aunts, cousins and other relatives that extend beyond the commonly accepted nuclear family found in the dominant society. The difference between these women and the traditional Amer-European student was illustrated with a CLS 101 research project conducted with 327 non-minority freshmen enrolled in the Montana State University College of Letters and Science verbal core in the fall of 1999. The survey asked the student whom they considered as their core family. Responses indicated that slightly under 98% of the non-Indian students did not consider aunts, uncles, first cousins or grandparents as immediate or core family. Those few who did were from small ranching and farming communities. In contrast, undergraduate American Indian students and the women interviewed for this study included grandparents and even

second level cousins in their range of immediate family.

Cooperation is traditionally listed as a primary core value for American Indian communities and societies. Many American Indian groups originated from a orientation that places a high social value on cooperation and limited competition within the boundaries of the group. This is not to say that all competition is antithetical to the social norm, only that philosophically, competition is devalued within the model family and community. Historically and contemporarily Indian communities had and have intense intra-community competition, as is illustrated in the social importance placed on team sports such as basketball. Over 50% of the women surveyed indicate a competitive nature in specified situations.

- I learned in my early education to work hard and do my best to compete (R12).
- In my community competition was seen as a good thing and was encouraged at home and in the schools—not like today, when non-Indians try to tell us that competition is not “our way (R25).
- I always wanted to be at the top of my class – always! I didn’t always achieve that, but I always strived for it (R27).

Many tribal communities also place a higher value on cooperation to build a cohesive social unit. A majority of the women respondents also placed a high value on groups and situations where cooperation was practiced. Most of the women’s idealized cohort was American Indian with shared values and understanding of their unique history, but the most important thing was that the group was supportive and available when needed. Several women indicated that they found a greater degree of honest support from non-Indian cohorts. The ideal situation was seen as one of American Indian students bonding and sharing, however this was not always possible and as R18 stated;

My support was my next door neighbor who was an Indian - from Madras India. What a crazy nut. I had hoped I would find this support with American Indian students—who should have been more support to each other –but were more

negatively competitive. As soon as they found each other, they would find fault, fight and argue. Indian politics always came up. Lots and lots of jealousy. Indian politics are always very stormy and often ugly.

All cultures utilize education to pass key information from one generation to the next. The US public school system relies predominantly on a teacher-to multiple student formulation to pass on key information. Many if not most pre-contact American Indian communities used a method of cross generational mentor relationships to imbed key cultural information. Therefore, it is not remarkable that traditionally grounded women place a high status on mentoring. Across categories such as academic, institutional, and key persons, an average of 67% of the responses related to the importance of positive mentoring. Respondent 26 indicates this and states,

My graduate mentor was probably the most influential person for my academic progress. She really understood my concerns with my family, my religion, my culture, etc. In many ways she understood me better than I did myself. She believed in my capabilities, knew my weaknesses, and the methods that I needed to undertake to strengthen those weak areas. I am truly grateful for the impact she had on my life.

Two other key concepts associated with traditional American Indian communities and values are altruism and generosity. Again across all categories the respondents indicate a empowering motivation of acquiring a terminal degree to the end goal of attaining knowledge and tools that can be utilized for the aggregate good within their home communities and for their families. Many found validation and empowerment in the concept that they were acting for the betterment of home communities.

Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that there were two things that sustained them throughout their process. Most important was the self-empowerment and strength of determination that they indicated was developed as a result of having had to struggle for

recognition in a system that they felt was often adversarial. Self-determination, perseverance, commitment, and similar responses were listed by 89% of the women. Many also indicated that they felt that they were following long established family and tribal traditions of strength and determination. As one woman stated, “No nation is defeated until the hearts of it women lay on the ground.”

The last two categories that the women respondents were asked to respond to were: advice and additional comments. Over 65% of the women surveyed indicated their primary advice that they would give to other prospective American Indian women who are considering a terminal degree run along the lines of “hold to your goal, don’t give up, don’t let anyone take this from you.” Specifically:

- I give this advice to ANY women/person seeking a degree – No one can keep you from doing anything except yourself. Don’t let yourself inhibit who you are destined to become. I do not believe that we get anywhere simply by ourselves. Acknowledge all the help that you receive and remember that we are not individual islands. Our life is a true reflection of what others (those around supporting us) have allowed us to become.
- Overcome barriers & and obtain your desired degree because that degree will open doors to careers and ability to made institutional changes to help other ethnic minorities.
- “Fight the good fight, don’t’ give up, remember those at home who are counting on you and your skills. Remember who you are.

Perhaps this feeling is best illustrated in a song by Gavin Greenaway & Trevor Horn.

Sound the bugle now—play if just for me  
 As the seasons change—remember how I used to be  
 Now I can’t go on—I can’t even start  
 I’ve got nothing left—just and empty heart  
 I’m a soldier—wounded so I must give up the fight  
 There’s nothing more for me—lead me away...

Or leave me lying here  
 South the bugle now—tell them I don’t care  
 There’s not a road I know—that leads to anywhere

Without a light I fear than I will-stumble in the dark

Lay right down—decide not to go on  
When from on high—somewhere in the distance  
There's a voice that calls—remember who you are  
If you lose yourself—your courage soon will follow  
So be strong tonight—remember who you are  
You're a soldier now—fighting in a battle

To be free once more  
Yes—that's worth fighting for.

Gavin Greenaway & Trevor Horn

### Recommendations

While the Tinto Model does offer an excellent foundation for research, it does not address the complexity of American Indian culture or diversity in Native women's personal experience or assessment of their experience. It also does not explain why some culturally grounded American Indian women who consider themselves traditional are successful at the university level.

Further research should be conducted to assess how these and other stories of empowerment can be adapted to create a model that will acknowledge the diversity and adaptability nature of American Indian cultures and thus increase self-esteem and success for American Indian students, men and women. With this knowledge, institutions of higher education should create a greater appreciation for American Indian cultures as a means to communicate the special values of this important segment of American culture. When students are encouraged to retain and utilize their traditional self-identities and their cultural values are projected as important and valid, students will be more likely to persist at the university level

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF AMERICAN INDIAN FEMALE  
TERMINAL DEGREE HOLDERS

My first Language is \_\_\_\_\_ I also speak \_\_\_\_\_

The majority of my pre-college education was completed :

On reservation \_\_\_\_\_ Border community \_\_\_\_\_ Off reservation \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever attended a tribal college? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Undergraduate Degree was in \_\_\_\_\_

@ (University) \_\_\_\_\_

Masters Degree was in \_\_\_\_\_

@ (University) \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree was in \_\_\_\_\_

@ (University) \_\_\_\_\_

Area of research \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Dissertation \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status at onset of program \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status at completion of program \_\_\_\_\_

Age at completion of degree 30-35 \_\_\_\_\_ 36-40 \_\_\_\_\_ 41-45 \_\_\_\_\_ 46-50 \_\_\_\_\_ 51-55 \_\_\_\_\_ Over 55 \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have children ? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If so ages at beginning of your program \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a first generation college graduate? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**If no, which other member(s) of your family have a degree and what degrees do they have**

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**Please consider the following categories. Please identify and briefly describe something or someone specific from each that contributed to the successful completion of your degree. Please Feel free to be as brief or expansive as you feel is necessary.**

**Cultural**

**Academic**

**Institutional**

**Economic/financial**

**Emotional**

**Committee or other influential person/people**

**What do you feel was the most significant element to your success?**

**What advice would you like to give to other Native American women who are seeking a terminal degree?**

**Additional comments**

**Thank You very much for your assistance**

**May I contact you if I need clarification or additional information?**

**Yes**

**No**

**If yes – please provide e-mail or other address.**