The Role of Resilience in Indigenous Students: A Qualitative Study on Understanding Barriers in Higher Educational Outcomes Framed Within the Tribal Critical Race Theory

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There is no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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Date of Dissertation Defense: July 10, 2022.

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Acknowledgments

For the late Alfred Clarence and others who believed in the 'skinny little Indian girl,' . . . *Naadjwinoon kina ebkaanat*! (Together, we can make a beautiful difference)! I acknowledge and honor my father, ancestors, and Elders who created and dedicated their work, and lives in honor of the paths I walk. I will persist in doing my part toward meaningful change for Indigenous Peoples and other underserved groups in the face of adversity.

I appreciate and value the support of my family, homeland tribe, and committee members who have tirelessly championed my academic journey.

Northwest University is located on the traditional territory of the Stillaguamish, Duwamish, Snoqualmie, Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla Tribal nations, a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous Peoples. I respectfully acknowledge these nations as the traditional stewards of lands and waters on which we use today.

Miigwetch!

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Abstract

Academic recruitment and retention rates for Indigenous students in higher education are dismal compared to any other ethnic group. Indigenous students who persist through a bachelor's degree to the graduate level are a rarity. The low proportion of Indigenous students in higher education is a multilayered problem beyond any single factor, such as socioeconomic status. This study intended to elucidate attributes of resilience that ameliorate adversity, and the outcomes have the potential to support knowledge used on increasing Indigenous student retention in academia. This qualitative thematic analysis employed a semistructured interview protocol. The tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit) provided a framework to examine Indigenous graduate students and early career graduates within 5 years of graduating from psychology or allied fields. Participants ($n =$ 12) across the United States and Canada shared their lived experiences about graduate school. The interviews were transcribed using an encrypted application for qualitative studies and assessed for reoccurring themes and subthemes. The study's results included two overarching categories aligned with the research questions on Indigenous student retention and resilience. There were two significant themes under each category and several subthemes explaining the dismal completion of Indigenous graduates in higher education in psychology and allied fields. The findings from this study may deliver perspectives on decolonization within academia and provide cultural recommendations for future research specific to recruiting and retention of Indigenous students. The details may be helpful for policymakers, university administrators, and prospective Indigenous graduate students.

Keywords: Indigenous students, phenomenological study, higher education, qualitative, resilience, decolonization, thematic analysis, Tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit)

Chapter 1

Historical Relevance

U.S. and Canadian Indigenous student enrollment in higher education is bleak compared to other racial ethnic cultural groups (Minthorn & Nelson, 2018; Universities Canada, n.d.). The low retention rates remain while high attrition rates persist (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Hunt & Harrington, 2010; Tierney, 1992). The current study evaluated why this near-invisible group has been least likely to graduate from college or university. It was critical to acknowledge the existing ineffectual solutions that impact these students. Simultaneously, identifying obstacles and the missing considerations elucidates resilience (protective factors) that can improve comprehension of this subject and illuminate the necessity for better protocols and implementation strategies to change Indigenous student recruitment and retention rates.

Indigenous students pursuing higher education are often perplexed when oral histories passed down from Indigenous generations on the traumatic history of Indigenous Peoples are either negated or are only partially reported in Eurocentric history books portraying Indigenous Peoples as savage. This widespread invisibility in modern-day accounts and societal perceptions maintains a void readily filled with destructive misconceptions and illusions that exploit negative bias and stereotypes and betray an equitable portrayal of Indigenous peoples' complete humanity (Love, 2021). Furthermore, the consequences left over from the government's pursuit to rid Indigenous Peoples as inhabitants of land, currently America and Canada, deemed as vacant for the taking by early settlers, have continued to have complex controls by laws holding that approval lies with the federal government on various levels (i.e., trust land-federal

government holds the title), including the development of natural resources (U.S.

Department of the Interior Natural Resources Revenue Data, n.d.).

Some researchers have suggested the precontact population of Indigenous Peoples

was as high as 112 million, while others have denoted less (Denevan, 1992). The

explorers held the perception that Indigenous Peoples prevented their claim of American

land and were also vastly deficient in education, religiosity, and social skills. These

reasons prompted the longest-lasting genocidal actions in history with efforts to strip this

group of tribal structure, beliefs, and spiritual traditions known as the Indian Problem

(Fixico, 2012; Garrett & Pichette, 2000). This act of assimilating and acculturating

Indigenous Peoples involved attempts toward the complete erasure of traditional

Indigenous ways replaced by customs and values of the Eurocentric culture are detailed

under the Office of the Historian, an entity of the U.S. Department of State for the

removal of Indigenous Peoples (National Archives, 2022; U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

Columbus ordered violence, enslavement, and conversion to Christianity, which forever

changed the history of Indigenous Peoples (History.com, 2019). This period of

Columbus's influence of continental exploration with violent rule and slavery introduced

new diseases—all of which were deadly to Indigenous Peoples. Some sources have stated

this movement acquired over 20 million acres of land (U.S. Department of State, n. d.). In

the early 1800s, the U.S. government enacted policies to remove all cultural traces of

Indigenous Peoples, including controlling economic activity among the United States and

Indigenous Tribes (i.e., pressuring land appropriation, trade, disputes, appropriating

funds, entering into treaties, and the removal of Indigenous Peoples to reservations;

Library of Congress, n.d.). The Library of Congress (n.d.) stated:

> It gives me pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the
> government . . . in relation to the removal of the Indians beyond the white
> settlements, is approaching to a happy consummation . . . it puts an end to all the
> possible danger of collision between the authorities of the General and state
> governments, of the account of the Indians. It will place a dense and civilized
> population in large tracks of country now occupied by a few savage hunters. (p.
> ix, Presidential message)

Approximately 70 treaties were removed due to his administration's negotiations (Kratz, 2017). Sadly, European colonizers and decedents' efforts to erode Indigenous Peoples and all strength-based protective factors changed the lives of this group on a profound level (i.e., health and educational trajectories), circumstances from which this population has not recovered.

Recently, a welcomed shift evolved when social media access displayed a video of the outward discriminatory racial strife present in society during the tragedy of George Floyd amid the COVID-19 global pandemic (Altman, 2020). This incident highlighted the necessity for more action-oriented social justice reparations for Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color (BIPOC). For instance, a physical remnant statue of Christopher Columbus celebrating Columbus Day, a federal holiday, was renamed in some areas as restitution to Indigenous Peoples from Columbus Day to Indigenous Day (Willingham et al., 2021). This example underscores the blatant and extended past evidenced in dominant culture superiority and a reminder of racial inequities apparent in society. Sensibly, the genocidal exertion on Indigenous Peoples and what came after

imparts comprehension into the held mistrust and impact of Westernized assimilation manifested in this group.

Unfortunately, discrimination, stereotypes, and the wake of countless travesties have echoed in collective memories in the United States and Canada for BIPOC groups, continuing in academia to invalidate well-being through an undermined sense of campus belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Although the circumstances are thought to be less brazen, still microaggressions and systemic and institutional racism endure. Microaggressions can be humiliating harmful threats (Carter, 2007) that affect the mental health of BIPOC individuals leading to hypervigilant behavior, nightmares, and flashbacks (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019). Huffman (2001) affirmed academic practices conflict with Indigenous Peoples cultural practices. Critical race theory (CRT) weighs historical, epistemological, ontological, and geographical nuances, including the variation and range in communities and individuals (Brayboy, 2005a). CRT provides a framework to identify and evaluate educational systemic structures that propagate racialized issues for BIPOC in education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Education Week, 44 states have proposed bills or implemented restrictions on how teachers discuss racism and sexism in public schools (Schwartz, 2021).

Due to the urgency of change, many universities and business entities have adopted diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs meant to instill fair and just treatment for all identities. Yet, the Harvard Business Review conducted a survey in early 2022 on the perceptions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) success; only 30% of employees in a Gallup study believed DEI issues around equality in racial justice improvements had faith in organizational changed occurring in their workplace

(Brecheisen, 2023). Stanford News reported the urgency of such implementation may have been impacted by the tragic death of George Floyd that was broadcasted over social media by a bystander acting against racial profiling and police brutality, which launched a major nationwide campaign on systemic racism embedded in the United States (DeWitte, 2021). Although some movement in the recognition of systemic racial issues in North America has bought promise, some may question whether this would simply be a check-the-box task or a jump on the bandwagon. Thus, truth lies in real change from the top in policies, systems, and academia.

In late 2021, the American Psychological Association (APA) attempted to acknowledge organizational contributions to the perpetuation of racial discrimination, including admission of a previously failed apology to Indigenous Peoples and a confession for people of color on the APA website, stating:

> [The] APA failed in its role leading the discipline of psychology, was complicit in contributing to systemic inequities, and hurt many through racism, racial discrimination, and denigration of people of color, thereby falling short on its mission to benefit society and improve lives. APA is profoundly sorry, accepts responsibility for, and owns the actions and inactions of APA itself, the discipline of psychology, and individual psychologists who stood as leaders for the organization and field . . . The APA previously engaged in unsuccessful efforts to issue apologies in the past, including an apology to indigenous peoples. (section APA's commitment to addressing systemic racism)

A lengthy line of similarly made statements by federal, state, and local governments, and, justifiably, an apology is the first step; however, a sense of futility arose for Indigenous

Peoples because promises have seldom been followed by concrete action. The APA organized a second apology to Indigenous Peoples, intact with a work group charged with dismantling systemic racism, complete with action items in a report, offered by the APA president at the Society of Indian Psychologists convention in June 2023, and another slated to be delivered at the APA Convention in 2023 (APA, 2023). Legitimate action acknowledging past wrongdoings can set a strong example of how to alter the course of history in the discipline of psychology, particularly if led by the APA. This heightened effort holds a significant promise toward reconciliation, efforts previously regarded as hollow words (Morse & McDonald, 2021).

Indigenous communities disproportionately encounter many issues characteristically not identified, shared, acknowledged, or understood by the general public. Yet, despite hardships, Indigenous Peoples have persevered through colonial rule. Collectively, this source of resilience originated in deep-rooted strengths of organization and sophistication. Precontact, Indigenous Peoples had used innovations, inventions, and strategies adopted by Westerners for survival, advancements, and contributions, which Indigenous Peoples have yet to be credited for or accepted in Eurocentric history or taught in academia today. The 20th century psychology Abraham Maslow has continued to influence the field of psychology with his self-actualization model in the hierarchy of needs that few concede was influenced by his observations in 1938 of the Blackfoot tribal way of life at Siksika (Feigenbaum & Smith, 2020; Heavy Head, 2007). The Encyclopedia of American Indian Contributions to the World: 15,000 Years of Inventions and Innovations offered more in-depth discoveries in medicine, astrological navigation,

advances in technology, technical processes, and wisdom from Indigenous Peoples (Johansen, 2002).

As change occurs gradually over generations, the historical and legal impacts endured by Indigenous Peoples have generated long-lasting effects that can compound mental and physical health disparities and impede success. Health inequalities are primarily secured by structural unfairness, systemic racism (Blane, 1995; Braveman, 2006). The complicated history carried by Indigenous students can affect graduate student matriculation and graduation numbers. Efforts in revitalization (e.g., Indigenous language rediscovery, traditions, arts) can help to mitigate disparities and contribute to Indigenous student resiliency (Jacob et al., 2019).

Generally, Indigenous Peoples have ascribed to acculturation within the dominant culture, not by choice, but by expectation—an expectancy that can often conflict with the cultural traditions and Indigenous ways of knowing (Garrett et al., 2014). More prevalent is the message of assimilation, which continues to emanate through the thoughts of Indigenous students pursuing higher education, sending contradictory implications of belongingness, and cultural opposition in belief systems (Garrett & Pichette, 2000). Even after graduation, early-career diverse (Pedrotti & Burnes, 2016) and Indigenous graduates struggle with breaking into the professional field of psychology. The subtle and more apparent genocidal erosion of strength-based cultural traditions undermines confidence and can be detrimental to Indigenous students' early career professionals, as evidenced by the discouragingly underrepresented statistics of Indigenous Peoples holding professional degrees (i.e., psychologists; Benson, 2003).

Indigenous student populations in the United States and Canada have presented as significantly underrepresented in institutions of higher learning contrasted with non-Indigenous populations (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Hunt & Harrington, 2010; Tierney, 1992). Academic attainment rates (i.e., dropout rate) for Indigenous high school students are one of the highest across racial and ethnic groups (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2018). This trend persists in higher education, with low college matriculation rates and low graduation rates among Indigenous students (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008; Hunt & Harrington, 2008). Consequently, Indigenous students in higher education are often solo pupils or one of a few BIPOC students (Brayboy et al., 2012), raising several questions about how and why this group remains underrepresented in undergraduate and graduate schools. The current research study explored the factors that undermine retention and contribute to resilience among Indigenous graduate students and early career professionals studying psychology or other related fields.

Indigenous Background on Colonization in Education

The scholastic chronicle of Indigenous Peoples grips colonial elements constructed across centuries that are a salient facet to facilitate comprehension of present-day Indigenous Peoples' experiential knowledge. The U.S. government enforced Westernized education designed to civilize Indigenous children through a systematic boarding school process. It was established to remove all cultural identification, as stated in Richard Pratt's speech, "kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (Churchill, 2004, p. 46), by removing children from their families and enforcing indoctrination of a foreign belief and value system. The list of promises between the federal government and Indigenous tribes is founded on statutes and treaties Executive Office of the President

(EOP, 2014). Unfortunately, the residual history of profoundly disconcerting federal policies and genocidal cultural proceedings had nearly destroyed the Indigenous culture (i.e., removal of the Indian Act; EOP, 2014).

Indigenous Statistics

The Decennial Census (2010) found across the United States, there were approximately 0.9% (2.9 million) residents who identified as solely American Indian or Alaska Native and 1.7% (5.2 million) residents who identified as either exclusively or biracially American Indian or Alaska Native. There are 574 federally recognized tribes (NCAI, 2020) and 63 state-recognized tribes (Indian Nations) in the United States (NCSL, 2023).

According to the Canadian 2016 Census, 1.67 million residents self-identified as Aboriginal persons (Indigenous Peoples) affiliated with 70 different languages (Statistics Canada, 2023). Canada has approximately 600 different communities of Aboriginal persons, representing 4.3% of Canada's population (Statistics Canada, 2011), with the majority residing in Ontario and 48% remaining on reservations (Assembly of First Nations, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2011). Nearly half (48.1%) of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit 14 and under children are in foster care (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Educational Data

Indigenous Peoples comprise a small percentage of the general population and are further underrepresented among faculty (Lundy-Wagner et al., 2013) and graduate students. The statistics for Indigenous students in higher education are similar in the United States and Canada. According to the National Center for Education Statistics of the United States (NCES, 2019), only 13.4% of Indigenous Peoples graduated with a

bachelor's degree, 5.1 % with a master's degree, and only 0.6% graduated with doctoral

degrees. Furthermore, in the United States, fewer than 1% of college and university

faculty (i.e., professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, and lecturer)

are Indigenous (NCES, 2022). Overall, the underrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples

seems to permeate all areas of academia and higher education in both the United States

and Canada.

Educational policymakers and administrators have continued to be perplexed by

the small number (and underrepresentation) of Indigenous persons pursuing and

completing doctoral programs (Guillory, 2009). Accordingly, it is essential to clarify the

varying experiences of Indigenous Peoples, explicitly for those residing on reservations,

rural, or urban areas, and to what degree of indigeneity Indigenous students follow to

better understand the barriers in academia and, ultimately, to identify the sources of

academic resilience among Indigenous Peoples. As a result, some Indigenous students

practice traditional cultural teachings. Although some students do not know tribal

traditions, having fully acculturated or assimilated to Western ways, others follow a

blended variation combining traditional and Western ways. Appropriately, it is essential

to understand historical factors that underwrite the modern etiology of Indigenous

Peoples. Race is considered a social construct (Braveman & Dominguez, 2021), while

ethnicity involves an individual's collective ancestry, history, culture, and language

(Berger & Miller, 2021). A person's culture may combine other cultures (religion,

spirituality; Berger & Miller, 2021), and all categories, along with lived experiences,

culminate into identity. Thus, generic assumptions can have immense repercussions.

Historical Trauma

Scholars introduced the term historical trauma to define grave, prolonged health and social injustices consequent from intended to obliterate Indigenous Peoples' linguistic, cultural, and spiritual customs (Bamforth, 2017; Brave Heart, 1998, 1999; Evans-Campbell, 2008). As a result, these colonization enforcements produced a cumulative lifespan of trauma. Lasting generational vulnerabilities and trauma (generational and intergenerational trauma) are created by injustices against Indigenous Peoples, affecting individuals, families, and tribal communities (Deloria, 1994; Duran, 2006; Hartmann & Gone, 2014). These researchers added the historical impact of the devastating, ruthless, and systemic maltreatment of Indigenous Peoples exacerbates the adverse effects on well-being and places this population at an elevated risk for poor physical and mental health (i.e., biopsychosocial) with long-lasting outcomes (Duran, 2006). Although beyond the scope of this paper, amending the historical trauma would focus on re-connection to traditional Indigenous values, which may serve as protective factors (Brave Heart, 2003, 2005). These factors call for deeper exploration into how the history of Indigenous Peoples contributes to the immense barriers to higher education present-day students face.

Understanding the history of colonization and cultural genocide on Indigenous Peoples is critical in getting a better picture of what this group faces daily. Gracey and King (2009) explained Indigenous Peoples face present-day disparities and continued consequences from mandatory colonization meant to eradicate time-honored traditions, such as decrees, languages, attire, religions, and sacred ceremonies for rituals and healing. Forced colonization led Indigenous Peoples to face historical practices of

cultural removal, causing debilitating physical, emotional, social, and mental health

inequities that persist today. Indigenous Peoples faced historical exposure to

microorganisms, like smallpox and tuberculosis (i.e., biological warfare), loss of culture

and faith, and were stripped of land (Gracey & King, 2009). The institutionalization of

Indigenous Peoples was sustained through economic, social, and political

marginalization. Some examples include the seizure of traditional lands and relocation to

isolated, smaller, unproductive, or industrial-waste land, still managed by government

bodies. Prejudiced property owners and management aggravated these discriminatory

practices, which fueled undereducation and unemployment, ultimately creating

dependence on government assistance, further impeding economic or social growth for

future generations of Indigenous Peoples (Gracey & King, 2009). Today, Indigenous

Peoples continue to face the lingering effects of these profound historical inequities.

Consequences of Residential Schools

The United States 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was created due to the

bewildering number of Indigenous children removed from their homes and families. This

long-term separation created a loss of strength-based cultural practices, mandatory for

creating confidence in self-identity. As a solution, the ICWA governs the removal of

Indigenous children by public and private entities (ICWA, 1978). It is crucial to note the

18-year differences in timeframe regarding residential school closures and Indian Day

School Closures between the United States (1978) and Canada (1996; Restoule, 2013). In

Canada, some residential schools were recategorized as Indian Day Schools. This

recategorization included the same infrastructure and systemic racism, where some

children were purposely severely malnourished, causing sustained biological effects

(Mosby & Galloway, 2017). In some cases, Indigenous children were psychologically, physically, and even sexually abused based on race. The main difference between Residential Day Schools and Indian Day Schools was children traveled home to families before and after school in the Indian Day School system (IRSHDC, 2020). The Federal Court of Canada agreed, in an ongoing nationwide class settlement beginning in 2019, to recompense day-school survivors organized by the Canadian government in partnership with and administered by Christian churches (IRSHDC, 2020). The last Canadian Indian Day School only closed 26 years ago, in contrast to U.S. residential schools, which closed in the 1930s (Gone, 2013). Recently, National News reported 1,000 unmarked Indigenous graves were accidentally found outside a former North Vancouver, Canadian residential school, many of which were children (Lowry, 2021).

Furthermore, the disparity of inequality for Indigenous People is still unresolved, as the Ontario Human Rights (2020) reported an over-representation of Indigenous children in Canadian foster care. The "Sixties Scoop" refers to the 1960s to the 1980s, during which First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children were detached from family and adopted into mainly non-Indigenous families (IRSHDC, 2020, Section, The Child Welfare System and Sixties Scoop). These children were separated from extended family, language, and traditions until the law changed in 1980. At that time, the provincial child welfare employees were to inform tribal communities about where Indigenous children were placed (IRSHDC, 2020). Although the Indigenous population in Canada represents only 4.1% of the Ontario population under the age of 15, it comprises approximately 30% of foster children. Statistics Canada (2018) reported 48.1% of Indigenous children under 14 were in foster care. According to the Ontario Human Rights Organization (2020), one

of the reasons for this considerable concern is low income (inter-generational

consequence of colonialism, a major driver of child welfare involvement for Indigenous

children).

The relevance of including statistics on Indigenous children being raised by non-

Indigenous populations is an example of deculturation stress (Mail, 1989). The present-

day Indigenous Peoples' identity struggle is due to deculturation stress, which involves

the loss or devaluation of cultural traditions caused by acculturation pressures to integrate

into the dominant culture (Mail, 1989). The scope of monoculturalism in the United

States and Canada has existed for generations and continues to persist in the identities of

Indigenous populations. Monoculturalism is the intent of cultural racism by individuals

and institutions projecting superiority over another's cultural identity and failing to

realize the harmful consequences (Sue et al., 1999).

Physical and Mental Health Disparities

Most appalling is the physical and mental health adversities Indigenous

communities must overcome are an uphill battle for this near-invisible group.

Incidentally, the effects of colonization can be internalized through negative messaging,

creating shame, self-blame, and suicidal ideation. Subjected to such maltreatment,

Indigenous Peoples face challenges with their identity early on, and may avoid

identifying as Indigenous due to cultural shame. Furthermore, they are constantly aware

of being derogatorily compared to the dominant culture as inadequate due to perceived

less than cultural differences embedded in nonconformity.

Such punitive internalization can result in depression and self-hatred without

understanding why such feelings exist. This deep-rooted shame of hundreds of years of

"oppression and annihilation" is held in self-denigration, negative self-image, and low

self-esteem . . . seen in disorders . . . problems of substance abuse . . . child abuse,

depression, and suicide (Cole, 2006, p. 125). In continuance of the mental and physical

travesties, Indigenous Peoples are further demoralized and misunderstood in their

collectivist ideals, which support the community, as stated by Duran et al. (1998):

> Western approaches that focus on illness and pathology do not consider
>
> community assets. Unless the strengths of Native American family structures are
>
> included in therapy and other forms of intervention, there will always be
>
> resistance to adopting a pathologized self. One important source of intervention is
>
> simply the education of Native Americans and others about this process, in Native
>
> American studies programs and elsewhere. (p. 61)

Sadly, Indigenous Peoples have a lower life expectancy of 5.5 years over other

races in the United States, carrying a critically disproportionate health burden affecting

the quality of life of many (Indian Health Services, 2020). In 2019, postpandemic, 72

years changed to 67 years and in 2020, to about 65 years by 2021 for men and women

(Goldman & Andrasfay, 2022). The epidemiological and ontological factors of

Indigenous Peoples are indicative of specific mental health conditions, such as post-

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, often co-

occurring with alcohol dependence and/or other substance use and a high incidence of

suicidal ideation (Gone et al., 2019). The consequences of genocidal conditions expressed

as oppression in Indigenous Peoples are influenced by changing contextual factors that do

not definitively define a racial/ethnic group as homogenous.

Poupart (2003) posited:

The demonstration of internalized oppression among American Indians and Others does not occur deterministically, nor in strict dichotomous directions (inward/outward). Rather, inward, and outward directed internal oppression should be understood as only two existing expressions within a nonlinear continuum of multiple expressions. Individual expressions of internal oppression are affected by individual material situations and experiences. Thus, potentially as many expressions of internal oppression exist as experiences of oppression. It is likely that the harm these expressions pose to self or Others is related to the extent that one is marginalized and oppressed by the dominant culture. (p. 90)

The toll of considerable disparities has been reflected in the high prevalence of suicidal ideation, attempts, and completion, compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the United States (Rey et al., 2022). As such, Indigenous youth are not only at an added risk of harm and circumstantial factors (e.g., increased violence, poverty, and unemployment rates), but they are also susceptible to mental and physical health inequalities and lower levels of educational achievement (Garrett et al., 2014). Furthermore, Indigenous youth are prone to face chronic racial microaggressions feeding the roots of internalized racism (Solórzano & Huber, 2020). Internalized racism adopted from the oppressor can affect self-esteem and self-confidence and trigger ingroup rejection (Watts-Jones, 2002). The feelings of inferiority lower the value of the ingroup; thereby, the appeal of the oppressor's worldview is more likely to be adopted, which comes at a cost. Such accumulative issues lead to significant health disparities resulting from a long history of systematic discrimination and maltreatment.

Generally, Indigenous Peoples have immense educational, health, and economic incongruences. The poverty rates for U.S. Indigenous Tribal communities are double the national poverty rate at 25% (Bread for the World, 2018), and 60% reside in high-poverty counties (USDA, 2018).

These economic disadvantages often hinder Indigenous students from the ability to finance education (Brayboy et al., 2012). Poverty conditions are not merely economic; they are generationally cyclical and combined with numerous social problems (Bourke et al., 2022). A common misnomer is Indigenous students are fully financially sponsored for education. Approximately 38% of Indigenous U.S. students use financial aid loans for undergraduate studies (NCES, 2019). Generally, Indigenous students attend public entities (Tierney et al., 2007). Because the existing grants and scholarships are not well-advertised, and the conditions are incredibly specific and complex to satisfy, the funds often remain unclaimed. Furthermore, many Indigenous students are unable to apply for such financial support because applications entail providing proof of identity to qualify as Indigenous, which is the only racial/ethnic group requiring membership proof (i.e., records of blood quantum for Tribal membership), leaving many students unable to apply for such financial support (i.e., mixed race, belonging to two separate tribes can disqualify an applicant). Recurrently, Indigenous students are dealing with their basic needs instead of preparing for educational readiness. More importantly, education holds colonial constructs from federally funded residential schools, with negative consequences preserved in the oral histories for generations, maintaining unappealing scholastic associations (Dinwoodie, 2001). The educational path from elementary school is pivotal as a bridge to high school, and the meager graduate statistics of high school signal a

failing system for Indigenous students' way of life (i.e., Indigenous belief systems). The vast difference in that Indigenous beliefs are connected to the community and teamwork whereas the Eurocentric view nurtures individualism, competition, and multiple-choice standardized testing for competency (Brayboy et al., 2012). The transition from high school to college or university continues to designate significant issues with an increased lack of retention (Adelman et al., 2013). Gone et al. (2019) asserted these conditions in Indigenous Peoples have been empirically tied to the colonization of the Americas by European settlers, who shaped the inequitable disparities and trauma. Hence, it is vital to recognize the historical inequities that continue to affect Indigenous Peoples today.

The lack of understanding of the official and unofficial policies of governmental colonization of Indigenous Peoples inserted ongoing effects of cultural destruction and trauma, eroding value and purpose in the Indigenous worldview (Cole, 2006). Such consequences can be understood in Holocaust survivors whose identities waver between strengths-based beliefs and attitudes to survival capabilities. Although some Jewish survivors appreciated publicizing the damaging consequences, others did not want to admit to the negative effects of the holocaust due to its pathologizing nature and admittance of Nazi oppressors being victorious (Cole, 2006). Like Jewish populations, Indigenous Peoples are resilient and have undergone tremendous abuse. Importantly, Indigenous Peoples are not monolithic in all cultural aspects or lived capacities, although similar challenges are widespread. Indigenous students who survive higher education through graduation show "extraordinary traits" as only the fittest survive (Williamson, 1994, p. 4).

Positive improvements come from openly and accurately educating the world, beginning with elementary school, with a curriculum that includes divulging the hidden history that has been inaccurate and incomplete on Indigenous Peoples (Loring, 2009). Although efforts cannot erase the past, Eurocentric acknowledgment, recognition, and understanding of the trials and tribulations (Brave Heart et al., 2011) of Indigenous Peoples might help facilitate Eurocentric acceptance of this group, which can lead to the collective healing of Indigenous Peoples and their rightful desire to reclaim their cultural identity. Explicit and full education regarding Indigenous Peoples should be taught in elementary school to validate a history rather than withhold it. Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1995) communicated knowledge of the historical trauma helped increase awareness of grief about the effects of trauma, while the traditional community healing rituals aided collective mourning and cathartic releases for Indigenous individuals and communities, creating a more positive group identity and increased commitment to curative work.

Intersectionality Factors

BIPOC students are disproportionately disadvantaged due to inequitable scaffolds (Massey et al., 2021). Different racial and ethnic groups have intersecting factors that undermine enrollment and retention success in educational settings (Garcia, 2018; Ishitani, 2006). Many scholars have highlighted many BIPOC students have come from lower socioeconomic status families (Ishitani, 2006; Terenzini et al., 1996), consequently, do not have the means to attend university (Estrada et al., 2016; Huerta et al., 2013), and have limited interactions with faculty (Ishitani, 2006; Terenzini et al., 1996). Accessibility to graduate school may require working. Frequently, Indigenous students work as graduate assistants to contend with financial issues. The research has

shown that 67% of Indigenous students are first-generation students, although 28% are

nontraditional at the undergraduate level); moreover, 30% have dependents at the

undergraduate level (RTI International, 2019).

Familial obligations can tax time management, and available support from

families is often nonexistent due to a myriad of factors. The statistics note a portion of

these students tend to enroll in community colleges (McKinney & Novak, 2013) or Tribal

schools in close proximity to home. People of Color as disadvantaged students are likely

to attend lower-resourced schools, including financial and social resources (Smedley et

al., 2001). Indigenous students might have to cope with navigating academia without

support or guidance (i.e., lacking role models, not aware of majors, direction, lack of

awareness about supports). University preparedness and lower grade point averages can

stall out ambition, sometimes tied to negative reports from family members who have

previously attended university. Underlying factors compiled with socioeconomic,

biological, access to healthcare, and cultural contexts have cumulative effects of

intersectional marginality that can disadvantage BIPOC groups, creating health

disparities (Gordon, 2020). As such, viewing the complexity of cumulative marginality in

factors affecting Indigenous students through a wide lens, chiefly while dealing with

adversity, empowers opportunity and extends understanding behind students' need to

develop persistent strength-based, power-driven resilience in higher education

atmospheres. The relevance of research in this area can support change to address

contemporary retention and recruitment for this group. Resilience-focused scholars

repeatedly equate it with positive compensatory adaptations despite adversity (Fleming &

Ledogar, 2008). Resilience was identified as solely coming from external influences,

including cultural components. More recently, efforts have incorporated research

evaluating innate protective characteristics stimulated in certain circumstances (Fleming

& Ledogar, 2008). Still, the research indicates that first-generation students are more

likely to trust in internal attributes of motivation and belief in self to persist in academia

(Naumann et al., 2003).

Worldview

Historically the statistics of Indigenous students in higher education have not had

favorable outcomes. The results can be partly attributed to the vastly opposing views and

value systems of Indigenous and Eurocentric cultural worldviews (Brayboy et al., 2012).

Brayboy et al. (2012) evaluated the self-determination of Indigenous students in higher

education and students transitioning to faculty as having several identifiable influential

factors. This study brings to light the evident influence of harmful stereotypes on the

academic performance of Indigenous students, as emphasized by Brayboy et al. Native

scholars have written countlessly about the effects of generational trauma and how the

ramifications of this history are costly for Indigenous students considered more at risk

than other racial and ethnic groups. Acknowledging the radical difference between

Western and Indigenous cultures affords a perspective on protective factors and the

strengths about Native students. The Indigenous knowledge systems come from a

collectivist perspective that incorporates a true sense of good founded on community

sharing, not necessarily for physical or monetary interests, but the aspect of knowledge.

This interrelated and holistic knowledge is mastered in everyday living (Barnhardt &

Kawagley, 2005). Eurocentric values are limited by evidence in the physical world with

hierarchical delineations and compartmentalized (see Appendix A; Stephens, 2001).

To better understand this group's challenges cast in Westernized higher education, it is essential to be familiar with the traditional Indigenous Peoples' definition of cultural knowledge. The *Way of Knowing* is an elaborate and keenly developed "social consciousness and sense of responsibility" (Kawagley, 2006, p. 8), which is the contextual foundation of the Indigenous worldview. Kawagley (2006) describes the way of knowing as an embodiment of the way of life constructed in meaningful illustrative stories and through the observation of natural processes passed down for generations. Since a traditional worldview holds resilience and stamina, the Indigenous ways of knowing conceptualization offers a perspective of how Indigenous students can view the world and carry these ideals into academic settings. Recognizing this worldview clarifies the origins of cultural resilience and pride in this group, affording belongingness and value for even those Indigenous Peoples who have lost a cultural perspective through colonization. Embracing cultural efforts and reincorporating these lost teachings in Indigenous communities in the United States and Canada helps to transcend generational trauma (Sarche & Whitesell, 2012) and breakdown decolonization and promote Indigenous student development and resilience within the community (Garrett et al., 2014). Vizenor (1994), a writer on Indigenous Peoples, expounds on the fact that this group is not a victim of postcolonial times, remnants of historic oblivion; rather, the concept of survivance signifies an absolute power in the presence of Indigenous Peoples through observable cultural customs shown in attributes of morality, courage, and solid mental disposition. Although there are numerous diverse tribal groups, the commonality in similarities of common values and psychological attributes discussed by Native scholars connects Indigenous Peoples (Garrett & Portman, 2011).

This awareness is salient to fully comprehend cultural norms for many Indigenous students who derive ideals from this ideology and the reason many discuss walking in two worlds: holding Indigenous traditions or accepting Western ways (Kawagley, 2006). Kawagley (2006) asserted the Way of Knowing is not wholly appreciated or accepted in Eurocentric ways. There exist interactive and communicative distinctions between behavioral practices at home for Indigenous students and in Eurocentric cultural practice within academics, consequently causing incongruence (i.e., self-assertive expectations like eye contact) and situating Indigenous students at an academic disadvantage (Huffman, 2008). Even though tribal differences remain, the overall traditional worldview concept is similar across Indigenous groups.

The Indigenous Ways of Knowing were established to encompass peace for self and others, harmony (Grayshield & Mihecoby, 2010). This incredible level of respect and the innate tendency for Indigenous Peoples to be invested in the welfare of one another is embedded in the subconscious. This worldview instilled in modern-day Indigenous Peoples plays out as an incentive to join helping fields to honor a conscious and unconscious drive. Oppressed communities lean toward group recovery and to change stolen potential embedded in the biases of the sociopolitical ideology of social reality built in dominant structures (Martín-Baró, 1994, as cited in Grayshield & Mihecoby, 2010). Under this context, Grayshield and Mihecoby (2010) expanded that obtaining answers for marginalized groups from educators inclined with a perspective from the colonial systems that created dominant constructs is unjust.

Eurocentric views on mental health involve treating individual psychological problems in isolation, whereas healthy Indigenous ways of healing entail living in

synchrony within devoted community support systems for resolution and harmonious

well-being (Lewis & Ho, 1989). Modern Indigenous Peoples are dynamic and diverse,

with differing identities and cultural assumptions should not enter into the context.

However, in traditional Indigenous worldview terms (theory of knowledge), there is an

awareness of interconnection that spans across all things coinciding with an innate

perceptive sense of observation honed over generations (integrated within oral histories)

to support navigation in daily life experiences of reality (Grayshield & Mihecoby, 2010).

Respect and space for such traditional knowledge can uplift the Indigenous community

and sovereignty, encouraging postsecondary Indigenous student retention. As Indigenous

Peoples hold a collectivist family system, support from family and community is integral

to university completion. Generally speaking, the Indigenous worldview comes from a

relational and holistic perspective, with everything being necessary; there is a deep,

grounded interconnectedness to nature, animals, life, communities, and individuals.

Storytelling is a "firmly grounded oral tradition," an essential manner in which

Indigenous People pass on teachings that instill knowledge (i.e., mind, body, and soul

connection) entrusted to "knowledge keepers" (Jesse, 2018). These knowledge holders

are taught, trained, and apprenticed Elders before being accepted as having a right to

share (Jesse, 2018). Sacred stories carry traditions, values, history, significant events, and

cultural beliefs that are not simply fictional tales (Solomon et al., 2022). The weight and

beauty of the acknowledgment and validity of such traditional protective factors are

valuable assets for Indigenous students; simultaneously, many, through acculturation, no

longer have access to or did not learn such protective factors in this Indigenous

knowledge. Consequently, they have lost important ties to sociocultural resilience to

support themselves in times of need. Alim et al. (2012) discussed the effects of chronic

stress and resilience and how stress-related systems are entwined with the brain, body,

behavioral and social functionality, and when dysregulated, can lead to addiction relapse.

Yet, resilience can buffer and enable better coping without leading to addiction,

irrespective of dealing with acute stress and adversity (Alim et al., 2012).

The prevalence of Indigenous invisibility is significant in higher education. Thus,

furthering current research is imminent if the Indigenous student participation and

completion statistics are to improve. Resilience in existing students, particularly graduate

students, is a crucial component of this research.

Campus Atmosphere

Various researchers have studied Indigenous graduate students discussing

evidential problems compounded and affecting success. Accordingly, Gallop and Bastien

(2016) evaluated Canadian Aboriginal (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) students'

underrepresentation among higher education graduates. The researchers proposed that

their underrepresentation was outside Eurocentric rationales, such as inadequate funds or

unsuitable career aspirations. Instead, low college enrollment and graduation were related

to other factors. Most salient was the forced colonization of Aboriginal peoples over

generations. For example, in 1996, the Union of Indians finalized the last closure of

mandatory Canadian residential schools (Restoule, 2013), which employed residential

schoolteachers, of which only 40% held official training, and even after closure, children

were placed with White families for assimilation. Consequently, The Royal Commission

on Aboriginal Peoples 1996 requirement that Aboriginal people must conform

demonstrated that the systemic marginalization of Indigenous Peoples remains a

significant issue in Canada (Gallop & Bastien, 2016). A qualitative study by Gallop and Bastien (2016) assessed self-efficacy through participatory action research using semistructured interviews to determine critical areas of importance for developing Aboriginal student aspirations and providing the methodology to help Aboriginal students achieve academic success.

The researcher identified the following themes: (a) cultural competency was essential for universities interested in Aboriginal student retention; (b) efforts toward an improved student-faculty relationship were vital; (c) positive support of Aboriginal students (i.e., multicultural center, tutoring, and Aboriginal staff support); and (d) the implementation of a mentorship program positively influence the upward trajectory of Aboriginal graduates (Gallop & Bastien, 2016). Congruently, the impact of faculty mentorship on BIPOC doctoral students created a healthier sense of independence and self-efficacy in managing the minutiae of graduate school, particularly regarding students with access to support on an ongoing basis (Ellis, 2001).

Universities in the United States have attempted to facilitate unrepresented populations in recent years; yet, other racial groups continue to grapple with issues of racial interactions. Research on Black students in Ivy League higher education contended with daily racialized incidents accessed in five Ivy League institutions that undermined Black students' experiences, belongingness, and well-being (Johnson et al., 2022). The findings highlighted the need for institutional leadership to: (a) adjust and implement urgent targeted strategies; acknowledge, assess, and execute procedures; (b) address racialized tensions and change the embedded culture; and (c) move the needle toward racial diversity. Such studies help define the need for explorative efforts in the ways race

and racism affect the physical environment of campuses, affecting BIPOC students'

perceived view on safety and security as students.

Indigenous student enrollment rates are rising slowly, despite the cumulative toll

of historical trauma. In contrast, postsecondary institutions have seen an increase in

Indigenous student enrollment, it remains low, with only 17% enrollment rates for the

Indigenous population compared to 60% for the entire United States (Castro et al., 2011).

Shared factors identified in students who had achieved doctoral success comprise

attributes, such as emotional intelligence, resilience, attitudes, and motivation (Ashleigh,

2004; Castro et al., 2011).

Castro et al. (2011) found extrinsic support factors and, conversely, harmful

external factors that were particularly impactful. Success in higher education and doctoral

persistence requires specific attributes and conditions for any population, let alone the

students facing substantial impediments like those confronted by Indigenous Peoples.

Importantly, this study found the intrinsic value of an activity of motivation, framed in

self-interest, brought about challenge or enjoyment. Emotional intelligence framed in

self-awareness and the ability to manage emotions and relationships were also critical.

The attrition rate for non-Indigenous graduate students pursuing a doctorate is

approximately 50%; it is the highest academic attainment level with the most stringent

system for entry to ensure student success (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). Furthermore, the

mental, cognitive, and social sacrifices required to achieve graduation in higher education

are comprehensively challenging without battling cultural, worldview differences, and

other barriers.

The Indigenous shared worldview and connection to the community play an important role in academic success. Evans and Davis (2018) assessed resilience in Indigenous youth by evaluating coping behaviors attached to Indigenous cultural practices. This study merged a multimethod approach in a tribal school and measured the student Sense of Coherence (SOC) scale, the Achenbach Youth Self-Report scale, and the Historical Loss Associated Symptoms Scale (HLASS) scale (Evans & Davis, 2018). Researchers found a statistical significance in an increased SOC, which yielded lesser symptoms. In a related study, Evans and Davis (2018) delivered a qualitative art-based interview comprising a negative and positive prompt to assess student coping strategies. The findings showed a higher SOC equated with fewer stressors. Importantly, the most pronounced generalized resistance resources (GRR) were spending time with family, community, and cultural support systems (Evans & Davis, 2018).

Research has shown that instructor and family support can positively influence student psychological capital and moderate well-being (Nielsen et al., 2017). Supportive racial/ethnically diverse faculty can bolster positive feelings for BIPOC students. Low rates of limited diversity in university faculty can increase stereotype threat for BIPOC students (Nouwen & Clycq, 2018; Park et al., 2020). A sense of belongingness can be inhibited by campus stressors with a negative racial tone (Good et al., 2012; Hurtado et al., 1997). These cumulative circumstances can negatively affect student well-being and persistence in academic success. Similar findings about the importance of culturally sensitive relationships have been found for other minority groups. Felder and Barker (2013) studied the Black student-faculty relationship, the most significant relationship for these higher education students, as racial discrimination and marginalization negatively

impact student achievement. Researchers applied a phenomenological approach to comprehend the role of advising two institutions specific to uncovering details about the Black student and White faculty-advisor relationship and campus climate (Felder & Barker, 2013). The researchers indicated that the student-faculty relationship was positively improved when a student was supported by a culturally sensitive faculty member versus an adversarial relationship. In addition, neutral relationships (only professional exchanges deficient in emotion) resulted in detached relationships and were considered a survival response (Felder & Barker, 2013). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) have dedicated a lifetime of research into factors allowing communities and individuals to flourish, known as positive psychology.

Indigenous resilience can come from Tribal culture and acts as a protective factor. Tribal culture refers to the particular practices specific to an Indigenous person's Tribal affiliation, which offers a sense of community, helping to anchor Indigenous Peoples. This resiliency comes from culturally shared values, spirituality, and a strong sense of identity, creating collective responsibility and accountability for self. This resilience plays an important role within more traditional Indigenous communities and can strengthen and preserve well-being. Guillory (2009) completed a qualitative study examining the strengths and weaknesses in program completion with Indigenous students' perceptions compared with local state representatives, university presidents, and faculty at three U.S. universities. The emphasis was on three areas: (a) family and community bonds, (b) assessing family issues (i.e., single parents), and (c) mentorship (Guillory, 2009). The results indicated the value of universities implementing cultural competency programs to increase the retention and graduation rates for AIAN students in

higher education. Universities should include academic and career support, peer

mentoring, and AIAN tribes' tutoring to boost AIAN students' academic confidence.

Another study offered support on Indigenous resiliency and how foundational it is

to the academic victories of these students. Jackson et al. (2003) evaluated successful

Indigenous college students from three states to assess student resilience and barriers

during college. These researchers acknowledged numerous Indigenous students'

resilience themes, specifically for Native Americans living on reservations until college

entry. Native Americans are the minority of minorities and hold the lowest percentage of

postsecondary graduates for all racial groups (Jackson et al., 2003). The study rationale

was interested in Indigenous students residing on reservations, as this group faces the

most intensive cross-culture shift. The results uncovered several factors, such as (a)

family support; (b) positive value of mentorship in NA or other multicultural groups; (c)

approachable, friendly faculty and staff; (d) encouragement of participation experiences

(i.e., Outward Bound); (e) inclination to request assistance (i.e., new assertive shift); (f)

strength from reliance around traditional cultural beliefs and spirituality; (g) deep-level

factors, such as contending with racism or oppression (macro and microaggressions); (h)

indirect course based on cultural diversity (i.e., allotment for choice in student timeline,

not Western ideals; and (i) self-contradictory culture pressure.

Moreover, another study supports the acknowledgment of culture and the value

that faculty can offer in supporting the success of Indigenous students, partly from an

open perception of Indigenous culture. Mosholder and Goslin (2013) conducted a

longitudinal three-series study to advance recruiting and retention for NA undergraduates

in an open-registration university. The rationale was based on the existing assumption

that students other than the dominant culture and at least from a midlevel socioeconomic background are believed to hold English and other academic deficits (Mosholder & Goslin, 2013). The study applied the grounded theory to construct a survey to capture the perceptions of NA students on graduating and further investigated repeated implementations to measure change. The two first studies exposed shortfalls in communication, advising, and mentoring NA students. This research measured a Eurocentric university's influence on several retention programs for NA scholastic achievement with the funds of knowledge method (i.e., emphasis on the abilities; familiarity in cultural interactions). The results revealed that NA recruitment and retention improved if the university integrated NA culturally competent programs (i.e., embraced student tribal communities, families, and ceremonial traditions). The university's endorsement of accepting and respecting cultural traditions, along with the continued efforts to implement, correct, and maintain the value significant to Indigenous students, dramatically improved Indigenous student recruiting and retention (NA enrollment resulted in an increase of 20% in Year 1; up 15% in Year 1; based on belonging, community, and family support by the university). The study further exemplified the value of endorsing Indigenous students' unique culture to improve retention in academia.

A literature review on doctoral candidates' success found many factors that impact attrition and retention, such as: (a) "student factors" (i.e., demographics, attributes, goals and inspiration, obligations, and coping competencies); (b) "institutional factors" (i.e., type of program, infrastructure, core curriculum, expectations, and

communication); and (c) "student integration" within college (i.e., scholastic, community, and financial integration; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012, p. 201).

Acceptance must come from the entire university and be exemplified throughout various areas in Eurocentric universities rather than endorsed by an individual department, a single professor, or one cultural event; systemic institutional support as a collective whole is optimal. Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) researched major themes for doctoral students associated with persistence: (a) perseverance factors (i.e., individual sacrifice, deferred expectations, and dissertation complications); (b) individual aspects (i.e., the inspiration behind the academic target, motives in persistence, and approaches for dissertation achievement); (c) social factors (i.e., support structures and coping methods); and (d) college/university aspects (i.e., program features) participants associated with their persistence. These findings provided an understanding of the struggles inherent in the journey and the factors associated with doctoral persistence.

Another study on Indigenous students in advanced social work journeys at the Brown School of Washington University (St. Louis) found six consistent themes with higher than average completion rates due to institutional support. The results attributed the following themes as advantages to the success of the students: (a) Indigenous student cohort; (b) skill improvement; (c) Indigenous community service; (d) success stability; (e) cultural individuality; and (f) resilience for nine participants (Thompson et al., 2020).

Complete institutional acceptance for all BIPOC groups would be exemplary. Researchers surveyed women of color in doctoral programs' lived experiences in key patterns of discrimination (racism, sexism, and classism; Ramos & Yi, 2020). The university climate on diversity continues to critically influence doctoral candidate women

of color's resilience. Ramos and Yi's (2020) methodology involved Mellor's taxonomy of coping by evaluating the student's conditions. Participants completed a semistructured interview conducted by women of color by doctoral researchers to ensure equitable treatment. The researchers obtained the following themes: (a) comprehension of intersectionality; (b) provision of strategies and coping mechanisms; and (c) the need for a roadmap for institutions, administrators, and faculty to address areas of discrimination in support of assembling structural networks to increase social skills and encourage student academic success. The results categorized coping strategies (Mellor) that doctoral students of color applied to help guard against, manage, and confront racist and sexist occurrences. Ramos and Yi (2020) substantiated future strategies to implement culturally relevant knowledge, training methods for educational providers, and developmental support to improve doctoral student retention (i.e., systems to help students feel validated and accepted). Finally, the researchers suggested a value-add solution comprising the same race student-mentor pairings to enhance a relationship of support. The prevalence of the necessity of support from universities is explicitly stated in previous studies.

Earlier scholars have focused on access for Indigenous students (Tinto, 1993). Unfortunately, the statistics show student populations remain dismal. The American Community Census (2021) showed a decline in enrollment for Indigenous undergraduates of 37%, from 196,000 to 123,000 from 2010 to 2020. The graduate enrollment declined by approximately 17%, from 17,000 to 14,000 (PNPI, 2022). The ratio based on percentages of the population of Indigenous students remains bleak. Later studies have evaluated the microaggressions BIPOC students face on campus and how such damaging environments set a tone for these students, often not recognized by

university leaders. Any student pursuing a master's or doctoral degree deals with college stressors; however, there is an additional level of exhaustion over the typical dynamics experienced by BIPOC students. Racial battle fatigue and race-related stress in higher education (Franklin, 2016) are wearing and cumulative and can increase the risk factors while affecting the overall student's mental health. Such dynamics require further research from a structural review to eliminate the burdensome complexities that BIPOC generally experience in academia over White students (Feagin, 1992; Smith et al., 2007). Within the context of Indigenous Peoples' general invisibility from erasure beneath endemic narratives and stereotypes (Dunbar-Ortiz & Gilio-Whitaker, 2016), Indigenous scholars have found that Indigenous students in higher education face the same level, being largely unseen.

McCabe (2009) of Florida State University used the CRT as an approach to evaluate racial and gender types of microaggressions experienced by a combination of 82 Black, Latino, and White students on a predominantly White campus. Four themes in McCabe's (2009) study were found: (a) Black men were viewed as threatening, (b) Latinas were regarded as exotic and sexually available, (c) Black women faced microaggressions in classroom settings, and (d) White women experienced microaggressions from male-dominated students. Not only do microaggressions have a bearing on the student's sense of belongingness, but racial judgments also affect self-perceptions knowing others have negative views of them. Black and Latina/o students connected to form support networks to cope with adversity. The study recommended how universities could better support Black and Latino students around racial experiences with supportive student of color organizations.

Unfortunately, frequent barriers exist not only for students, but also for faculty. Racial and ethnic faculty are instrumental in supporting Indigenous student retention. Underrepresented Indigenous faculty also deal with persistent microaggressions (Smith, 2012) and are subject to discriminatory racial bias fatigue (Hartlep & Ball, 2020). Racial discrimination negatively affects psychological functioning, such as isolation, self-esteem, depression, and stress (Cokley et al., 2017). Faculty are often expected and feel obligated to offer mentorship or serve in other ethnic or racial roles without compensation (Walters et al., 2019); while simultaneously dealing with additional administrative scrutiny (Brown et al., 2022). Additionally, Brown et al. (2022) explored the mentorship link that may inhibit or enhance professional career development for Native American faculty in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Indigenous research methodologies were employed to align Indigenous community ontology in a qualitative study with 23 Native American faculty. The findings showed a strong connection between: (a) the value and connectedness of mentorship; (b) the importance of verbal team affirmations towards professional development; (c) the need for a healthy work-life balance; and (d) the significance of institutional knowledge and respect about Indigenous values and research methodology (Brown et al., 2022). Essentially, the lived experiences of Indigenous professional faculty development, both personally and professionally, were strengthened with institutional mentorship aligned with Native American faculty goals and achievements.

Finally, it is valuable for Eurocentric groups to understand the contextual dealings appreciated in a non-Indigenous framework under the taxonomy of dominant cultural parameters for improved insight. The scholastic horizon for BIPOC students dawdles

with disproportionate barriers of systemic and institutional racism, with BIPOC students needing to make necessary accommodations to be compatible with the dominant culture. Carrero Pinedo et al. (2022) researched BIPOC stress and resilience for psychology graduate students and the call for institutions to decolonize educational structures. This quantitative study analyzed critical race theory (CRT) and liberation psychology (emphasized cultural histories for healing) as frameworks for BIPOC trainees and found testimonies as viable sources in establishing pressure to transform and implement more equitable systems to aid BIPOC students in higher education foster resistance (Carrero Pinedo et al., 2022). Even with diversity and inclusionary implements, deficits highlight oppressive dynamics and paths of privilege in the disparities that endure for BIPOC students shaped through colonialism. Not surprisingly, during placements in predominantly White institutions, BIPOC students experienced loneliness. They were obligated to shift identities with cultural transitions, meet expectations to assist site diversity improvement, and accommodate slights with dominant supervisors and peers, with assumptions of good intentions, while deciding if reporting racial circumstances would stifle the supervisor-mentee relationship (Carrero Pinedo et al., 2022). At times, stereotype threat or needing to ignore, challenge, or adhering to dominant cultural aspects meant the difference in academic and professional growth. The impact in influence of success professors have on doctoral students is significant (Barker, 2011; Felder, 2010; Walker et al., 2008). Hence, this current study aims to offer a more specific framework aligned with Indigenous students under the tribal CRT covered more comprehensively in Chapter 2.

Well-Being of Indigenous Students

The history and the effects of maltreatment on Indigenous youth are relatively unknown or briefly covered and acknowledged in educational history. The plight of Indigenous people has had long-term influences that are still widespread. Ultimately, it is crucial to recognize the narratives of Indigenous history in education. Canadian postsecondary institutions had tremendous negative influences with substantial systemic issues built into the K–12 framework for First Nations peoples with an inclination to be assimilative, "everyone is expected to fit in" (RCAP, 1996, p. 476). This long list of historical tragedies inflicted on Indigenous Peoples is woven into why this group does not seek or graduate from postsecondary education. Consequently, Indigenous students are apt to contend with more challenges than non-Indigenous students in higher education (Astin et al., 1996; Pavel et al., 1994). Despite this history, Indigenous Peoples are resilient, proud, and honorable. They endeavor to maintain a positive footprint in this world. Contemporary Indigenous Peoples are working toward advancing Indigenous communities; accordingly, mental health and well-being efforts to support these communities are vital.

Simultaneously, education was a promissory condition substituted for land by the United States government (Battiste, 2002). Indigenous students may be inclined to ascribe to solidarity derived from collectivist cultural beliefs, in contrast, individualistic cultures typically practice autonomy. Accordingly, more traditionally raised students within the Indigenous culture or residing on tribal lands have conflicted views or a transformational resistance to return to their communities to reinvest support, though

other students believed higher success meant not returning (Brayboy, 2005b).

Nonetheless, many viewed education as equated with improving life.

One way forward for Indigenous students to thrive is Indigenization: a movement

that empowers Indigenous students by integrating Indigenous knowledge and ways of

being within educational systems. Thus, Indigenization calls for the elimination of a

"tokenized checklist response that merely tolerates Indigenous knowledge(s), to one

where Indigenous knowledge(s) are embraced as part of the institutional fabric"

(Pidgeon, 2016, Abstract). Indigenous students with a solid, intact cultural identity can

better join an academic environment and learn about other cultures and beliefs without

fearing losing or having their own culture questioned (Huffman, 2001).

Indigenous knowledge, or Indigenous ways of knowing, has been considered

antiquated, as the strategies were not recorded in Eurocentric systematic educational

systems. Yet, the extensive richness and wealth of knowledge in the worldview,

languages, and teachings, both observable and teachable, have existed and progressed

through time (Battiste, 2002). Furthermore, the identification of Indigenous knowledge

on some accounts has been viewed under a Eurocentric lens with a "taxonomical

approach" (i.e., documenting names and meaning), thus only providing a partial

framework and biased perspective (Battiste, 2002, p. 9). Modern Indigenous scholars are

working to decolonize the Indigenous knowledge systems and bring forth an integrated

educational system that acknowledges and respects Indigenous and Eurocentric

approaches (Battiste, 2002).

Academic success is predicated on several factors that need to be considered that

are required in higher education. Psychological resourcefulness, support, and compassion

(resilience) are circumstances essential for any student pursuing an education to combat

the stress from an increasingly competitive environment (Poots & Cassidy, 2020).

Therefore, it is essential to consider success in academia without support, and plagued

with added stressors, such as having few to no other same race/ethnicity students and

faculty like them. Consequently, an integrated and layered supportive approach strategy

is paramount (Milne et al., 2016). A strategy consistent with cultural understanding to

safeguard and protect the autonomy of an Indigenous worldview to increase the rates of

success in higher education.

Rationale, Purpose, and Significance of the Study

Actualizing an academic concept of equality focused on increasing Indigenous

students in higher education demands recognition and consideration of the sociopolitical

forces that impede and endorse equal opportunity in academic success for this group. It is

salient to lay the foundation to understand the background with examples of Indigenous

Peoples' barriers. The disparities are overwhelmingly evident, making it a challenge for

Indigenous Peoples to thrive in a healthy standard of living (i.e., loss of cultural

strengths; unfamiliar colonial methodology), which leaves a group without the necessary

protective factors required today. Inside a Western milieu, Indigenous individuals may be

expected to attend college or university to meet the criteria for ideal doctoral candidate

criteria while still struggling with satisfying the basic needs of life.

Several cultural and ideological transformations are compulsory for graduate

students, particularly Indigenous students departing from reservation life, leaving their

families and communities for the first time. This sentiment is true for a sizable portion of

racial or ethnic minority students, as their community deviates fundamentally from

academic communities (Alvarez et al., 2009). Carter (2007) theorized that race-based

traumatic stress (RBTS) from discrimination can cause symptoms of intrusive thoughts,

hyperarousal, and avoidance tendencies in attempting to stop negative effects. RBTS can

negatively affect student behavior and development found in performance challenges

(i.e., advancement and retention) and integration with peers and faculty (Levy et al.,

2016; Trent et al., 2020). The limited number of studies in this area equates to Indigenous

students' sparse representation in graduate school. The cumulative overview illuminates

factors like lower preparatory readiness but, more importantly, once on the doorstep of

graduate school, Indigenous students must contend with insufficient Indigenous role

models and inadequate or non-existent peer support, and a climate not supportive of the

Indigenous worldview. These issues are only a glimpse of Indigenous graduate students'

life experiences, exposing a troublesome dynamic that further necessitates the continued

evaluation of Indigenous graduate student retention. Indeed, Pewewardy and Frey (2002)

found that students of color attending Eurocentric Universities are inclined to experience

marginalization feelings more so than feelings of acceptance. As such, perceptions of

students of color provide an essential perspective from which to scrutinize Eurocentric

colleges and universities' racial climate around evaluating different ideologies,

supportive services, multicultural curriculum, and areas pertinent to cultural diversity

(Pewewardy & Frey, 2002).

One significant change created to address the disparate percentages of Indigenous

students in higher education was the introduction of Tribal Colleges and universities.

These institutions (often a subsidiary of larger universities) were explicitly established to

offer postsecondary education to Indigenous students and were built and aligned with

Indigenous cultural competency within the curriculum to increase graduate numbers. These "Tribal Colleges are chartered by the governments of federally recognized American Indian nations and operate in 75 campuses across 15 US States" (American Indian Service, 2017, Section found in Free Scholarship for Native Americans).

Chapter Summary

This study aimed to expand upon the limited research available in examining Indigenous Peoples at a master's or doctorate level or graduates under 5 years. This lower percentage is quantifiably more prevalent in evaluating Indigenous students' success within higher education institutions (Huaman & Brayboy, 2017; Pidgeon, 2016). Furthermore, Indigenous Peoples are often assessed through a monolithic lens as one entity; thus, the differences between communities and the individual must be carefully examined to find truly unique experiences. There are several considerations in evaluating the lived experiences of Indigenous graduate students: being raised in a predominately White society, having different tribal affiliations, whether raised in a traditional Indigenous, Eurocentric, or blended upbringing, rural or urban context, whether gender roles and more finite areas to wholly recognize the strengths and hindrances of various groups of Indigenous people contending within academia (Keene, 2012). In considering these cumulative factors, the present study uncovers the nuances explaining disparate rates of graduate school attendance in the Indigenous populations founded under the Tribal Critical Race Theory under the context of resilience. This study defines resilience as adjustments made to adapt to one's environment despite adversity.

Definitions of Terms

Educational Reform(s) – From an equity perspective across public education, reforms strive to identify and address institutional disparities through policies and practices, instruction, funding, and pedagogy modifications (Maranto & McShane, 2012).

Ethnicity – A sense of belongingness within a social group with the same national origin or cultural traditions recognized as a social construct (NYU, 2023).

Equity – The fairness quality being promoted to recognize that some individuals may have deficient access to equivalent resources and make a concerted effort to allocate or distribute fairness equally (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983).

Equity in Education – Fairness and inclusion in the design (risks to equity), resources (provision of earlier life interventions), and practices (input of systemic support to minimize repetition) in education and at home to minimize failure or dropout rates and make society fairer and forego the social disparity of marginalizing adults with a lower basic skillset (Field et al., 2008).

First-generation – an undergraduate whose parents do not have a bachelor's or higher degree (RTI International, 2016).

Indigenous Ways of Knowing – a common Indigenous worldview, which contains cultural values among many Indigenous Peoples characterized by harmonious living within the environment informed by a collective sense of colonization.

Microaggressions – Intentional or unintentional hostility, negative attitudes, and derogatory beliefs toward culturally marginalized or stigmatized groups, demonstrated through daily behavioral, verbal, or environmental slights (Johnson et al., 2022).

Indigenous Peoples – an overarching term indicative of solidarity and collectively refers to all types of distinct cultures and societies, which may be intertribal or multiracial on a worldwide basis. For this study's purpose, only tribes within the United States and Canada are discussed. The terms *Native American* and *Alaskan Natives*, excluding Native Hawaiians, are the primary terms used for the United States, whereas *First Nations*, *Métis*, and *Inuit* are included as the primary terms for Canada. The term *Indigenous* means originating from a place, while the earliest inhabitation refers to first to an area. The Hawaiian Island Native, or Polynesians, came from central Polynesia between 1 and 300 A.D.; the Hawaiian Kingdom was colonized by the USA after it was a state per international law, accordingly Hawaiian people are not considered to originate from the Hawaiian Islands or as Indigenous Peoples for this reason (Hawaiian Kingdom, 2016). The intention is not to disregard the unique and vast heterogeneity of different tribes worldwide. There are extensive differences (i.e., languages, cultural and spiritual practices, and beliefs) between American and Canadian tribes, including federal, state, and provincial differences among tribes and beyond this study's scope.

Resilience – the ability to adjust through adaptations to the dynamics of one's environment in spite of adversity.

Sweat – a spiritual tribal tradition for Native American ceremony for healing, including the following: spiritual rites in preparation, purification, and prayer. This special ceremony should only be performed by a Native American Elder knowledgeable in the tribal ceremonies and traditions. Referred to by Native Americans as a sweat, held in sweat lodges (Harvard, 2020).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Systemic marginalization of Indigenous Peoples has remained a significant issue in U.S. and Canadian universities and colleges. Hurdles exist before entry and while in graduate school that contribute to the attrition and retention of Indigenous doctoral students, and understanding the Indigenous Peoples' history delivers a better perspective of current-day Indigenous students. Chapter 1 reviewed the major historical elements of this group, and Chapter 2 reviews topics and studies more specific to the current scope of this research on Indigenous students in higher education. Indigenous theories are limited, and Eurocentric frameworks need to completely acknowledge the lived nuances of this group from a modern perspective. A Eurocentric model is used to warrant acceptance under this realm. The following section includes the TribalCrit to deliver insight from an Indigenous lens.

Tribal Critical Race Theory

TribalCrit has nine central tenets intended to address difficulties for Indigenous Peoples in the United States and bring forth progressive race consciousness for Indigenous Peoples (Brayboy, 2006). It is partially founded upon critical race theory (CRT) and includes Indigenous literature, education, political and legal theory, and anthropology with the facilitation of understanding the complex relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the U.S. federal government. A portion of Brayboy's (2006) research explored the views of Indigenous graduates that expressed concerns over the lack of like-minded faculty and students (i.e., aligned racially, ethnically, and spiritually), and their experiences with structural inequities and other problems, that instead, with an improved cultural sensitivity of Indigenous students, can change the horizon in how

students think about school, and in what way institutions and policymakers, and educators perceive Indigenous students.

Although controversial due to its left-aligned view, CRT came about in the mid-1970s to responsibly consider critical legal studies (CLS) and designate how specific groups run into contradictions over laws that maintain a hierarchical society (Brayboy, 2006). For example, regarding the United States' War on Drugs, strict laws over different sentencing rates for cocaine, as opposed to crack, have propagated a lopsided racialized incarceration rate for BIPOC groups (Fornili, 2018). U.S. practices, policies, and principles are rooted in racism under the CRT, as opposed to unintentional acts by well-meaning individuals (George, 2021). Fornili (2018) emphasized CRT's attempts to acknowledge the dismissal and request revision of such laws as an ethical and responsible condition to create healthy and equalized sociopolitical environments for all. The extension of systemic issues flows into academia, with graduate students of color navigating harsh and brutal everyday experiences during a doctoral education (Gildersleeve et al., 2011).

Similarly, Brayboy's (2006) TribalCrit outlines an equalized methodology of evaluation for Indigenous Peoples with nine tenets:

> (1) colonization is endemic to society; (2) United States policies towards
> Indigenous Peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for
> material gain; (3) Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for
> both the political and racialized natures; (4) Indigenous peoples have a desire to
> obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-
> identification; (5) the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new

meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens; (6) governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation; (7) tribal philosophies, beliefs and customs, traditions and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illuminate the differences and adaptability amongst individuals and groups; (8) stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real, and legitimate sources of data and ways of being; and (9) theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways, such that scholars must work towards social change. (pp. 429–430)

According to Brayboy (2005b), the founding principle of Tribal Crit serves as the basis for the other eight tenets, which affirm that colonization is a fundamental element of society. Indigenous scholars have explicitly explored and written about the systemic problems of extended ill-treatment of Indigenous peoples due to cultural genocide and forced assimilation. General modern views of Indigenous Peoples are relegated to historical ideations, exploitative assumptions displayed in movies, tokenized as team mascots or cartoon caricatures, and blatant acts of disregard that perpetuate stereotypes and self-efficacy of Indigenous Peoples by society. Brayboy's (2006) first tenet accounted for this notion of invisibility: Indigenous erasure of daily experiences wiped away through colonization. Indigenous students face systemic barriers within academic institutions, which have harmful impacts on their mental and physical well-being which can obstruct their academic achievement.

Counter storytelling (i.e., narratives, experiences, perspectives, and truths), a major tenet of the CRT, are common in underrepresented and marginalized groups to

facilitate understanding and give a voice to such groups about the systemic inequities of

racism and challenge dominant culture conventional practices, and values (Olszewski,

2022). The Mexican Revolution was described through narrative ballads about

oppression and adversity (Gurza, 2017), while Black history protested oppression

expressed in music and poetry over the centuries (Morgan, 2023). Similarly, TribalCrit

endorses counter stories in Indigenous narratives that oppose the influences of

colonialism (dominant culture theory of knowledge; Delgado et al., 2012), by exposing

structures of oppression and marginalization, and disrupting invisibility (DeCuir-Gunby

et al., 2019). The counter stories were in part regarded as autoethnographic (Ellis et al.,

2015), drawn from experiences, or aspects of life and are data rich recounting the

circumstances faced by marginalized groups (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019).

Overall, TribalCrit helps define challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples today,

such as language change and loss, natural resources management, low enrollment and

retention of graduate students, increased representation of Indigenous Peoples in special

education, and power frays in government across tribal governments, state, and federal

levels (Brayboy, 2006). Likewise, as dominant culture hierarchal structures exist in

academia, this study evaluated the lived experiences of current and recent graduates of

higher education for Indigenous students and to describe resilient behavior patterns

through examining barriers under the framework of the TribalCrit theory for more

prevalent tenets specific to academic settings.

Philosophical Worldview

The current research employed a thematic analysis approach that combined

inductive and deductive methods in this study. The primary objective was to investigate

the resilience of Indigenous students in higher education, with a specific focus on identifying the hindrances to obtaining psychology and allied field degrees in Eurocentric universities or those with an Indigenous track. This study builds on a previous pilot study conducted by Debassige Rasmussen in 2020, which implemented a phenomenological approach. The subsequent section, foundational methodology, provides more details regarding the pilot study, and why the TribalCrit was used as a framework for the current study.

Qualitative approaches have been widely used and accepted among scholars studying Indigenous populations (Pavel, 1992; Tierney, 1991). Qualitative research is useful when a topic is under established, as it grants a wider approach and becomes more refined during the interviews as themes are developed (Pattern, 2004). Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained, to ascertain the meaning of a participant's point of view, qualitative research is valuable.

The *constructivist worldview*, also known as *social constructivism*, considers the historical and cultural perspectives in which the participant was born and the researcher's desire to find the meaning behind the participants' processes and interactions rather than beginning with a presumed theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In contrast, the *transformative worldview* was founded on diverging from structural laws that do not provide for marginalized communities and is further packaged in political change agendas to advocate and reform the lives of the oppressed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Either worldview would work; however, the present researcher was not focused on political endeavors, although a portion of this research outlines the TribalCrit as a framework to evaluate how to improve the academic landscape for Indigenous students.

Aptly, this study evaluated the interviews of Indigenous graduate students to identify

themes to examine barriers relevant to supporting Indigenous students with a

constructivist consideration to find deeper relevance in the lived experiences which

included interactions of graduate students from a cultural perspective.

As the scope of qualitative studies is complex, diverse, and very nuanced, a

thematic analysis helps in flexibility and compatibility with constructionist and

essentialist patterns in psychology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is the most

widely used qualitative method (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). Braun and Clarke (2006)

posited it is essential to note the theoretical framework and ensure transparency in

disclosing assumptions about the data. A contextualist method (current study) is between

constructionism and essentialism, like critical realism that accounts for the participant

meaning of the experience (graduate school) and the broader social context (institution,

structure, cohort mates) that imposed the meanings (framed within TribalCrit; Braun &

Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, it is difficult to keep the researcher's insights and directions

out of the study; as a result, with thematic analysis, themes do not emerge, but are instead

an active research process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Although there are limited documented Indigenous methodologies, cultural

sustainability is contingent on the ability to provide a respectful use of the "culture's

knowledge system" (i.e., colonialism disturbed the practice of knowledges by Indigenous

cultural methodologies; Kovach, 2010, Decolonizing Aims and Ethics section; Ferguson,

2011). The dismissal of including an Indigenous framework creates a challenge in

research in meeting the Way of Knowing, which comes from Tribal epistemologies

(Kovach, 2010) and is considered "methodological discrimination" (Ryan, 2000, p. 220).

Fitting Indigenous knowledge into a Westernized format is difficult for researchers (Bennett, 2012; Hampton, 1995). Thus, the proposed Indigenous epistemological framework would integrate decolonizing intentions and follow these ethical tenets: (a) incorporate Indigenous values; (b) provide community accountability; (c) research reciprocity; and (d) do no harm as a researcher to the community (Kovach, 2010).

An important explanation is this researcher's commitment to thoughtful and reflexive engagement in the analytic process of carefully and skillfully generating themes is based on emic experiential knowledge. This researcher's personal Indigenous student lens has provided a lived experience of resilience due to having navigated through the many barriers Indigenous students face before and during the pursuit of a doctoral degree. Persistence and resilience were established through a combination of traditional Indigenous teachings and Eurocentric ways garnered over a lifetime. Through this self-efficacious process, this researcher's worldview was founded on a collectivistic positive outlook.

Indigenous People's lack of trust has remained over Western researchers. Accordingly, the present study supported a descriptive perspective that was as true as possible to illustrate the experienced lives of Indigenous participants and a deductive approach (i.e., analyzing the meaning of participant that supports the researcher's interpretive Indigenous lens. When referring to Indigenous Peoples' unfavorable impressions of non-Indigenous researchers, anthropologist Tuhiwai Smith (2021) emphasized research was a "dirty word" that draws on a colonialist effort to claim the uncovering of Indigenous Peoples' innermost thinking and their communities, when what it really does is take information out of context. Such experiences have amassed and

forever damaged the perceptions about Indigenous People's by others and within themselves. The Indigenous population has experienced wide-ranging scrutiny and endured the lengthiest, most extreme cultural eradication ever disseminated upon a race (Braveheart & DeBruyn, 1998; Duran & Duran, 1998; Whitbeck, 2006); consequently, most Indigenous communities, as a whole, are reluctant to allow tribal members to share subjective experiences outside the respective group.

Huffman (2020) studied Indigenous education for 30-plus years. He found the discontinuity theory, CRT, and structural inequality theory to be valid analytical frameworks to improve an emic perspective with comprehension of Indigenous students while attending Eurocentric universities. Such theories provide a framework to explain, preserve and cultivate tribal identity to secure personal values, direction, and goals (Huffman, 2020). Ideally, if Indigenous students had the opportunity to be culturally acknowledged, supported, and welcomed for their uniqueness as equals, they would have a better chance at excelling academically rather than be compared to other BIPOC experiences.

Methodological Foundation

The current study was founded on an unpublished pilot study ($n = 5$; Debassige Rasmussen, 2020), which used a phenomenological approach (i.e., data based on interviews, surveys, and limiting priori assumptions about a phenomenon) and narratives that identified factors and mechanisms that contribute to resilience and positive outcomes for Indigenous students in higher education.

Scholars focused on Indigenous research have worked to maintain Indigenous knowledge and apply Indigenous epistemology to research Kovach (2009). Cultural

sustainability is contingent on the ability to provide a respectful use of the "culture's

knowledge system" (i.e., colonialism disturbed the practice of knowledges by Indigenous

cultural methodologies; Kovach, 2010, Decolonizing Aims and Ethics section). The void

of not including an Indigenous framework creates a challenge in research in meeting the

Way of Knowing, which comes from tribal epistemologies (Kovach, 2010) and is

considered "methodological discrimination" (Ryan, 2000, p. 220). Fitting Indigenous

knowledge into a Westernized format is difficult for researchers (Hampton, 1995). The

2020 pilot study research project (Debassige Rasmussen, 2020) not only uncovered

definitive resilience in Indigenous students, but also conveyed insights into factors

affecting the retention of Indigenous students in higher education.

      The value of phenomenology and narrative inquiry were deemed the most

appropriate methodology to gather important information from the participants' lived

experiences (in vivo coding) under a social constructivist perspective predicated on

separating the phenomenon from the researcher's perspective to furnish the least biased

view. The pilot study revealed (see Appendix B) critical barriers Indigenous doctoral

students face during graduate school in Eurocentric universities (Debassige Rasmussen,

2020). In contrast, programs with an Indigenous program were more supportive of an

Indigenous worldview. This information supported important problems behind the dismal

statistics on enrollment and graduation from psychology and allied similar fields. In

particular, the pilot study yielded the difference in a curriculum founded on Eurocentric

perspectives, which excluded the Indigenous worldview.

      Furthermore, systemic barriers added to the adversity these Indigenous students

faced on a regular basis. The pilot study afforded rich findings and granted a solid

foundation that Westernized methodologies often hinder the Indigenous voice in research (Debassige Rasmussen, 2020). However, the findings gave a solid foundation for understanding the significance of internal and external support contributing to extraordinary Indigenous student resilience, which played a significant role in carrying the students in graduate school despite experiences of adversity.

The pilot study identified worthy limitations that could be strengthened in a more comprehensive study (Debassige Rasmussen, 2020). Therefore, the pilot study delivered preliminary data and formulated the basis for the current study (In, 2017). Enhancements included incorporating a thematic analysis of the existing themes (inductive approach) and adding a deductive approach (for an emic perspective) into Brayboy's (2006) TribalCrit framework to validate an Indigenous worldview while uncovering more about the barriers this group faces in academic environments. The pilot study employed a semantic approach, although the current study changed to a latent approach to interpret the initial themes generated. The latent approach uses an interpretive element based on the previous data, thus approaching how themes and subthemes were generated (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The pilot study incorporated data triangulation, member checking, memoing, and interrater reliability to heighten the credibility, validity, and reliability of the study (Debassige Rasmussen, 2020). Furthermore, the value in conducting a proper analysis in a pilot study can enhance these areas (construct validity, internal validity) and inform the feasibility of subsequent research (Malmqvist et al., 2019). In this case, the same research questions, inclusionary criteria, interviews, and concepts were honed to launch a new, more comprehensive study.

The current research strived to comprehend better the underlying causes behind the inadequate retention rates of Indigenous higher education students. It was equally paramount to acknowledge and authenticate the Indigenous voice and comprehensively comprehend this critical predicament. Early career psychologists and allied field graduates would grant a more long-term perspective.

The 2020 pilot study (Debassige Rasmussen, 2020) accounted for the housing and use of data for this current study, and careful considerations of past and present participants followed the study protocols to password protect and housed both study participant files on the researcher's OneDrive storage on Northwest University's secure Microsoft 365 platform. The current study is completely described in the methodology section.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The following chapter describes the methods and procedures for conducting the present study. Included are the research questions and framework (research methods), data source selection and strategies for data collection, data analysis, coding process, and Institution Review Board (IRB) submission. The study addressed knowledge gaps among Indigenous students in higher education across the United States and Canada, encompassing a qualitative thematic analysis approach based on the TribalCrit framework (Brayboy, 2006). The methodology description, data sample, and protocols were reviewed to safeguard the protection of human subjects through the IRB.

Purpose Overview

The primary basis for this study was centered on two research questions: (a) what factors affect the retention of Indigenous students in higher education (psychology and related fields), including current and recent graduates, and (b) in particular, what resilience characteristics contributed to graduate students' persistence resulting in academic completion. Additionally, the data were integrated into the TribalCrit as an Indigenous framework where applicable. The current study examined the lived experiences of Indigenous graduate students' enrolled or as recent graduates (masters or doctoral) in a Eurocentric university or a Eurocentric university with an Indigenous curriculum (i.e., psychology or a related field) aimed to capture positive and negative social and emotional outcomes (resilience characteristics) regarding the students' encounters in academia.

The data provided understanding of how Indigenous students perceived their college or university experience, distinguishing the efficacious factors that contributed to

overcoming daily challenges, and obtaining in-depth details on how successes were managed. This research pinpointed implications within academia and underscored the need for equitable change. The potentiality of such information may improve the landscape to support professional career advancement in psychology and related fields for Indigenous students interested in pursuing these fields.

In addition to illuminating the path or the mechanisms associated with building resilience and positive trajectories, this study also explored resources (i.e., support networks) that Indigenous students employed while navigating the graduate school experience (i.e., augmenting one's understanding). This process aimed to shed light on the heterogeneous Indigenous student perspectives and why the percentage of postgraduates in this higher education population are dismal in the United States and Canada. This study may conceivably call attention to the existing approaches that may not support equalizing the higher education landscape and highlight more accessible ways to maintain a sense of comfort for Indigenous students to thrive and graduate. Thus, the TribalCrit analysis is helpful in the identification of problems under this context.

Qualitative data pertaining to Indigenous graduate students provide an important perspective that can improve the academic climate and support recruiting, retention, and graduation of this group. To this author's knowledge, there is a gap in studies that have examined resilience characteristics used by Indigenous graduate students to overcome barriers to support educational success in a Eurocentric university with or within an Indigenous focus in the United States or Canada based on a framework of TribalCrit Theory. Future researchers may find this study helpful for institutions, university

administrators, policymakers, Tribal colleges, Indigenous students' pursuing graduate school, researchers, or individuals implementing cultural competency policies.

Research Questions

This study aimed to gain deep insight into the factors that underpin the resilience and self-efficacy of Indigenous students who have either recently graduated or are currently enrolled. Through a thorough analysis of the themes and subthemes from their experiences, the researcher endeavored to pay due respect to the unique and intricate backgrounds of Indigenous students. The findings hold immense potential to increase the graduate percentages for Indigenous students in higher education, while also offering a clearer understanding of the challenges Indigenous students face. Ultimately, this study may lead to heightened awareness and the development of strategies that can better support the recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of Indigenous higher-education students. The research questions addressed by this study were:

- RQ1: What factors affect the retention of Indigenous graduate students in higher education (psychology and related fields), including current and recent graduates?

- RQ2: In particular, what resilience characteristics contributed to graduate students' persistence in graduate school?

Population and Sampling

Purposeful sampling was a good strategy to target a certain population. This type of sampling created a stronger probability of accumulating information of rich data from participants with experiences that matched the study sample criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study incorporated convenience sampling, snowball sampling, or purposeful

sampling. Convenience sampling is a prevalently accepted form of sampling (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). Gender and other self-identifying information were collected and

discussed to provide a fuller context of participants' lived experiences.

Participants disclosed tribal status and nontribal status; and more colonized

delineations, as such, offered more about the barriers of conditions held under such

criteria. The study recorded how each participant self-identified as an Indigenous person

(necessary for creating themes; however, not explicitly shared). Indigenous students in

higher education and recent graduates are an extraordinarily small and private population.

To ensure confidentiality, all personal details of participants, including tribal information,

schools, gender, and enrollment status, remained strictly confidential. This measure

protected the identity and maintained privacy for the limited and easily identifiable

participants.

Member checking covered under the section on Credibility, Validity, and

Reliability ensured further protection of participant identity. The disclosure of

confidentiality to participants enabled a basis for more in-depth and authentic sharing of

personal stories. Any future published demographic information will implement the same

modesty around confidentiality discussed in the protection of human rights section.

Inclusionary Criteria

Participants who met the following inclusionary criteria for the study were invited

to continue in the study: (a) actively enrolled in a master's or graduate program in any

year of academia, including recent graduates (for at least 5 months in their 1st year or up

to 5 years postgraduation) in a psychology or allied fields (i.e., social work) within the

United States or Canada (i.e., PhD in Clinical or Counseling Psychology, PsyD Clinical

or Counseling Psychology, Master's in Psychology or Master's in Social Work); (b) either registered or not registered with any Tribal affiliation or self-identify as Indigenous; (c) hold an active status in their program other than recent graduates; and (d) are at least 18 years of age. There were no gender exclusionary criteria for the current study. The final sample size was comprised of 12 participants.

The researcher recruited participants from a diverse selection to increase data credibility, enhance trustworthiness, and minimize researcher bias (Johnson et al., 2020). Although the scope of the study included 12 participants in sample size, the researcher recruited participants from different universities across many states and provinces, with a variety of backgrounds (i.e., urban, rural, clinical psychology, counseling psychology, and social work), and all were from different tribes. The results found many similarities in the academic experiences; thus, saturation was reached with regard to the research questions. Saunders et al. (2018) discussed the widespread acceptance of saturation (i.e., redundancy in the data) as a sign of thoroughness in qualitative studies, at which point discontinuing sampling is terminated (Guest, 2006). The purpose of this study was to achieve redundancy, meaning that no new information was offered from the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Design and Methodology

Detailed Data Collection Process and Procedures

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using a recruitment flyer, listservs, bulletin boards, social media (i.e., Facebook), and through word-of-mouth contact. The researchers' contact information was included on the flyer. Interested individuals could open a

hyperlink to learn more about the study and fill out the prescreening form on Qualtrics.

Upon entry to the study landing page, a brief study description encouraged participation

(see Appendix C for the advertisement or Appendix D for the recruitment letter). If

participants chose to move forward, they responded to the prescreening questions. Once

participants met the inclusionary qualifications, the researcher discussed consent, the

incentive, and the right to withdraw. At this point, a formal interview was set convenient

for both parties. At the onset of the interview, the participant was provided the Consent

form's link on Qualtrics, or some participants opted for an emailed copy before

commencing with the interview.

        The first flyer (see Appendix C for the flyer and Appendix E for the email) was

posted one time on the online listserv for the Society of Indian Psychologists (SIP) after

IRB approval and the SIP research protocol consent was met. SIP is an Indigenous

professional network for psychologists across the United States and Canada. The

members include undergraduate and graduate students.

        A second social media flyer (e.g., Facebook posts, Instagram posts, Twitter posts,

and direct messages) was employed to target Indigenous students from various

universities in Canada and the United States for word of mouth referrals (see Appendix

F) to recruit current students and recent graduates from a university offering an

Indigenous curriculum in psychology or related fields or a university offering an

Indigenous program (accredited or nonaccredited). The third target group included

specific Indigenous group searches to recruit Indigenous students in BIPOC professional

support groups.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) specified a convenience sample helps when recruiting participants from a small, unique population, representing a special area of interest. Under this essence, Indigenous students in higher education are considered an underrepresented minority group. Historically, in Indigenous studies, Western researchers have often misrepresented Indigenous Peoples' expressed interests or misconstrued cultural perspectives, causing reluctance in participating in research under Euro-centric contexts about Indigenous Peoples and communities (Whitbeck, 2006). On the other hand, more Indigenous Peoples have been willing to support other Indigenous Peoples, and this has held true in research. Being motivated to participate in research for this group can call on a true depiction of Indigenous Peoples views that can be enmeshed in traditional Indigenous beliefs held in a characteristically collectivist culture, wherein "people are interdependent within their groups (family, tribe, nation, etc.), give priority to the goals of their in-groups, shape their behavior primarily on the basis of in-group norms, and behave in a communal way" (Triandis, 2001, p. 909). Accordingly, participants were invited to support this Indigenous student research project as an opportunity for reciprocity for the greater good of Indigenous communities and sovereignty.

The participants replied directly to either recruitment flyers through a link to a Qualtrics prescreening questionnaire (see Appendix G) consisting of five questions, including a section to provide their contact information, or participants replied individually to the researcher's email. The researcher sent a follow-up email with a link to the Qualtrics prescreening or conducted the prescreening over email or with a personal phone call, after a mutual time was coordinated via email. Once the screening criteria

were met, a consent was either emailed or a link to Qualtrics was sent and completed

online, then an interview date was set. After completing the interview, the participants

received $40 as compensation after their participation. The screening letter (see Appendix

G) ascertained whether participants met the study criteria as an official Tribal

membership or self-identifying as an Indigenous student in a graduate-level program or

recent early career graduate. A warm phone call to speak to each participant established a

better rapport and extended participants the opportunity to ask more questions about the

study. The rapport was immediately developed with the researcher's emic experience as

an enrolled Tribal member in higher education. A resource sheet (see Appendix H) was

discussed and emailed after each interview in the event that participants required

additional emotional support.

Study Design: Thematic Analysis

The current qualitative study design implemented a thematic analysis

methodology as an overarching research design and analytic method. common as a

unitary method (Braun & Clark, 2006). The objective of this research was to shed light

on the heterogeneous Indigenous student perspectives and why the percentage of

Indigenous students graduating with graduate degrees continues to be so dismal in both

the United States and Canada. From these data, the goal was to advance the continued

understanding of how students perceive their college or university experience and isolate

the efficacious factors that contributed to the participants overcoming daily challenges

and how successes were managed. Understanding the low rates (i.e., invisibility) for this

group is a multifaceted, complex, and significant problem that deserves understanding for

resolution. Thus, furthering the current research is essential if Indigenous student

participation and completion statics are to improve. Resilience in existing students, particularly graduates, is a crucial component of this research.

Qualitative approaches are very useful and accepted for research on Indigenous populations (Pavel, 1992; Tierney, 1991). Establishing a place for new theories can be supported in the use of narratives for qualitative research with refined themes (Pattern, 2004). Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained, qualitative research facilitates the meaning behind a participant's point of view.

Thematic analysis augments flexibility in examining the data to identify, analyze, and report common ideas and patterns. It is an active process for analyzing data for theme identification (Braun & Clark, 2006). Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis incorporated six key steps in analyzing data, which include (a) familiarity with the data, (b) development of initial codes, (c) generation of themes, (d) theme review, (e) definition and theme labeling, and (f) reporting. The intent of this method is to avoid confirmation bias when formulating an analysis.

This study incorporated a deductive approach (i.e., analyzing the meaning of participant) including a contextualist method, constructionist, and essentialist account for increased sharing to gather participant meaning of experiences (i.e., graduate school), and the broader social context (i.e., institution, structure, cohort mates) that imposed significances founded on TribalCrit, emphasizing all nine tenets (see Appendix I). Additionally, research under a thematic analysis includes a distinction between a semantic and latent approach. The semantic approach (descriptive codes) can be described as analyzing the data from an explicit context, whereas a latent approach (interpretive codes) delves into the subtext of assumptions (Lovett, 2009). This study

used a semantic approach and regarded the data (Indigenous student experience in

academic settings) as explicit knowledge.

Through a semistructured interview and observations, this study interpreted,

contextualized, described, and acquired in-depth understanding into the specific concepts

or phenomena of Indigenous graduate students and early career psychologists. According

to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the method of thematic analysis employed in previous

social science research can be used to explore and describe the lived experiences and the

essence of the human condition.

<p align="center">**Data Collection Process and Procedures**</p>

Data Collection

Interviews

In this qualitative study, a semistructured face-to-face interview was used (see

Appendix J) as the primary instrument. The interview consisted of 12 overarching

questions, each with two to six subquestions. The interviews were recorded for the study

after participants gave consent. Throughout the interviews, a conversational tone allowed

for flexibility in exploring additional relevant topics, whilst also adhering to the interview

questions for consistency. The interviews were held over a Health Insurance Portability

and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliant video communications platform (Zoom,

Microsoft Teams [MS] Teams), both audio-video conferencing platforms, for two main

reasons. Firstly, a virtual interview provided access to geographically distant participants

in the United States and Canada by eliminating travel costs. Secondly, both software

applications offered data security. Last, MS Teams offered a transcription feature, and

Zoom interviews used a separate encrypted and secure application (discussed under audio

recordings) to transcribe the data. The choice of application was based on the preference of the participants.

Participants were directed to the consent form offered on Qualtrics (see Appendix K) or via email prior to the interview. The interviews were 90–120 minutes and were coordinated at a time convenient for the participant. Interview questions can be found in Appendix J. Interviews began with an orientation to the study, consenting procedures, and a brief overview of the interview process, with time allotted for any questions from the participant. During the interviews, a series of open- and closed-ended questions free of any known assumptions. Closed-ended questions were used to clarify demographic and educational information to ensure the prescreening criteria were met. An open-ended format fostered participants to offer more nuanced disclosure that explored (in contrast to forced answer choices) for a more comprehensive evaluation, permitting the identification of diverse themes. The data collection incorporated a follow-up interview, if necessary, to address gaps in data such as misunderstandings, clarity in information, or recover any missing information in the field notes, audio recordings, and video recordings. According to Giorgi (1995), a semistructured interview procedure provides a balance between open-ended responses (warranting participants offer more spontaneous personal experiences) and more targeted responses that touch on the key research questions. Indeed, less structured, or semistructured interviews, allow the participants to define personal worldviews for superior flexibility in the questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This researcher offered supportive comments from a mutual Indigenous perspective during and after the participant answered questions to facilitate a relational

in-depth exploration of the study topics on sensitive academic issues for this group of

graduate students. Furthermore, compassion and sensitivity around Euro-Centric research

methodology were necessary. Indigeneity and Eurocentric research are compared and

depict the incongruent viewpoints, as seen in the diagram in Appendix L (Cruz, 2020).

The audio recordings (i.e., Zoom, MS Teams) were transcribed from two sources.

MS Teams has a transcription feature; however, Zoom's transcription feature was overly

expensive. REV, an industry standard secure transcription software, was used to

crosscheck correctness and provide transcription of the interview. The researcher

compared the video to the transcription and corrected inaudible portions (often

Indigenous Tribal language or internet interruptions) to ensure a verbatim transcript. The

transcripts were emailed, password protected, to each participant, with an invitation to

clarify information to complete member checking. Researcher notes (memoing) described

the participant's nonverbal communication and behaviors, including laughter, voice

inflections, stuttering, or any anxious behaviors, were included for concentrated transcript

examination. Transcripts were coded line by line within a software application (NVivo

14) to organize and query common themes or universal ideals within the study

participants.

Permissions

This study was approved by the Northwest University IRB to ensure all research

methods met compliance standards, followed the legal guidelines, and observed the

ethical practices that align with academic protocols for the safety of participants. In

addition, IRB permission was obtained from the SIP to recruit doctoral students and

recent graduates in psychology from the listserv. Social media platforms and word of

mouth (i.e., private emails) used a flyer (see Appendix F) for student recruitment in the

United States and Canada.

Coding Research Data

The current study data collection used hybrid coding, incorporating inductive,

strongly correlated to the data (Patton, 1990), and deductive coding. The deductive

coding (priori codes) included assigning and categorizing data (words and extracts).

Inductive coding gauged new results without the researcher assumptions and solely based

on the research questions. To finish, a second analysis was completed on the findings

correlated within the framework of the TribalCrit in Chapter 5. A latent approach allowed

identification of underpinnings of conceptions through the researcher's Indigenous emic

perspective and worldview. The hybrid approach ensured a more comprehensive

analysis. An excerpt of sample coding is shown below in Table 1. This table illustrates

inductive coding, which used a thematic analysis coding for resilience factors (a

foundational theme based on the research question).

Table 1

Extraction of Sample Coding from Current Study on Indigenous Student Resilience

(Personal Determination and Support)

Participant	Code	Quote
Participant 01	Resilience-humor	I feel like being able to find the humor and share laughter with people, even when it's hard, is one of my biggest resilience factors.
Participant 02	Resilience-desire to change Indigenous community narrative	I think wanting to fill the gap in that in my community was something that really drove me early on in my graduate studies
Participant 05	Self-advocacy to better life	I definitely think that it's still the determination to finish it that is pushing me along because I'm like, you know, I have a master's degree.
Participant 06	Resilience-spirituality	I would say it's more spirituality. In terms of traditional practices, I can't really practice anything here in [name].
Participant 08	Resilience-flexibility	I think one of my biggest strengths is that I am a vibe shifter.
Participant 10	Resilience-desire to change community narrative	That's really ultimately because it didn't feel like a degree for me or just to add initials to my name. I'm like, "This is for all Indigenous folks." We deserve to be heard

Data were thoroughly coded to preserve participant confidentiality and were secured and stored on MS 365 with a unique study code separate from password-protected, identifiable information. A master list linking the data to individual participants was maintained securely and separately from the data with a password. Identifying information was removed from participant interview responses and other data. Access was restricted to the researcher and deidentified for the team. A more comprehensive development of understanding the research questions was incorporated

through the data triangulation and discussed in the section on credibility, validity, and reliability.

Consent Form Distribution and Storage

The screening phase included a survey link on the listserv flyers which directed interested parties to answer five questions (see Appendix G). If the participants met these criteria, the researcher called the potential participant to discuss the consent form, build rapport, answer questions, and schedule the interview. Screening included: (a) identifying as Indigenous (with or without tribal affiliation), (b) being 18 years old plus, (c) being enrolled in a current master or doctoral program, or (d) being a recent graduate of 5 years. Willing participants completed the consent form by submitting a personal digital signature or scanned their completed consent form and emailed it back to the researcher. Qualtrics has been known to have excellent encryption and storage capabilities, ensuring participant security. Before the participants began the interview, each was offered a secondary opportunity to ask questions about the consenting process and were informed that they had an option to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Data Usage

The results of this study will be disseminated in a brief for the Journal of Indigenous Research. Second, the findings will be presented at a research symposium help by SIP during the Summer of 2024. It may be presented at additional professional conferences, such as the American Psychological Association poster session or for other entities. Manuscripts will be sent to targeted journals for publishing.

Personal Files

Each participant file contains a de-identified transcript plus narrative notes that comprise the most valuable portion of data. The confidential files and handwritten notes were scanned and uploaded onto the researcher OneDrive account. These files are password protected and are stored in the researcher's OneDrive storage on Northwest University's secure Microsoft 365 platform. All data will be kept until dissertation completion by August 2024, after which all interview videos will be deleted. This researcher will be retaining in perpetuity electronic data such as transcripts, field notes, and coding without identifying information.

Credibility, Validity, and Reliability

Increased attention incorporated the use of different measures to improve the study's credibility, reliability, and validity. Qualitative researchers do not attempt to isolate the laws of human behavior; instead, researchers strive to accurately assess participant experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research is exceptionally valuable in acquiring insights into human experiences to gain meaning under certain conditions (Leech, 2007). A strong qualitative study can mean the difference in understanding an otherwise confusing state (Eisner, 1991). At least two strategies should be incorporated to maintain the rigor of reliability and validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Tests and Measures

Qualitative researchers should aspire to accurately assess participant experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A strong qualitative study can mean the difference in understanding an otherwise confusing state (Eisner, 1991). Consequently, eight measures

are essential to safeguard the reliability and validity of the research: (a) in vivo coding, (b) data triangulation, (c) member checking, (d) the researcher's position or reflexivity, (e) intercoder/interrater reliability (third-party peer rater), (f) field notes, (g) memoing, and (h) a culturally proficient Indigenous committee member and a separate peer-reviewer for cross-checking the reliability of interview questions.

Data Triangulation

Triangulation can advance reliability in qualitative research with trustworthiness, dependability, and consistency by incorporating numerous methods of collecting data to identify themes in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to evaluate validity via the convergence of different sources (Patton, 1999). This current study incorporated multiple methods to substantiate the themes and enhance the external validity using interviews, behavioral observations, verbatim transcripts, fieldnotes, memoing, and member checking.

Participant Observation

Special attention was undertaken in observing participant behavior during the video recordings granting an opportunity for the researcher to ask questions around such reactions to provide a more congruent assessment of the participant's responses reflected through body language, attitude, and tone. Additionally, the researcher and participant behaviors were carefully observed post interview video review discussed under Audio Recordings, these interactions have been shown to yield unconscious or unsystematic behaviors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), furnishing further vision into the findings. Last, behavioral observations were briefly noted as a form of metacommunication.

Field Notes and Audio Recording

Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) found field notes are recommended as a

secondary method of collecting rich authentic information (i.e., observational notes on

participant affect, bodily shifts, glances, in both positive and negative reactions) to

enhance participant data and potentially extend research and collaborative data sharing

amongst researchers. Accordingly, the audio recordings illuminated participant

inflections, pauses, sighs, and other audible communication not necessarily expressed in

the transcripts. Both field notes and audio recordings aided in contextualizing the data

and better defining deductive insight to the themes and additional pertinent information

not necessarily expected.

Memoing

Memoing (i.e., memos on researcher's thoughts on codes and connections

between codes; Montgomery & Baily, 2007) is another opportunity to increase reliability,

minimize research bias, and increase outcomes by supporting conceptual jumps to better

explain phenomena in research (Birks et al., 2008). Memoing notes were recorded after

the interviews regarding the researcher's reaction while observing participant behavior

during the interview to ascertain more meaning and check reflexivity. Memoing and field

notes are often thought to be the same, however are independent in research

(Montgomery & Bailey, 2007).

Member Checking and Respondent Validation

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained how researchers may unintentionally

introduce biases into research participants experiences and within various phases of the

study. Member checking (also known as participant or respondent validation) was

incorporated as a cross-check to enhance the accuracy of trustworthiness and ensure a

higher level of consistency is maintained throughout qualitative research studies. Member

checking can aid as a cautionary measure or a process of allowing the participant to

review the study interview transcript as well as view the researcher's study correlations to

confirm, clarify, and/or change any misinterpreted data discrepancies on the data

collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Member checking was employed by sending the edited transcript to the

participant to correct any misspellings (Indigenous words) or clarify any gaps or

statements. This check was expected within 7 days after sending (if no response was

received, this acted as acceptance which was clearly stated in the email; see Appendix

M). Member checking granted reduced inconsistencies as best as possible. Four others

replied with immediate consent, while the last seven allowed the time to lapse which

granted consent. Seven participants did not respond, four agreed to continue shortly after

receiving the transcript, and one provided a detailed edit of their transcript. The changes

included taking extra precautions to conceal their identity. These edits were

accommodated and carefully recorded to respect the wishes of the participant. All

considerations were accounted for, and no one withdrew from this research project.

Interrater Reliability

The current study used one third-party impartial rater (i.e., peer debriefer,

observer, examiner, and reliability coder) to substantiate reliability and validity

throughout the data analysis process, explicitly using inductive coding directly keeping

an open perspective from the data without preconceived notions for themes and

subthemes (constant comparative method) and reach an agreement (Lange, 2011).

Interrater reliability improved the degree of replication in the study's results, thereby increasing reliability and validity. The coding process engaged an experienced non-Indigenous BIPOC third-party research debriefer. The instructions (see Appendix N) were given to the rater, and all clarifying questions were discussed before the initial coding began. The preliminary criteria were founded on the study's two research questions. Both the reliability coder and researchers evaluated the first interview, separate from the researcher's first round of coding to assess the level of agreement between the themes. This process was exercised to ensure the least biased structure throughout the entire coding process. This reliability check was followed by cross-checking the researcher's and coder's findings to evaluate any disparate results and reach a consensus on the initial themes or remove the differing conclusions. This agreement on the findings helped to standardize the results and reduce researcher bias to finalize analysis of the remaining 11 interviews. These remaining interviews were coded incorporating the same format for consistency.

The reliability coder was an experienced qualitative individual employed to code separately from the researcher and collaborate on the themes and subthemes until agreement was reached strictly to improve reliability. The results granted rich data and ensured reliability.

Reflexivity and Credibility

There is ongoing debate in academic circles over the impact of reflexivity on research results, and the potential for researcher bias to influence findings. However, proponents argued that reflexivity can actually be advantageous when used transparently (Dodgson, 2019; Olmos-Vega, 2023). In fact, disclosing a culturally sensitive emic

perspective can enhance credibility and deepen understanding of a study if acknowledged completely (Dodgson, 2019; Snonu, 2021; see Appendix O). The researcher in question was a Canadian tribal member who grew up on a rural reservation until attending college. They were granted permanent residency in the United States under the 1974 Jay Treaty, which allows Indigenous Peoples with a certified blood quantum of 50% or more to enter the United States for study, work, retirement, investment, and permanent residency (USCIS, 2020). After 5 years, they can apply for U.S. citizenship.

The researcher now lives in the Pacific Northwest after attending several colleges and universities in both Canada and the United States. Their family followed Catholicism and currently practiced Indigenous spirituality and sought to learn more about traditional spiritual knowledge and teachings from personal tribal practices. Given their own experiences with discrimination in academia and elsewhere, the researcher made a concerted effort to avoid research bias based on assumptions of shared experiences among the participants. By incorporating an emic perspective that recognizes and draws on firsthand knowledge, the researcher was able to offer a greater understanding of the participants' experiences and fostered deeper communication and camaraderie among them. This approach was important in the 2020 pilot study and remains so in the current study, as it allowed participants to feel more comfortable sharing their lived experiences feeling that they would be respected and represented truthfully.

Protection of Human Rights

Deidentification

This study paid special attention to removing identifying information of all participants and their academic institutions. For example, participants often made

references to their school name, Tribal affiliations, Tribal words, or phrases, including names of professors, other students, and family, which were all changed to a generic descriptor (i.e., university, Tribe, or male peer) to protect the identity and maintain the confidentiality of the participants. The original participant data were given a unique study code separate from protected, identifiable information. A master list linked the data to individual participants, which will be maintained securely and separately from the data.

In optimizing human rights protection, the current study sent, based on participant preference, a personalized link from Qualtrics with detailed consent procedures (see Appendix F), or a personal email with an attached form, which outlined the confidentiality and protection of identification security procedures in housing participant data. All client identifying information is stored on a separate file and password protected on the researchers' OneDrive account under Northwest University's secure Microsoft 365 platform. The video/audio files will be destroyed after the dissertation is defended or by August 31, 2024 (i.e., researcher's graduate date) and until then will be housed on Northwest University's secure platform. All accompanying handwritten field notes were scanned, stored separately, and password protected under an unidentifiable and unique code. This researcher will be retaining in perpetuity electronic data such as transcripts, field notes, and coding without identifying information stored on person Microsoft 356 platform.

Ethical Considerations

Observance of Northwest University's Human Rights Research Protection Program criteria was a mandatory certification process to ensure faithfulness and adherence to the ethical principles through to the completion of this study.

IRB Permission

This study was passed before the Northwest University IRB to ensure all research methods met compliance standards, followed legal guidelines, and observed ethical practices that aligned with academic protocols for participant safety. The IRB approved this study on September 27, 2022. In addition, the researcher submitted documentation to the SIP research process, and permission was obtained, giving the authorization to post a call for USA and Canadian participants on the listserv. Social media platforms were used to post a flyer (see Appendix F) for student word-of-mouth, to recruit students from Ontario, Canada.

Confidentiality and Data Storage

All participant-identifying information was kept as electronic data in perpetuity. The video/audio files will be destroyed on the date specified below, as all documentation for this study will be held for dissertation research. The agreement to hold personal content was discussed during consenting procedures. The dissertation study data gathered by participants will be held until the expected completion date of August 31, 2024. Audio files were password protected and stored in the researcher's OneDrive storage on Northwest University's secure Microsoft 365 platform. All accompanying handwritten field notes were scanned, stored separately, and password protected under an unidentifiable and unique code in the same area. In the event that the researcher is unable to complete the above research, study data will be passed on to the dissertation chair to destroy all material.

APA Code of Ethics

The study was managed under the foundation of ethical practice. The researcher is

a 4th-year student in the Doctoral of Psychology in Counseling Psychology and licensed

Mental Health Counselor-Associate bound by the APA Ethical Principles and Standards

of Psychologies and code of conduct. The peer debriefer or peer-rater signed a

nondisclosure agreement (see Appendix P) ensuring integrity and competence in handling

deidentified transcripts. The peer-rater opted to remain anonymous.

Informed Consent

All participants were granted an opportunity to ask any clarifying questions

regarding the research study and were informed about the opportunity to withdraw from

the study at any time. The consent included the contact information of the IRB contact

and study chair. Participants were granted a second opportunity to evaluate their

involvement when reviewing the transcript. If no response or input was made after 7

days, this nonresponse was deemed an acceptance. The purpose, benefits, and risks of

participating were covered in detail during the consent process. All participants signed

the informed consent form.

Chapter Summary

This study interviewed current and recent Indigenous graduate students to acquire

a more comprehensive knowledge of distinctive experiences while navigating university

life as an Indigenous student. Both video and audio recordings of the interviews were

coded to evaluate each for various themes. Careful consideration of the participants'

confidentiality and privacy was prioritized to ensure the protection of all Indigenous

participant information. Validity and reliability were carefully employed throughout the

study. The researcher's perspectives and assumptions were acknowledged, and explicit

energies were taken to retain the integrity of an emic perspective while circumventing

any overcompensations in predetermined schemas. The thematic analysis proposed in the

TribalCrit contextual framework ensured the lived experiences whether traditional or not

however, were managed in a respectful and balanced manner to grant Indigenous

participants the autonomy to guide and ensure the study content properly reflected

personal views and experiences. The study outcomes were solely based on approved

interviews by each participant.

Chapter 4: Findings

Analysis and Results

This study aimed to provide valuable insights into higher education factors contributing to student resilience and self-efficacy. A methodical examination of a dozen 90–120-minute interviews delivered invaluable experiences about Indigenous students currently enrolled or recently graduated from a higher education program (Eurocentric or Indigenous curriculum). Importantly, the general findings consistently highlighted minoritized accounts through counter stories, accounted for under the framework of all TribalCrit theory tenets, presented under the analysis in Chapter 5. This study involved an understanding about the lived experiences of U.S. and Canadian Indigenous students in psychology and allied fields through deeply subjective personal narratives, which differs from the dominant culture methods of study that rely heavily on statistics, observations, or reference. This deeper understanding of the underlying determinants to success among higher education Indigenous students afforded a unique perspective and valuable knowledge about the driving forces that enabled Indigenous students to overcome challenges in academic settings and achieve personal educational goals. The research contributed to the broader discourse on challenges Indigenous students face in pursuing higher education.

Chapter 4 serves as a comprehensive guide outlining the research questions employed in this study, accompanied by a detailed account of the implemented data collection procedures. The chapter extensively explored aspects of the demographic composition, leaving out specific identifying characteristics for participant protection, when emphasizing factors such as field of study, employment status, relationship status,

and parental status—included to understand the context of the various roles each

participant managed in addition to schooling. The chapter covers the data analysis and

techniques used in the study. A thorough overview is presented, including a

comprehensive summary of the study's findings. These outcomes are systematically

organized and presented through three distinct perspectives, incorporating impactful

excerpts from the gathered discussions, thereby fortifying the study's trustworthiness and

dependability.

Research Questions

The following research questions applied to this study:

- RQ1: What factors affect the retention of Indigenous graduate students in

  higher education (psychology and related fields), including current and recent

  graduates?

- RQ2: In particular, what resilience characteristics contributed to graduate

  students' persistence in graduate school?

Data Collection

To recruit doctoral students and recent graduates in psychology from the United

States, permission was obtained from Society of Indian Psychologists (SIP), meeting the

research criteria to recruit. Social media platforms were used to post another flyer (see

Appendix F) to facilitate student word-of-mouth recruitment efforts, specifically targeting

students from Canada. Word-of-mouth efforts through a direct email campaign helped

with the recruiting efforts for Indigenous students in allied fields. A total of eight

interviews were conducted from November to December 2022, with an additional four

new participants recruited in a second effort, resulting in a total of 12 participants. The final results can be found in the sample characteristics section.

During the interviews, the researcher created a relaxed and conversational atmosphere by sharing personal experiences in academia, this approach permitted an extensive exploration of the lived experiences of Indigenous graduate students. Conducting interviews via Zoom and MS Teams ensured accessibility, reduced travel costs, and afforded data security. A combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions was employed to elicit narrative responses and demographic information, ensuring the inclusion of diverse themes in the analysis. The respondents' verbatim interviews were recorded on Zoom, or MS Teams, transcribed through MS Teams or REV, and the thematic analysis approach was coded separately using NVivo 14 software.

Participants were directed to a consent form on Qualtrics before the interviews, and an orientation session was conducted to explain the study's purpose, consent procedures, and interview structure. A debriefing session was held at the end of the interview to check on the participants' emotional state. A resource sheet was provided, and study particulars and next steps were reiterated. The researcher encouraged participants to ask questions to wrap up exploration covering some sensitive, relevant study-related experiences.

The transcription process was highly time-consuming, with approximately 12,000-word files that included several Indigenous terms that were not caught by the transcription features. Zoom interviews were transcribed using a secure transcription application, REV, while the videos recorded on MS Teams used the included transcription feature. The researcher crosschecked the transcriptions word by word and

corrected any necessary errors against the video recordings. Member checking was also conducted to clarify any discrepancies in the transcripts if needed.

Sample Characteristics

The participant characteristics offered minimal detail to ensure the safety and privacy of the study participants. Due to the minute Indigenous student and graduate population, many aspects of the demographics were not included in the final study. The prescreening questionnaire queried for more detailed demographic information to authenticate the validity of inclusionary criteria for the study. The second purpose of the demographic information allowed the researcher to understand the explicit dynamics of the participants for the emic deductive TribalCrit analysis. The detailed information was deleted after the study. Nonetheless, the basic information offered shared enough to frame the variability in the unique backgrounds of the study participants. The sample used in this study included Indigenous students in higher education and recent graduates in allied fields (n = 12). The mean age of the sample was relatively young (M = 34.8, SD = 6.216). The average age was 32 years old. Participants identified as 8% male and 92% female and identified as being of different tribal affiliations (i.e., Alaska Native, American Indian, First Nation, Metis, and Inuit) within the United States and Canada. Ninety percent of participants lived with a significant partner (i.e., married, domestic partner). Ten percent had a long-term partner in a separate dwelling. Sample characteristics are further detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Sample Characteristics

Variable	%, *M*, or Range
Gender	
Male	1
Female	11
Significant other	10
Age	
Variance	38.63
Mean	34.83
Mode	32
SD	6.22
Year	
Tribe	All different; Removed to protect participant identity
Education	
PhD, PsyD in Clinical, Counseling, Social Work, Mental Health, Combined, Indigenous Track	9
Master's in Counseling, Social Work, Mental Health, Combined, Indigenous Track	3

The demographic data of the participants were analyzed, revealing important insights into the varied characteristics of the group. The participants hailed from 12 diverse academic institutions and represented 12 different Tribal populations, with a mix of PhD, PsyD, and allied field qualifications. Among the participants, clinical psychology and counseling psychology were equally represented, with five participants each, indicating a balanced representation of these fields. Social work had the lowest number of representations, with only two participants.

When it came to employment status, the participants had varied work arrangements. Three were employed full time, three worked part time, and five were not formally employed during the research timeframe. Many students held graduate assistant

positions and were involved in extracurricular scholarly activities such as research. This

mix of employment situations reflects the diversity of the group.

Regarding relationship status, the majority of participants were married or in a

long-term serious relationship, comprising eight individuals, and only one participant

reported being divorced. In terms of parental status, most participants did not have

children, with seven falling into this category, and four reported being parents. A few

participants did not have biological children but had an active role as caretakers of

younger children.

Table 3

Demographic Data

Personal demographic data	Frequency
Area of study	
Clinical psychology	5
Counseling psychology	5
Social work	2
Early career	5
Currently enrolled	7
Employment status	
Full time	3
Not employed	5
Part time	3
Marital status	
Divorced	1
Married	8
Significant other	3
Parental status	
No children	7
Children	4

Data Analysis

In this study, a framework of six stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyze the narrative data. The first stage involved in vivo coding with a thematic analysis, which began with repetitive reading and breaking down the transcripts to gain familiarity with the data and identify relevant patterns and phrases.

The second stage was an active process (Braun & Clark, 2006) of organizing and interpreting the data using NVivo software, version 14. The researcher employed a manual coding process and used an inductive approach to generate themes based on preliminary knowledge from a pilot study in 2020. Nodes were created based on participants' responses to interview questions, and a thematic map was used to aid in active coding.

The third stage involved organizing the nodes into categories based on themes, concepts, or ideas to identify any new patterns specific to the research questions on resilience and retention. Each line was analyzed independently, and the overall narratives for each question were grouped based on core concepts (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Word Cloud Based on Participants' Narration

The fourth stage required a review of the themes and finalizing the thematic map (see Figure 2). The fifth stage involved reviewing the codes for redundancy and significance and making necessary modifications.

Figure 2

Thematic Map
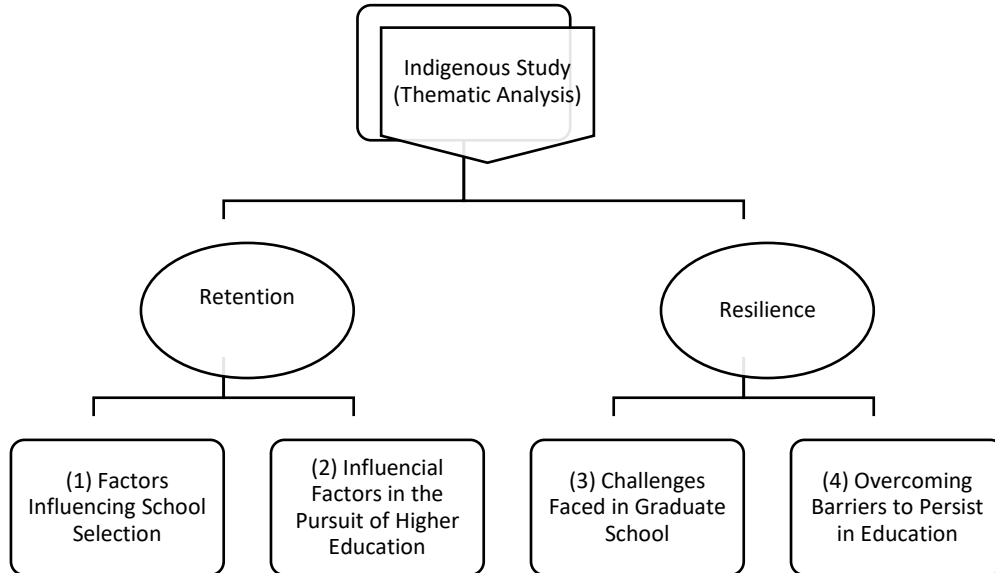
Note. Thematic Map of Overarching Ideas, Main Themes.

The final stage was reporting the results. This intensive coding process provided insights into the lived experiences of Indigenous students in higher education. The systematic analysis led to meaningful conclusions regarding the research questions.

Results

This study revealed two overarching categories—retention and resilience—aligned with the research questions. These significant areas consisted of four major themes, and two subthemes under each. Retention included: (a) Factors Influencing School Selection; (b) Influential Factors in the Pursuit of Higher Education; while resilience incorporated (c) Challenges Faced in Graduate School; and (d) Overcoming Barriers to Persist in Education.

Figure 2

Thematic Map
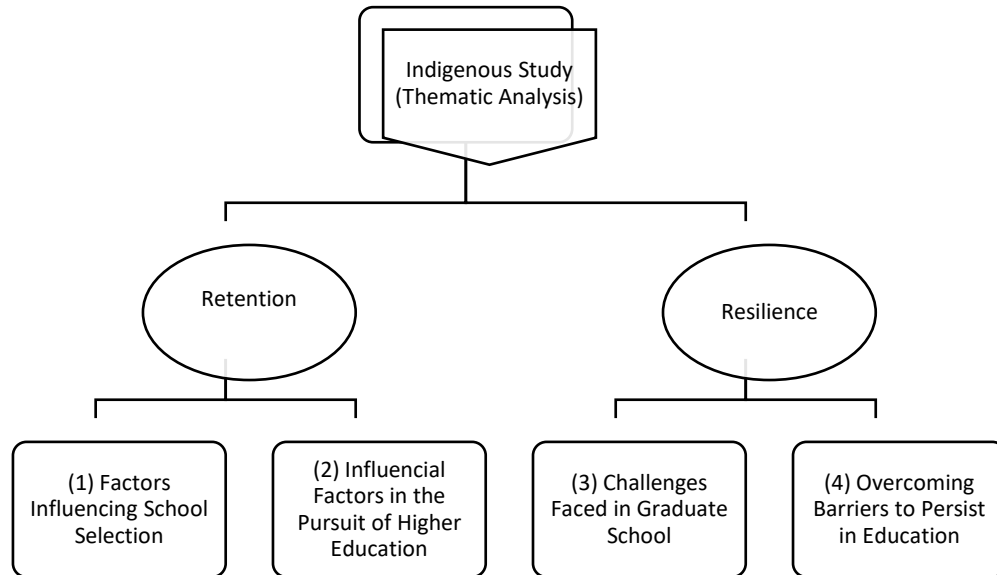
Note. Thematic Map of Overarching Ideas, Main Themes.

Theme 1: Factors Influencing School Selection

The participants disclosed careful considerations in choosing university programs as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Factors Influencing School Selection
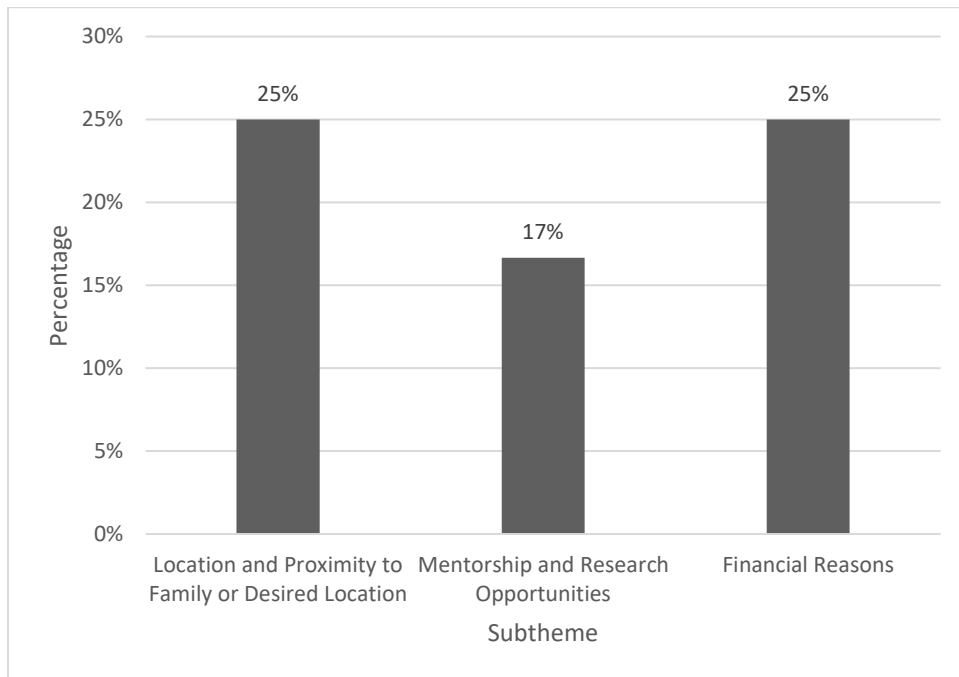
Note. Factors affecting participant university doctoral programs.

Location and Proximity to Family or Desired Location

One of the factors highlighted by 25% of the participants influencing school selection by Indigenous students in higher education was the importance of proximity to family. Participant 01 expressed the need to be close to their relatives and Indigenous community for a dedicated support network already in place. Participant 01 shared this sentiment when selecting their college of preference, stating, "I needed proximity to my community in some way. That was overall, I couldn't apply somewhere that was too far. I needed to be able to get home often."

Upon visiting the campus, Participant 10 was swayed when their prospective university had an Indigenous student presence. Participant 10 believed attending a

university with a supportive community would counteract the potential isolation commonly experienced within the academia. They said:

> But once I got to campus, it was the only school too, that had a Native student center, and so they had Native faculty there, and I knew that there would be Native grad students there. For me, that really made the decision because then I was like, "I want to be in community." Like, everyone talks about how isolating these things [school experiences] are and the academy is overall. I knew my mom would be with me, but it's like almost at every turn, I'm trying to surround myself with my people, bringing mom, being close to the community.

Furthermore, they mentioned their motivation in remaining close to their Indigenous community was crucial to choosing a program.

Mentorship and Research Opportunities

Seventeen percent of the participants identified mentorship and research opportunities as another significant factor influencing their decision-making process regarding program selection. Participant 02 reflected on being mentored by a professor during undergraduate studies and the inspirational experiences that played a crucial role in shaping Participant 02's decision to continue in higher education. They said:

> Being mentored in undergrad by one of my professors and getting involved in research and stuff, I just think all those things kind of came together and were like, okay, I love science.

Similarly, Participant 09 mentioned the value of a long-standing relationship with an Indigenous mentor who supported the student in seeking school aspirations. This early cultural developmental identity support stages helped shape the participant's path.

Moreover, the Indigenous mentor played a significant role with opportunities for mentorship and a transfer of professional knowledge to successfully facilitate groups. Participant 09 reviewed this support system, stating, "I actually landed in it because my director of the [Name removed] Indian Student Center, she is someone I definitely see as a mentor."

The comments by participants are congruent with the existing research as academic scholars have researched the quality and level of college support worldwide that impart increased student performance (Perez-Encinas & Ammign, 2016). These findings are congruent with Lenx-Rashid (2018) who highlighted the integral value of support increasing the probability of student's academic completion. Practically, the same support more specific to encompass the needs for Indigenous students would garner increased success for this group.

Financial Support

In addition to mentorship, 25% of the participants referenced financial reasons as another influential factor in the decision-making process in university selection. Participant 04, for example, highlighted the appreciation of financial support they received from their Tribe. Although this financial support was crucial, it required the submission of several applications and parental guidance on the complicated application process. Participant 04 stated, "My Tribe funded me as long as I applied," emphasizing although many scholarship opportunities were available for registered Tribal Indigenous students, the application process was also time consuming. Unfortunately, most Indigenous students were unaware or struggled and gave up on the scholarship application process.

Participant 05 shared that a Tribal scholarship program supported their undergraduate studies, stating, "I knew [Tribal affiliation] would not help with the second master's, but they would fund me for PhD So that's also part of it."

Participant 07 explained how being reared on Native land and the intersectionality of a White passing identity influenced their educational journey. In third grade, they tested into a tribal private school funded by their tribe as part of a pilot program. Participant 07 shared, "Because of that tribal funding and encouragement, I ended up going to a private school off reservation." Although the program was eventually discontinued due to low graduation rates and college enrollment, the participant's experience of tribal funding and encouragement led them to attend a private school off the reservation. They acknowledged living on Native land helped save money, but their family continued to face financial constraints. They saw education as a means to break the cycle of poverty and improve their future, grateful for their opportunities compared to their mother's experiences.

Theme 2: Influential Factors in the Pursuit of Higher Education

Aligned with RQ1, retention for psychology and related fields, the participants discussed major themes as shown in Figure 4. The subthemes include several areas and denote undertone of a strong collectivist worldview particularly in the desire to support autonomy of Indigenous Peoples and communities.

Figure 4

Retention Factors Influencing the Pursuit of Higher Education
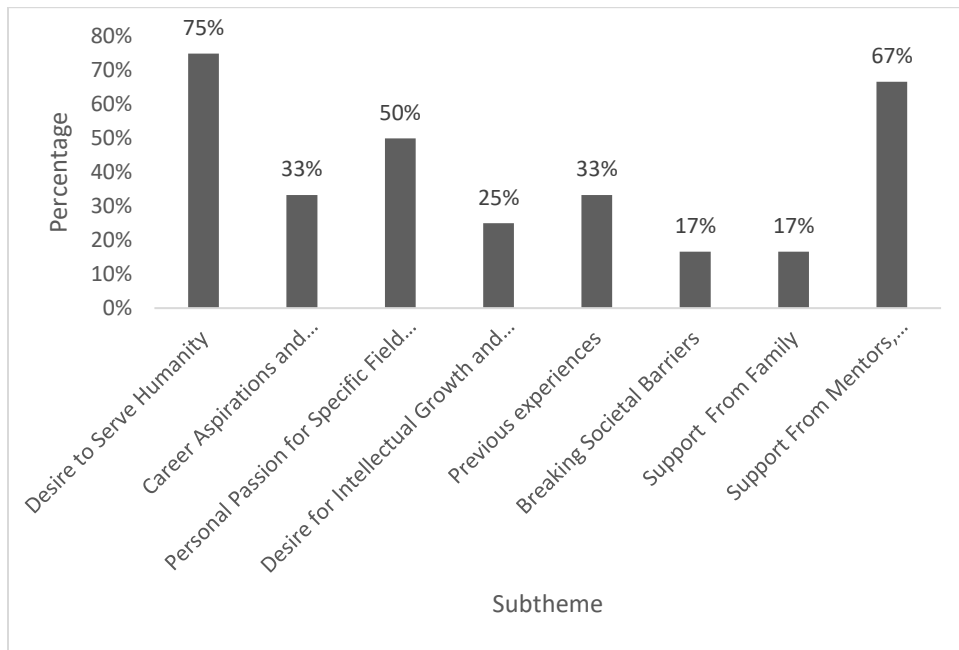
Note. The pursuit of higher education for Indigenous students may bolster retention.

Desire to Serve Indigenous Populations

Seventy-five percent of the participants reported the desire to serve humanity (i.e., give back to their Indigenous communities) as an influential factor in their decision to pursue higher education. Participant 01 expressed a strong desire to return to their community and contribute to the overall mental health well-being as an academic educator. For instance, Participant 01 felt less judged by their community over White groups and saw their involvement in psychology as an opportunity to make a positive impact, stating:

I definitely want to come back to my community and help with the mental health side of things, both in the school but also in the larger community. It's this weird

thing I guess, because from the Western side of psychology there's all these rules

by the APA about how you're supposed to practice and how you're supposed to

be and boundaries and relationships. And it's hard because my community's

small. I know everyone and I know them intimately. They're not strangers to me

and yet they're all very supportive and know everything about me. It's funny, I

feel less judged from my community.

They highlighted the challenges faced in adhering to Western psychology practices and

boundaries, given their intimate knowledge of and close relationships within their small

community.

Participant 02 mentioned early professional aspirations to join the helping field

were influenced by familial community leaders in mental health. According to Participant

02, pursuing higher education became a way to enhance their skills and give back to

Native communities, and they expressed this sentiment:

I think, probably starting out, the thing that came to me pretty, at an early age,

was that I wanted to be in the helping field. My dad and my uncles are different

types of counselors. My dad is, like, [type of counselor], so I just grew up

watching him do his work and stuff, just kind of put myself in those shoes,

growing up. I was like, I want to be in the helping field in some way.

These family members shared a mutual passion for supporting their Tribal

Indigenous communities and felt that improved credentials would be beneficial.

Likewise, Participant 04 had a personal motivation driven by their family and origin.

They initially aspired to be a doctor, but recognizing the effects of colonization on

Indigenous Peoples deeply affected the student. From this experience, the participant

recognized their strengths, and instead, pursued a doctorate in psychology. They saw themselves as a powerful advocate for their community and aimed to use their expertise to make a difference, stating, "I'm good at it [navigating the Western world]. It comes so easy to me. I'm a powerful advocate for our people and I've always been like that. So, I knew I wanted to get a doctorate."

Participant 04 acknowledged their innate understanding of Indigenous experiences and the stolen knowledge from Indigenous people that form the foundation of psychology, stating:

> Yeah. I always wanted to be a doctor. It comes back to family and origin. My uncle was like, "you're going to be the first doctor of the family." And then he ended up having a brain aneurism and he lost all motor functions and I had to take care of him while my mom went to school. It was me and my mom, we were living in low income housing, and we were taking care of my uncle.
>
> So basically, the reason why I got my PhD is for him, because I couldn't be a medical doctor because I'm [expletive] bad at science and math. Numbers and [expletive], I'm not good at it at all. I know my strengths, that's not it. And I found that psychology just came easy to me because I grew up in my community and I know what it's like to be an Indigenous person. And a lot of what psychology is based on, is stolen from Indigenous people.

Participant 06 expressed their desire to provide support to Indigenous Peoples, stating, "For me, it's just more so being of service to people." Their focus was on contributing to the well-being of others and making a positive difference in their lives through their education and career.

Participant 08 had a vision of using their future doctorate to advocate for change within the workforce, recognizing the importance of cultural empathy in providing effective care, as they said:

> I'm going to get. . . . In my mind, I'm going to get my doctorate, and then practice
> that ability to educate the employers and change the lot to where they can allow
> for people to have their needs given at work so that they can do their job. Again,
> whether it is to do with mental or physical disability, but I also want to help the
> patients embrace their culture and then be relatable to them.

Furthermore, their aim included educating employers on accommodating the needs of individuals with disabilities, both mental and physical, while also embracing their culture.

Career Aspirations and Professional Advancement Opportunities

A joint factor considered by the 34% of participants was career aspirations and professional advancement opportunities. Participant 04 explained that their upbringing on Tribal land in a low-income household resulted in subpar education. They added, "I am very much a product of my reservation. We grew up super poor and my education, my high school and just grade school education, I should say, is not very good. It's not good at all." Yet, despite the challenges, Participant 04 acknowledged their K–12 education was inadequate, motivating them to pursue higher education to improve their career prospects.

Participant 06, a nontraditional student, initially entered the casino industry after dropping out of undergraduate studies but grew dissatisfied with their career path. Participant 06 endorsed:

So, it actually started, if I'm being completely honest, because I didn't want to be

in the casino industry anymore. So, my educational path is, well, I'm a

nontraditional student. So, what ended up happening was once I graduated high

school . . . So, I just was really unsure about what I was going to do.

Participant 06 eventually decided to pursue a psychology degree, partly influenced by a

desire to join the military as an officer. Completing a degree was a requirement for

enlisting as an officer, providing opportunities for professional advancement.

In addition to professional development opportunities, another factor impacting

career aspirations was the participant's gender. Participant 08 faced challenges as a

woman and a minority when obtaining leadership positions despite having more

education than direct managers. The recognition of the need to rise to the highest level,

pursue a doctorate, overcome barriers, and create opportunities for themselves and other

people of color incented an education. Participant 08 expressed:

I have more education than our director for the program. I have more education

than the men that I have to get permission from to bring in [removed] partners.

But I'm brown, I'm a woman. So, I thought to myself, "The only way that I can

be on top and bring other people like me to the top, is to be at the very, very top.

What's the highest you can get, a doctorate. Once I'm there, then nobody can

knock me down, hopefully.

For Participant 08, having the right knowledge, cultural competence, and qualifications

would empower them to bring about meaningful cultural change.

Participant 11 expressed, "[I was] interested in psychology as a career since high

school. That was the main thing that I saw myself doing, attending college, and that was

my first experience doing a psych-related degree." Being in the helping field, specifically for Indigenous clients, initiated a need and understanding of cultural practices to help this population. This experience of working in the field with Indigenous clients increased the participant's desire to learn more about Indigenous teachings to better support her Indigenous clients with traditional knowledge such as the Way of Knowing, to taking care of others and create a strong community. Participant 11 observed Indigenous and non-Indigenous professionals with different backgrounds in allied fields working in mental health services on Tribal land. This exposure expanded their perspective on the potential career paths aligned with Indigenous theories and practices connected to their roots; hence the desire for change motivated them to pursue higher education in the field.

Personal Passion Specific Field or Subject

Another factor reported by 50% of the participants was a personal passion for a specific field or subject. Participant 04 expressed a fascination with psychology that they discovered later in life. The quality of education in public schools on Tribal lands, due to a lack of funding and qualified teachers and more (outside of this study's scope), do not typically provide a broad spectrum of curriculum. This student learned more about psychology-related classes after high school. Participant 04 shared the experienced disparities in their preparatory educational path, stating:

> When I got older, I started finding out more about psychology because we didn't have a psychology class at my public school that I went to. We didn't have any of that. And so, I started learning more about it. And then whenever I was in my master's program, it was so fascinating to me, and it just came super easy to me.

> Being able to connect to people through therapy was just so... I felt I have a
> passion for it. I love it.

Academic interest was stoked by an authenticity founded on traditional Indigenous Ways of Knowing that helped Participant 04 easily connect with clients during therapy sessions. This positive reinforcement developed a genuine passion for psychology, which fueled self-efficacy and a desire to pursue higher education in the field.

Participant 05 had ambitions of a career in academia but were unsure about the specific role. After stumbling upon a school counseling program while browsing through programs, Participant 05 found it intriguing, stating:

> I've always known that I want it to be in the school system though, so definitely
> working in the schools, but I just didn't know, like as what. And then one day I
> was looking through, I think it was in a use-like program and stuff, and then the
> school counseling program kind of caught my eye.

For Participant 06, their personal history and family background as an Indigenous person played a significant role in their passion for psychology. They said, "It's been a passion of mine because, of course, my own history and then the family history and trying to understand more and being a part of just the community of people of color." They sought to understand more about their marginalized community and personal experiences. The intent was to make a difference as a part of a supportive community for people of color.

Participant 08 expressed a deep connection and passion for psychology founded on systemic colonization issues prevalent in their community. Participant 08 acknowledged, "I can't see myself doing anything else. I've tried. I've tried other

[avenues], I've worked at the hospital, and I've done administration. I've joined the

military. I can't see myself doing anything else." This deep passion and drive to support

Indigenous Peoples was garnered through seeking education for change. This beckoning

incented exploration of different career paths, and they ultimately found a fit in the

psychology field. They explored various career opportunities, including administration

and the military, but ultimately realized that psychology was their true calling because it

aligned with collective values and need to support Indigenous growth and autonomy.

Desire for Intellectual Growth and Knowledge Acquisition

The findings showed 25% of the participants accounted for a desire to gain

intellectual growth and knowledge acquisition as factors influencing a decision to pursue

higher education. Participant 06 expressed a motivation in education to increase levels of

authority, equality, and respect in professional spaces, as they said, "I need to go higher

with my education so I can be in these spaces without people feeling threatened or saying

those types of things to me, because it did a lot to my self-confidence." The student

believed navigation in a dominantly White work environment required the most respected

level of academic credentials to confidently establish themselves as a respected

contributor and advocate for other people of color. This credentialing was thought to be a

factor in diminishing threats and disrespect that created a desire for intellectual growth

and acquiring higher education for increased self-confidence as an established

professional.

Influenced by access and a desire to work with children, Participant 10 decided to

switch majors to psychology and expressed, "So, I ended up, like after the summer ended,

I went and worked at their main hospital on the weekends while I was still going to

college, and I went back to college and changed my major to psychology because we didn't have anything for social work." The recognition of the benefits of mental health wellness impacted their academic trajectory based on the welfare of others. This change and pursuit of knowledge and skills were partially informed by a supervisor and mentor.

The desire to increase their skill set motivated Participant 12 to pursue the master's program, as they said:

> This program was offered after years of being in the field and me wanting to increase my skills and credentials so that I could do more in the way of therapeutic counseling work, et cetera, healing work. I saw this program and I was so excited.

Previous Experiences

The account of general participant past experiences for 34% ranged from encounters with reports of need from psychologists, exposure to trauma, witnessing community issues, and problems with access to mental health services, shaped the perspectives and fueled motivation to pursue higher education in psychology and allied fields. Participant 02 described a previous positive experience with a mental health professional as a catalyst for their interest stating, "A psychologist was, like, really helpful to me in my teens and like early 20s, and so kind of solidified that or crystallized that idea of wanting to help them in the field even more."

Participant 03's decision to pursue higher education in psychology was influenced by personal experience:

> I saw trauma at a young age in this poor community. Um, but also it was beautiful to, like, . . . [being cared for by] a lot of the hippies . . . [that] were very

> community minded and it had sort of a tribal sense to it because it's like, my best
>
> friends, all their parents are like my parents and you know, they could, I could get
>
> in trouble just as easily with them as with my parents.

Participant 03 served as a community advocate for teens which involved dealing with high levels of exposure to in the community. Additionally, the student faced a traumatic brain injury, which further heightened interest in understanding and working with individuals who experienced trauma.

For Participant 10, a significant event in their life, being sexually assaulted on campus, shaped their pursuit of higher education. They said:

> I was sexually assaulted on campus, and part of my healing journey, and a lot of
>
> that was about seeing how much of an epidemic it was against Indigenous
>
> women, and I'm like, "This is a huge problem. It's not just an individual-level
>
> problem." Once I had started my graduate program, that was really my focus in
>
> going through social work and thinking about social justice.

This experience prompted reflection on the broader issues of violence against Indigenous women and the need for social justice. The encouragement they received from an Indigenous professor and advisor, and their focus on Indigenous women's experiences of violence, played a role in the decision to consider obtaining a doctorate.

The factors incented by Participant 11's experiences played a crucial role in their decision to pursue higher education. They revealed witnessing a [significantly altering traumatic event] at school. This experience instilled recognition of the need for access to mental health services for societal support:

>Growing up and noticing working within mental health services on a [Tribal
>
>affiliation] reserve in different communities, like hearing from family members,
>
>and then eventually my own experiences, accessing services that weren't so
>
>culturally safe or informed at all. Or even ones that said that they were, but were
>
>very Eurocentric, culturally adapted CBT, and I was like, "Yeah. No."

Participant 11's observations and personal experience with the limitations and lack of

cultural safety in existing mental health services motivated a need to make a difference in

the field. This inspired an advocacy role in incorporating community-based initiatives

that are culturally informed approaches to healing.

Breaking Through Societal Barriers

Participants recognized the low levels of educational attainment within

Indigenous Peoples, whether prevalent in familial or community history. Recognizing the

effects of historical trauma led to a notion of breaking through the societal barriers as a

first-generation student and set a precedent for future Indigenous generations. Participant

05 expressed a motivation to serve as a role model and positively impact their

community, stating:

>I definitely think it is to get back to the community, but also, I think part of it is
>
>just being a role model to show that it can be done in that you can do it if you
>
>want to. You know, I think you know like, like what they say, representation
>
>matters, if you see it, maybe you're more like, oh, I get it, you know.

They recognized the importance of representation and believed that pursuing higher

education could inspire others and demonstrate that it is possible to achieve educational

goals.

Participant 01 highlighted the influence of family support through a senior family member actively incentivizing their decision to pursue higher education despite limited postsecondary preparation from high school did not create a sense of need. They said:

Well, my grandma. I'll just start with that, that's the easiest way to put it. I didn't think I was going to go to college in general, just because my parents, neither of them went to college. My dad didn't graduate high school. It's very rare for people in my community to go to college. And I did pretty bad, grade-wise in high school, I really didn't take anything AP. There weren't really AP classes to begin with. There was no college prep in my high school, so it was just like I didn't know what happens next. I figured I'd work for my tribe in some capacity.

Support From Family and Close Friends

Some participants (17%) recognized the pivotal role that family played in supporting educational pursuits. From actively seeking scholarships to providing guidance and emotional support, their families played an integral part in contributing to an educational journey. Participant 01 mentioned the significant influence of their grandmother, who actively sought scholarships for the tribe and arranged a meeting with a community college recruiter. They said:

My grandma really developed a program for our tribe trying to look up scholarships. And she brought a recruiter for a community college to the reservation who spoke to me and some of my cousins at the time about what it could look like, what college is like, how do you get in, how do you apply. And she really wanted me to do that. So, I went to the meeting and he kind of walked

me through what it would look like to apply to the community college. And so, I

did. And then I've just been in school since that point.

Participant 04 credited a parent who had completed a master's and had taught the

student how to navigate the scholarship application process, sharing valuable insights and

strategies. The value of a familial role model and privileged knowledge imparted by a

parent allowed Participant 04 to access funding opportunities and achieve significant

progress in their academic journey. Additionally, the student acknowledged the

instrumental support from other family members, including their spouse, uncle, sister,

grandmother, and father. The emphasis on the collective level of support and

encouragement played a pivotal role in Participant 04's ability to persevere. The example

set by the student's mother's attainment provided motivation to get through challenging

structurally prejudiced and circumstantially racist moments to successfully graduate from

higher education. Participant 04 imparted more about this new skillset, saying:

> That's how I ended up getting so far, as far as I did, because my mom taught me
>
> how to apply to get funding from scholarships. She's like, "Oh, this is how you do
>
> it. When they say this, this is what they mean. This is what you put in there." And
>
> I was like, "Oh [####], okay." I know how to work the system in that way just
>
> because of my mom. She did it when she went through her master's program.

Participant 08 shared a unique perspective regarding their child's influence in

pursuing a master's degree. Through a spiritual reading, it was predicted that [name of

daughter] would surpass the student's academic achievements, motivating Participant 08

to strive for the highest level of education to pave the way for their daughter's success.

They said:

She's [daughter]just gifted in a different spiritual way. So, I took her to a reading

and the gentleman said, "She is going to be way better than you. I see her and her

light will outshine you." And at first, I was like, "Oh, well that's kind of good."

But then I thought better than me and I didn't feel like I was doing good enough.

So, I thought, "Okay, so if she's going to be better than me, then what is the

highest that I can go so that she can surpass that, so a doctor." So now if it was up

to me, I would run for president just so that she can get past that.

Participant 11 discussed the influence of growing up with adoptive family

members in the medical field served as a source of encouragement for Participant 11 to

pursue their educational and career path in psychology. They said:

Well, a lot of my family members are in the health profession field, whether it's

doctors or nurses. So, I have seen helping professions growing up.

Participant 12 expressed the value of education was instilled from a young age by

parents and relatives. The dream of pursuing higher education was encouraged and

supported by family members, and the discovery of Indigenous-specific programs further

solidified their aspirations. They said:

From the time I was very, very young, my parents expressed the need for

education, higher education, they wanted better opportunities for me and my

siblings and this was always a passion inside.

Mentorship From Professors or Academic Advisors

The acknowledgment of the instrumental roles played by mentors, professors, and

academic advisors shaped the direction of 67% of participants educational journeys.

These individuals provided guidance, advice, and support, showing belief in participants'

abilities, and actively advocating for their success. This dedicated mentorship and

encouragement played a crucial role in motivating the participants to pursue higher

education in psychology and allied fields. Participant 04 described the impact of a mentor

who had recently graduated from a master's program:

> She was like, "Why don't you just do the master's program?" Because she just
>
> got done with it. And I was like, "You know what? [####] it." I threw my
>
> application in there. I think I had two days until the deadline, and I got picked.

Participant 09 credited their director for recognizing their potential and redirecting them

towards a program in higher education. The guidance and intervention played a crucial

role in Participant 09's decision to pursue this particular path, as they said:

> My director came out one day and she was like, "What are you doing?" I was like,
>
> "Working." She was like, "No, with your life. What are you doing? Because this
>
> isn't what you wanted to do. I know it's not what you wanted to do." And so, she
>
> talked me into signing up for the program in higher education.

> Participant 10 shared their experience with an Indigenous professor and advisor.

The professor's encouragement and suggestion to consider pursuing a PhD planted a seed

of ambition in Participant 10's mind. Throughout their second year as an undergraduate,

the professor provided mentorship and assistance with application processes, and served

as a guiding force. Additionally, Participant 10 mentioned meeting with the head of an

Indigenous student center and another encouraging Indigenous faculty member during the

graduate school interview weekend. This group's support and advice further solidified

their decision to pursue higher education. Participant 10 said:

It was the first Native professor I ever had, and she actually ended up being my advisor, too, and it was like the final paper that I wrote for her class, like first semester of the program, and she was like, "Have you ever considered getting your PhD?" And I was like, "What?" Yeah, I guess. I don't know. So, she planted that little seed, and then going into my second year, she helped me fill out applications and really mentored me and did a lot. She was the first Indigenous woman to get her PhD at the school that I ended up going to.

Theme 3: Challenges Faced in Graduate School

Theme 3 shared common problematic areas that the participants faced in higher education. The five subthemes underline areas that require Indigenous students' activation of resilience to withstand the contextual challenges while navigating academic environments. Not surprisingly, the prevalence of experiences of racism and discrimination stand-out as indicated in Figure 5 and in alignment with the current research.

Figure 5

Challenges Faced in Graduate School
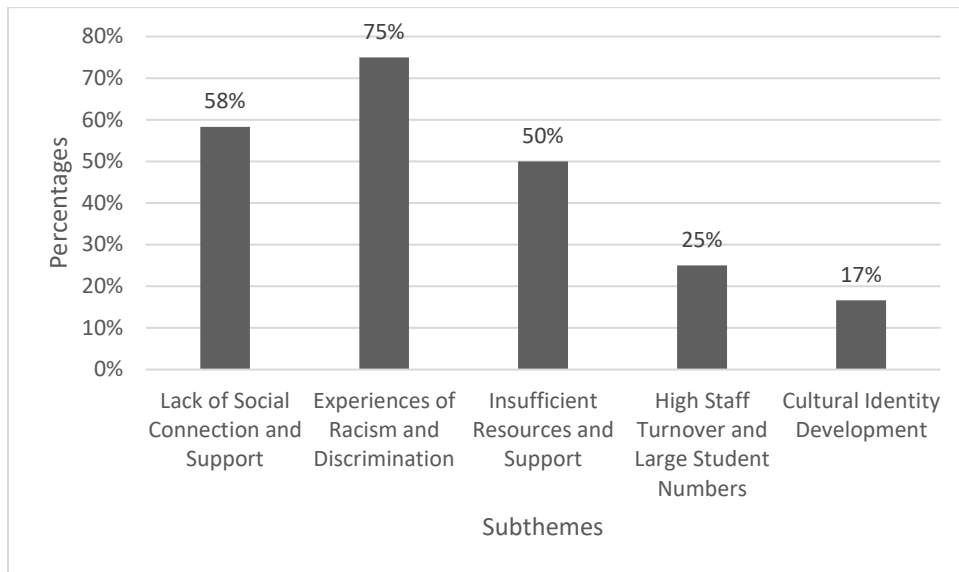
Note. Subthemes denoting challenge areas and a necessity for Indigenous students to activate characteristics of resilience while in higher education.

Lack of Social Connections and Support

The lack of social connections and support presented significant challenges for 58% of the Indigenous participants pursuing higher education in psychology and allied fields. The students faced numerous obstacles, including experiences of racism and bullying, vast limitations in cultural competency and understanding specific to Indigeneity, inconsistent teaching staff, an absence of Indigenous faculty and supervisors, limited BIPOC faculty and supervisors, feelings of isolation, limited support, and family obligations.

Participant 01 mentioned familial obligation taxed their time, resulting in limited opportunities to form connections. This student was tasked with various responsibilities

that limited their availability to establish social connections. Describing challenges,

Participant 01 stated, "I mean I'd say the biggest barrier I think, forming connections at

times, has just been my obligation to my family." The student was the family's legal

conservator and had many stressful obligations in this role advocating for a younger

family member. Stresses over and above graduate school responsibilities are all too

common in Indigenous graduate students over other racial and ethnic groups and White

students. They emphasized the additional load many Indigenous students must contend

with during graduate school. Such significant emotional and time-consuming situations

can lead to increased obligations and potential isolation.

> Participant 03 highlighted the inconsistent teaching staff at the doctoral school

they attended, which affected the formation of stable connections with instructors and

mentors. Participant 03 recalled the loss by stating:

> Um, one of my teachers from [name] used to teach at [doctoral school] and she
>
> shared with me, um, after I left the program that she just felt like their integrity
>
> was getting worse and worse. And so, she stopped teaching for them and then
>
> there would be teachers who would come in like one quarter and really like the
>
> teacher and then they'd be gone.

Participant 04 expressed the absence of an Indigenous supervisor, suggesting a lack of

representation and potential challenges in finding mentorship from someone who shared

their cultural background, stating, "I never had an Indigenous supervisor."

> Participant 05 emphasized the challenge of feeling isolated and not completely

comfortable, noting the differences, and acknowledging them although still yearning for a

stronger sense of connection and support. Participant 05 highlighted the adversity during their academic journey, stating:

> I definitely think the challenging one we have kind of gone over, like that, not having a strong connection, and really feeling to some degree, alone and going through it and then not feeling, I guess, completely comfortable is the best word I can use to describe it.

Participant 06 described the struggle to connect with Indigenous students at their university due to the COVID-19 global pandemic but mentioned connections began to develop after the first 2 semesters. Participant 06 recounted the isolation, stating:

> I do struggle to make connections with the [State] Native people. Because of the pandemic, I haven't really had that exposure or had the opportunity to have any cultural engagement. But there is a difference though.

Many participants dealt with racialized issues in higher education. Participant 09, Participant 10, and Participant 12 faced significant outright racism, bullying, and harassment; whereas Participant 04 and Participant 10 reported being tokenized during their graduate school experiences. All participants noted such issues were not addressed by the university. Participant 09 shared instances of racist slurs and threats and Participant 10 recounted incidents of rumors, derogatory nicknames, and confrontations in class. Participant 08 described common hurtful assumptions not communicated over the relationships with White students and White professors, stating:

> There was just a lot of bullying and harassment that people started rumors about me and the only Native professor. They were like, "Oh, you should close the door." His name was Dr. [Native faculty], and they would call him [nickname]

and they would be like, "Oh, I bet you're just going to go in there." I'm like,

"Don't say that." I don't need people to think that I'm out here like . . . It was just

the innuendo. It just kind of escalated from there, just different . . . They would

just act out in class.

Racist microaggressions and direct harassment created a hostile and toxic environment,

further isolating participants and impeding their social connections and support.

Experiences of Racism and Discrimination

Unfortunately, 75% of the participants' experiences demonstrated the presence of

racism and discrimination during graduate school, creating a hostile environment,

whether intentional or not. In effect, such systemic conditions further stigmatize

Indigenous students and other people of color. Participant 01 shared a specific encounter

with microaggressions in the form of comments. The participant was offended by racially

prejudiced slights from a client and felt dismissed by the supervisor when the situation

was not addressed. Both are forms of discrimination and contribute to cumulative

negative effects that must be considered significantly harsh forms of transgression.

Participant 01 recalled the hurtful situation, stating:

I've had a few clients make microaggressive type comments to me. The

supervisors, just kind of really focused on the client, and not even trying to

understand, or help me figure out how to navigate that. I've had clients, just very

rarely, but sometimes be like, "Oh, Native women are so beautiful. I have always

loved Native women."

Participant 02 expressed the constant need and pressure to prove their worth to be in

graduate school, indicating the pressure and expectations they faced was higher for an

Indigenous student in a higher education setting stating, "You're always having to prove yourself."

Participant 03 mentioned experiencing microaggressions along the way but noted that they had a reduced impact due to being a non-traditional student with more life experience. Even in hostile environments, their understanding of a head-down focus would get the student through school, even if the situations were hurtful. However, during their dissertation process, they confronted racism directly and recognized the institutionalized nature of their challenges. Participant 03 painted a picture of the norm and varying degrees of adversity for Indigenous students:

> There was like, you know, microaggressions and stuff that happened along the way that being an older student, I think I, it didn't phase me quite as much but when it, yeah got down to my own dissertation process.

Participant 11 shared experiences of microaggressions within their research lab focused on Indigenous research. They mentioned the burden of correcting and educating other students although their supervisor did not intervene. Additionally, they mentioned a discriminatory professor and a tumultuous faculty environment that added to their challenges. Participant 04 described a traumatic first year in their doctoral program and felt tokenized. This example highlights the need for cultural competency to avoid initialization (Pidgeon, 2016). This professor sought their approval and guilted them into taking specific classes, displaying a lack of understanding and regard for racial issues. Exasperated, Participant 04 shared their frustration and the impact of this experience, stating "My first year, my [doctoral]program was [####] traumatic. I was tokenized and fetishized. It was very disgusting. One of the professors actually was doing the tokenizing

and fetishization of me to the point." On the other hand, Participant 09 described an encounter with a professor who dismissed their perspective on silence in Native American culture and instead imposed their own assumptions and experiences. The professor's behavior and lack of respect during supervision sessions were distressing.

Participant 06 shared an incident where they experienced discrimination in the professional space. A longer-term and older White woman sent an email expressing dissatisfaction about not being chosen for a position, highlighting potential racial biases at play. Participant 06 discussed the experience of discrimination during their academic training, stating:

> And there was an incident that occurred where another older White woman actually sent out an email to the whole team, essentially saying that, I don't even remember how it was said, but it was like, "Why does the new employee get to be with [the managers names removed] instead of me who's been in this for many years?"

Participant 07 mentioned the complexity of intersectionality in their experience as a White-passing Indigenous student. They faced challenges in classroom discussions where their Native identity was questioned and their worldview, beliefs, and values were invalidated. Navigating such hurtful experiences occurred often and deteriorated the validity of this Participant 07's cultural identity, as they said:

> I think what makes it a little complex is being White-passing, and I went to fancy schools my whole life. I act in a certain way, and I think that makes it hard sometimes, because there was one class discussion, particularly, where one of my good friends basically was getting very, I don't know the right word, I want to say

irritable, but we were talking about me being Native, and she's like, "But

basically, you're White-passing." I'm like, "Okay, I'm still Native." Sometimes

it's hard, because it's like, I don't know what it's like to be an openly identifiable

person of color. She's Black. I'm like, "That's totally valid." Yes. I don't know

what that's like.

An Indigenous student expressed hesitation out of a feared retaliation based on

past experiences of lodging a racial complaint. Participant 10 believed such issues should

be recognized by institutions, faculty, and non-Indigenous students without having a need

to ask for cultural respect in addressing discrimination and racism. They said, "Mm-

hmm. I'm like, 'I don't want to be.' Like, it's hard enough to be the brown person here. I

don't want to be that brown person that lodged a racial complaint. But I'm like, Hello?'"

Insufficient Resources and Support

During discussions, 58% of the participants shared experiences about a lack of

resources and support while pursuing higher degrees in psychology and related fields.

These obstacles distressed the students in various ways. Participant 04 recounted their

attempts to seek help from an internal clinical support program. They faced resistance

and could not connect with the person in charge, who held a negative view of the

counseling program. Additionally, Participant 04 made valiant efforts to seek assistance

elsewhere; even the undergraduate student support avenue proved unhelpful and even

uncomfortable. The participants expressed frustration at the lack of support, especially as

the demands of the doctoral program were already full of time constraints without having

to spend time trying to search for support. Participant 04 recalled the failure in support,

not for a lack of self-advocacy, stating:

They had an inside program, but that was just for clinical people. I tried to get

hooked up with the person that ran it, but he didn't like the counseling program.

And I didn't know about that prior. So, he wouldn't talk, he just wouldn't talk to

us. I tried reaching out to him.

Participant 06 recounted the limitations in familial support and understanding.

Despite being a single parent, the student's mother made efforts to involve them in

cultural practices to boost the student's coping practices. However, due to her workload,

Participant 04's mother did not understand academic strains, nor could she provide

consistent academic support. As a result, the participant felt unsupported and eventually

withdrew from school. It took Participant 06 a long time to return to academia.

In another instance, Participant 06 faced a challenging situation and reported it to

the relevant individuals, including their supervisor and human resources. However, the

responsibility to determine how to move forward fell on the participant, and there was a

lack of follow-up on the institution's end in addressing the issue. Participant 06 shared

the anguish and had to return to her external community to compensate for the lack of

help in academia. She said:

So, at that point, I went to the people to talk . . . my people, who I usually talk to

things about. But at that point, I was out of school because I didn't have the

academic support. Now that was a different challenge I wasn't prepared for

because I'm still really hanging onto it mentally. And I can tell that my thoughts

about where I'm employed at right now have changed. I'm like, "This isn't the

most magical place that I thought it was."

Participant 07 shared problems about the rising cost of living and loans for a private school, especially in an expensive urban city. They faced financial struggles and had to rely on the principal for transportation. They expressed frustration with the increasing costs of education, lack of scholarships, and uncertain support due to faculty retirements and potential departures. Participant 07 discussed such hardships:

Yes, I know. I keep reminding myself of that, because I'm applying to all these scholarships, not getting as many as I want, or really any so far. It's just getting more expensive, and rent is increasing, and the cost of living is increasing, and the scholarships here are not great.

Another student, Participant 08, discussed the difficulty of finding a graduate program aligned with their Indigenous worldview, practices, and beliefs. They expressed a desire for higher-level knowledge and integrating Indigenous practices into their studies. Participant 08 felt that the current methods and curriculum were outdated and sought a more modern and culturally relevant approach. An Indigenous based curriculum is advantageous in Indigenous student retention (Demmert et al., 2003). Participant 08 disclosed the absent Indigenous view accounted for in academia, stating, "One would be just finding a program that aligns with what I feel like I need, or what I'm craving, I should say, which is to have that Indigenous practices included into the doctorate."

Participant 10 described a situation where concerns about the racist endemic environment within the school were raised to the institution's dean. The student feared a formal grievance process would affect their standing in the program. However, without formal complaints, the institution claimed its hands were tied, indicating a lack of action without official documentation. This type of problem is placed back on the student to

educate, guide, and rectify institutional issues, or the student can risk being labeled as problematic and difficult. Participant 10 recounted the devasting conundrum in consequences of disclosure, stating:

> The dean of our school had to come into one of our classes and we filled out note cards about, like, "Do you feel like there's a problem with the environment here or whatever? And what do you think solutions to this could be?" So, it's like it was well known. Everybody knew that something was going on. They said that since I didn't want to write anything down or put anything in as a formal complaint, they're like, "Well, we can't really do anything about it."

> Lastly, Participant 12 expressed gratitude for support in their participation in a cultural event, an Indigenous circle process program. Such unique and enriching experiences are limited and virtually nonexistent in academic environments. Participant 12 recounted the richness of inclusion for the Indigenous worldview, stating:

> There's not very many of these circle processes, Indigenous circle processes in [the area], though there are other Indigenous programs, it's a very unique rich one and I consider myself very fortunate to have participated in this one. It was one of my top graduate program choices.

High Staff Turnover Rates and Large Student Numbers

During the discussions, 25% of the participants highlighted high turnover rates and large student numbers as significant challenges Indigenous students face in graduate school, particularly in the field of psychology and allied fields. Participant 03 expressed frustration with the administrative process due to the high turnover rate of staff members at their school. This lack of continuity and expertise hindered the participant's progress

and added to their overall dissatisfaction. Participant 03 highlighted the ineffectual

support, stating:

> No, I really didn't [have support]. And what I realized was that the way the
>
> process was slowing down more and more because the school had such a high
>
> turnover rate with their administrative folks, that from one quarter to another,
>
> when I'd be asking questions, um, of admissions or financial aid, it'd be someone
>
> different! So, there was, um, people who did who didn't really know their job and
>
> didn't know the institution from the time that I had been there.

Participant 05 acknowledged the faculty members in the program were also

overworked, which limited the time they had to check on students. As a result, the

participant adopted a negative reciprocity mindset, believing that if faculty members did

not reach out to them, they would not initiate contact either. This dynamic likely

contributed to a sense of disconnectedness and limited support within the program.

Participant 05 discussed the systemic overload on faculty, alienation and its

consequences, stating:

> I think our faculty is overworked too, so they have very little time to, to check on
>
> us. And honestly, I'm like when you're not reaching out to me, I'm not reaching
>
> out to you. You know, it's not that.

In Participant 10's doctoral program, the cohort consisted of 16 students who

were admitted simultaneously. Although the group was together daily, managing such a

significant number of students and ensuring individual attention and support could be

demanding and overwhelming. This large group size posed challenges as they all had to

take the same classes during their first semester. Participant 10 shared difficulties with

overloaded cohorts for institutional financial gain:

> Our cohort of people that were admitted at the same time for the doctoral program
>
> was 16. So, that's a lot of people. It was really difficult because we all had to . . .
>
> For our program, you take classes your first two years. But the first semester,
>
> everybody takes the same classes in your cohort. So, we were all together every
>
> single day.

Cultural Identity Development

During the discussions, participants identified identity and cultural considerations

as significant challenges faced by Indigenous students in graduate school. Participants

struggled to reconcile their Indigenous perspective and approach to healing with their

program's Western-oriented curriculum and framework. They felt a lack of

representation and discussion around Indigenous spirituality, soul, and holistic healing

practices, making it difficult to fully engage with the material and find their identity

within the academic context. Participant 03 shared more about such experiences, stating:

> I struggled a lot like trying to find my Indigenous perspective within all that and
>
> trying to name it because I was like, I just don't get this, this is just not, like this
>
> isn't the way I think and it's not the same approach to healing that I have. And so,
>
> and there was very little discussion about, like a, a spirit, a soul and if it was then
>
> it was a very different, it was much more of uh, like Western poets idea of soul.
>
> Participant 08 described the challenge of maintaining their identity while

simultaneously navigating the school environment. They shared experiences of being

mislabeled with a different racial or ethnic identity and feeling pressured to represent a

particular culture or group. This expectation became particularly burdensome when certain projects or topics related to a specific culture arose, and they were expected to provide insights solely based on their racial or ethnic background. The participant also recounted an incident during their master's program where a support group was organized for minority women. However, the grouping was done solely based on racial or ethnic backgrounds, segregating participants by their respective groups. This experience highlighted the lack of understanding that not all minorities share the same experiences, and that intersectionality plays a significant role in shaping individual experiences.

Furthermore, Participant 08 expressed a sense of isolation and the inability to connect intimately with other racial/ethnic groups due to these predetermined divisions and having no other Indigenous students. This further emphasized the need for inclusive and comprehensive discussions that acknowledge the diversity of experiences within minority groups and foster a sense of belonging and understanding for all individuals and racial/ethnic groups. Participant 08 noted the ill-fitting assumptions by the institution to accommodate BIPOC students by grouping:

Their [paired with another racial/ethnic group] experiences were totally different because we were talking about the discrimination that happens and whatnot. And I'm thinking as females and minorities, be sure you got to have something in common. Turns out we didn't. We didn't. And I don't know the other groups because I couldn't connect with them at that intimate level. But yeah, I realized that not all minorities have the same experience and not all females have the same experience, but, and for me, again, I was left alone.

These results highlight systemic conditions enduring in academia and provide a

correlation with the TribalCrit discussed in Chapter 5.

Theme 4: Overcoming Barriers to Persist in Education

The participants in the study identified five subthemes that ameliorated sometimes

negative circumstances in higher education. Support under the subthemes reinforced

characteristics of resiliency and aided them in overcoming barriers and persist in

academia as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Overcoming Barriers to Persist in Education
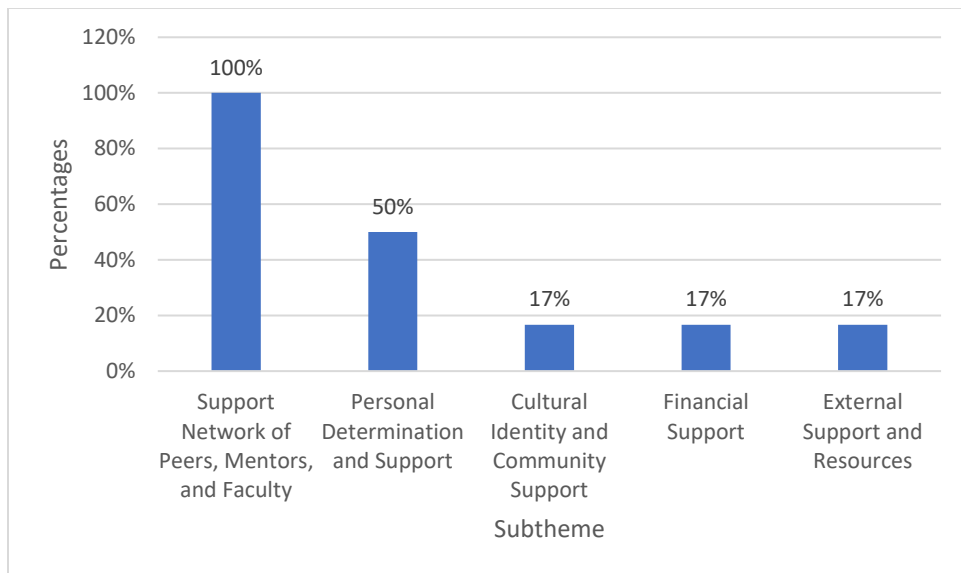
Note. Supportive networks and resilience characteristics that help Indigenous students in

higher education.

Support Network of Peers, Mentors, and Faculty

The most significant factor underlined by 100% of the participants was the magnitude of having a support network consisting of peers, mentors, and faculty members who understood and valued their Indigenous identity and experiences. Second, the level of awareness on personal determination was recognized by 50% of the participants. Participant 01 mentioned during their time in community college, a Native faculty member from a different tribe served as a mentor for them and other Native students during various stages of their educational journey. They said:

> That Native professor and Native professors have been some of the ones, even when they're not in psychology, the ones I go to. When I'm stressed, I'm not going to psychology professors, I'm going to the professors in American Indian studies or anthropology or sociology or wherever they are, because those are the ones that get what I'm going through, even though they might not know the specifics of my program.

The interaction with people from divergent backgrounds and phases of life provided a valuable learning experience. Additionally, they received support from Native professors in disciplines other than the psychology field, such as American Indian studies, anthropology, and sociology, who were empathetic and could relate to their experiences.

In Participant 02's case, they found a sense of commonality and support from international students from collectivist cultures, which contrasted with the individualistic culture often found among Eurocentric students. They said:

> I started going to sweats [traditional Indigenous spiritual healing ceremony] there with people who I was familiar with and the state of [state]. They have a really

good human services department or whatever, and so I was able to get connected

with a psychologist. And so, I was like going to therapy. I was going to sweats.

This connection and shared understanding helped them feel less like outsiders and more

supported in their educational journey.

The presence of mentors and supportive faculty members played a crucial role in

the participants' persistence. Participant 06 experienced a positive life-altering change in

their life upon meeting a mentor who introduced them to research, guided them through

the graduate program, and provided support and advice whenever needed. They said:

She became my mentor, and my life changed after that. So, definitely, she brought

me onto her project. She really introduced me to research. She introduced me to

what it was like to be in a grad program and what it's like to be a Native person in

a grad program. And any concerns that I've had or if I had questions on just

processes, I could go to her. So, that was a game changer for me.

Likewise, Participant 09 met a non-Native professor who dedicated her career to building

relationships with Native communities. This professor's commitment, knowledge of

Indigenous scholarship, and involvement in tribal events made her a valuable mentor and

resource for the participant. Participant 09 described their mentor's influence in the

community by stating, "There's a higher education professor at [university] in the

counseling department, and she is non-Native, but she worked her whole career to build

relationships with Native communities in many capacities."

Peer support was also emphasized by several participants. Having a supportive

cohort or group of friends who shared similar experiences and understood the challenges

faced by Indigenous students was invaluable. Participant 03 mentioned the importance of

their cohort in providing support during their educational journey, reflecting, "It was, the support came from the cohort, the students, my fellow students." Participant 06 also expressed gratitude for the friendship and support they received from peers on the way to graduate school. They said:

> Yeah, after being done with being homeless, so yeah . . . Yeah, so I went on to do my bachelor's and I had a little community there and I was part of [a group], which also didn't think I was [racial/ethnic identity] enough to do some of their dances, which that was [name]'s idea. I don't care. But I had a little support system between both cultures that I think it fit perfectly. I sometimes I miss that because I don't have that here in [current state]. But yeah, I have my group. We were able to just be ourselves. . . . Yeah. I had a little group. So, I did my undergrad in [state] [racial/ethnic identity 1]. Lucky for me, it's filled with Indigenous, and we have a great population of [racial/ethnic identity 1], so that worked out very well. Which is why I say my bachelor's experience was way better than my master's. 'Cause my master's was here in [current state].

Furthermore, participants mentioned specific individuals who significantly impacted their academic and personal growth, such as mentors, advisors, and professors who went above and beyond to support them. These individuals provided guidance, listened to their concerns, and advocated for their well-being within the academic setting. Participant 04 described the positive influence of their direct supervisor, who encouraged their identity as a clinician and helped them gain confidence in their abilities, contributing to self-efficacy. Similarly, Participant 10 highlighted the support they received from their advisor, stating:

My advisor, Dr. [Native Faculty], our only Native faculty, he actually drove me

home because I just was crying so hard. I was like, "I want to leave. I want to

leave." I don't know. Just knowing that he was going to support me the whole

time, he was like, "I'm going to give you today. You can cry it out." He was like,

"But tomorrow we're going back to work." I was like, "Okay." That toughness.

The emotional support from Participant 10's advisor demonstrated empathy during

difficult times and provided strong motivation which contributed to their overall

resilience to continue their studies.

Personal Determination and Support

During the discussion on overcoming barriers to persistence in education, 50%

Indigenous students in higher education, the participants identified the factor of personal

determination and support. Participant 01 shared finding humor and sharing laughter with

others, even in difficult times, was a significant resilience factor. They believed humor

was an important aspect of their culture, as many stories with challenging life meanings

still carried a playful and humorous tone. Participant 01 expressed thriving on finding

stories, humor, and sharing laughs, stating:

I feel like being able to find humor and share laughter with people, even when it's

hard, is one of my biggest resilience factors. Almost finding the story in it. And

I'm like, it kind of makes sense, because a lot of our stories have hard challenging

life meanings.

Participant 02 mentioned a strong drive to fill the gap in their community

propelled them during their graduate studies. The fear of failing or letting people down

was a motivating factor. As time passed, their community started seeing them as someone

who would succeed academically, which created a sense of responsibility not to let their

hometown down. Participant 02 shared this sentiment, stating, "I think wanting to fill the

gap in that in my community was something that really drove me early on in my graduate

studies."

The determination to complete their education was also a driving force. For

Participant 05, having a master's degree would allow them to easily return home, live

comfortably, and make a positive impact on their community. Recognizing this sense of

perseverance, Participant 05 stated, "I definitely think that it's still the determination to

finish it that is pushing me along because I'm like, you know, I have a master's degree."

The desire to achieve their educational goals and personal fulfillment pushed them to

keep persevering.

Beyond academic motivations, there were also factors related to culture and

traditions. Participant 06 emphasized the importance of spirituality and traditional

practices. Although they could not engage in these practices fully due to their current

location, Participant 06 felt it was important to attend cultural events and have access to a

traditional clinic, stating:

> I would say it's more spirituality in terms of traditional practices, I can't really
>
> practice anything here in [place]. We do have some cultural events I could go to.
>
> And there's actually a traditional clinic with the healthcare system up here, and I
>
> actually just got a referral to it.

Participant 08 highlighted their ability to shift their frame of mind for self-protection.

They did so to manage adverse situations and not take in negative energy, an attribute of

survival and resilience. Managing and adapting to different environments, sometimes

unwelcoming, was a self-described strength which can be a common coping mechanism necessary for oppressed groups (Carrero Pinedo et al., 2022). Simultaneously, such mechanisms tend to be pathologized in Eurocentric terms; however, this accommodation of hostile environments showed flexibility in this participants persistence in academia. Participant 08 stated:

> I think one of my biggest strengths is that I am a vibe shifter. I used to say I have no feelings. That was another of my strengths. I don't take anything personal, but I think that's part of just shifting my vibe to the environment that I'm on. And that probably is part of resiliency, but I think it's just the ability to shift my energy to match the room so that I don't become a threat and I don't see them as a threat to me. We're just a little different. It's like a little dance with each other.

They saw this skill as a way to blend into all settings and mitigate any threat perceived by others fostering a sense of calm, even if a lack of understanding was filtered through omnipotence.

Participant 10 expressed having a resilient nature and being determined to push against adversity faced within educational institutions. The importance of cultural discipline of Indigenous ancestors, taught through the Indigenous ways of knowing, helpings bring strength and courage in present Indigenous Peoples times, reflecting on the remembrance of Indigenous Peoples who experienced great trauma and lost people, but were resilience for the good of all when they faced colonization (Stensgar, 2009). They looked forward in time and attributed their drive to becoming a good ancestor for the following generation, driven by the knowledge that their mentor had likely faced challenges during their own academic journey. Participant 10 aimed to make the path

easier for future Native graduate students, hoping to eliminate the need for constant

explanations and the experience of harm whilst honoring the voices of those who had

gone before them, stating:

> I think a lot of what really propelled me is that kind of being a good ancestor
>
> because I'm like, well, maybe I don't know what my mentor went through while
>
> she was here, but I know it wasn't great because clearly of the things that I'm
>
> experiencing. I'm like, she made it better for me. So, I'm trying to make it better
>
> for the next Native grad student that comes along so that hopefully they won't
>
> have to explain all of these things to people or deal with all of these harms.

Cultural Identity and Community Support

Some participants (17%) recognized the significance of cultural identity and

community support in overcoming barriers to persistence in education for Indigenous

students in higher education. Supporting Indigenous student felt belongingness,

universities must incorporate Indigenous culture to validate students (Tachine et al.,

2016). Participant 02 shared their experience as a Native student and how they felt

disconnected from the student body during high school. They mentioned attending a

tribal college was crucial in their academic journey. The presence of familiar faces,

including their mother's friends, older siblings' friends, and older relatives, created a

welcoming environment and helped them acclimate to an academic setting. This

experience was a launching point for their transition to state schools and universities.

They also highlighted their grandmother's influence as a fluent speaker of multiple

Indigenous languages. Growing up around her and other relatives exposed them to

[Tribal language] spirituality, sun dances, sweats, and cultural practices, such as

smudging. Participant 02 recalled:

> I was lucky to grow up around my grandma. She was a fluent speaker in [Tribe1]
>
> and [Tribe 2]. A lot of people would come to visit her, and a lot of her relatives
>
> from all over the place would come and visit her. And so, I grew up around that,
>
> and I grew up around uncles and stuff, wanting to become more involved in
>
> Lakota spirituality and stuff. And so, I grew up going to sun dances and going to
>
> sweats, smudging and all that kind of stuff. Looking back on it now, I feel pretty
>
> acculturated. And I think even more than that is like, I grew up around all Native
>
> people, and I belong to a Native community and home is home.

Reflecting on their upbringing, they felt a strong sense of cultural integration and

belonging. Being surrounded by Native people and connecting to their Native community

made them feel rooted and affirmed in their cultural identity. Participant 02 expressed the

importance of having more Native individuals from their communities involved in the

field of psychology and related work. They emphasized the need for representation,

expertise, and voices that can advocate for their communities from within the academic

realm.

Similarly, Participant 11 discussed the value of incorporating grounding

traditional Indigenous teachings into their daily life by reconnecting with their

community and family members to help ground them in school, stating:

> So that involved traveling to my community more, meeting more of my family
>
> members, reconnecting with them, a lot of them I hadn't seen since I was an
>
> infant, or community members who just remembered me as an infant and were

really welcoming and accepting going to the bush. So, on our family's trap line

and reconnecting with culture and language in that sense. I'm not a fluent speaker

still.

For Participant 11, engaging in cultural activities, such as visiting the woodlands and

connecting with their language and culture. Although not fluent in their language,

Participant 11 embraced the communal experience of preparing traditional dishes and

experimenting with new recipes. Cooking and exploring traditional food provided an

avenue for connecting with family members and strengthening their cultural ties.

Financial Support

Some participants (17%) recognized the importance of financial support in

overcoming barriers to persistence in education as Indigenous students in higher

education. The students emphasized their efforts in securing scholarships and the positive

impact these financial resources had on their educational journeys. Participant 05

mentioned their proactive approach to securing financial assistance by applying for

several scholarships, stating, "I did apply to several scholarships, and I actually got like

four of them, I think, or three of them. One was [scholarship], one was that Native

Forward which used to be the American Indian Graduate Center."

Additionally, they mentioned receiving a professional scholarship, specifically

highlighting the stipend aspect, which provided support as they were not employed full

time. They also acknowledged the financial support provided by their partner, who took

care of the bills and served as the sole income provider, contributing to their ability to

pursue education.

Participant 07 shared their experience with scholarships during their undergraduate studies, stating "[undergraduate college] gave me a really good scholarship, and so did [city]. The [doctoral university] did not, but when there's a need, they do step in, which is helpful."

External Support and Resources

Some participants (17%) recognized the significance of external support and resources in overcoming barriers to persistence in education. Participant 02 acknowledged the impact of being a role model for other Native individuals in similar positions, stating "For Native people who get put in here, who end up in these positions and stuff. There are always people, like looking up to you. And I think that was a big driving factor too, for me." They underscored how having other Indigenous students look up to them served as a motivating factor in their educational journey.

Participant 06 shared their experience of accessing external support and resources, specifically mentioning their connection with healthcare services in the state through a foundation. They expressed gratitude for the exceptional care team and the assistance they received in addressing their healthcare needs. Participant 06 expressed such by stating:

> Being able to have access to that healthcare resource where it helped me to realize what was going on and just get the help that I needed. So, yeah, that really helped me through that last bit of my program and being able to have those supportive resources and coming out of my shell and being able to ask for help from people outside of what my expectations of what support looked like.

During the last months of their program, they were diagnosed with attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder, and this diagnosis, along with the support they received, proved immensely helpful. Accessing healthcare resources provided them with a better understanding of their situation and enabled them to seek the necessary help. They emphasized the importance of supportive resources and the willingness to ask for help from individuals outside their initial expectations of what support would look like.

Chapter Summary

The study aimed to provide insights into the factors influencing resilience and self-efficacy. Additionally, it sought to deeply understand the determinants of success among Indigenous students in higher education navigating a master's or doctoral program. The study acknowledged Indigenous students' unique and complex backgrounds to shed light on the themes and subthemes extracted from the analysis. Accordingly, academic supports were reported as being vital in Indigenous student success in academia by 100% of the participants. Furthermore, 50% of the students accounted for self-determination and grit as influences of resilience as necessary in higher education. These factors may contribute to future research in elucidating why Indigenous student statistics are dismal compared to any other racial/ethnic group.

Chapter 4 of the study detailed the data collection process, including demographic information, data analysis, and results. This chapter discussed two overarching categories—retention and resilience. Four major themes and the corresponding subthemes materialized from the study. Theme 1 focused on the factors influencing school selection, including location and proximity to home or desired location, mentorship and research opportunities, and financial reasons. Theme 2 explored several factors influencing the pursuit of higher education. It includes the following: (a) a desire

to serve humanity; (b) career aspirations and professional advancement; (c) personal passion for a specific field or subject; and (d) the desire for intellectual growth and knowledge acquisition, previous experiences, breaking family barriers, and support from family. Theme 3 highlighted influential figures in the decision to attend graduate school, including mentors, professors, academic advisors, family, and close friends. Theme 4 discussed the challenges faced in graduate school, such as a lack of social connections and support, experiences of racism and discrimination, a lack of resources and support, high turnover rates, student numbers, and identity and cultural considerations. Theme 5 focused on the strategies employed by Indigenous students to overcome barriers to persist in education, including a support network of peers, mentors, and faculty, social support systems, personal determination and support, cultural identity and community support, financial support, and external support and resources. Moreover, the redundancy in the common trends around circumventing barriers in academia for this population were evident and aligned with the existing research. Chapter 5 contains a further examination of the findings within the TribalCrit framework, study limitations, and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Tribal Critical Race Theory, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter 5 of this study deliberates the incorporated a comprehensive secondary analysis of the themes in relation to existing literature as compared to the nine tenets of Tribal Crit. The analysis drew upon relevant references from the existing literature to support and contextualize the overall findings through a deductive approach with respect to the research questions and an emic Indigenous examination. The provision of practical recommendations for practitioners, leaders, and researchers offered insights and implications. Furthermore, the chapter critically provides limitations of the study, acknowledging any constraints or potential biases that may have influenced the outcomes.

The current study resulted in 12 participants. The sample population had reached redundancy when similar experiences were found in participants who expressed the same viewpoints (Guest, 2006). Inclusive findings showed 50% of participants relied on attributes of self-efficacy to support success in graduate studies. More importantly, 100% of the students dealt with racial microaggressions to varying degrees during their academic journeys.

Discussion of Findings

The retention of Indigenous students in higher education, particularly in the fields of psychology and related disciplines, is a topic of critical importance to find out more about why the low portion of this group subsists in higher education. Understanding the factors that influence retention and the resilience characteristics contributing to student academic persistence and completion was essential for creating inclusive and supportive educational environments. Moreover, graduating does not eliminate the obstacles this

group faced in academia, thus understanding the factors Indigenous students must

navigate will support future studies on how to help this population thrive in higher

education. This discussion of findings addressed the research questions regarding the

factors that affect the retention of Indigenous students in higher education and the

resilience characteristics that contribute to the academic completion of graduated

students.

Theme 1: Factors Influencing School Selection

The importance of the location and proximity to home or desired university site

selection for Indigenous students aligns with existing literature on the significance of

location (Waterman, 2012). Research has highlighted the role of geographic and cultural

proximity in supporting Indigenous students' academic success, cultural affirmation, and

connection to the community (Waterman, 2012). Indigenous students often value

maintaining ties with their communities, and many enjoy engaging in specific cultural

practices while pursuing their education (Frawley et al., 2017). The participants'

emphasis on the presence of a Native student center and Native faculty and graduate

students reflects the significance of the value of community and representation. When

Indigenous faculty representation is not available, students often feel more support from

other people of color more likely to understand a repressed worldview, and can support

navigation in academia settings (Brayboy, 2006). Otherwise, culturally competent

professors and administrators make a difference in supporting this group. Existing

literature has recognized the positive impact of culturally supportive environments and

the presence of Indigenous faculty and staff in promoting a sense of belongingness and

academic success among Indigenous students. Indigenous student centers and similar

initiatives provide spaces for cultural engagement, mentorship, and support networks that counteract the isolation often experienced by Indigenous students (Shah & McKay, 2018).

The participants' recognition of mentorship and research opportunities as influential factors in school selection aligned with the existing literature on the significance of mentorship and undergraduate research experiences for Indigenous students. Research has shown mentorship relationships, particularly with individuals who share similar backgrounds and experiences of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010), can contribute to Indigenous students' academic success (Ballout, 2009), self-efficacy (Garman et al., 2001), personal growth, and persistence in higher education (DeCastro et al., 2014). Involvement in research can afford Indigenous students with opportunities to explore their interests, develop skills, and contribute to their communities (Butler et al., 2022).

As emphasized by participants, financial considerations have been well-documented challenges for Indigenous students in pursuit of higher education. Limited access to financial resources and scholarship opportunities can hinder their ability to pursue higher education. The participants' experiences underscore the worth of tribal support and financial assistance in facilitating Indigenous students' educational paths. Scholarships and funding from tribal communities play a crucial role in enabling Indigenous students to achieve academic goals (Anderson et al., 2022).

The participants' discussions about their upbringing on Tribal land and White-passing identity reflect the intersectionality of Indigenous students' experiences and the multifaceted complex dynamics they must navigate. Indigenous students often face

unique challenges related to cultural identity, discrimination, and socioeconomic factors

(Ovichegan, 2015). Their experiences underline the resilience and determination of

Indigenous students to overcome barriers and improve their futures through education.

Theme 2: Factors Influencing the Pursuit of Higher Education

Participants reported a strong desire to serve humanity as a significant factor

influencing their decision to pursue higher education. This motivation stemmed from a

sense of responsibility to contribute to the well-being of others and make a positive

impact. Some participants expressed their intention to contribute to the mental health

well-being of their community (give back) as a form of self-governance (Brayboy, 2006),

whereas others aimed to advocate for change within the workforce. Similar motivations

have been documented in existing literature, drawing attention to the altruistic nature of

Indigenous students pursuing graduate degrees to serve their communities (Walters et al.,

2019) and advance Indigenous self-determination, community wellness, and sovereignty

(O'Keefe et al., 2021).

Career aspirations and professional advancement opportunities were influential

factors in participants' decisions to pursue higher education. Their decisions included the

recognition of limited career prospects without higher education, the desire for skills

enhancement, and the need to overcome barriers in accessing leadership positions. Some

participants mentioned the impact of being raised in a low-income setting and being

motivated by the state of trauma embedded in their communities. Some evaluated their

limited career prospects, while other participants highlighted the importance of

qualifications for creating opportunities. These findings align with existing literature that

emphasizes the role of career goals and economic factors in driving individuals to pursue

higher education (Schermer & Perjessy, 2011).

An additional factor influencing their decision to pursue higher education

included the participants' expressed passion for a specific field or subject. This passion

was fueled by genuine interest, a desire to work in a particular industry, and the need for

self-exploration. Participants developed a fascination for psychology and allied fields.

The desire for intellectual growth and knowledge acquisition emerged as a factor

influencing the participants' pursuit of higher education. This motivation stemmed from

the participants' aspirations to gain authority, establish themselves in professional

settings, and contribute to the healing processes of their communities. Some participants

expressed the need for self-confidence and recognition whereas others aimed to enhance

their skills and credentials. Existing literature emphasizes the pursuit of knowledge and

personal development as key factors driving individuals to pursue higher education

(Love, 2021). Professor Fryberg inserted Indigenous scholars wish to address, through an

Indigenous research lens, the long-lasting issues of inequity and lead social justice

initiatives to breakdown negative societal narratives (i.e., misconceptions, stereotypes,

myths) that preserve colonialism and propagate damage of Indigenous Peoples mental

health and physical well-being (Love, 2021).

Participants' previous experiences (e.g., exposure to trauma, accessing mental

health services, and witnessing community issues) played a significant role in shaping

their motivations to pursue higher education. Participants had a positive experience with

a psychologist. In addition, observations of limitations in mental health services

motivated them to make a difference. These findings align with existing literature that

highlights the influence of personal experiences and encounters with professionals in shaping individuals' educational and career choices (Brave Heart, 1998, 1999; Evan-Campbell, 2008).

The participants recognized reasons for the long-lasting effects of the low levels of pursuing an education within their families and communities. The need for representation and the preservation of Indigeneity weighed heavily on the participants, and their pursuit of higher education aimed to break the barriers and set a precedent for future generations. Participants mentioned their family's influence and aimed to inspire others and demonstrate the possibility of achieving educational goals. Similar findings in existing literature emphasize the importance of family background and the desire to create opportunities for future generations as motivational factors for pursuing higher education (Vargas-López et al., 2021; Wilkins et al., 2017). Modern Indigenous students wish to honor those who strived for sovereignty before them, ancestors, and provide a voice through legacy.

Existing literature underscores the significance of familial support in encouraging individuals to pursue higher education and overcome challenges (Jackson et al., 2003). The participants acknowledged the pivotal role of family support in their educational pursuits. They highlighted the active involvement of family members in seeking scholarships, providing guidance, and offering emotional support. Participants credited family members for the instrumental support and the influence of strength that families afforded. Family members served as a grounding factor, and helped participants to cope in culturally effective ways which established a strong sense of ethnic identity. As such, cultural pride supported self-efficacy and seemed to buffer moments of adversity.

The participants counted on the influence of mentors, professors, and academic advisors in shaping student educational journeys. These individuals provided guidance, belief in their abilities, and support throughout the student's academic pursuits. Participant 04 highlighted the impact of a mentor, while Participant 09 credited their director for redirecting them toward a higher education program. Analogous outcomes were demonstrated in the existing research literature that accentuated the critical role of professors (Barker 2011; Felder, 2010; Walker et al., 2008), mentors and advisors in supporting Indigenous students' educational choices and success (Kuh et al., 2019; Soria et al., 2017).

Theme 3: Challenges Faced in Graduate School

Participants in the study reported experiences of various challenges related to the lack of social connections and support while being enrolled in graduate programs. The graduate students faced obstacles such as family obligations, inconsistent teaching staff, absence of Indigenous supervisors, feelings of isolation, and experiences of racism and bullying. These findings align with existing literature that stresses the significance of social support and connections for student success and well-being (Gloria et al., 2017; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Indigenous students often face unique challenges in building social connections, given the dynamics of their cultural backgrounds and potential marginalization within academic settings.

The participants in the study shared their experiences of racism and discrimination during their graduate school journeys. They encountered microaggressions, pressure to prove themselves, direct confrontations with racism, and discriminatory behaviors from professors and peers. These experiences reflect the

persistent racism and discrimination Indigenous students face in higher education (Ramos & Yi, 2020). The lack of acknowledgment, understanding, and support from faculty and supervisors further exacerbates the challenges faced by these students (Smith, 2012).

The participants discussed the lack of resources and support during graduate studies, and they faced difficulties accessing academic, cultural, and institutional support. These challenges are paralleled with existing literature that stresses the inequities in resources and support for Indigenous students in higher education (Gallop & Bastien, 2016).). The limited availability of culturally relevant programs and the financial burdens experienced by many Indigenous students impact such challenges.

The participants identified high turnover rates among staff members and larger student numbers as difficulties in graduate school experiences. These factors can lead to diminished continuity, difficulty in seeking assistance, and limited individual student attention. Existing literature recognizes the impact of high turnover rates and large class sizes on students' experiences and academic outcomes (Bahr et al., 2017; Kuh et al., 2008). These challenges are particularly relevant for Indigenous students who may require additional support and mentorship to navigate the complexities of graduate education (McGregor et al., 2015).

Identity and cultural considerations emerged as major obstacles for Indigenous students in graduate school. Participants expressed the struggle to reconcile belongingness in their Indigenous perspectives and healing practices with their Western-oriented curriculum and framework of their programs. They also highlighted the pressure to represent a specific culture or group and the lack of understanding around intersectionality. These findings align with existing literature on the importance of

cultural competency and the need for inclusive and culturally relevant education

(Brayboy, 2005; Wilkinson et al., 2018).

Theme 4: Overcoming Barriers to Persist in Education

       Participants emphasized the critical nature of a strong supportive network of

peers, mentors, and faculty members who understood and valued their Indigenous

identity and experiences. This support network delivered understanding, guidance, and

encouragement throughout students' educational journeys. The presence of mentors and

supportive faculty members was given significant emphasis and was crucial to their

persistence during university. Collectivist culture social dynamics are shaped by

maintaining harmony and an established community helps to regulate and preserve self-

agency (Akkus et al., 2017). Existing literature corroborates the findings that support

networks are vital for Indigenous students in higher education. Research has shown

mentorship and peer support contribute personal growth and significantly impact

Indigenous students' academic success (Gallop & Bastien, 2016). The availability and

connection with mentors with similar backgrounds and experiences can provide valuable

guidance and cultural affirmation (Brayboy, 2006).

       Participants identified personal determination as a key factor in overcoming

barriers. They shared stories of finding humor, having a strong drive, recognizing the

desire for personal fulfillment, and embracing spirituality and traditional practices.

Participants also made known that possessing an ability to adapt and shift energy as a

strength in navigating different environments made circumstances more tolerable

(Carrero Pinedo et al., 2022). The value of personal determination and resilience in the

educational journeys of Indigenous students has been acknowledged in the literature.

Indigenous students often face unique challenges and obstacles, and their personal

motivation plays a significant role in persisting despite adversities (Keene, 2012).

Culturally rooted values, such as spirituality and traditional practices, can provide

strength and resilience. Additionally, adapting to different environments and maintaining

a positive mindset has been identified as important in overcoming barriers (Keene, 2012).

The participants recognized the significance of cultural identity and community

support in overcoming barriers to persistence. Some discussed the value of attending

Tribal Colleges, having connections to their Native community, and being surrounded by

familiar faces. They emphasized the need for Native representation in academic fields

and the positive impact of cultural integration and belonging. Existing literature

consistently underlines the importance of cultural identity and community support for

Indigenous students in higher education (Brayboy, 2006). Building strong connections to

their cultural heritage and community positively influences Indigenous students'

academic success and retention (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). Tribal colleges and

universities (TCUs) have been recognized as critical institutions in providing culturally

responsive education and support to Indigenous students (Bryan, 2019). Representation

and involvement of Native individuals from their communities within academic fields

have been identified as significant factors in supporting Indigenous students' educational

journeys (Tull et al., 2015).

Participants acknowledged the significance of financial support in their

educational persistence. They mentioned securing scholarships and financial resources

that alleviated financial burdens and allowed them to focus on their studies. Moreover,

they specified the value of support provided by their families or partners was

instrumental in success; however, some Indigenous families do not have the means to fund college financially. Financial barriers have been well-documented challenges for Indigenous students in higher education, and limited access to financial resources can hinder their ability to pursue education and persist in their studies (Brayboy et al., 2012). Scholarships and financial aid programs specifically designed for Indigenous students have been identified as critical in facilitating their educational journeys, however, these are difficult to find, and many specify an arduous process of nuanced criteria.

Participants recognized the significance of external support and resources in overcoming barriers while in pursuit of higher education. Role models and accessing healthcare services had a positive impact on their well-being and academic journey. The importance of external support and resources in supporting Indigenous students' persistence in education is well-documented. Having role models who have succeeded in related circumstances can inspire and motivate Indigenous students. Access to healthcare services and other support systems that address students' holistic needs can contribute to their overall well-being and success (Evans & Davis, 2018).

Tribal Critical Race Theory Analysis

Premise

Critical race theory (CRT) acts as an excellent foundation to decipher more about the barriers attributed to systemic racism in this study (Brayboy, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Following the thread of deconstruction, Tribal CRT (TribalCrit) finitely addresses systemic issues Indigenous Peoples face. Moreover, TribalCrit helps to define and understand the Indigenous community contexts of colonization beyond straightforward racism and instead points to embedded barriers held in the structures of

society and academia for this group. Applying TribalCrit to this study elucidates a deeper

perspective and meaning about systemic barriers in society and academic institutions in

the United States and Canada through the subjective experiences of Indigenous students.

Challenges from the effects of colonization remain in the educational system and permeate

all aspects of the environment. As profiled in Chapter 2, counter storytelling facilitates the

Indigenous worldview of students in higher education. As such, counter storytelling is

employed in Chapter 5 for the analysis. This research posited student resilience and self-

efficacy help mediate the impact of systemic issues Indigenous students face in higher

education. Finally, this portion of the analysis incorporates an emic Indigenous researcher

perspective through a thematic analysis with a deductive approach focused on the findings

in Theme 3: Challenges Faced in Graduate School, specifically for the subtheme of

Experiences of Racism and Discrimination.

Resilience is a mediator for Indigenous students facing systemic barriers that

continue to exist in academia. Although not heterogenous, this population has more

adverse conditions over White students in higher education, beyond balancing or simply

navigating the typical graduate academic load (Lee et al., 2010). This study intended to

emphasize areas of change necessary to close the gap on racial inequality concerning

systems held for the dominant groups' success over Indigenous graduate students. An

explanation through an Indigenous lens shared a few of the educational constructs that

uphold the barriers in educational institutions and perpetuate why the Indigenous student

population statistically has the lowest enrollment and completion compared to other

racial/ethnic groups. The statistics account for Indigenous students' low enrollment and

completion from a population-to-student ratio perspective. This study addressed two

research questions to clarify the resilience factors that add to Indigenous student retention. A more suitable understanding could champion more culturally specific conceptual models for Eurocentric university policies to increase the retention of future Indigenous student populations.

A sizable portion of the participants (75%) reported at least one incidence of racism or discrimination correlated with a TribalCrit tenet. Frequently, the participant examples have the potential to fit in one or more TribalCrit tenets. The participant experiences were paired with a tenet based on the weight of the circumstance, justified through the researcher's emic perspective. It is central to note that due to the extent of adverse participant experiences' compatibility with one or more tenets, the researcher postulated racialized systemic issues are universal in educational institutions for Indigenous students even though the particulars vary based on the institution, faculty, and active student body. Consequently, this consistency in destructive experiences of adversity align with Tenet 1 signifying that the effects of colonization on Indigenous Peoples are alive and well across civilizations, including academia. The TribalCrit furnished a cultural window into the varying levels of how systemic barriers continue to impede success in academia for this population. Further clarification can be offered in worldviews between a Traditional Indigenous knowledge framework versus a Western research outline shown in a schematic model as indicated in Figure 7. The model shown in a Venn diagram depicts a separate circle outlining the two distinct research viewpoints, and the convergence of the circles indicates commonalities in respecting and validating the Indigenous experience (Stephens, 2001).

Figure 7

Traditional Native Knowledge and Western Science Similarities and Differences
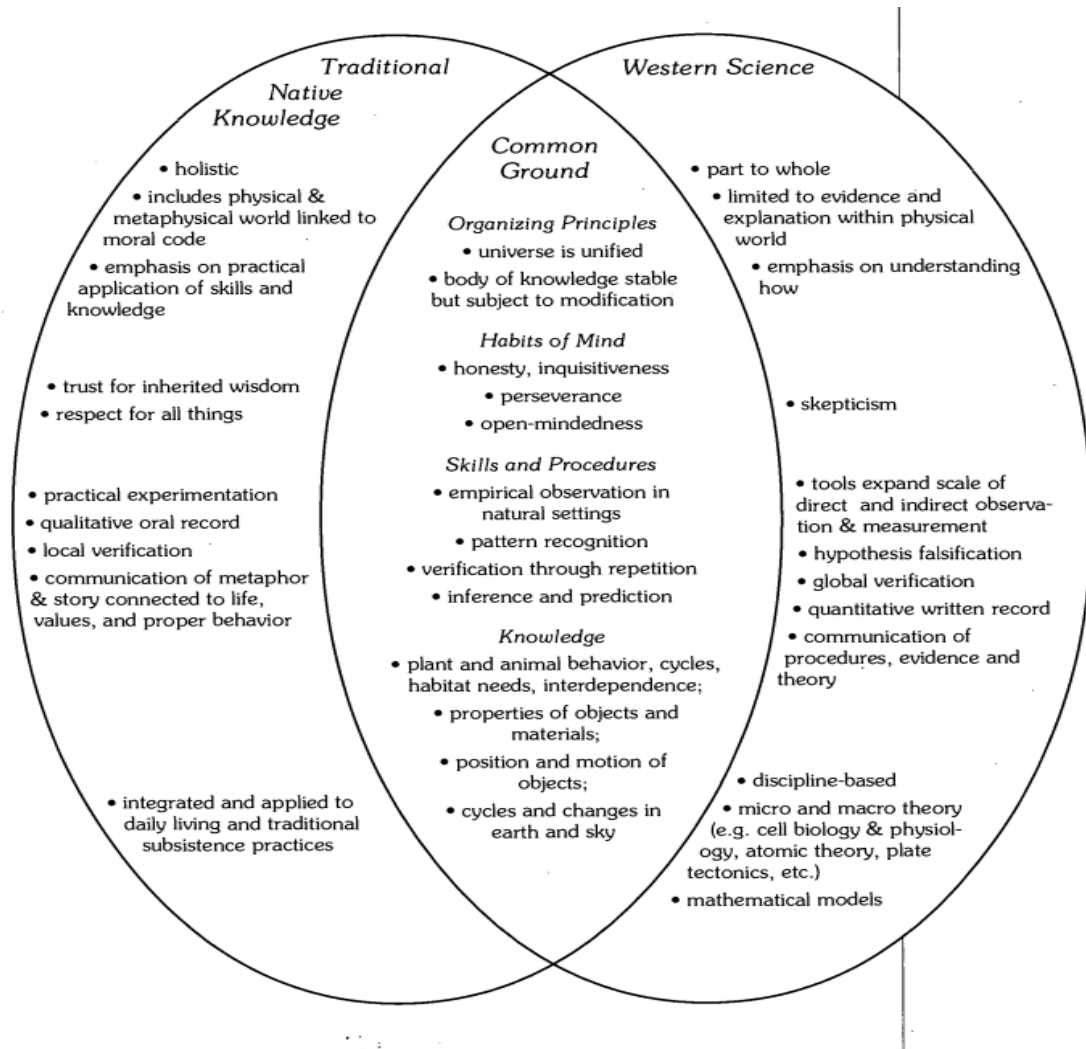
Figure 7 underlines the critical importance of implementing Brayboy's (2006)

TribalCrit. It is imperative to prioritize the well-being of Indigenous students who often

face prejudice being taught Western-only content that opposes an Indigenous worldview,

this lack of knowledge and integration is confusing, discriminatory, and invalidating for

Indigenous students. The effects of invalidation, as indicated in the existing research by

Indigenous scholars, can create an unwelcoming and, in some cases, hostile environment for students.

The principles of TribalCrit aim to bring attention to harmful practices and eliminate the idea of assimilation in academic institutions. By recognizing Indigenous research that incorporates narratives as valuable sources of information, this framework demonstrates that real-life experiences are not separate from theory. In this way, cultural knowledge based on Indigenous methodologies can be seen as equal to Eurocentric research models (Brayboy, 2006). The main goal of this study was to gain deeper insight and explore ways to enhance the systems and approaches to support Indigenous students in academia, so that they can thrive rather than just survive.

Tenet 1

In line with the first tenet, erasure extends not only race, but also violent racial stereotypes. Participant 04 shared their difficult encounters with racism and bullying in school, and how they coped by using a neutralizing technique to prevent internalizing the harmful messages from non-Indigenous peers. This helped them maintain a positive self-image, despite frequently facing similar situations. Participant 04 said:

> I think being oblivious to it a little bit. But I also know that I'm not inclined to label things [discrimination, marginalization] like that because I'm like, I don't need to carry it with me, and I don't want to feel that way. So, I think part of it is just letting it go and it's like, not really my problem.

Participant 12 discussed awareness on the impact of colonization in their undergraduate and graduate studies. They felt the need to process the prevalence of such issues with an Indigenous mentor in academia for validation. The mentors' personal

struggles and guidance on how to overcome academic challenges were crucial.

Participant 12 reported this special relationship helped boost their self-assurance and

resilience, as they said:

> Yeah. I think my experience, so in my undergrad, I feel like I was a little less
>
> aware and starting to learn my own decolonizing journey too. And I think it was
>
> towards the end of my undergrad that I was becoming more aware of these things
>
> [effects of colonization], coupled with the fact that when I went out [area] and
>
> worked with [Dr. Mentor] and another great mentor, who was Indigenous [gender
>
> pronoun] self, but who was a really good ally and from other marginalized
>
> identities. And so, I felt like [gender pronoun] could still really understand some
>
> of the struggles within academia and was really, I think good at inviting those
>
> conversations and recognizing [gender pronoun] own privilege too at the same
>
> time.

This excerpt demonstrated inspiring account of a resilient student who drew strength

from the mutual worldview from their Indigenous mentor. The mentor's insightful

guidance garnered triumph over the harmful labels and judgments imposed by

Eurocentric culture. By staunchly rejecting these negative views and discovering ways to

cope, the participant effectively countered discrimination and degradation in academia

and society. Such resilience is crucial for cultivating a more equitable environment.

Examining the scenario through a Eurocentric lens reveals a problematic and

unethical multiple relationship situation. This highlights the potential clash of worldviews

and the tendency for Indigenous perspectives to be overlooked in Eurocentric academic

environments.

Tenet 2

During their practicum experience, Participant 06 shared an incident that clearly

exemplified the second tenet, highlighting the widespread existence of colonial

judgments. Participant 06 shared the following situation:

And there was an incident that occurred where another older White woman

actually sent out an email to the whole team, essentially saying that, I don't even

remember how it was said, but it was like, "Why does the new employee get to be

with [the managers names removed] instead of me who's been in this for many

years?"

The participant experienced hostility during their practicum placement as a result

of a White colleague's dominant behavior. The colleague's conduct intensified to the

point of rage and violent outbursts when an Indigenous student, who was more qualified,

was selected for a professional position over them.

Imperialism's impact on classrooms is unmistakable. Participant 03 disclosed that

Indigenous students in their program encountered colonialism-rooted predicaments.

Consequently, they bore the responsibility of instructing non-Indigenous students and

professors on cultural proficiency. In this regard, Participant 03 stated:

Some, I've mainly relied on my preexisting relationships outside of my program.

And that's not to say that I haven't been able to make any connections, but it's

sometimes been a mixed bag too within my lab that focuses on Indigenous

research. I was the only Indigenous student for quite some time up until recently.

And so, dealing with microaggressions within that too, within that space as well,

and people who are well-meaning, I think. But yeah, it still is uncomfortable and

not having the supervisor not intervene in those moments too, and had been very

much on my shoulders to correct or to educate, and often with my supervisor as

well. And so that's a big emotional burden to carry too.

At Participant 03's institution, a damaging Eurocentric cultural norm persisted,

perpetuating ideas about the inferiority of Indigenous Peoples. Unfortunately, the new

cohorts also adopted this norm, leading to various forms of microaggressions that

professors fail to address. These acts created and promoted racial inequities among

Indigenous Peoples, regardless of their nature. Even within an Indigenous research lab,

the supervisor's lack of awareness about such negativity takes a toll on Indigenous

students. The White supervisor's inadequate knowledge puts the burden on Indigenous

students to educate their classmates. Participant 03 continued to face struggles, and the

latest Indigenous student in the program has also suffered similar harm.

During the interview, Participant 10 firmly expressed their frustration with the

university's exploitation of their status as the only Indigenous student and one of the few

people of color in the school. The participant felt immense pressure to participate in

marketing efforts and promote the school as a desirable place for people of color to

attend. They made a point to highlight that the university's diversity, equity, and

inclusion (DEI) efforts only served as further evidence of this blatant exploitation.

Having only been enrolled for 1–2 months, Participant 03's reality set in, as they said,

"I'm literally immediately tokenized, and I just, It's a lot harder than I thought it would

be." Participant 03 concluded the advantage was solely for the institution's benefit.

Despite their concerns, they complied to avoid jeopardizing their chances of success in

the program. However, as time passed, they experienced significant disparities within the

institution and suffered negative consequences as a result.

Participant 06 clearly conveyed they carried the weight of contributing to the

financial advancement of their educational institution, as they said:

So, in school, I've always been [mislabeled foreign country racial/ethnic identity].

The most part, it's like I always have to be advertising. At some point it was too

exhausting. Just call me whatever you want. So, it was difficult when given

projects or certain topics would come up, especially with the [foreign racial/ethnic

group] culture, they will look up to me. Yeah, I think that's one of the biggest

challenges, is keeping my identity while I'm going to school and not being put as

an example.

Academic environments have statistically had lower populations of People of Color and

fewer Indigenous students. Thus, the awareness about Indigenous Peoples and

understanding of their culture, can create mystery and evidence of ignorance. Participant

06 felt their authentic self was dismissed as another racial group, and pressure to speak on

behalf of all Indigenous Peoples and the intersectionality over their mislabeled identity

and the invisibility as an Indigenous person as wearing:

Participant 11 recounted life-experience as a mediator when experiences of

microaggressions arose. For this student, Brayboy's (2006) second tenet focused on

Western contexts of science are juxtaposed to Indigenous accounts of research.

Consequently, Participant 03 discussed the power and practice of imperialism outlined in

Tenet 2, as they said:

> There was like, you know, microaggressions and stuff that happened along the
>
> way that being an older student, I think I, it didn't faze me quite as much but
>
> when it, yeah got down to my own dissertation process.

Participant 11 recounted their years of being subjected to slights as an Indigenous person became standard throughout their academic journey. From Participant 03's view, such hostile experiences were the norm, a situation they were used to enduring as an Indigenous student while in academia. Again, the example is explained by Tenet 2; White supremacy is superior, and the dominant culture is in charge.

> Participant 11 walked through their anguishing experiences in a severely hostile educational environment, as they said:

> Sometimes it's going through the process of mentally quitting and thinking about
>
> withdrawing, and I could be somewhere else or envisioning that plan. Because
>
> then it helps me reset to, "Okay. What is the end goal? What is most feasible?"
>
> And it helps me reframe it as a choice to be in the program that I'm in. And
>
> sometimes that's having my partner talk me down and remind me of the goals, or
>
> family members, or friends and community really having a sense that . . . "I'm, so
>
> sorry, I'm going to cry", being cheered on has been this double-edged sword.
>
> Sometimes where I feel really supported and that's beautiful. Other times it feels
>
> like this pressure of not wanting to let people down, not wanting to let down my
>
> community and my family. But for the most part it [family support] feels really
>
> supportive and it's something that really keeps me going.

This instance illustrates the severity of emotional damage caused by institutionalized racism within a mainstream establishment, which the individual has had to endure.

However, the circumstances were tolerated with the invaluable external assistance from loved ones, friends, and guidance from Indigenous mentors.

Material gain was shown in Participant 10's frustration with finding academic support in a large cohort model, as they said:

Our cohort of people that were admitted at the same time for the doctoral program was 16. So, that's a lot of people. It was really difficult because we all had to... For our program, you take classes your first two years. But the first semester, everybody takes the same classes in their cohort. So, we were all together every single day.

Although the research showed cohort camaraderie was enhanced in a cohort model, racial diversity, to include room for relationship reciprocity with similar cohort mates, was equally as important (Mauldin et al., 2022).

Tenet 3

The third tenet has two instances of the polarizing challenge Indigenous students hold. As aligned with the research literature, action efforts for social change often fall short. Participant 03 shared the effects of their disorientation and ambiguity over legal and political pressures as a racialized being, in alignment with TribalCrit Tenet 3, as they said:

Yeah. Some faculty being really against DEI/ED [diversity, equity, inclusion] initiatives. And like you said, not just microaggressions, but macroaggressions too within the classroom. I think also working with supervisors who portray themselves as being pro-decolonization and pro-Indigenous Peoples, and stuff like that. But in practice, what does that look like? Yeah. So, a lot of mixed feelings

about where I'm at and what that means for me and supporting, and sometimes

conflicting feelings about going against my values and trying to recognize that

this is a means to an end that will hopefully serve the greater good after. But

feeling like that that's coming at a really high personal cost too. Yeah. Yeah.

The lasting effects for Participant 03 were visibly noted in the emotional reaction and the

cost of such environments. The student remains hopeful that pushing through extreme

levels of adversity will not be too personally damaging, to benefit the good of future

Indigenous Peoples as a licensed clinician.

Participant 02's experience shows the ambiguity, disorientation, and

discriminatory standards in academia. Internalized oppression brings forth a feeling of

powerlessness and resignation (Pheterson, 1990). Whether well-intentioned or deliberate,

such noticeable expectations set classroom precedence stigmatizing Indigenous graduate

students because, as Participant 02 stated, "You're always having to prove yourself."

Different expectations for Indigenous students over their White counterparts, set by

professors, caused added stress and internalized uncertainty and doubt in Indigenous

student academic efficacy.

Tenet 4

Brayboy (2005a) stated, "Indigenous Peoples have the desire to obtain and forge

tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification" (p. 429).

When Participant 08 was asked what propelled them to push through the adversity in

graduate school, they responded with attributes of self-determination being foremost. The

participant added this fight for their identity contributed to the greater good of Tribal

Sovereignty and unmuting their Indigenous voice. Under this tenet, Participant 08

discussed their resilience, as they said:

> Well, I have a pretty hard head. There's just a big part of me that just will . . . .
>
> Like, if someone tries to, especially all the adversity and stuff that we experience
>
> in these institutions, it kind of is like they try to push us down, so we have to push
>
> back even harder. But I think a lot of what really propelled me is that kind of
>
> being a good ancestor because I'm like, well, maybe I don't know what my
>
> mentor went through while she was here, but I know it wasn't great because
>
> clearly of the things that I'm experiencing. I'm like, she made it better for me. So,
>
> I'm trying to make it better for the next Native grad student that comes along so
>
> that hopefully they won't have to explain all of these things to people or deal with
>
> all of these harms. That's really ultimately because it didn't feel like a degree for
>
> me or just to add initials to my name. I'm like, "This is for all Indigenous folks."
>
> We deserve to be heard!

Not only did this sense of determination help increase Participant 10's self-confidence,

but it prioritized their cultural identity and the desire to gain Tribal autonomy in graduate

school. Importantly, this view from the participants' perspective also highlighted their

drive and resilience.

Tenet 5

Brayboy (2005a) stated, "The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on

new meanings when examined through an Indigenous lens" (p. 429). Participant 03 was

frustrated and struggled with the lack of respect for their Indigenous view, as they said:

I struggled a lot like trying to find my Indigenous perspective within all that and

trying to name it because I was like, I just don't get this [Western worldview], this

is just not, like this isn't the way I think and it's not the same approach to healing

that I have. And so, and there was very little discussion about, like a, a spirit, a

soul and if it was then it was a very different, it was much more of uh, like

Western poets idea of soul.

This participant felt their perspective was dismissed over Western ideologies. Brayboy

(2005a) posited the two views could coexist, and that the concept of culture was

powerful.

Tenet 6

Brayboy (2005a) stated, "Governmental policies and educational policies toward

Indigenous Peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation" (p.

429). Participant 01's superior dismissed issues in therapeutic practice with an

inappropriate client who had used racial slurs in session with the student. After seeking

supervision, to learn how to make recommendations to change the racial dynamic,

Participant 01's experience was dismissed, having them believe their gender-race cultural

perspective and beliefs were not valued, and the beliefs of the Eurocentric client held

more value. They said:

I've had a few clients make microaggressive type comments to me. The

supervisors, just kind of really focused on the client, and not even trying to

understand, or help me figure out how to navigate that. I've had clients, just very

rarely, but sometimes be like, "Oh, Native women are so beautiful. I have always

loved Native women."

This example also underscores the first tenet, that such situations are systemic and not deemed as a threat.

Participant 10 communicated a fear of affecting their future and standing out founded on past encounters in asking for support in recognizing cultural Indigenous identity and freedom to practice. Relating this experience, Participant 10 stated, "Mm-hmm. I'm like, 'I don't want to be. . . .' Like, it's hard enough to be the brown person here. I don't want to be that brown person that lodged a racial complaint. But I'm like, 'Hello?'" The gravity to assimilate in this example of Brayboy's TribalCrit are evident in the pressures to quiet the dispute against Western educational norms.

Tenet 7

Brayboy (2005a) stated, "Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous Peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups" (p. 429). Participant 12 shared their worldview, integrated as a state of being, that was evident in every aspect of daily living, when they said:

> Yeah. I think one of my teachings was that it's very much a state of mind. And so, this idea that you can take your Indigenous identity and I'll speak more in terms of [Tribe] terms. But that being [Tribe] is a state of mind and that regardless of where you are, you carry that with you. So, to me that speaks to the values that you live by, whether that's giving back to community in meaningful ways . . .

This way of being bolstered the student's self-identity and drive to push through adversity, knowing they would eventually have the right credentials to support Indigenous communities.

Participant 04 discussed their visions of the future and how attributes of adaptability provided strength to manage the adversity of graduate school, as they said:

That's how the [doctoral program] came about was because I was like, I can do this. It's not hard for me. I'm going to be able to help in Indian country in this aspect. And the cool thing about having a [doctorate] in psychology is you literally can do anything. You can teach, you can do clinical work, you can be a powerful advocate, you can write books, you can have your own professional practice. You can do what I'm doing . . . You literally can do anything with this degree. When I found that out, it was when I was like, okay, this is where I'm going to go, and this is where I feel most set. But it was really my [family members] who are the most influential people in my life.

. . . But the people who were my grounding and people that kept me going, definitely my [parent] and my [relative]. And then my spouse, [name], and my [sibling], my [grandparent], my [parent], everybody, we all come together. And to be honest with you, I don't think I would've been able to finish if it wasn't for them because you're feeling it [the systemic and academic burdens] right!

. . . Yep. Some days I would just sit there in front of my computer, and I would just cry. And then [spouse] would be like, "Are you okay?" And I'm like, "I just need to sit here." I was like, "I'm fine. I just need to sit here." Some days when I go to my clinical placements. . . . My clinical placements, I sought out severe mental illness and things because that's what our people are lacking really good services around, because it's hard to get trained in that. So sometimes I would just come home and cry. I'd cry on my ride home, listen to my sad [blank] music, and

I'd let it out. And then I'd wake up the next morning and do that [blank] all over

again.

. . . I think too, see, there's so much gaslighting that happens in [doctoral]

programs and it's like, I don't know. I talk about this a lot. I speak the truth, I was

like, "This is who I am. This is where I come from. I'm not a suit. And at the end

of the day, this is, all I have, is my identity. All I have is my identity. All I have is

my respect. That's all I have.

This participant relied on external support. However, the evidence of the internal amassed

examples of resilience from a collectivist, cultural, spiritual, locus of control,

determination, and cultural pride are at play and provide protective sustenance during

adversity. Moreover, the drive to support their community upon graduation motivated the

participant, and advocacy for change is prevalent.

Participant 07 shared the importance of learning about traditional Indigenous

medicines and how the use of these supported them through their academic journey when

they said:

I remember doing my science fair project on traditional medicines and how all of

modern pharmaceuticals are derived from them. Yeah, I'm really thankful I had

all of that, because I think that's what. . . . [Interviewer: helped you weather the

storm?]

All of the storms, yeah. And going to [university], those kids were incredibly

racist. They would write, "Prairie N word, go back home," on the whiteboards

outside your dorm room. I remember I used to have to walk past a house that had

a lot of boys in it, and they would call me Sacagawea or Pocahontas and threaten

to rape me, and nobody did anything. No one did anything.

Participant 07 later discussed reliance on Indigenous ways of grounding themselves in

times of difficulty, stating:

Yeah. Yeah. And I learned bead work really early because of my school. And so,

I did a lot of beading. I found it really helpful in processing things for myself.

And now I know why. That repetitive movement is really helpful. . . So, I did a lot

of stuff like that. I did go to sweats with a family in [area] that I knew.

The participants shared the value of exercising different traditional cultural

practices. Beading promotes wellness and cultural knowledge (Ansloos et al., 2022),

whilst traditional sweat lodge ceremonies promote healing and purify the body, mind, and

soul (Native American Connections, n.d.). These ceremonies, at minimum, are similar to

attending church, communion, and praying in Western terms. The depth is much more

involved for Indigenous community members, and the ceremonies differ for Tribes;

overall, the practices aid mental health wellness.

Tenet 8

Brayboy (2005a) stated, "Stories are not separate from theory; they make up

theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and Ways of Being" (p.

429). Participant 05 discussed the vast difference between the content of an Indigenous-

specific program versus a Eurocentric-only university program. They had attended both

types of programs and felt the Eurocentric program missed the mark in accepting their

Indigenous worldview, customs, and beliefs central to the participant. The participant

transferred to an accredited Tier 1 research university with an Indigenous program so that

the goodness of fit supported their worldview. The unique program was tailored to

Indigenous pedagogy as a legitimate form of research. Participant 05 was able to apply

cultural learning for an Indigenous client that made all the difference, as they said:

> I had attended university and college programs that were mainstream. And while
>
> these were beneficial education wise, these were never quite a fit. One being in
>
> child development, the other mainstream program, sociology, they just didn't
>
> have the... I didn't feel as connected and as. . . . I felt very disconnected from the
>
> content and at that time there wasn't any support. It wasn't about. . . . It [the
>
> programs] didn't incorporate my own Indigenous worldview. And so, when I
>
> moved back to [state/province], my home territory, as I was in [another
>
> state/province], there were more Indigenous programs being advertised, and I had
>
> always wanted to pursue a bachelor's and master's. And so, when this program
>
> was offered after years of being in the field and me wanting to increase my skills
>
> and credentials so that I could do more in the way of therapeutic counseling work,
>
> et cetera, healing work, I saw this program and I was so excited. So many of my
>
> professional peers, locally, and colleagues had highly recommended it and so
>
> that's how I came into the master's program.

Participant 05 later recounted systemic impacts for Indigenous Peoples, stating:

> As you may know, the impacts of decolonization/boarding schools in Canada and
>
> in North America have been a huge problem for our people and the impact . . . the
>
> social impacts, on our people are huge! And it's something that's within my heart
>
> [to change] and that's the area that I want to head towards.

Describing the beauty in Indigenous traditions of healing, Participant 05 stated it is entirely different than the surface-level ways of individualistic Westernized view, as they said:

> Yes, but even deeper than that, it's holistic self-care and relationship with spirit, very different than a mainstream program. Our program is teaching us that spirit comes first. And those are traditional tribal teachings and concepts that I think a lot of people in mainstream society would be like, "What, that's something so hokey." But we are engaging in deep work for Indigenous Peoples

The student grinned with pride at the recollection of making a difference in healing therapy for Indigenous clients across a lifespan with a culturally aligned methodology.

Tenet 9

Brayboy (2005a) stated, "Theory and practice are connected to deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change" (p. 430). Despite the systemic prevalence of issues in society and education, Participant 02 reflected on personal strengths. The student attributed a desire for social change and the great good of Indigenous Peoples as a significant motivator. Simultaneously, the intersectionality of the student's shared feelings about the pressures of heading up change was a tall task. The driving factor of their collectivist cultural values of theory and practice lay in supporting the cause of their Indigenous culture as a noble modern-day warrior. Participant 02 discussed struggles with adversity, stating:

> Kind of naively at the time, I know there's a lot more now, but I came to find out there's a lot more things at play than just education. There's a whole lot of systemic things. But I think wanting to fill the gap in that, in my community, was

something that really drove me early on in my graduate studies. And then also, I

don't know, not wanting to fail or let people down, that's something that really

drove me too. And I think some people could think about that differently, in

different ways and stuff. But for me, that was a resilience. For me, graduate

school was terrible for me. I did not like it. It was tough, it was lonely. It was like

the most stressful time in my life and stuff. But by that time people were like, oh,

[named self] is like, [gender pronoun]'s going to get a [doctorate]. [Gender

pronoun]'s out going to school and stuff. And so, just like, I can't let people from

home down. So, that was a big driving factor for me. And then along the way too,

I think for Native people who get put in [position], who end up in these positions

and stuff, there are always people, like looking up to you. And I think that was a

big driving factor too, for me.

Finally, TribalCrit grants non-Indigenous understanding in the application of

Brayboy's (2005) recommendations for social change and reject modern days acts of

assimilation in academic institutions and embrace Indigenous cultural accounts to help

create strategies that move toward Indigenous students' well-being to increase this

population in academia.

Discussion

Indigenous students in higher education have discussed lived experiences that

support the need for changes in academic institutions to increase enrollment and boost

retention for this group. Many educational barriers continue to exist for this group

(Gardner & Holley, 2011; Garland, 2013). Calling attention to the oppressive

consequences should be a priority, "the pervasive and insidious role that systemic forces

in the form of cultural tools and resources (ideologies, images, stereotypes, scripts) play in promoting and promulgating both oppression and privilege" (Tappan, 2006, p. 2139). Scholars have researched students of color that have more successfully navigated racially challenging environments as undergraduates (Brondolo et al., 2009). Thus, the likelihood of increasing such efforts has been shown in the current study, as the Indigenous students and graduates have expressed reliance upon several different coping techniques (internal and external), including cultural, spiritual, and emotional attributes throughout their academic journeys. As correlated with the existing research, these attributes have buffered adversity.

Most importantly, participant narratives strongly provide evidence of the strength and capacity of self-determination and forging the fight for Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty, which are inherently at work daily in academia. The personal cost has been high, and the striking difference in participants in an Indigenous program lit up when recounting inclusionary curriculums and supportive institutions. Further, the impacts of institution-wide support and respect for the Indigenous worldview and efforts to acknowledge and understand the beliefs and value of Indigenous Peoples is essential (Brayboy, 2021). Action based plans are imperative over marketing that falls short. A mere DEI/EDI statement or marketing poster with Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) students on the front. Instead, it means overhauling policies and digging into the facts of why Indigenous student retention and completion are dismal to accommodate Indigenous students. Adding Native systems of knowledge and culturally effective changes to educational policies, systems, and culturally responsive assessments (Trumbull & Nelson-Barber, 2019) will help move the needle toward equality.

Moreover, the efficacious role of mentors is instrumental in Indigenous students' successful outcomes. The results of this study have valuable implications on mentorship for Indigenous students and appropriately highlight important recommendations for institutions, administrators, researchers, faculty, and Indigenous students pursuing academia. The opportunity and appreciation to learn more about the lives of the participants, modern Indigenous warriors, was an honor.

Recommendations to Leaders and Practitioners

This study elucidated mediators supporting Indigenous students' retention in graduate school. It does not account for the added heterogeneous needs to encompass all aspects of Indigenous students. However, it is a start in laying the foundation for what this group deserves in academic settings. The study presents valuable and noteworthy insights based on the disproportionate burden of intersectionality (i.e., colonization, racism, other areas of bias, underrepresentation, workload, material gain, and financial constraints) for Indigenous students in higher education and recommendations for leaders and practitioners regarding two research questions. The first research question focused on understanding factors that influenced Indigenous student retention in higher education, specifically in psychology and related disciplines, including current and recent graduates. The second research question explored the resilience characteristics that contributed to the persistence and academic completion of graduated Indigenous students.

The initial recommendation for leaders and practitioners should develop culturally responsive recruitment strategies that consider the importance of location and proximity to Indigenous students' homes or desired locations. By establishing educational institutions or programs inaccessible areas (i.e., through partnerships with Tribal Colleges

and universities or satellite campuses in Indigenous communities), students can maintain connections with their community and receive support from their families. Such institutions further aid in Indigenous student enrollment and completion and transfer into mainstream university programs (Bryan, 2019).

Second, enhancing mentorship and research opportunities is crucial. Leaders and practitioners should prioritize creating mentorship programs that connect Indigenous students with supportive faculty, Native graduate students, and professionals in their desired fields. These relationships and research opportunities foster a sense of belongingness and engagement, encouraging Indigenous students to pursue higher education.

Creating inclusive and supportive learning environments is essential for Indigenous students in graduate school. Leaders and practitioners should implement cultural competency training for faculty and staff, incorporate Indigenous perspectives into curricula, and establish support systems that address the unique challenges Indigenous students face, such as limited resources, experiences of racism and discrimination, and identity and cultural considerations.

Strengthening support networks is emphasized in the study. Leaders and practitioners should encourage the development of formal and informal support networks within educational institutions, including student organizations and affinity groups. These networks should comprise peers, mentors, and faculty members who understand and value the identities and experiences of Indigenous students. Initiatives that facilitate cross-generational connections, like pairing Indigenous students with alum mentors, can further enhance these networks.

Collaboration with Indigenous communities is crucial to supporting Indigenous students' educational journeys. Leaders and practitioners should actively engage with Indigenous communities, seeking partnerships, guidance, and the integration of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge within educational programs. Collaborative efforts enhance cultural relevance, create meaningful learning experiences, and strengthen the sense of belonging for Indigenous students.

Addressing critical financial barriers is another key recommendation. Leaders and practitioners should actively work to increase access to financial resources for Indigenous students by promoting scholarships, grants, and financial aid programs designed specifically for them. Additionally, providing guidance and support throughout the application process can help alleviate the burden of financial barriers and facilitate smoother access to educational opportunities. Streamlining and limiting the complex application conditions would increase Indigenous students' usage to assist with financial barriers. For instance, many Indigenous students come from two or more Tribes, and issues with proof of status might exclude students from applying.

Furthermore, complex inclusionary criteria take valuable time. The process can also be daunting and time-consuming for both the applicant and their references, who must continually fill out different applications (i.e., generic letters are not accepted for many, or the application has specific questions that must be filled out) because most scholarship offerings are at a lower amount. Students need several scholarships to meet the total cost of school. Indigenous students may need more academic references. Thus, students want to avoid burdening their mentors by writing many letters of recommendation to apply for scholarships. In most cases, Indigenous students use People

of Color or Indigenous references who are also strapped with the additional responsibilities of navigating and supporting the multifaceted dynamics Indigenous students face in academia.

Finally, leaders and practitioners should provide holistic support services beyond academics. Recognizing that Indigenous students may face multiple challenges, institutions should establish comprehensive support services that address their holistic needs. This plan includes providing access to healthcare services, mental health support, counseling, and resources to navigate personal and family obligations. By offering holistic support, institutions contribute to Indigenous students' overall well-being and academic success.

Implications

The significance of the findings in this study suggests many implementations would be beneficial to enhance the recruitment and completion of Indigenous students in higher education. A start with three major theoretical or practical implications is suggested. The following three implications were evident in the study results.

The findings suggest accountability and acknowledgement that a problem exists begins with academic intuitions, administrators, faculty, and advisors, and entails an internal burden to educate. When 75% of study participants provide lived experiences of adversity around racism and discrimination when they were enrolled or as early career graduates from 12 different accredited academic institutions, there is a significant problem. The results suggest a structural overhaul to address cultural competency training with an action place within U.S. and Canadian academic programs. Such efforts could improve the prevalent issues of racism and discrimination in academia.

The results hold implications in a lack of culturally competent support. The findings showed 100% of the Indigenous students expressed a reliance on mentors, faculty, advisors, and family support. These support networks helped ease effects of systemic burdens and were instrumental for Indigenous student retention and scholastic success. A portion of participants reported a lack of support, larger class sizes, and minimal resources made academic settings challenging. This result would include the addition of more culturally competent resources for support, including like-minded BIPOC resources to support this group's completion in academia. Extra support to bolster the retention for higher education students to stay on as faculty seeking tenure opportunities would improve the horizon for future Indigenous support. A key area about Indigenous student resilience was recognized by 50% of participants who shared experiences indicating their capacity to withstand challenges was over and above the standard academic load.

The results suggest the success rate of academic completion could rise if Indigenous students did not have as many stressors to contend with during their educational journeys. If adversity and cultural acceptance were incorporated into academics, more Indigenous students could focus on academic success over other issues. Addressing these challenges requires institutional commitment, moving forward denotes the need for a diversity task force that has the authority and power to implement real change.

Study Limitations

This study had four main limitations to consider. Methodologically, this study prescribed a Eurocentric research analysis to warrant the recognition of equality under

Eurocentric research parameters. Eurocentric research parameters can potentially introduce biases in the lived experiences of Indigenous students. Even though the researcher posits implementing an Indigenous methodology would bring greater understanding, dismissal of such a methodology might bring predispositions about the quality of the study from a Eurocentric academic perspective. Therefore, the researcher aimed to account for this methodology difference with a deductive emic perspective in the tribal critical analysis section of the current study. Though the emic perspective may have introduced bias in fitting Brayboy's framework, the deductive element has highlighted the tenets to establish a logical order of presenting the findings.

The first limitation is the relatively small participant sample size. Due to the nature of this qualitative study, the reduced quantity of participants permitted the researcher to lend a specific focus on Indigenous students in psychology and allied fields. Due to the nature of the study, gathering a large and diverse sample was a challenge, particularly because Indigenous populations tend to refrain from research. In this case, participants felt a duty and compelled to share accounts of their troubled experiences in academia for social change and recognition of Indigenous identity. This duty may stem from the Indigenous collectivist view for the betterment of all and Indigenous sovereignty. Although this limited sample size may restrict the applicability of the findings to a broader population of Indigenous students, the targeted approach revealed findings that specifically addressed Brayboy's (2005) nine tenets. Because the SIP listserv was a large nonprofit network with Indigenous professional psychologists and students across the United States and Canada, the Indigenous student population subscribing to it represents varying tribal backgrounds and diverse disciplines within the

psychology field. Contacts within SIP have additional networks whereby some of these psychologists reached out to higher education students not involved with SIP. Furthermore, social media efforts yielded two other participants in allied fields. Additionally, this study was based on the findings from the 2020 pilot study, including three out of five participants outside SIP, which had similar experiences in education. Although convenience sampling may introduce a sampling bias, it was the most appropriate method for this particular research study.

Secondly, there may be recruitment and participation bias within the study. Ensuring equal representation from different Indigenous communities or geographic regions could be difficult. The study participants were from different institutions in North America, from different Tribes, at different stages in their programs, and of different ages. Thus, there were no crossovers under the listed terms. Certain factors such as cultural beliefs, trust issues with research, or time constraints may make some Indigenous students less likely to participate, which could introduce biases into the study's results.

Finally, the study's focus on psychology and related fields may limit the generalizability of the findings to other disciplines or academic contexts. However, the intention of this study was specifically targeted at the discipline of psychology and related fields (i.e., social work) and no other fields.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be used to improve the current state of systemic barriers in academia to support a plan for Indigenous student recruitment and retention. The first recommendation includes developing an action-based culturally responsive recruitment plan for Indigenous faculty

and students which would strengthen student academic support network and enhance

mentorship and possibly open up Indigenous research opportunities.

The second recommendation involves developing a culturally responsive program

with Indigenization (Pidgeon, 2016). This should include collaborating with Indigenous

communities and would foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

A third recommendation would be to address the policies and procedures and

implement standardization on scholarship to decrease the financial barriers for this group.

Holistic support services can provide a profound impact for future Indigenous students.

Recommendations include access to tutoring and research positions. Other areas might

include free childcare, healthcare, and therapy services (i.e., Indigenous spirituality).

For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies, explore

intersectionality (e.g., dropouts and tribal school graduates), dig deeper into self-efficacy,

examine the perspectives of Indigenous faculty, investigate value and incorporation of

Indigenous knowledge systems, study the role of institutional support and policies, and

establish collaborative partnerships between higher education institutions and Indigenous

communities. These research recommendations aim to further enhance understanding and

support for Indigenous students' persistence and success in higher education.

Future Research Recommendations

Based on the findings discussed, several recommendations for future research in

the field of Indigenous student persistence in higher education can be made: Conducting

longitudinal studies that track Indigenous students throughout their educational journey

can yield valuable insights into the factors that contribute to their persistence and success.

By examining the long-term effects of support networks, personal determination, cultural

identity, and financial support on Indigenous student outcomes, researchers can identify patterns and inform strategies for improving retention rates. Deeper understanding of cultural contexts is widely accepted by psychology scholars (Garcia-Coll et al., 1996; Wang 2021). Consequently, further exploration of the intersectionality of Indigenous students' identities is necessary. Research should delve into how factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic location intersect with Indigenous identity and influence educational experiences and outcomes. This should include the effects of mental health deterioration directly linked to health disparities and caused by continuous long-term exposure to and stress adaptations (Geronimus, 2006). Understanding these complexities can guide the development of more tailored and inclusive support systems for Indigenous students.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of Indigenous student persistence, future research should explore the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous faculty members. Investigating their unique challenges, successes, and strategies for supporting Indigenous students can inform the development of inclusive practices and policies within higher education institutions.

Research should also examine the incorporation and integration of Indigenous knowledge systems within the curriculum and pedagogy of higher education. The addition of incorporating Indigenous perspectives and diverse cultural frameworks can foster inclusive learning environments. Understanding how Indigenous ways of knowing and cultural practices contribute to student engagement, academic success, and overall well-being can inform the design of culturally responsive educational environments.

Investigating the role of institutional support and policies in promoting Indigenous student persistence is crucial. Future research should examine the effectiveness of existing support programs, scholarships, and policies to address the barriers faced by Indigenous students. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of administrators and staff members involved in implementing these initiatives can provide insights into best practices for fostering a supportive and inclusive institutional culture.

Research should also focus on establishing collaborative partnerships between higher education institutions and Indigenous communities. Exploring the impact of community engagement, mentorship programs, and culturally relevant outreach initiatives can contribute developing sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships that support Indigenous student success.

Study Conclusion

The study aimed to provide insights into the factors influencing the resilience and retention of Indigenous students and early career graduates in higher education for psychology and allied fields. Additionally, it sought to gain a deeper understanding of the determinants of success and barriers that could correlate with this group's low enrollment and retention rates. The findings of the study were discussed and compared with existing literature. Although the study's limitations include small sample size, potential recruitment and participation bias, reliance on self-reporting and recall bias, limited scope and generalizability, social desirability bias, and the lack of longitudinal data. Despite these limitations, the study provided recommendations to policymakers, institutions, decision-makers, faculty, mentors, and practitioners to support the need for an overhaul to increase the statistics for Indigenous students in higher education. Additionally, the

results contribute to the existing literature delineating specific barriers for Indigenous students.

The study supplied data-rich content, participant diversity (i.e., varied tribal affiliation, university, stage in the program), and redundancy in Indigenous student experiences. The findings highlighted the instrumental significance and dependence students in higher education have on support. Furthermore, this showed that mentorship (faculty, advisors, community) for this group contributed to the self-efficacy and bolstered Indigenous resilience and academic success.

TribalCrit Support

The ramifications of numerous experiences from the population sample in correlation to the racialized discrimination, misunderstandings, misconceptions, and bias the Indigenous participants discussed during their academic journeys strongly support the overarching theoretical view of the TribalCrit. The unsurmountable additional challenges Indigenous students face are indicative of low recruitment and retention rates due to systemic colonization. Such stressors added to the academic load are far beyond what any student should contend with during graduate school. Oral stories—the instruments for transmitting Indigenous knowledge and culture—are relevant sources of data (Brayboy, 2005). Thus, the high percentage of adversity from this study's graduate students from 12 different institutions fosters the value of a TribalCrit framework. Consequently, the study conclusions show White Supremacy is evident in academia and should not be detrimental to an individual's culture (Brayboy, 2005).

According to Freire (2000), oppressed communities seek to identify and understand it to move toward creating solutions for full humanity (as cited in Burnette &

Figley, 2016) and sovereignty. Only through awareness, acknowledgment, and understanding of the problem by the oppressor can structural inequalities get better. The Indigenous students, early career psychologists, and other allied fields graduates in this study voiced their experiences with systemic challenges while in graduate school. These students had to overcome tremendous adversity, showing extraordinary resilience and strength in the pursuit of betterment and 'to give back' to their respective Indigenous communities. Understandably, this group relied heavily on support from like-minded or culturally competent faculty, mentors, family, and peers who supported their worldview and success. Freire (2002, as cited in Burnette & Figley, 2016) inserted Indigenous Peoples are not acquiescent but instead demonstrate a remarkable ability to survive. Promise has been shown with the implementation of DEI programs; however, goals and metrics are instrumental for such programs to work. Revisiting the program annually will evaluate its efficacy. Implementation of these programs should not be an action item for BIPOC employees.

The cost of systemic barriers for Indigenous students in this study has taken a toll and confounded their graduate experiences. Therefore, it is likely other Indigenous students face the same obstacles in academia, consequently attributing to the low statistics of enrollment and retention for Indigenous students.

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Appendix A

Indigenous Ways of Knowing Versus Western Science

Traditional Native Knowledge

- holistic
- includes physical & metaphysical world linked to moral code
- emphasis on practical application of skills and knowledge
- trust for inherited wisdom
- respect for all things
- practical experimentation
- qualitative oral record
- local verification
- communication of metaphor & story connected to life, values, and proper behavior
- integrated and applied to daily living and traditional subsistence practices

Common Ground

Organizing Principles
- universe is unified
- body of knowledge stable but subject to modification

Habits of Mind
- honesty, inquisitiveness
- perseverance
- open-mindedness

Skills and Procedures
- empirical observation in natural settings
- pattern recognition
- verification through repetition
- inference and prediction

Knowledge
- plant and animal behavior, cycles, habitat needs, interdependence;
- properties of objects and materials;
- position and motion of objects;
- cycles and changes in earth and sky

Western Science

- part to whole
- limited to evidence and explanation within physical world
- emphasis on understanding how
- skepticism
- tools expand scale of direct and indirect observation & measurement
- hypothesis falsification
- global verification
- quantitative written record
- communication of procedures, evidence and theory
- discipline-based
- micro and macro theory (e.g. cell biology & physiology, atomic theory, plate tectonics, etc.)
- mathematical models

(Stephens, 2001)

Appendix B

Pilot Study Result
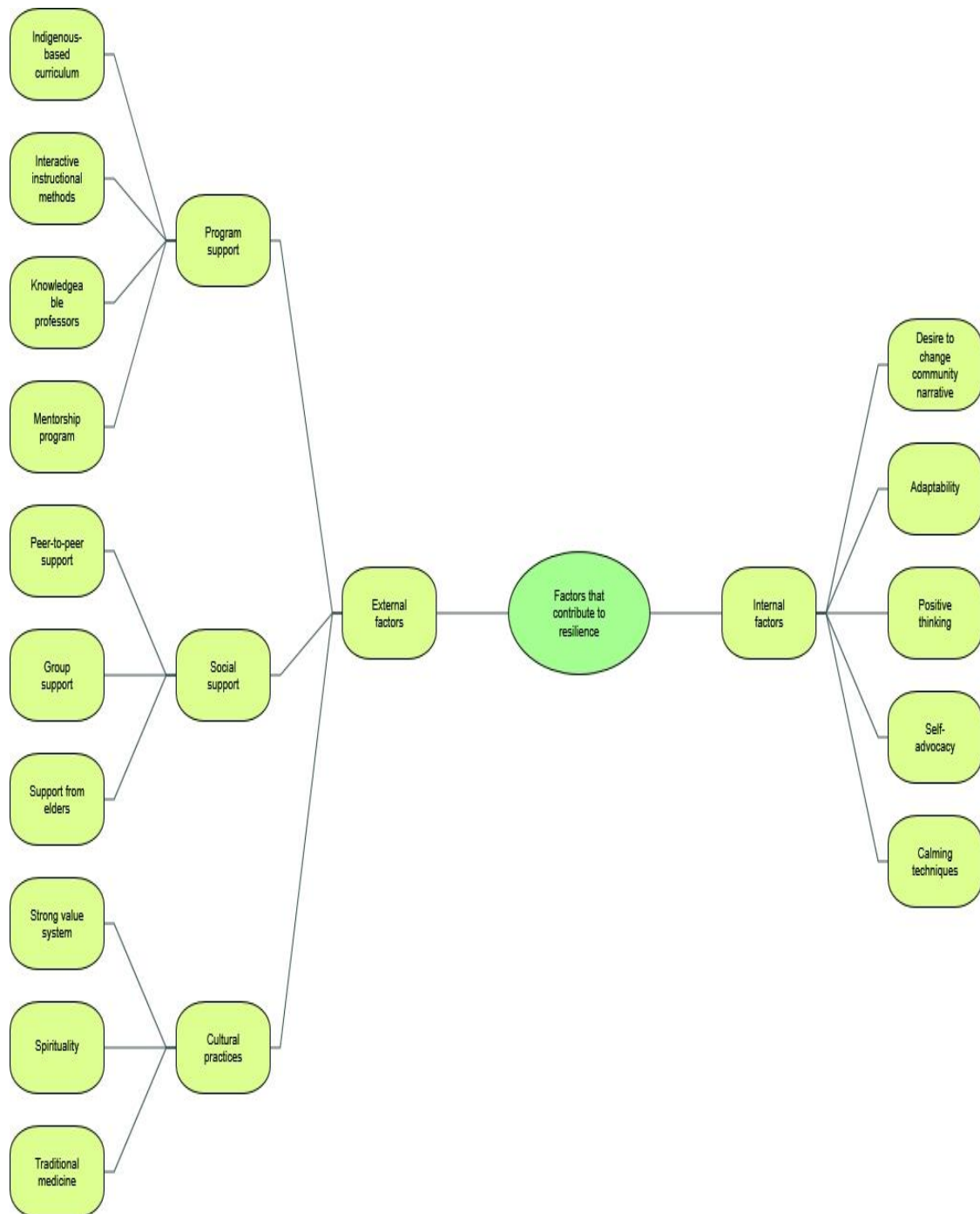
Appendix C

Recruitment Flyer for Society of Indian Psychologists Listserv

10/25/2022

Indigenous Student & Early Career Graduate Lived Experiences

IRB Approval Confirmed Northwest University

RECRUITMENT FLYER

SEEKING:

(1) Current Indigenous Master/ Doctoral Psychology Students or Early Career Graduates within 5 years

(2) Ages 18+ years, identify as Native American, Alaskan Native, First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (with or without tribal affiliation)

(3) Want to share your educational experiences and personal narrative

*All identifying info. kept confidential (culture, language, national origin, gender, age, ability, religion, spirituality, and socioeconomic status).

Participation in Lived Experiences Interviews

INTERVIEW LOGISTICS

Dissertation interviews will be conducted in October through December 2022.

Each ZOOM interview will last approximately 90-120 minutes, with two simple follow-up emails to verify the transcript accuracy and identity of common themes. *All identifying information will be kept secure and confidential; such details will not be made available in the findings.*

Interested...please select the CLICK SURVEY BELOW to complete the 1 minute inclusionary criteria.

Each participant may quality for a $40 digital Amazon gift card for their participation in the interview.

VALUE As an Indigenous doctoral student and relative, learning more about fellow graduate students' experiences is of personal interest as few Indigenous student graduate (0.6% USA).

♦ *Often Indigenous Peoples are misunderstood and/or misrepresented; the intent of this dissertation is to hear your experience and accurately portray Indigenous graduate student lived experiences and present the findings to move the needle toward decolonizing education for the future of our people.*

♦ *Participation will contribute to the wider available research and help clinicians and administrations in academia better support Indigenous students.*

Click Survey

Appendix D

Sample Recruitment Email Letter

Dear

I am a doctoral student completing a PsyD in Counseling Psychology at Northwest University in Kirkland, WA. As a part of my dissertation, I am completing a qualitative study exploring all experiences around resilience for Indigenous University students and recent graduates 5 years and under.

I am asking for your assistance in finding participants for my study. I am looking for individuals who meet the following criteria:
- Indigenous student (self-identified or tribal affiliation)
- Currently enrolled as a master's or doctoral student
- Over the age of 18

Participants will be asked to take part in a 90 to 120 minute interview via Zoom answering questions related to their experience as an Indigenous Tribal college or doctoral student. Participants will be asked to review a consent form prior to participation. Questions will be related to the academic, social, and mental-health or well-being aspects of the student's experience. Participant responses will be kept anonymous. The study has Northwest University Institutional Review Board approval. As an incentive for participation, each participant will be enrolled in a drawing to receive a $10 Amazon gift certificate. If you meet the study requirements and are chosen to participate in the full study by meeting the requirement, you may qualify for a $50 Amazon (or other equivalent) gift card drawing as compensation for participation in the interviewing process. Participation will contribute to the wider available research and help clinicians and administrations at the university level better understand how to assist and support Indigenous students. If you know of an individual who meets criteria and is interested in participation, please have them contact me via email or phone. Attached is the consent form participants will be asked to sign for inclusion in the study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Kindest regards,
Gwen Rasmussen, M.A. Doctoral Student/Researcher Northwest University
XXXXX@northwestu.edu
XXX-XXX-XXX
Supervisor:

Nikki Johnson, PsyD
Professor | College of Social & Behavioral Sciences
Doctoral Program in Counseling Psychology
XXX.XXX.XXX office
XXXXXXX@northwestu.edu

Appendix E

General Recruitment Flyer for Listserv/Social Media

10/25/2022

Indigenous Student & Early Career Graduate Lived Experiences

IRB Approval Confirmed Northwest University

RECRUITMENT FLYER

SEEKING:

(1) Current Indigenous Master/ Doctoral Psychology or allied field Students or Early Career Graduates within 5 years

(2) Ages 18+ years, identify as Native American, Alaskan Native, First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (with or without tribal affiliation)

(3) Want to share your educational experiences and personal narrative

*All identifying info. kept confidential (culture, language, national origin, gender, age, ability, religion, spirituality, and socioeconomic status).

Participation in Lived Experiences Interviews

INTERVIEW LOGISTICS

Dissertation interviews will be conducted in October through May 2023.

Each ZOOM interview will last approximately 90-120 minutes, with two simple follow-up emails to verify the transcript accuracy and identity of common themes. *All identifying information will be kept secure and confidential; such details will not be made available in the findings.*

Interested...please select the CLICK SURVEY BELOW to complete the 1 minute inclusionary criteria.

Each participant may quality for a $40 digital Amazon gift card for their participation in the interview.

VALUE As an Indigenous doctoral student and relative, learning more about fellow graduate students' experiences is of personal interest as few Indigenous student graduate (0.6% USA).

♦ *Often Indigenous Peoples are misunderstood and/or misrepresented; the intent of this dissertation is to hear your experience and accurately portray Indigenous graduate student lived experiences and present the findings to move the needle toward decolonizing education for the future of our people.*

♦ *Participation will contribute to the wider available research and help clinicians and administrations in academia better support Indigenous students.*

Click Survey

Appendix F

General Recruitment Email for University Listserv/Social Media

Re: Invitation to all Native American, Alaska Native, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Students and Recent Graduates (5 years or less)

Call for interviews of Lived Experiences
IRB/REB Approval Confirmed
R e c r u i t m e n t   F l y e r

WHO
(1) Current Indigenous (University; Program) students or recent graduates (5 years and under) are invited to participate in sharing their experiences and personal narratives.
(2) Ages 18+ years, identifying as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Native American, or Alaskan Native, (with or without tribal affiliations), all social identities (culture/language/national origin, gender, age, ability, religion, spirituality, and socioeconomic status).
VALUE
As an Indigenous graduate student and relative, learning more about our graduate students' experiences is a personal goal of interest as few attend, and fewer graduate (0.6% USA).

- o Often Indigenous Peoples are misunderstood and/or misrepresented; the intent of this dissertation study is to hear your experiences and *accurately portray* Indigenous graduate student perceptions that modify a successful academic journey.
- o Participation will contribute to the wider available research and help clinicians and administrations in academia better support Indigenous students.

INTERVIEW LOGISTICS
Interviews will be conducted beginning in the summer of 2022. Each interview will last approximately 90-120 minutes. Interviews will be conducted on Zoom (Industry leading security and privacy), along with two simple follow-up checks to confirm the accuracy and identity of common themes. All identifying information will be kept secure and confidential; it will not be made available in the findings.
Interested participants, please click the link to confirm inclusionary criteria (1-minute criteria check-in):

6 Question Survey

Each participant may quality for a $40 digital Amazon gift card or similar for participation, distributed after completion of the interview.

Thank you for your interest,
Gwen Debassige Rasmussen
Graduate Student Counseling Psychology in the Pacific Northwest

Appendix G

Screening Questions

The following screening questions will be made available via Qualtrics.

1. Do you speak English?

2. Are you 18 or older?

3. Are you attending a master's or Doctoral Program in psychology or a related field in the United States or Canada? Or are you a recent graduate under 5 years?

4. Do you identify as Native American/ Alaskan Native/First Nation/Metis/Inuit/ Indigenous/Aboriginal/ American Indian or are mixed with another racial/ethnic identity within the United States or Canada?

5. Do you currently have tribal affiliation or ties to your homeland/Indigenous culture?

6. Please provide your contact information (Name, email, phone number).

Appendix H

Resource Sheet

[Under construction based on geographical location of Participant as well as

University)

Native American Health Center crisis hotlines

- *SIP president*
- *SIP mentor*

Northwest University Resources

NU Hope Community Counseling Center www.northwestu.edu/nuhope or 425-889-5294

Psychology Today Directory of Therapists www.psychologytoday.com

Crisis Connections

o This 24 hour, toll-free telephone hotline provides immediate, confidential assistance to people in distress in the King County area. Call 1-866-4-CRISIS (1-866-427-4747) or 206-461-3222.

Washington state:

o Washington 211: free referral and informational helpline that connects people to health and human services, available 24/7

o Call 211

o 211 also has a database of resources, with searches including crisis-intervention hotlines, outpatient substance abuse treatment, and general counseling services

o Washington Recovery Helpline: 24-hour crisis-intervention and referral assistance for substance abuse, mental health, and gambling

o Call 866-789-1511

o Volunteers of America/Crisis Response Services (Everett): 24-hour emotional support to people in crisis and/or considering suicide

o Call 800-584-3578 or chat online

o Crisis Clinic of the Peninsulas (Bremerton): over-the-phone crisis intervention, information referral and a supportive listening ear to people in our community who are experiencing situational distress

o Call 360-479-3033

National:

- o National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: This national network of local crisis centers provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- o Call 800-273-TALK or chat online

- o Para información en español: 1-888-628-9454

- o Crisis Text Line: free, 24/7 support for those in crisis

- o Text 741741 to text with a trained crisis counselor

- o Veterans Crisis Line: a free, confidential resource that's available to anyone, even if you're not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care

- o Call 800-273-8255 press 1, text 838255, or chat online

Appendix I

Tribal Critical Race Theory Tenets

1. Colonization is endemic to society.

2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a

desire for material gain.

3. Indigenous peoples occupy a luminal space that accounts for both the political and

racialized natures of our identities.

4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal

autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.

5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined

through an indigenous lens.

6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are

intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.

7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to

understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the

differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.

8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make theory and are, therefore, real and

legitimate sources of data and ways of being.

9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must

work towards social change. (Brayboy, 429-430)

Appendix J

Interview Outline

- Welcome and Introductions (Permission to record)
  - As an Indigenous relative, learning more about our graduate students' experiences is a personal goal of interest as few attend, and fewer graduate.
  - Often Native people are misunderstood and/or misrepresented; the intent of this study is to hear your experiences and accurately portray Indigenous graduate student perceptions that modify a successful academic journey.
- Explanation of Study and Informed Consent
  - I am legally and ethically bound to ensure your information is accurately recorded and your information is kept private.

Demographic Information Gathering

1. What is your focus of study? (i.e., PhD, PsyD, or Clinical or Counseling track)

    a. What is your current year of study? (i.e., Year One, Internship, Post-doctorate,

    Master's, Graduate (how many years past)?

    b. How old are you? (i.e., Partner/Married? Children? Working-Full or part-time?)

Graduate School

2. What was the path that led to your decision to attend graduate school?

    a. What factors were most important to your school selection (i.e., program,

    reputation, proximity)?

    b. Tell mee about who had the most influence on your decision to attend graduate

    school (e.g., parent(s), teacher(s), school counselor(s), Elder(s))?

3. What are your long-term career goals (e.g., area of focus)?

Cultural Background

4. What is your Native identification (i.e., change based on participant: registered or non-

registered; United States (census number); Canada (band number)?

    a. Tell me about where you grew up (e.g., urban, rural, reservation, combination)?

b. What does being Indigenous (utilize specific Tribe provided in questions #4)

mean to you?

c. What is your experience with your traditional Indigenous culture?

1. How would you describe your "self-identified" spiritual beliefs.

d. What is your experience with your traditional teachings (community)?

1. If not traditional, how would you describe what this means to you?
e. Describe your strengths in terms resilience under traditional, Western, blended

that have helped in graduate school?

f. How has your connection to your community helped or hindered resilience in
graduate school?
g. Tell me about your experience with any type of transition into graduate school

(i.e., relocation experience)?

h. Did you reach out for support services (i.e., community, mentor, family,

professor, spiritual mentor, Elder)?

1. If no support was available, what would your ideal support include?

Academic Experiences

5. Tell me how graduate school has been going since you began your program.
    a. What has been going well in graduate school?
6. Have there been aspects of graduate school that have been challenging?

    a. Describe how you overcame those barriers to persist in pursuit of your
    education (if applicable)?
7. What type of cultural competency course(s) does your school offer?
    a. Are there any specific experiences that you feel have made your experience as

    an Indigenous student more pleasant (e.g., seminars, discussions with professors,

    mentors, academic counselors, etc.)?

 8. Tell me what tutoring or additional resources are offered by your school or within
your community (i.e., counseling services, academic support, etc.)?

a. What support systems are in place for Indigenous Peoples (BIPOC) at your

university?

    1. Why or why not did you utilize these resources?
    2. If none, what would be ideal to support your success as an Indigenous
student?

Social Experiences

9. Tell me about any positive social experiences you have encountered while at graduate

school?

10. Tell me about any challenging social experiences you have encountered while at

graduate school (i.e., discrimination, racism, bullying)?

a. How did you manage the situation?

i. Did you consider/not consider not telling the school?

ii. What contributed to this decision?

b. Were you content with the outcome?

i. If not, what would have been the ideal result of the situation?

Cultural Experiences

10. How do you bridge your cultural beliefs and Western ways at school?
a. Do you keep these beliefs separate or combined?

b. How do you do this?

c. Has this been helpful or challenging?

1. If you do not follow traditional cultural beliefs, what Western attributes

have brought you strength?

11. How are your interpersonal relationships in graduate school & outside of school?

a. What moments do you share with friends about positive and difficult

situations?

1. How does your support network react to such situations?

2. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your peer relationships at school, outside of school?

     i. While at graduate school, what ethnicity are your closest friends (i.e., BIPOC, White, blended)?

3. Do your friends support your cultural identity?

<u>Closing Comments</u>

12. In closing, are there any changes or services you wish your school offered that would help your success as an Indigenous student?

13. Is there anything about your experience as a graduate student you would like to include in this interview that we may have missed?

Thank you for your participation!

- Cover the consent terms and right to revoke.
- Would you like a copy of the research/dissertation upon completion?

Appendix E

General Recruitment Email for University Listserv/Social Media

Re: Invitation to all Native American, Alaska Native, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Students and Recent Graduates (5 years or less)

Call for interviews of Lived Experiences
IRB/REB Approval Confirmed
R e c r u i t m e n t F l y e r

WHO
(1) Current Indigenous (University; Program) students or recent graduates (5 years and under) are invited to participate in sharing their experiences and personal narratives.
(2) Ages 18+ years, identifying as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Native American, or Alaskan Native, (with or without tribal affiliations), all social identities (culture/language/national origin, gender, age, ability, religion, spirituality, and socioeconomic status).
VALUE
As an Indigenous graduate student and relative, learning more about our graduate students' experiences is a personal goal of interest as few attend, and fewer graduate (0.6% USA).

- o Often Indigenous Peoples are misunderstood and/or misrepresented; the intent of this dissertation study is to hear your experiences and *accurately portray* Indigenous graduate student perceptions that modify a successful academic journey.
- o Participation will contribute to the wider available research and help clinicians and administrations in academia better support Indigenous students.

INTERVIEW LOGISTICS
Interviews will be conducted beginning in the summer of 2022. Each interview will last approximately 90-120 minutes. Interviews will be conducted on Zoom (Industry leading security and privacy), along with two simple follow-up checks to confirm the accuracy and identity of common themes. All identifying information will be kept secure and confidential; it will not be made available in the findings.
Interested participants, please click the link to confirm inclusionary criteria (1-minute criteria check-in):

6 Question Survey

Each participant may quality for a $40 digital Amazon gift card or similar for participation, distributed after completion of the interview.

Thank you for your interest,
Gwen Debassige Rasmussen
Graduate Student Counseling Psychology in the Pacific Northwest

Appendix K

Consent Form

(Qualtrics Signature Software)

The Experience of Indigenous Master's or Graduate Level University Students

Dissertation, Northwest University

Gwen Debassige Rasmussen

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by an Indigenous, tribal affiliated doctoral psychology student at Northwest University. The study is being conducted to satisfy the requirements for the Doctor of Psychology program in Counseling Psychology. You have been invited to participate in this study because you have identified as being Indigenous, with or without tribal affiliation, are over the age of 18, and are a master or doctoral level student in psychology or related field.

Purpose of Study

The rationale behind this study is to explore the in-depth resilience experiences of Indigenous graduate students and what may be helpful to achieving their success.

What are the Requirements

If you agree to participate, you will complete an interview with the researcher, which will take approximately 90-120 minutes. Interviews will be scheduled according to the most convenient time for the participant and will be conducted via computer-based online communication software (Zoom). It is important to choose a private, secure location in which to take part in the study interview.

Additionally, after the interview the transcripts will be provided for you via email, you may read over these to be sure I have clearly identified certain themes and clarify anything that may have been misinterpreted or recorded incorrectly. You will have 7 days to return these changes; if I do not hear from you, I will assume everything is correct.

Confidentiality

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed (password protected) as a data source for this study. After the completion of the entire research project (no later than August 31, 2024), the audio recordings, and video will be destroyed. This researcher will be keeping the study notes, codes, and general data which will be deidentified and held for perpetuity. For clarity, by signing this form you are giving your permission to hold the audio, video and notes for this project and future dissertation research by this researcher. The information will be held on a secure cloud server.

Risks and Costs

There are minimal risks associated with participation otherwise, there are not apparent physical, legal, or financial risks involved in participating in this study. Some

individuals may experience discomfort in answering personal questions or the recall of certain information may provoke memories; however, every precaution will be made to make this experience as relaxed and safe for the participant as possible.

Support

In the event participation causes distress you may which to contact the National Suicide Prevention Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255) or Text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the United States anywhere about any type of crisis. In Canada, the National Suicide Hotline is -------------. As you are student of a university, it is also likely you are eligible for free services included as a part of your tuition. For UNIVERSITY NAME students, you may contact the Counseling & Testing Center (office: 208-885-6716 or Crisis line: 208-885-6716).

Benefits or Value for Participants:

The benefit of taking part in this study is the opportunity to share a personal story that will help inform what universities, other agencies, and future scholars on how to better support Indigenous students in higher education. In addition, you will be entered in a drawing to receive a $100 gift card (or e-gift card) to Amazon or equivalent. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this study at any time and for any reason. There will not be any negative consequences for you if you refuse to participate. You may refuse to answer any questions asked. All responses are anonymous and any identifying information will be removed.

Non-Participants:

Your name will be entered in a drawing to receive a $10.00 Amazon gift certificate, with the drawing completed after and contact information will be retained to see if interested in future dissertation study.

Permission

By signing this form, you are giving permission to use your interview responses kept in the form of transcripts and narrative notes taken during the interview for this research study and a future dissertation study. The results from this study will be presented anonymously in a written second year research project which will further support a doctoral dissertation and as a part of doctoral dissertation defense presentation. All data forms will be destroyed on or before August 31, 2024.

Questions

If you have any questions about this study, contact Gwen Debassige Rasmussen via email or phone listed below.

If you have further questions, please contact my faculty advisor, Nikki Johnson, at the email address listed below.

You may also contact the Chair of the Northwest University IRB, Cheri Goit, RN, MN, at goit@northwestu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.
Gwen Debassige Rasmussen
Doctoral Student/Researcher
XXXXXX@northwestu.edu
XXX.XXX.XXXX

Nikki Johnson, PsyD
Professor | College of Social & Behavioral Sciences
Doctoral Program in Counseling Psychology
XXXXXX@northwestu.edu
XXX.XXX.XXXX

Signature of Consent

By signing on the line below, I agree to the terms stated above and have been given adequate information regarding my participation in the above listed study.
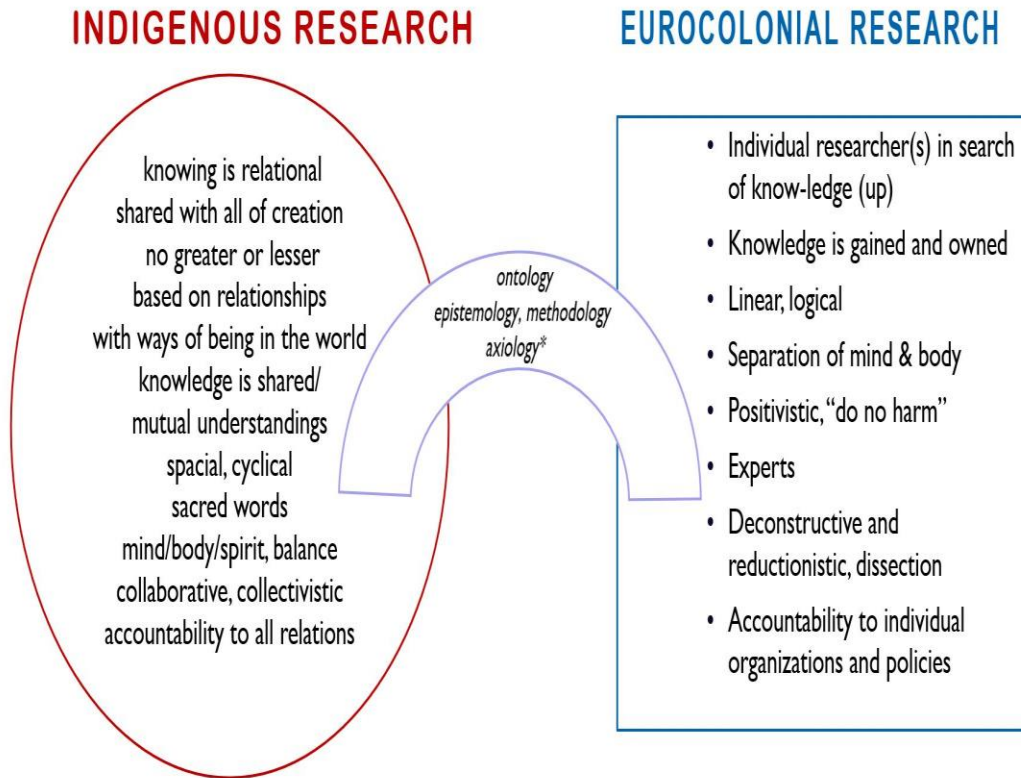
_____

Participant Signature
By signing below, the researcher confirms that all relevant information has been shared with the above participant. No deception or coercion has taken place and all identifying information will be concealed and protected to the best of the researcher's ability.

_____

Gwen Debassige Rasmussen, M.A.
Researcher Signature

Appendix L

Indigenous Research Eurocolonial Research

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

knowing is relational
shared with all of creation
no greater or lesser
based on relationships
with ways of being in the world
knowledge is shared/
mutual understandings
spacial, cyclical
sacred words
mind/body/spirit, balance
collaborative, collectivistic
accountability to all relations

*ontology
epistemology, methodology
axiology*

EUROCOLONIAL RESEARCH

- Individual researcher(s) in search of know-ledge (up)
- Knowledge is gained and owned
- Linear, logical
- Separation of mind & body
- Positivistic, "do no harm"
- Experts
- Deconstructive and reductionistic, dissection
- Accountability to individual organizations and policies

*Indigenous bridging approaches include some translation of Indigenous ways to support Euro-Western academia's movement towards centering Indigenous research and knowledges (decolonization) as is essential for validity as well as deconstruction of epistemological racism

Source: Cruz, C. (2020, Dissertation)

(Stephens, 2001)

Appendix M

Member Checking Email

Dear _____ ,

Thank you for your willingness to help me with this last stage of the Indigenous study. As mentioned, it is vital for the Indigenous perspective is verified and correct. Your response is an opportunity for you to read over the interview transcript and make sure that I have all the details recorded correctly. It is also an opportunity to clarify any details that may have been misinterpreted or recorded incorrectly. This process will ensure the data is verified and help the study be more reliable and credible.

A separate theme document is attached; this sheet includes the main themes gathered from everyone who participated in the study. Not everything you stated is included but is essential and may be used in the dissertation phase.

Please, read through the document and provide any comments and impressions you would like to emphasize or de-emphasize. If I do not hear back from you by (Date 7 days after), I will assume all is good and ready to move on with these results.

Thank you so much again for participating in this study. The information you provided will help assist Indigenous graduate students in the United States and Canada.

Kindest regards,

Gwen Rasmussen, M.A.
Doctoral Student/Researcher Northwest University
XXXXXX@northwestu.edu
XXX.XXX.XXXX

Supervisor: Nikki Johnson, PsyD
Professor | College of Social & Behavioral Sciences
Doctoral Program in Counseling Psychology
XXXXXX@northwestu.edu
XXX.XXX.XXXX

Appendix N

Peer Debriefer Instructions

Dear

RE: Thematic Analysis Qualitative Study

The title of my study is, *The Role of Resilience in Indigenous Students: A Qualitative Study on Understanding Barriers in Higher Educational Outcomes Framed Within the Tribal Critical Race Theory.*

The research questions are:
  1) What factors affect the retention of Indigenous graduate students?
  a) In particular, what resilience characteristics contribute to Indigenous graduate student's persistence in graduate school?

This study utilizes a phenomenological qualitative research design and seeks to explore and understand the meanings Indigenous graduate students ascribe to for challenges encounter in graduate school. This study intends to emphasize understanding from participants' views, by obtaining major themes and subthemes that emerge from the data. The researcher will gain insights about the individual's experiences on a phenomenon founded on the individual's explanation of his or her lived experience.

Instructions for peer debriefing . . . you will receive a minimum of two to six interviews.

Please answer the following questions while and/or after reading the interviews.
1. What is the relevance of the study?
2. Considering, the research questions, what are the broad themes?
3. How do they answer the research questions?
4. What do the answers mean for Indigenous graduate students?
5. Any other comments that are significant and stand out to you?

Please let me know if you have further questions.
Thank you kindly,

Gwen Rasmussen, M.A.
Doctoral Student/Researcher Northwest University
XXXXXX@northwestu.edu
XXX.XXX.XXXX

Supervisor: Nikki Johnson, PsyD
               Professor | College of Social & Behavioral Sciences
               Doctoral Program in Counseling Psychology
               XXXXXX@northwestu.edu
               XXX.XXX.XXXX

Appendix O

Reflexivity and Positionality Statement

As research biases can enter into studies and therefore it is important to acknowledge one's own subjectivity. The process of transparency can propagate feelings of vulnerability. However, uncomfortable, my ancestors have given up much for me to be here to make a difference. Therefore, my intent is to be more transparent as it provides an opportunity to increase my level of reflexivity. As a Canadian registered tribal member raised on a tribal land until moving from college, the trials and tribulations of academia have been on a steep curve, my starting line was a lap or two behind the official start, not due to personal factors, but factors outside of my control. Currently, in my fourth year of graduate student I intend to continue advocacy work for underserved populations. Less favorable experiences with Catholicism and now more fully integrated again with Indigenous ways of knowledge, along with adopted holistic ways have informed my theoretical orientation. Cultural proficiency continues to be a goal and finding peace more spiritual traditional Indigenous practices. Finally, the researcher is a product of an Indian Day School, attended several Canadian and American colleges. Thus, based on this researchers lived experience of discrimination in every nook, including academia, special attention was given to avoid research bias on my emic assumptions about the participants.

Appendix P

Reliability Coder Instructions

Dear _____,

RE: Thematic Analysis Qualitative Study

The title of my study is t*he Role of Resilience in Indigenous Students: A Qualitative Study on Understanding Barriers in Higher Educational Outcomes Framed Within the Tribal Critical Race Theory*
The research questions are:
  1) *What factors affect the retention of Indigenous graduate students?*
  a) *In particular, what resilience characteristics contribute to Indigenous graduate student's persistence in graduate school?*
      This study utilizes a phenomenological qualitative research design and seeks to explore and understand the meanings. Indigenous graduate students ascribe to challenges encounter in graduate school. This study intends to emphasize understanding from participants' views, generally by obtaining significant themes and subthemes that emerge from the data. The researcher will gain insights into the individual's experiences on a phenomenon founded on the individual's explanation of their lived experience.

Instructions for reliability coding:
1. A thematic analysis with an inductive approach was utilized with line-by-line coding. The emphasis will come from internal and external factors that enhance Indigenous graduate student resilience as outlined in the research questions. I can answer any questions you may have and ensure you understand the process.
2. We will complete this process separately. We will both use the same coding, and after completion, we will move to phase 3.
3. We will go through our codes and see if these are congruent and discuss items not mentioned in the coding schema to code the additional transcripts systematically.
4. We will collaborate until an agreement is reached on the final themes and subthemes based on the research questions.

Please let me know if you have further questions.
Thank you kindly,

Gwen Rasmussen, M.A.
Doctoral Student/Researcher Northwest University
XXXXXX@northwestu.edu
XXX.XXX.XXXX
Supervisor: Nikki Johnson, PsyD
                 Professor | College of Social & Behavioral Sciences
                 Doctoral Program in Counseling Psychology
                 XXXXXX@northwestu.edu
                 XXX.XXX.XXXX