Anishinaabeg Voices

Anishinaabeg Voices: Intersections of Identity, Culture, and Values
in Education and Professional Life

A Master’s Thesis
presented to
the faculty of
Communicating Arts, Division of Fine and Applied Arts
at the University of Wisconsin-Superior

In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

By
Ivy Vainio
Date: May 3, 2013
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Approved by:

Martha J. Einerson, Ph.D., Chair

Brent Notbohm, M.F.A., Member

Ephraim, Nikoi, Ph.D., Member
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to everyone who knowingly walks into a world they did not grow up in for the betterment of others.

Know you are not alone.
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Acknowledgements

First, I want to say chi miigwech (big thanks) to the seven participants who participated in this project. Each of them willingly and openly shared their important life transitions, familial interactions, and what is truly important to them. Sometimes we laughed and a few times we cried together. Overall, I learned from each of them and because of their participation I am a better person. I am truly honored by the gift of meaning and understanding that they gave me during this process. In hindsight, and maybe even symbolically during the interview process, I felt their guidance and encouragement for me as a fellow Anishinaabe graduate student to carry on in their footsteps. Many told me that their academic and professional success was an obligation to give back. What a humbling gesture. Chi miigwech for giving back.

Second, I want to say chi miigwech to the incredible faculty and staff of the Department of the Communicating Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Superior: Dr. Martha J. Einerson, Tom Notton, Dr. Keith Berry, Dr. Ephraim Nikoi, Brent Notbohm, Dr. Tara Kachgal, Scott Smith, Susan Stanich, and Sherry Chuzles. Each of you have played a very important role in my graduate school education, and life in general. You helped me to believe in myself when I doubted my ability to achieve academic success. With each course, each paper written, each presentation, each time I came by your offices just to talk, our visits at Starbucks and the Olive Garden – all of you made time for me, encouraged and supported me. I am forever grateful. I also would like to thank the Jim Dan Hill Library staff and in particular, Alison Stuke and Carolyn Caffrey Gardner, the reference librarians who helped and guided me through all of my graduate research.
papers and my thesis project. I don’t know what I would have done without your help. Miigwech.

Finally, I give my chi miigwech to my loving and supportive family. I believe that family is most important. Obtaining my Master’s degree has been time consuming, and stressful at times but Arne and Jacob you have always been there for me. Miigwech, for always understanding when I wasn’t fully present at home when I was doing homework or when I was stressing out about an upcoming presentation or research paper. You two will always be my number bezhig. Your love, care and support for me carried me through this project and my graduate education. Miigwech ni mama for being my biggest cheerleader, counselor, friend, sounding board for ideas, supportive mother, and for always being there for me when I needed to discuss this project. You always had open ears and an open mind. After May 18, you can set the table up anytime for “hand and foot.” I’m in for going for the championship round.
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Abstract:

This research explores how seven Ojibwe adults talk about cultural ways of knowing in their education, professional careers, success, and overall life experiences. More specifically, this research examines participant experiences with identity negotiation, familial communication practices, support, and educational transitions when they left their Ojibwe families to attend college and/or advanced studies while walking in two cultures. Conducting in-depth interviews provided valuable insight into cultural values, old and new traditions, familial support, issues with acculturation and transitions, and the definition of success. Four cultural themes emerged in analysis interwoven throughout the talk of each participant’s lived experiences including, effects of intergenerational boarding school experience, importance of family, college experience, and success. This research provides a better understanding of ethnic identity and cultural issues surrounding these participant’s intercultural and interpersonal transitions with family, education and professional careers. Findings and conclusions have the potential to help better prepare and inform American Indians, and others, as they negotiate the sometimes tumultuous waters of traditional family expectations and intrapersonal sense of obligation, on their academic journey to finding success in dominant Western culture.
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**Key Definitions:**

Ojibwe: A term used to describe a tribe of North American Woodland Indians. Government official term is Chippewa. Different tribal bands (communities) of Ojibwe are located throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, North Dakota and Canada.

Anishinaabe or Anishinaabeg (plural): means “first people” in the Ojibwe language. It is the preferred term used by traditional Ojibwe people especially by those who know and speak the Ojibwe language. Both forms of this word are used interchangeably. Identifying oneself as Anishinaabe(g) is a symbolic act that when spoken takes back the power of naming and labeling.

The terms Ojibwe, Anishinaabe, American Indian, Indian, and Native are all used interchangeably in this research proposal. These terms are used and interchanged freely in speech and written communication by many of the Ojibwe people that I interact in social and academic situations. Even though Anishinaabe(g) is the traditional term I personally feel comfortable with using any of these terms to describe this cultural group of people.

Traditional: A way of life for American Indians who practice the ancestral rituals, ceremonies, customs and values.

Dominant Western culture: Refers to the majority of individuals, organizations, and institutions (European White Male) who hold the majority of power, influence, and privilege within contemporary U.S. culture. Values associated with this culture are individualism and capitalism.
1.0 Introduction

“You act like you are white!” These were the first words out of my husband’s Ojibwe grandmother’s mouth when he told her, on her deathbed, that he was going to quit his job and go back to school to become a medical doctor. His Ojibwe cousins told him, “You need to get a real job,” because working in the woods is more of a job than going to school. Comments and perspectives like these can have a damaging affect on the person hearing those words, especially coming from family members. These words can serve to hold people back from moving forward. Many Native youth have been discouraged (intentionally and unintentionally) by their families when they try to break away from the family unit, break away from their circle of friends, and the reservation and/or urban setting, and choose a path in dominant (White) society. Conversely, some have been encouraged and fully supported with their life decisions.

In this research, I will explore how American Indian identity changes when individuals break away from their traditional Ojibwe/Native family units and have to compete, in nontraditional/Western ways, (which is many times a foreign concept of living and thinking for many Native individuals) and become successful in dominant Western culture. I will explore and examine how participants talk about the communication that occurs during the transition phase that many Native young adults face when they decide to leave their families, friends, and home communities to attend college. Specifically, I am interested in how the participants talk about the communication practices, experiences, and stories of having gone through higher education and advanced study to become what dominant culture considers successful.
This interpretive thesis project utilized individual, depth interviews with seven Ojibwe individuals who have self-identified as being ‘successful’ in dominant Western culture and who are in professions that include medicine, teaching, tribal administration, the media and literature. Through interviews and subsequent thematic analysis, I examine their talk and stories about cultural transitions from leaving their family to attend college and potentially negotiate cultural identity and norms to feel accepted or to “fit in” to their new scene. I am also interested in how participants talk about their experiences of cultural encouragement or discouragement by their families and close friends. Further, how do participants talk about competing in dominant Western culture as a traditional Native person and what does that mean to them. Does being successful in dominant culture change their traditions and traditional way of looking at the world?

The late Lakota author and professor Vine Deloria, Jr. stated that there is a difference in how Native and non-Natives view and value education in his book, *Indian Education in America* (1991). Deloria (1991) stated that education in the American Indian traditional setting “occurs by example and not a process of indoctrination” and that elders are respected and viewed as the “best living examples of what the end product of education and life experiences should be” (p 23). With non-tribal peoples, Deloria explained that they tend to “judge their heroes more harshly and that they expect a life of perfection” (p. 23). Deloria also stated that accomplishments within traditional tribal education are regarded as the accomplishments of the whole family and not to the whole world and that traditional knowledge enables individuals to see their place and responsibility within the passage of history. Formal education he adds helps individuals to understand how things work, why they work and being able to make them work is a
symbol of a professional person in society. He goes on to state that for “many Americans there is no personal sense of knowing who they are, so professionalism always overrules the concern for the persons” (p. 23). Robinson-Zañartu (1996) adds that American Indian ways of knowing is neither linear nor hierarchical and that traditional learning concerns all life and its interrelationships which include sensory, cognitive, emotional and spiritual aspects that are all drawn together into relationships in order to affect and change perceptions (p. 378).

One primary goal in this project is to gain new insights on cultural ways of being, thinking, learning, adjusting, negotiating identity and relationships, and finding acceptance from those Native people who have walked in two worlds by attending college/professional school in dominant culture. Another goal is to honor the research participant’s voices and lived experience. The findings and conclusions have the potential to help better prepare and inform people as they negotiate the tumultuous waters of traditional family expectations and judgments, as well as success in dominant Western culture.
2.0 Review of Literature

Brief History of the Anishinaabeg.

One way to learn about the Ojibwe people is to look back through history at the origins of the people. Some people get their information by reading books and others from the source themselves. Many believe, as does Ojibwe historian, author, and professor Anton Treuer (2010) that, “The ancestors of the Ojibwe were not living in what is now called Minnesota but could be found throughout the northeastern part of North America and along the Atlantic Coast” (p. 5). The traditional stories that are told tell that our ancestors were guided by a giant miigas (conch) shell in the sky that led them to where ‘food grows on the water.’ This food was manoomin or wild rice. Ojibwe people would settle throughout the Great Lakes region all the way into what is now known as Canada, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, North Dakota and Montana. Some of the older traditional stories state that the Ojibwe people were always here. According to Ojibwe traditional elder and author Jim Northrup, who had heard this story from a medicine man, “Old stories say that we were created here but because of the glaciers that came through 16,000 years ago we had to leave four different times and each time we came back. The Ojibwe people would settle around the rice lakes where the food was found in Minnesota and Wisconsin areas” (J. Northrup, personal communication, October 2011). Many non-Indian people believe, and have been taught in the educational system, that Indians crossed the Bearing Strait long ago to immigrate to the Americas but many Indians and Ojibwes don’t believe this because of their traditional oral creation stories.

According to Anton Treuer (2010), “Sometimes referred to by historians and linguists as Algonquian or Algic, this indigenous people eventually spread out and
diversified throughout the continent. Today, twenty-seven different tribes trace their origins to this mother group. All of those tribes share some common features of language and culture…” (p. 5).

Ojibwes, and many other Indian Nations, were nomadic in that they moved their settlements along with the four seasons. They lived in harmony with the land – taking only what they needed to survive and always as a collective unit. Anton Treuer (2010) stated, “The Ojibwe primarily lived in dome-shaped, birch covered wigwams.” (p. 8). He also stated that, “Ojibwe culture revolved around the concept of reciprocity. Tobacco (a sacred medicine from the Creator), food, and other gifts were offered with any harvest of plants or animals from the natural world for food, lodges, clothing, or medicines.” (p. 8)

With the European invasion came new laws and government policies/restrictions that placed Indians onto land bases called reservations to where Ojibwes and others tribes could not travel to hunt, fish, gather berries, and harvest manoomin (wild rice) and maple sugar that they were accustomed to. They were encouraged to assimilate to the new dominant culture and become farmers and change their lifestyles to accommodate the new immigrants. Christianity was introduced and sometimes enforced. Indian children were taken and sometimes stolen from their families and homes to attend Indian government funded boarding schools that were hundreds of miles away and were educated in White European, Christian ways. With these detrimental changes came a loss of culture, land, language, identity, and the traditional roles of parenting with many American Indians. What this shows is that “Both history and the present are rife with examples of cultural groups whose pasts have been lost. Studies of displacement and forced assimilation have long pointed to how detrimental these can be to cultural identity
and in turn to mental, emotional, and physical well-being” (Bammer, 1994; Adler, 1995; Papadopoulos et al, 2004) – in fact, the effects of losing one’s cultural connections and sense of continuity, which describes the relationship to an environment over time and ideas about permanence, stability, and familiarity (Hayward, 1977), can carry forward through generations” (Hadjiyanni, 2002).

Today, Ojibwe people live all over the United States on reservations, while some live in urban and rural areas. Some live and work abroad. All Ojibwe Bands (or communities) have their own tribal governments as well as medical and law enforcement facilities on the reservations and in some urban areas. With time comes change, adaptation, and evolution. Many Ojibwe have stepped away from the traditional ways and don’t follow the spiritual/cultural ways of their ancestors, but some still do. With the historical progression of loss of the Ojibwe language and cultural ways, several people and reservations are promoting revitalization of the language and culture through higher education courses and language gatherings. There are many Ojibwe who still live by the seasons like their ancestors did. Jim Northrup and his family harvest and process manoomin (wild rice) in the traditional way (without machine processors) in the Fall. They collect birch bark in the spring to make birch bark baskets using only traditional and natural materials, which they use during their processing of manoomin. This helps sustains them in the physical, spiritual and familial sense. In late winter, they harvest maple sap from maple trees and process it in the traditional way.
Interpretive Communication Theory

Interpretive research is grounded in the desire to understand meaning through social action. This collective understanding occurs between researcher and research participants wanting to find answers to social issues through lived experience and communication. Interpretive research is a holistic approach of gaining meaning by taking on several viewpoints, perceptions, and even biases to a scene where the researcher and the researched are equal members in their roles at finding the meaning to life issues. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) state that, “Very little is linear about it (qualitative research). Very little of it can be controlled in the strict sense” (p. 66). Further, qualitative researchers are usually found researching in the fields that hold significance to them to the field, as researchers but also to the researched, and that’s what brings them the curiosity of how people in a community live and make meaning from their cultural environments (p. 68).

Identity theory informs my research. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2008), this identity communication theory incorporates three cultural contexts of identity, which are the individual, the community and the society, (p. 89), and all three identities are always interchangeable (p. 90). Littlejohn and Foss (2008) also state that communication is what helps create identity but it can also change (p. 89). Identity can be shaped by what the individual communicates about themselves and also what others have to say about them and through other nonverbal interpersonal interactions. This concept leads right into Identity Negotiation Theory, which correlates with this research project specifically relating to when Ojibwe people seek education in non-traditional Western dominated institutions they are not accustomed to. According to Martin and Nakayama
(2010), each person will define themselves in relation to others within their cultural group but also that people need to have differentiation from within their groups (p. 166).

Further, managing involvement with intercultural groups can create boundary rules where individuals need to work through the potential tensions that can occur between someone feeling included and feeling different within these groups (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 166).

Littlejohn and Foss (2008) explain, “one’s identity is always emerging from social interaction” (p. 90). Also one’s own identity or self reflection imagery can exist through “negotiation whenever we assert, modify, or challenge our own or others’ self-identifications” and that this negotiation process happens when we are very young and with our families (p. 90). From the time that we are very young toddlers we start to learn various social and personal identities from parental beliefs, values, and assumptions.

Ceginskas (2010) supports this in that during our childhood and adolescent development we are designated to certain socializations and are introduced to the very cultural life systems that we were born into (p. 211). Ceginskas cites Erickson (1963) in that individual ways of knowing are learned through imitation and demarcation from family members and parents, also by interactions with their peers, which become significant during adolescence (2010, p. 211). Through social interaction with our families and close friends, we develop our cultural identity through the accepted norms and values of those close to us. Educational systems and institutions make an impact on individual’s identity as well. Ceginskas goes on to cite Durkheim (1956) and Erickson (1963) that in every society education is a tool that is used to create a homogenized socialization of students.
into one conformed dominant cultural framework that affects how individuals further develop their identity in how they see themselves (2010, p. 211).

This research examines the lived experience of Ojibwe individuals who have made the decision to attend college and professional/graduate school. Further, this research looks at how these individuals transitioned “away” from their families and how they may have negotiated their own identity and values as an Ojibwe person within Western educational systems, and perhaps within their own families. Identity negotiation happens through communication. Communication occurs through verbal and nonverbal acts in regards to how positive and/or negative communication is used towards individuals. For example, in Sherman Alexie’s novel “The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian,” when the protagonist, Arnold Spirit, tells his best friend Rowdy that he is leaving the Spokane Indian Reservation to attend the all white school in Reardon, his best friend – his only friend - shuns him by yelling at him, “You always thought you were better than me,” (p. 52). Many Native young people experience this kind of negative communication either from their friends and/or close family members when they decide to leave the family structural unit and community to gain life experiences that will enhance or better their livelihood. As my husband’s grandmother who told him, “You act like you are white.” Just as families and friends can discourage someone from attaining their personal and educational goals, there are many that encourage their family members with going onto college.

American Indians, in general, have had to make many transitions in life to become what is deemed successful in dominant society. Many had to overcome poverty, family biases, and Western academic structures which in turn have made Native
individuals look inside themselves and question who they are but also negotiate their own identity within outside, foreign-to-them, cultural scenes to reach their achievement goals.

**One of these things is not like the other**

According to Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Roberts, and Romero (1999), ethnic identity is a “critical component of the self-concept” and they associate this with other aspects of identity and see its importance during the adolescent years (p. 301). As I reflect on my years growing up, I always knew I was different from those around me. My mother and maternal grandmother are tribal members of the Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe. I never knew my Bahamian immigrant father. My grandmother is the daughter of Frances Beargrease and John Scott Mercer, Sr.. Growing up I always knew that I was part Indian. But it was not explicitly discussed within the family. Out of my family, my grandmother and some of her siblings were the only ones that looked somewhat different from the rest of my family because she has darker skin and some Native facial features. I remember only one Native boy named Robin who I went to school with who was in the grade level above me. He was adopted into a white Christian family in the next town. Out of the whole school, he and I were the only ones who stood out because of our skin color. Then in 5th grade something happened at the beginning of the school year. The elementary school introduced the student body to their new school principal, Mrs. Finley. Mrs. Finley was an African American woman. She was the only person of color that I knew while growing up in my small rural town, and surrounding area, that was in a prominent position. Students, even in our young years, didn’t like her. I was confused by her so I joined their dislike of her. I now know that I was trying to fit in with my classmates by negotiating my own identity.
The only Native Americans that I saw consistently while growing up were in the western television shows where the Indians were portrayed as heathen savages or in crime shows where, if there would even be a Native American in the cast, he/she would be the criminal or shady individuals that you couldn’t trust. The media in the United States remains one of the most powerful teaching tools in America and throughout the world (Sanchez, 2003). Many people form their ideas, perceptions and assumptions, in and outside of formal education, based on their own lived experience but also by what they view on television, on the big screen, the internet, in advertisements, by what they read in newspapers, and what they hear on public radio programs. What people hear and see influences their perception of reality.

Neil Diamond is a Cree filmmaker who grew up in a traditional Native village near the Artic Circle. Diamond challenged our realities and mediated assumptions of American Indian identity by producing the 2009 documentary entitled, “Reel Injun.” The film takes a historical, yet personal, look at the portrayal of American Indians through cinematic enterprise. He states in the film that as a kid growing up, he never identified with the Indians in the movies, only the cowboys.

Diamond shows the viewers of his documentary that Indians were cast and portrayed either as the hero or as the heathen savage from the silent film era to the late 1980s, when more Native filmmakers started to make films. Overlying the silent films, were Westerns where John Wayne’s violence against Indians was accepted, to contemporary films and TV shows that were Native-focused with a sense of shaping identity of, and for, American Indians. The late Russell Means, a Lakota activist and American Indian Movement founder, was interviewed for Reel Injun along with other
well known Native actors, activists, and non-Native filmmakers. Means reflected that he and his siblings would go to the movie theater and watch Westerns, where they always sided with the cowboys, and immediately after walking out of the theater, other kids or people would yell, “There are the Indians!” and that those real life scenes always ended in a physical dispute. Diamond stated that to see ourselves (American Indians) in “real” scenes and stories on the big screen is a powerful thing and with the new age of cinema will come a new identity for American Indians that will, as Cheyenne/Arapaho filmmaker Chris Eyre states, be “progress in which the gaze will be ours and that we are only asking to be portrayed as humans” (*Reel Injun*, 2009).

The first time I ever saw an American Indian in a professional setting was in college in 1987. I took an American Indian Studies course taught by Larry Aitken, a full blood Ojibwe person who taught within the American Indian Studies Department. I had an instant connection to him and we are still friends. Dr. Bob Powless, another faculty member within that same department, was one of my professors in the latter part of my college education. He is a full blood Onieda from Wisconsin. He was the first Native person that I had met with the letters Ph.D. after his name. Because of people like Dr. Powless, Larry Aitken, and the other Native faculty in that program, I graduated with an American Indian Studies minor and this led me on my own cultural identity road to self-affirmation and self-awareness.

Parasnis and Fischer (2005) wrote an article that looked at the impact of diverse educators among ethnic-minority hearing impaired students at a university in New York, that to be successful in retaining minority “deaf” students is to increase the number of minority educators so that those students and all students can benefit from having
positive role models (p. 343). These researchers interviewed minority faculty and staff at the university and found out that having diverse academic role models are beneficial for several reasons. They also learned that the lack of minority role models in the developmental formative years is why it is important now that minorities need to be seen in the environments of where they work and that having minority role models encourages self-confidence because it shows the viewer (the students) that success can be achieved. One of the research participants revealed in their interview, “Seeing a role model like themselves gives the students something that they can strive for” (2005, p. 344 -345).

**Differing Cultural Values and Identity Negotiation**

Differing cultural values among varying cultural groups in regards to social action, speech acts, competitiveness or lack of it, living in harmony with the natural world, and respect for authorities and/or elders can be examined to understand how misunderstandings can lead to negative intercultural interactions. To understand this concept, one could address and understand the concepts of varying worldviews and beliefs. According to Robinson-Zañartu (1996), worldview “is a set of belief systems and principles by which individuals understand and make sense of the world and their place in it” (p. 375). Burk (2007) also explained that in traditional education Native students are culturally taught not to be competitive (p. 6). Deloria (1991) outright explains that competitiveness is considered a “crude behavior” within Native traditions and that dominant society’s education system is designed for competitiveness by measuring oneself against their peers (p. 63). Burk also cites Pewewardy (2003) who stated that the social construct of the act of competitiveness in dominant classrooms does not fit with Native students’ cultural values of harmony and mutual collaboration (2007,
Robinson-Zañartu explains that for concepts such as those dealing with identity and cause-effect relationships to have meaning, there needs to be an inclusion of cultural relevance. If those concepts are devoid of cultural wisdom and relevance, such as in classrooms and other societal interactions, they will appear to be culturally insufficient, which means the end result will leave misunderstandings and feelings of exclusion (p. 375).

A significant cultural value with many American Indian tribes, including the Ojibwe, is the value and importance of family. The focus on family connectedness is a key value within many non-Western cultural communities in which they are seen as collective units relying on each other for support and guidance. This is in contrast with much of Western culture, where individualism is more highly valued.

Machamer and Grover, 1998; Mankiller, 1991; Pewewardy, 2003 all exclaimed that Native Americans see family as an extension of themselves, which in turn helps in providing a sense of cultural identity and values consisting of confidence and security (Burk, 2007, p. 7). Deloria exclaimed that “the family was rather a multi-generational complex of people and clan and kinship responsibilities extended beyond the grave and far into the future (1991, p. 22).

There are many cultural reasons why a family would support their loved one to further their education. For example, education is seen as everyone working together in supporting that person to succeed, which will positively come back to the whole family as it will also be witnessed by the community. However, many parents and grandparents have been students in the boarding school era and with the cultural, physical, psychological, and sexual abuses that occurred, many Native children that experienced
this harsh reality— are now parents and grandparents of current students, and so mistrust the dominant educational systems that once mistreated them. Grandbois and Sanders (2012) note that “Native Americans and the elderly among them are continually confronted by daily traumas that often result in what has been called “soul wounding” by indigenous researchers Duran, Duran, Yellow Horse Brave Heart, and Yellow Horse-Davis (1998)” (p. 389).

I work in Multicultural Affairs with the responsibility to recruit and retain American Indians, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino American students. Throughout my twenty years of working in multicultural affairs offices, I have worked with countless students who have struggled and overcome many barriers to graduate with their Bachelor’s degree and sometimes their Master’s degree. Some lose their way on their educational journey. Many of the barriers include finances, not feeling secure in their new environment, and family. All play a big role in their decision of staying enrolled in school. Many students get home sick, and no matter how much intervention and support they receive at the school, homesickness can make them drop out within their first year. Another challenge is being able to transition into a new academic cultural scene that is different and difficult for most traditional American Indian students to understand.

Quite a few years ago, I worked with a Native student from Canada. She grew up in a traditional home on her First Nation Reserve. She was recruited to the university to play sports. She came by the office to meet me after I had sent out a welcome message in which I stated in my email signature that I was African American and Grand Portage Ojibwe. She stopped by shortly after receiving that email and we talked at length about
her life. I remember her looking at my office door that was covered in photos of past students. She pointed at all the Native students and asked me about them. After that first meeting she would come by often to visit. More into the semester she didn’t even have to tell me that she was homesick. I could read it all over her. I tried my best to stay connected with her but she only stayed one semester and dropped out to go back home to the reserve. I heard later that she moved in with her boyfriend and that they had a child together. She was so far away from home and her family. I believe that those family strings were so strong they pulled her back home.

There was an Ojibwe student that transferred from a tribal community college in northern Wisconsin. He had grown up on the reservation and was immersed in Ojibwe culture and traditions his entire life. When he transferred here he was in his mid-twenties. He lived in the residence halls for non-traditional students. Even though he became active with the Native student organization on campus and felt a cultural connection, he didn’t fare well in academics because of cultural obligations that pulled him home. For example, an Ojibwe funeral is four days long before you have the traditional ceremony for the passing of the spirit over to the spirit world. There are cultural obligations before and after the funeral ceremony. These and other ceremonial obligations are top priorities for traditional students and result in missed classes. These differing values can be misinterpreted by faculty who misunderstand the culture leading to the non-retention of American Indian students. The student that I mentioned dropped out of school in his second semester and went back home to his reservation, and is there to this day.
At the university where I work, our office held a multicultural student gathering with acclaimed visual artist Wing Young Huie. He recently spoke to a very diverse group of about sixteen students. There were Ojibwe students, African American students, Hmong students, Japanese students, and a couple of Caucasian students. Huie inquired with the group to talk about how they see themselves and how they feel that others perceive them. A rich dialogue began. There were two students whose mothers were Caucasian and fathers were African American. In both situations, the two biracial students exclaimed that they both lived with their white mothers while growing up and their mothers were the positive parent who encouraged the notion of going to college and staying the course when times got tough. They both exclaimed that their black fathers who they didn’t grow up with, were the first to discourage them from staying the course when times got tough. One exclaimed that when she once talked to her dad on the phone about feeling like she couldn’t handle all the course work in her classes. He told her, “Just quit and come back home. You don’t need to be up there… you can be home with us.” However, one African American student spoke up and stated that both of her black parents were supportive of her and her college education almost to a fault. They wouldn’t even let her come home for a funeral of one of her close friends because they didn’t want her to miss out on attending her classes.

I have seen both types of familial support, or lack of it, in my many years of working in higher education, especially with Native families who have grown up on the reservation. I have also seen many cultural misunderstandings and missed connections between non-Indian faculty and staff that have been a result of non-retention of Native students. Universities need to thoughtfully address this cultural phenomenon to create a
more welcoming space and acceptance for Native students, their culture and cultural obligations, and become aware of Native value systems.

**Acculturation: Trying to fit in at college**

In regards to education, American Indians, including the Ojibwe, have been marginalized in a Westernized education system, and society, from the inception of boarding schools to current times. According to Robinson-Zañartu (1996), “Native Americans have been expected by the U.S. government, schools, institutions, and religious groups to give up virtually all that was sacred and unique in their traditional life-styles” (p. 375). American Indians face many challenges that include standardized, Western biased curriculum and where the majority of the teaching staff are non-Indian. Even with tribal schools, found on the reservation, where there may be a Native consciousness and themes found throughout the school curriculum and programs, many times their students are ill prepared to “compete” for admission in four year universities. Many students decide to either drop out high school or are encouraged to apply for community college or to a trade/technical school. Those students who do graduate and go on to a higher education institution sometimes find themselves sometimes having to negotiate their identity and cultural values to “fit in” to their new cultural scene. They can also find themselves acculturating to the new academic system to become successful, which can add stress on to familial relationships and cause intrapersonal identity concerns.

Nekby, Rödin, and Özcan (2009) defined acculturation as, “individual changes in attitudes, behaviors, values and customs due to long-term intercultural contact” (p. 942).
This research described acculturation identity as an affiliation to both their ethnic background and also to the dominant culture that they are a part of (2009, p. 939). They explored the potential trade off second generation and first generation immigrant students had with their ethnic identity while pursuing a higher education. They identified four clear acculturation strategies for how students related to their own ethnic cultural background in part with the dominant culture. The first of the four strategies is integration - a strong sense of connection to both your cultural community and the new community. The second being assimilation - a stronger connection to the dominant culture with a lesser connection to their cultural community. The next is separation - defined as a definite strong tie to cultural background and weak ties to the dominate culture. Finally, there is marginalization - referring to weak ties to both the dominant and cultural communities (Nekby and etal, 2009, p. 942.) Nekby and etal (2009) concluded that male immigrant students that identified with both the dominant culture and their own (those who identified with integration strategy) were more successful in attaining graduation than with men who identified with only with the majority culture (assimilated men) or those that had week affiliations with both cultures (those men who associated with marginalization) (p. 938).

Other findings of Nekby and etal (2009) confirm that a student with an integrated identity or what they also call a “bicultural identity” is more conducive to school performance (p. 942). In Nekby cites Portes and Rumbaut (1990) in clarifying that parents who are integrated appear to motivate and encourage their students more than assimilated parents (p.943). Students specific from international geographical regions found that the majority of immigrant students identified with being integrated in their
new society. Farver, Xu, Bhadha, Narang & Lieber (2007) confirm Nekby and et al by stating that “integrated individuals had less acculturative stress and anxiety than those who were marginalized, separated, or assimilated” (p. 187). American Indian students struggle between each of these four strategies of acculturation identities to try to fit in and succeed in their dominant Western academic institutions.

American Indian students struggle with acculturation identity to attain their higher education goals for a variety of reasons. Many American Indian families and individuals have a similar history when it comes to education. Many have been affected by boarding schools where there were forced assimilation practices. Even if the student is attending a higher education institution now, they have had a close family member a generation or two back that have been affected by being a student at a boarding school. This generational experience influences everyone. Many of the boarding schools were governmental institutions that were put into place to enforce assimilation for the Native students to achieve what the founder of Carlisle Indian School, General Pratt, stated, “Kill the Indian and save the man.” Many past boarding school students were literally stripped of their indigenous ways; their hair was cut, their language was beaten out of them, and Christianity was enforced. So many of the great-grandparents, grandparents and parents of students today and are still struggling with the tragic experiences they endured when they were students. Even though assimilation was enforced during the boarding school era, there were students who held onto their traditional cultural ways and so through that life process, they could be considered associated with integrated acculturation identity. Others, because of the harsh experiences they went through, went back to the reservation or urban areas and became marginalized and ultimately lost a
cultural connection to their traditional life because they couldn’t fit in to dominant Western culture. All these experiences influence the education of Native students today.

In 2008, American Indians represented one percent of all students enrolled at colleges and universities in the United States (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). There are multiple reasons for this. One reason for such a low percentage is that it could be the differences found in the value systems between European dominated institutions and non-Western individuals whose values are most times opposite in nature. According to Burk (2007), “the United States dominant values and ways of knowing depicted in college curriculum assume that American Indian/Alaska Native college students will assimilate to dominant cultural beliefs and values in order to acquire a degree in higher education, (p. 1). Burk goes onto cite authors McQuiston & Brod (1984) and Pewewardy & Frey (2002) that our “Western European ideology” infiltrates throughout many of the higher education institutions to where cultural and ethnic minorities and their values are squashed, neglected, or dismissed within classrooms, textbooks, and curriculum (2007, p. 1). This can been seen through a critical lens of unequal power structures influencing marginalized students into negotiating their cultural and ethnic identity to conform to try and try to “fit in” to their new cultural scene at the university or college. Burke goes on to state that most college curriculum, academic standards, textbooks and educators are based on the dominant students’ experiences that refer to a normative paradigm which non-Western, marginalized students experiences don’t match. Their ways of knowing become “problematized” which will turn to “othering” those marginalized individuals (2007, p. 5). This fact makes learning experiences and individual comfort levels unequal, which can result in the non-retention of students of color and/or marginalized students.
because of the value differences and misunderstanding between the cultures. Robinson-Zañartu (1996) supports this thought by stating that schools throughout history “have participated in devaluing Native American languages, cultures, and traditional ways of learning and knowing” and because of this Native students are “pushed out” feeling “frustrated, alienated, and underserved” (p. 373).

Delia Saldaña (1994) looked at acculturative stress with Hispanic students in relation to their minority status stated that, “ethnic identity may more accurately reflect internal factors associated with level of acculturation” (p. 117). Examples include dealing with cognitive awareness, values and loyalty to their cultural ethnic group membership. Reynolds, Sodano, Ecklund and Guyker (2012), citing Utsey, Chae, Brown and Kelly (2002), suggest that another distress happens with many American Indian college students “persistent discrimination and racial microaggressions” are collected in what they term as “racism-related stress” (p. 102). Reynolds et al (2012) state that with this type of racism-related stress, American Indian students will experience situations of alienation, isolation, self-doubt, and identity struggles (Garrett & Pichette, 2000; LaFromboise, Albright, Harris, 2010) (p. 103).

**Success: What does this really mean?**

American Indians have the highest high school dropout rates of any ethnic group, some as high as 96 percent (Robinson-Zañartu, 1996, p. 374). According to Robinson-Zañartu (1996), the insufficient educational systems as early as the fourth grade contributes to this phenomenon as well as other factors, including poverty, health issues and unemployment within society. She directly states “that poverty by traditional Native American standards is defined differently from the economic sense of the mainstream (p.
374). Robinson-Zañartu cites Red Horse (1988) in giving an example of difference in standards by stating that a “gifted” Native American who knew the traditional ceremonies was seen as role model within his community had seen him as a “wealthy” man and in an opposite case he knew of another Native American who was attending school, getting good grades, and was applying to Harvard, but was seen by the tribe as someone who would die in poverty for giving up his tribal traditions for a Western education (p. 374).

Whitney Howell (2012) wrote an article on the professional and cultural life of one of Fort Lewis College’s assistant professors and department chairs. Dr. Boxer is an American Indian woman who grew up on two Indian reservations and in a traditional Native family unit surrounded by culture and values. Boxer was influenced and inspired to go into education by her mother, who consistently encouraged her. She observed Native women work as teacher’s aides at her school while growing up. Boxer was referenced in the article as stating that she feels that Native students see her as an ally and someone that they can identify with. She also stated that her goal is to help the 20 percent of Fort Lewis’ Native students integrate into and acclimate to the Western dominant way of higher education without losing their cultural identity. Her advice to her students, “I tell them that being educated in a Westernized institution should not make them feel less Native…” and “A lot of them struggle to live in two worlds but I try and help them see that they can leave, go to school elsewhere, and then if they choose, return to their communities with new skills. They won’t be outsiders.” (p. 13). This professor must feel a sense of accomplishment and success when she works to help further Native students on their journey to graduation. I feel the same way when working with students of color at my university. Our students of color see me as someone that
they can identify with and know I am there to help them. Working together, we have achieved success in academic and personal goals.

Richard Morris’ research on documenting on how American Indians students viewed higher education acculturation attempts was cited in Bill Eadie’s 1997 article “Rhetorical aspects of American Indian education.” Eadie (1997) explained that Morris described himself as translating “his interviewer’s (Native college students) words and worlds” by being able to walk into two worlds as the students have had to do (p. 12). Morris focused on students who were now working in the dominant culture but who had thought about their past and how they journeyed to their futures. Richard Morris (1997) stated that one of his interviewees, a young Native man in his early twenties who became an engineer, explained that he wanted a good job and a nice home and that he couldn’t get those things if he still lived on the reservation. He stated that his parents discouraged him from becoming an engineer but as he understood it that they (him and his parents) figuratively live in two separate worlds now (p. 160). Another interview that Morris (1997) had was with a 31 year old Native woman, originally from the Southwest, proclaimed that her transformation occurred when she went home from school and that things she once recognized were a part of her were not to her liking anymore. The interviewee stated that her house wasn’t big enough, her friends were ‘dirty Indians’, and she hated her parents for not having her raised in the kind of life that ‘she was supposed to have’ had. The interviewee claimed that she hated everything Indian (p. 161). Her school experience had assimilated her so much that her own identity was in conflict with itself due to the worldviews that students were exposed to while they are away at school (Morris, 1997, p. 161, 162).
Overview

The Ojibwe Nation, as well as many tribal Nations within the United States and Canada, has experienced many detrimental changes throughout history to their culture, traditional forms of education, spiritual ways, natural environment. This has impacted how their members perceive their own cultural identity at the hands of dominant Western culture through forced governmental, religious and educational assimilation policies, and the media. It is difficult to grow up culturally different in a relatively homogenous and individualistic culture. Mediated stereotypes and assumptions only re-enforce the difficulty Native people have in transitioning and interacting in intercultural situations.

There have been very few Native professional role models that Native youth have been able to associate with on a personal level, which can be a limiting factor for success in educational and professional settings.

Individual differences in worldviews, such as competitiveness and living in harmony with all living beings, can cause intercultural problems within educational and institutional systems. A balance is possible by incorporating Native cultural values and teachings within more standardized dominant White curriculum, which will help with retention rates and acculturation issues for non-Western students. For American Indians to be able to walk successfully in two worlds, they have to overcome many cultural and educational obstacles. Native students gaining their graduate and professional degrees are seen as role models, which in turn can encourage and help other Native people to successfully walk in two worlds. Through interviews with research participants, I gained a richer understanding of their experiences of cultural encouragement or discouragement in their transition to higher education, about having to compete in dominant White
culture, and about being successful in and finding out if success changed their traditions or cultural world view.
3.0 Research Methods

Method

How do, and/or what is involved when, Ojibwe youth transition away from their family unit to attend an university where they have to compete in non-traditional (Western) ways to become “successful” in the dominant Western culture? Do Ojibwe students feel like they have to cover their traditional values and negotiate their identity to fit into their new experience of being a student? Were these youth encouraged or discouraged by their families and friends to leave their home community to become college educated? Does being professionally successful in dominant White culture change their sense of traditional ways of knowing and does it change how they see themselves from when they first began their educational journey? I am interested to learn how particular Ojibwe individuals talk about traditional community and their higher education and professional experience in a non-traditional community. How do they walk, talk, and perform while living in two worlds? I explore these questions by conducting depth interviews with participants.

García’s (1998) article entitled, “A Chicana in Northern Aztlán: An Oral History of Dora Sánchez Treviño” demonstrates how interviewing can allow insights into cultural norms of a certain society and gain understanding between interactions with intercultural and interpersonal relationships. Garcia (1998) stated that through her interview she wanted to “glean information from Dora on her experiences as a Chicana in Quincy, to examine what kind of differences or similarities might emerge between her experience and those of other Chicanas in Quincy…” p. 20. This is one of the primary reasons I used in-depth interviews concentrating on the life experiences of Ojibwe professionals.
Everyone has an important story to tell and given the appropriate attention, the listener can learn about an individual’s cultural values and find meaning in their talk about lived experiences. Seidman (1998) stated that the clear purpose of conducting in-depth interviews is to gain an understanding of the experiences of other people and to make meaning from the participant’s experiences told (p. 3). Seidman also states that interviewing, as a method, supplies the necessary and sufficient way to gain inquiry into the understanding and meaning to what people understand of their own experiences (1998, p. 4-5).

The philosophy and approach in this method presumes participants can share their important life situations, decisions, and life histories about their familial and college/professional employment transitions experiences. Furthermore, depth interviews help both of us come to a better understanding of the concepts of ethnic identity and cultural issues surrounding these participant’s intercultural and interpersonal transitions with family, education and professional careers. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) state that qualitative interviews gives deep insight on “understanding the social actor’s experience, knowledge, and worldviews” (p. 173). My approach here involved the utmost trust and respect for the participants as it was important to honor their voices and contributions to my project, and to be mindful and accepting of their shared experiences. Giving the participants a voice is an act that many American Indians have been denied in the past. They often haven’t been included in society as equal members. Discrimination, racism, anti-Indian governmental policies, and media have all worked to silence American Indians. The marginalization of Native people has been well documented, ongoing, and overwhelming. Recently, this phenomena has started to change and Native people in
media, political action, and higher education are starting to have their authentic voices heard. I knew going into these interviews I wanted to honor the individual identity and voice of each participant. I treated each participant’s story and words with full respect by avoiding inference or assumptions about hidden meanings. In this research I work hard to trust the participants’ talk.

I believe depth interviews are a valuable means of gaining interpersonal and intercultural knowledge about important lived experiences. The process of interviewing is, in a sense, like telling oral histories, or storytelling. The Ojibwe teach their young and other tribal members in this fashion. Not until American Indians were forced into White boarding schools, was a written language part of their experience. Listening is an important concept with interviewing but is essential within Ojibwe culture. A sign of respect is to listen with open ears and an open mind while someone is speaking. According to Burk, many traditional Native children learn to be active listeners (2007, p. 7). Similarly, qualitative interviewers must engage in active listening. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), meaningful qualitative interviews require an interviewer that can be trusted and/or is seen as a trusted confidant (p. 171.) I believe my Ojibwe heritage helped to remove the common mistrust a lot of Ojibwe people have of non-Native researchers who want to retrieve data and information for their own benefit.

Participants. I interviewed seven successful professional Ojibwe adults who live in Minnesota and who are enrolled in tribal Ojibwe Bands located throughout the Midwest. Two participants are male and five are female. All are currently employed in professions in the fields of health/medicine, education, tribal administration, and media. All seven have earned their Bachelor’s degrees and five have received advanced degrees.
All left their family community to attend college or professional schools. Each participant had at least one parent and/or grandparent who attended federal boarding school. Participant information is included below:

George is a middle-aged male who is a family practice physician. He grew up in a rural town that bordered a reservation in a traditional Ojibwe/bicultural household. He went to college right after graduating from high school and was encouraged by his mother, but received discouragement and negativity from his Ojibwe grandmother and other family members. He had no family support during his higher education career and it took him a couple of tries at college to see it through. He felt that he had to sacrifice some of his Ojibwe values to become competitive during his time in college (when he became serious about college) and also in medical school. He now practices medicine on an Ojibwe reservation.

Susie Yellowtail is now in her early 40s and is a nurse at one of the local hospitals. She was one of two full-blood Ojibwe participants interviewed. In her early childhood, she grew up in urban settings with only her mother and siblings. The family unit lived a traditional Ojibwe lifestyle and was involved in the cultural and spiritual aspects of the culture. She always knew that she would go to college. She went right after her high school graduation but it also took her a couple tries due to becoming pregnant and other life obligations. Her family supported her during her time in higher education.

Vickie is now in her 50s and is a professor at a local university. She grew up in a bicultural home that followed Catholic beliefs. She is the oldest of 14 children, and they grew up in an urban setting. While growing up, she didn’t know that an Indian person
could be a teacher. She first thought about going to college during her middle school years because she was a student in the gifted and talented program. Her family was impressed with her when she did go to college right after high school. Her transition to college was hard and she dropped out after her first semester. She eventually went back and received her doctorate degree later in life.

Cheryl is in her 50s and is a tribal administrator for one of the Ojibwe bands of Minnesota. Both of her parents were Ojibwe and followed the Catholic religion. She grew up off the reservation in an urban city outside of the Midwest. There was never a time when she thought that she couldn’t go to college. Her family was very supportive. Even though she had a child at 15 years old, she stayed in school and went to college right out of high school. Even with the obstacles she faced, she went on to receive her Master’s degree.

Binesii Kwe is in her late 30s and is an adjunct instructor at one of the local universities. Both of her parents are Ojibwe and followed Ojibwe cultural traditions and beliefs to a certain degree. They grew up in an urban city. She was 21 years old when she first thought about going to college. Her family was supportive overall, although there were some instances of “the crab in the bucket” syndrome that occurred with her mother trying to hold her down. She had a rough transition to college but had lots of support from a college administrator and friend. She went on to receive her Master’s degree.

Gail is in her mid 50s and works for a radio station on one of the Ojibwe reservations in the upper Midwest. Both of her parents are Ojibwe and past boarding school students. She was raised Catholic while some of her relatives followed traditional
Ojibwe ways. Her dad was in the military so she was born and raised overseas. When she was in her teens, they moved to an urban U.S. city and lived there for a couple years. That was the first time that she experienced racism just because she was Indian. They moved back to the reservation in her later teens where she finished high school. She went to college right after high school. Her transition to college was hard and she wanted to quit at one point, but her father wouldn’t let her. She was supported by her family for the most part, but her father put her down and people that held academic degrees.

Kokopeli Man is in his mid to late 40s and works in the Counseling profession. He is the other full-blood Ojibwe that I interviewed. Both parents are from the same reservation in the Midwest and he grew up with the traditions but his parents wouldn’t teach him some of the traditional ways. He is the only one who grew up almost entirely on the reservation. Though, he sometimes lived with his mother in an urban city during the summers. He graduated high school early and went to college. He flunked out after the first year. It took him a few tries at college before he got serious. Kokopeli Man was supported by his mother and somewhat by his father, even though his father didn’t outright state he was proud of him. Kokopeli Man never compromised himself to fit into college or later in his profession. He went on to receive his Master’s degree and works throughout Indian Country and off reservation as a mental health therapist/counselor.

**Interview Guide.** I chose research participants using a snowball sampling method. I knew many of them, some more than others. All participants are seen as professionally “successful” in dominant White culture. They each hold full-time jobs and are known in and outside of the Ojibwe community for their service to the general public as well as Native people.
I contacted each research participant, either by phone and/or via private messaging, and provided a brief overview of my research project. I then asked them to be a part of my research by allowing me to interview them. Each participant that I asked seemed personally touched at the request, and even stated that they were honored to be included. Once they agreed to participate, I collaborated with each on where and when to conduct the interviews. I wanted each participant to feel comfortable in the space, in part to approximate natural conversation. I advised them to think of a place where there would be no interruptions. The interview process, including setting up the interview site, should be respectful and honoring to both researcher and participant. The interviews were conducted in work offices, a library conference room, at their homes and in a meeting space at a local building complex for homeless and low income American Indians.

Out of respect for my participants, I brought to each interview a cultural gift of tobacco (a sacred medicine), cloth, and metal coins. This is a traditional practice and is spiritually significant with the Anishinaabe when someone asks another person to do something for them. This was one of the first things that I presented before I started the interview. I believe that following this cultural tradition demonstrated my respect and thankfulness to each participant and aided in the comfort level of the interview process. I wanted to honor them with this tradition by honoring their spoken agreement to share their experiences. In this way, I worked to set the stage for the interview in honoring their experiences, their time, and their ways of knowing.

After explaining in detail my research goals and objectives, I presented and explained the consent waiver form for them to sign. (See Appendix C.) I asked each participant if I could audio record the interview. I thoroughly explained that only I would
have access to the recordings and that my thesis chair would have access to the
transcripts only during the analysis portion of my project. Once I knew that my
participants were fully informed and had no further questions, I proceeded to ask them
open ended questions about their life and communication experiences growing up, where
they grew up, about their families, if they had any Native role models while growing up,
their transition to leaving their families to attend college, acculturation with attending
college and professional school, and what success means to them. (See Appendix A.) I
developed the research schedule to engage my research participants openly and honestly
about their personal life, cultural, education, and professional experiences. The questions
were designed to let my research participants speak for themselves and to share their
stories. My goal is that by hearing them talk to me about their experiences, I will gain
more interpersonal and cultural understandings about the bicultural processes that many
American Indians go through when they transition through life to be seen in the
community as successful and professional members of society.

I knew going into each interview that I needed to have an open mind and be
cognizant and respectful in my listening. Initially, I was concerned that my assumptions
of people and their experiences might cloud my understanding. I came to the realization
some of my assumptions were quite wrong.

Each interview lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. I assured participants at the
end of each interview that their identity would be held in confidence and that I would
leave it up to them to come up with their own interview name. The names used are ones
that each participant told me to use, each having special meaning to the participant.
Participants were all informed that I would send them a copy of the thesis paper in its
final editing stages for them to read, if they so chose, and also gave them the option that if they wanted to leave out something that they told me, that I wouldn’t include it, and/or if they decided that they didn’t want to be included in the project that I wouldn’t use their information. Every participant stated that they wanted to be included in the project, and most said that they would like to have a copy of the finished thesis project, and that they trusted me with their information.
4.0 Data Analysis

**Analysis Preview.** I used a thematic analysis approach utilizing a system of categorizing and coding data from depth interviews. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) explain that categories are a covering term for certain phenomena that deal with similar concurring ideas found in interviews, such as concepts, constructs, and themes and that categorization is the analytical processing system that sorts the information into properties that are similar (p. 246). In qualitative research analysis, there is a category known as high-inference, which describes a system of finding cultural themes in certain communication texts such as words, phrases and/or sentences that the research participant uses that ultimately means that the interviewer will need to have inside knowledge of the research participant’s culture (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 247). The participants are Ojibwe and I am also Ojibwe so we have that cultural connection. My plan was to look for cultural codes, within the interviews, that fit into emerging themed categories that addressed my research. According to Carl Auerbach (2003), the “coding method is a procedure for organizing the text of the transcripts, and discovering patterns within the organizational structure” (p. 44.) Auerbach (2003) uses a staircase as a symbolic example for what coding is, in that the research moves from a “lower to a higher (more abstract) level of understanding,” in which the lower steps are the “raw text” and the higher steps is your research concerns (p. 48).

Moreman’s (2011) research explored Latina/o-White individuals and how they dealt with living a dual identity. The method that Moreman (2011) used was qualitative interviewing because, “it provides my research participants a forum to organically discuss their lived experiences” (p. 199). He then analyzed the data from his interviews by
dividing the results into four categories (ritual disciplines, the body as text, language as text, and institutions of identity) in which each category related to a larger theme of “construction and negotiation of the “how” of Latina/o-White hybrid identity” (p. 202).

Yung (1998) states that “Giving Voice to Chinese American Women,” the author proclaims that she, as a Chinese American woman, takes pride in her ethnicity through her oral history research the voices of the somewhat silenced Chinese American women, that she interviewed, came to the forefront of their society in that people would learn from their struggles and accomplishments through their own spoken words (p. 130). Yung (1998) stated that she felt it was time for America to listen to her research participants’ histories and that she wanted to be “the conduit” in that process (p. 130). I echo Yung’s purposeful approach in that I want to give voice to seven Ojibwe research participants and empower them by giving them the platform to share their oral histories with me, and potentially others, for my research project. I’m hoping that one day this research paper will be available to those who want to learn from their words, concepts, and life experiences.

**Data Analysis.** At the beginning of this project, I was already thinking of certain people that I would eventually want to ask to participate. I knew that I wanted to get a wide array of people that have gone into the fields of medicine, politics, and education. I had to think long and hard about who I would ask to interview. I knew that they would all be considered “professionals” by people in the community since my research would delve into how successful Ojibwe people transitioned throughout their lives to become professionals. All seven of the research participants have graduated from college and five of the seven hold professional or graduate degrees. All have professional roles/careers
within dominant White culture. I interviewed and audio-recorded each participant in a location of their choice. I sent the audio recorded interviews to a national transcription service. Shortly after each interview, I typed out my own reflection from the field notes that I took at the interview scene about my experience with each participant. Key ideas and answers to questions that I had asked each of them was the information that I typed in the reflection hoping that it would help me digest the overall interview better and help me to begin the process of finding patterns and ideas throughout all of the interviews. Even though I knew all of the participants in some form and fashion, I learned a lot about who they are, how they see themselves, and how those around them (their loved ones) see or saw them during important life transitions. I found interviewing to be a very enjoyable process. There were times that we laughed and times where we cried. In one interview both the participant and I cried twice over her spoken experiences between her and her father.

I manually categorized and coded my transcribed interviews based on the grounded theory approach by looking for cultural codes and ideas surrounding their familial upbringing, transition process to college/professional school, and career life. Auerbach (2003) states that the steps involved in the grounded theory approach relating to coding deal with the research concerns, theoretical narrative, theoretical constructs, themes, repeating ideas, relevant texts and raw texts of the research project (p. 48).

When I received the verbatim interview documents from the transcription service, I read each interview transcription once without taking notes. I read them again and this time I took notes on blank sheets of papers with the interview participant’s chosen name at the top and center of the page. I knew by writing a full reflection of my thoughts about
the interview and writing down what things stood out for me would help me in my preliminary stages of making sense of possible patterns that came up. Each reflection included the location, date and times with a brief overview of the participants’ answers to each question that I asked in the interview. After I was done taking the notes, I took some time away from the transcriptions and actually studied the notes on each participant. After a couple of weeks, I decided to read through the transcriptions for the third time. It was my intent to have my participants’ words become clearer with each pass through the transcripts. Through participants’ talk and voice, I hoped to see cultural ideas emerge that crossed over each participant’s lived experiences, along with their communication interactions with loved ones, and important transitions that dealt with potential identity negotiations that occurred on their educational journey into finding their career of choice.

After my third pass through the transcripts, I designed a grid where I recorded common and uncommon, ideas that emerged throughout the interviews. I marked down topics that demonstrated patterns. Along the top of the document, I wrote down the preferred names that each participant gave me permission to use for them, and down the left side I wrote down the patterned ideas. Then I marked an “X” under each name that the idea was mentioned by the participant. Through this process I was able to find about 50 possible topics and ideas that related to the lived experiences of the participants. However, only seventeen of the fifty topics revealed patterned ideas which happened “across the board/grid” with the majority of participants. The following 17 ideas were mentioned by at least by five of the seven research participants:

• Their parent(s) and/or grandparent(s) attended boarding school
The importance of father’s influence

Importance of extended family

Strong and resilient women in their families

Grew up identity strong

Absence of Native role models during their upbringing

Emulation of someone they respected

Family encouragement regarding college

No big send offs by family when they left for college

College was difficult

Created a sense of community by interacting with Native students on campus

Native college counselors and professors made a big difference

The need to change the racial perceptions that others had of them

Didn’t negotiate their values or themselves while in college

Success means importance of family

Their families (parents, siblings, extended family) see them as no different now than when they first went off to college, and

Now that they are seen in the community as role models, they see it as a responsibility and obligation to empower others in their community

All of these patterned ideas emerged through the participant’s talk on how they became successful within their professional careers.

I believe these initial, patterned ideas shared by the majority of participants were in part due to the questions I asked each of them. My questions were tailored from some of my own personal experiences, and from the knowledge that I have gained from my
interactions with many of my Ojibwe friends, including my husband, surrounding their upbringing, college transitions, and professional career. However, I do believe that as indigenous people, we have a shared collective history and many times, similar experiences. A history that includes poverty, the negative remnants of boarding school, being classified as being “different” from the majority, and still growing up with a strong sense of who we are culturally and where we come from.

After reviewing the seventeen shared patterns of the participants, I was able to integrate the topics down into more refined patterns that create a deeper meaning by connecting similar topics and concepts together among the seventeen into eleven emergent topics that reflect the participants’ lived experiences with upbringing, college and professions.

From the participants’ own words, I share excerpts from eleven of the seventeen patterns that emerged from my interviews. Many participants spoke to me about their family’s experience with federal sponsored Indian boarding schools, the strong influence of particular family members who made a positive difference and impact on their life journey, how difficult the transition of leaving home and becoming a college student was, and their experiences of being a Native student in the college setting, how they wouldn’t compromise themselves or their values during college, and now that they are professionals in dominant society, what success means to them and what it means for them to be seen as role models within the Native community.

Emergent Themes

**Federal Indian boarding schools.** Boarding schools played a negative generational factor in the social, cultural and familial structure of countless Native people
throughout the United States. The boarding schools started in the mid to late 1800s and continued well over a hundred years. If you were to ask an Ojibwe person if they know of someone in their families who attended one of these schools, most would confirm that their parent, grandparent and/or great-grandparent had attended. These schools were detrimental because they took children away from their family units, traditional lifestyles, and home communities, and indoctrinated them into becoming Christianized “Whites.”

According to Ojibwe author Anton Treuer (2010), the United States government had a clear goal to “assimilate Indians into the broader, white culture” (p. 31). And by doing so, the U.S. government built schools in which they took Native children away from their families and sent them to these schools to moralize them. These boarding schools had more to do with taking away their traditional culture than with educating them (Treuer, 2010, p. 31). Treuer (2010) stated that once the new students were taken to the boarding school, which was far from their homes to detract students from running away, their hair was cut, their traditional clothes and belongings were burnt, and they were prohibited from speaking their language, which was a punishable offense (p. 32). Many of these students, along with their parents, lost their once traditionally strong parenting and familial bonding skills, which hindered the cohesiveness of the family unit. Every research participant that I interviewed had a parent or grandparent who experienced their early youth as a boarding school student.

Cheryl told me that her father was taken away from his parents to attend a boarding school and his parents didn’t see him again for seven years. Cheryl shared this about her father’s experience,
My dad was a boarding school kid, so he was fluent in the language before he got sent away. And then, of course, that language use was forbidden once he got into school. So, dad was gone. He left when he was six to boarding school and he didn’t get to come back until after eighth grade because they (her paternal grandparents) just didn’t have the money. You know what I mean? To get him back. (Cheryl, 2012).

Both of Gail’s parents attended boarding schools.

Um, so my parents grew up in boarding schools, a lot of – a lot of boarding schools, different boarding schools. They went to, um – I think they did go to the local schools too, but they also went to, uh, boarding schools. Um, and my mom said because of her experience at the boarding school, she would never send us to boarding school, so we never went to boarding school. And I can’t imagine sending my five year old child away from me for nine months, I can’t imagine how heart wrenching that would be… I can’t imagine what it must have been like. (Gail, 2012).

A strong family influence. All participants shared with me the importance of family, including their father’s influence or values taught to them by strong female family members like mothers, aunties, and godmothers. These close family members and distant relatives, that sometimes weren’t blood related but were considered so by the family, all played an important role in the future success of research participants.

Kokopeli Man, one of two full blood Ojibwe research participants, spoke of his father with a great sense of pride. He shared with me that his father refused to be taught
the traditional ways by his grandfather and that he didn’t really fully understand why. He also shared this excerpt with me,

He (his father) was a loved man in the community because I remember at his funeral, looking back, riding in an ambulance, they used as a hearse (his dad was an EMT), and there’s a place called “The Cutoff” up in XXX XXX (his reservation), and he was being – he had his ceremony in XXXX and the burial was in XXXX. And I was – I remember looking back and seeing all this whole line of cars there, and they were still coming as we were going out of sight… I said man, if I go, that’s how I want to go too, you know, all these people know me and… (Kokopeli Man, 2012).

Cheryl spoke of the strong women that played a major role in her upbringing. She shared with me,

I had the benefit of a lot of strong women around me. My mother. I had a godmother who was a professional woman, and I saw her making her way through the world. I had my aunties… And, those women were protective, they were strong, um, they were resilient. Um, each of them had their own different kinds of struggles that would have been a handy excuse not to have the strength that they had, but there was something in them that made them into formidable women. And it never really occurred to me that you couldn’t be that way. And in hindsight, I’m grateful for every one of them, because I’m the accumulation of their influence. (Cheryl, 2012).

Grew up identity strong. The first question I asked all of my research participants was, “Did you grow up in a traditional Ojibwe family unit that followed
traditional Ojibwe lifestyle and beliefs?” A few of my participants surprised me in that they didn’t grow up with the ceremonies, never had received their Anishinaabe Spirit Name, or participated in cultural activities. My own biased cultural assumptions caused me to believe that the majority of the participants grew up with some cultural/spiritual aspects of the culture. Knowing now after the interviews that the majority of the reasons why their families abstained from cultural and spiritual ways was because of the Christianity or Catholicism they had been introduced to when they were young, and from their forced parents’ and grandparents’ boarding school experience. Although, Western religion had converted these families, most research participants shared their familial knowledge of the traditional ways through a grandparent or extended family members. Only two out of the seven grew up on Indian reservations. All the others grew up in urban cities or rural towns where many times their families were the only Native family in the town or in their neighborhood. Binesii Kwe shared with me,

Um, we weren’t a family that attended ceremonies or anything like that, um, but my mom, as much as possible, tried to make it very clear to us that, you know, we were Anishinaabe… Um, my dad, on the other hand, um, as Indian – as much as he is, always claimed to be White. He claimed to be White even though he acted, acted Ojibwe… He has some mixed identity stuff going on there, but, I mean, the language was important to my mom, so she tried to make sure that we were exposed to situations where we heard the language. (Binesii Kwe, 2012).

Cheryl shared,

But, both of my parents are tribal members... Both were born and raised here on the reservation, except for his time away at boarding school. So I would say I was
deeply embedded in our family and their history, and their stories, and their struggles, and their tribulations, and definitely the values. Um, I grew up a dancer, but I learned how to do all of that in a pan Indian environment at an urban Indian center… So I would say that even though we didn’t have access to the language and access to the culture, and things like that, I definitely knew I was growing up in an Indian household. (Cheryl, 2012).

George answered,

Yes. Um, my mother was, uh, a very traditional Ojibwe and, um, went to Mide ceremonies when she was younger. And she did a lot of things that were, um, spiritual and traditionally Native and, you know, some that she explained and some that I still just do because she did. And, um, it was traditional. She grew up in a traditional family. Her parents spoke primarily Ojibwe when they were younger. (George, 2012).

Absence of American Indian role models and professionals during upbringing. Most of my research participants had a lack of Native role models outside of family members. Usually the answers to my question about if they had Native role models that they looked up to, included a parent, an aunt, and a grandmother. Two of my participants had never met their grandmothers, due to their deaths before they were born, but the family talked so favorably, and with high praise and reverence about them that their grandmothers still had influence on them and their value system. However, there weren’t many Native role models found outside of the family unit and some would mention non-Native people in their lives that made a difference. Examples given were that of a grade school teacher and an Appalachian godmother. When I asked my research
participants if they knew any Native professionals growing up, the majority of answers included the words, *no* and *never*.

Vickie shared with me that her grandmother and aunts were her Native role models.

My, um – my aunts and, really, the – the strong, strong, um, impressions of my grandmother – both of my grandmothers actually. They died before we were born, but, uh, my parents talked about them ad, um – and so I – I really would’ve liked to be like my dad’s sister, ‘cause I could see the things that she had done, and I just – I admire her for this, and so, um, she was not there in person, but she was a – for me, a very strong model. When I asked her about if she knew of any Native professionals while growing up, she shared, “Never. Never. I didn’t even know an Indian person could be a teacher or anything else. No. No. I – it wouldn’t even have occurred to me. (Vickie, 2012).

George shared with me about his lack of Native role models,

I don’t think there were real Native, Native guys that I looked up to because, you know, most of them were, most of them were alcoholic. You know, which is not to say I wouldn’t have looked up to ‘em, but they just weren’t around. You know, we didn’t live on a reservation. We didn’t live, you know, close to a reservation. You know, maybe kind of close, but, you know, my mom had, uh – but, you know, she had a lot of traditional – lots of traditional beliefs and things that we did.” When I asked him if he knew any Native professionals during his childhood he stated, “That’s an easy one. No. There were just – no, there were none.” (George, 2012).
When I asked Kokopeli Man if he had any Native role models while growing up, he stated outright, “Actually no. ‘Cause I don’t – no, I don’t remember particularly wanting to be like anybody.” As for Native professionals, his dad was the EMT on the reservation but outside of that, he shared with me that there was only a teacher’s aide.

**Family encouragement regarding college.** My own personal experiences with having family encouragement when I was young didn’t play out too well. I grew up with my bi-racial (Ojibwe/White) mother who had severe depression that many times would land her for weeks-on-end in the Miller-Dwan Psych Ward. When I was applying for college I remember mostly filling out the application myself, even though my mother was in college at the time I submitted my application. By the way, my mother was the first one in her family to receive a Bachelor’s Degree. A couple years after my mom graduated from the University of Minnesota-Duluth, I became the second person in my whole extended family to graduate from college. My husband’s family didn’t encourage him to attend college and many of my friends, from my past, had similar experiences. So I was surprised when a few of my research participants said they always knew college was for them. The majority of participants stated that their families encouraged them to move in that direction for their academic and personal growth.

I asked Suzie about how her family responded to her decision to attend college. She stated previously in the interview that her mother was a college graduate and education was very important to her.

I think they (her parents) were pretty supportive. I’d say my mom was really happy, you know, to see me off to college… I don’t really remember anything except my mother being pretty happy I was going. “Grandma” (their neighbor
who was really connected to Suzie) next door – you know? She would always write me letters at Flandreau. She’d written letters to Haskell. She’d always end the letters with, “See you in the sun shines.” You know? (Suzie, 2012).

Cheryl grew up with a private school education along with her siblings. She always knew that she would go to college, but due to tribal scholarship funding requirements for college, she had to move back to Minnesota, her home state, to receive the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe education scholarship. She moved away, for the first time from her parent’s home, with a three year old child in tow. She told me that on her school breaks she would always travel back home, by bus, with her daughter to visit her parents. She shared with me,

Oh they were always happy. Just happy I was home, and encouraging, and you know – you know – I don’t know what we ever talked about it. They were just always glad I was home and the baby was home. And, um, you know, just the expectation that I was gonna finish, I think. (Cheryl, 2012).

Gail shared with me that she was always a pretty good student in high school and she liked getting good grades and even competing with other smart kids in her grade. She said that her parents had different expectations for her two brothers than for her. This is what she shared with me,

I know they (her brothers) both tried college and they didn’t like it, they didn’t stay in it, but it wasn’t a big deal because there is vocational training. That was kinda the way with the guys, you know, some kind of vocational training. But for me, there was an expectation that I was going to college, there was no vocational
training for me. [Laughing.] It’s like, no, you’re going to college. That was from my mom and dad. (Gail, 2012).

The transition of becoming a college student. Many participants stated that they received no “big send-offs” from their parents and families when they left for college and that many of their parents, and family members, didn’t understand what college really meant. The majority of participants were encouraged and emotionally supported with their decision, while a couple of them received a somewhat negative response by certain family members when they moved away for college. Many participants were the only Native students in their college classrooms and the majority of them stated that “college was hard” for them during their first time around. Vickie shared about dropping out of school only after her first quarter of college,

Um, and my dad always acted like he was just so humbled by the tremendous ability that we had to go to school. I’m like, ‘Oh, God,’ you know? Um, so I – I I didn’t wanna go. Um, when I’d been to UMD for probably – we were on the quarter system, and I’d been there for about half way through the quarter or so – it was time to register for the next quarter, and I looked and I thought, ‘You know, these classes look really interesting, and I think I’d really like them,’ and then I thought, ‘I – I can’t do this.’ I thought, ‘I have no money. I have no time. I’m not doing well.’ (Vickie, 2012).

George shared with me about his first try at college when he was right out of high school and how right away he was “lost” in the university setting. He told me,

And, you know, I mean within just a few days, there was no reason for me to be in class anymore because I didn’t understand any of it (his coursework). So I
didn’t know I could withdraw from classes. I didn’t know anybody in college. I didn’t have any guidance. I didn’t have any counselors that were telling me what to do and – you know, so I just took a bottle of Jack Daniels and a bag of weed, and I just drove up the North Shore – or wherever – on any given day… And I failed that first quarter and the second quarter. (George, 2012).

Native college faculty/staff members, and students, created a sense of community. A sense of belonging, feeling welcomed, having the support of Native faculty and staff members, and having a centralized place for Native students to be themselves are all components of participants’ college acculturation experiences and overall retention. Depending on who I spoke with, these topics were found right away in their college experience or later when they returned from being away from college. The literature and the participants confirm that having people that looked like them, and resources and programs that were there if they needed help, were a major factor in sticking it out and graduating with their Bachelor’s and/or their Master’s/Professional degrees. Binesii Kwe shared with me about two of her mentors who happened to be Native and one was a college administrator at the community college she attended.

But, um, I think they both just, oh, my gosh, they were both just like the best cheerleaders ever, you know. They both just believed, believed in me in ways that I had no belief in myself, you know. And it was I’m guessing – I mean, I’m, I’m sure part of it was because I had no idea how to believe in myself in those capacities, you know like attaining a degree or whatever, you know, I mean, just, just ways – I don’t know, just things that I hadn’t ever been exposed to, you know, in regards to that time period in my life when I was in college and stuff like
that, those two were just able to really see the qualities in me that I didn’t know really existed, so… (Binesii Kwe, 2012).

Cheryl shared with me when she went to graduate school, and was away from her own family, that she became the family for other Native students who were attending school there.

So, and then funnily enough, when I went to XXXX (university) I hung around with the XXXX University Native American program kids. So, I ended up being auntie because I was older – I was the oldest female that was there at the time because I was in mid-career. And, they all, I think they all fell in love with me at the first potluck when they all walked in with Doritos and Oreos, and I walked in with deviled eggs and brownies. It was like, ‘That’s real food. Did you make that?’ I’m like, ‘You kind of have to make a deviled egg.’ So, from there I knew they were all starving for like-home attention… I grew up in a majority society, and I pride myself in being able to fit in anywhere. But, where I felt most comfortable was with those other Indian students. That was my family away from home. (Cheryl, 2012).

**No compromise.** Many participants never felt that they had to compromise who they were or their values to fit in to their college surroundings. A couple of them did but the majority didn’t. They didn’t feel the need to compromise themselves in any way to be successful in college.

Kokopeli Man shared with me a lot on this subject of not compromising oneself to fit in and how he was “Kokopeli Man” when he was attending the university, while he
was back home, and even within his career. When I asked if he had to put his
“Nativeness” aside to get something accomplished in the classroom, he shared,

Oh, ah, I look at that as being objective, you know, because, um, you know, if I’m
there to learn about a theory, I’m there to learn about a theory… and I think that
changing who we are – I don’t think, um – I don’t think – through it all, I don’t
think I’ve ever compromised who I am. Ah, and – and – and – and I was raised
with some good values from – from XXXX (place of upbringing), from – from
my mom and dad. (Kokopeli Man, 2012).

Vickie shared with me about an elder who told her that Indians could only go so far being
educated because there was too much at stake with personal and cultural identity
compromise.

I was told by an older person once, some years ago, that, um, a Master’s – you
know and – I mean, I was kind of being instructed by somebody, and I just don’t
– [blows air out] – maybe it was just the times – I mean, somebody who said to
me, ‘Well, you know, you can still be an Indian with a Master’s degree, but I –
but going beyond that, I – I don’t think a person can really still be an Indian,
because too much compromise is required.’ And this is somebody who had pretty
good opportunity to observe that, and that was really tough, because then when I
thought of going into this Ed.D. program, I – I really thought about that, and – and
they were right, of course. There is a huge compromise that has to be made… But
I think it takes work without – without compromising, um, what is really, really
basic of what you need to – need to know and need to be. (Vickie, 2012).
**Changing racial perceptions and assumptions of others.** While many participants didn’t compromise themselves throughout their years of higher education, there were a few that felt that they needed to change the racial perceptions of their White peers, professors, and/or colleagues by demonstrating, by example, behaviors and values that overturned their original assumptions. George told me about his medical school student experiences in which he overturned negative racial assumptions that his White classmates and peers had about American Indians to positive outcomes.

I knew it and I could feel when – you know, any minority person can do that – they can feel when, you know, people are thinking about ‘em, you know. And, you know, and I had that always. And even in medical school, you know, when I was in medical school, you know, I could tell that people, you know, weren’t expecting me to excel and were expecting me to struggle and have a hard time and need a tutor and a whole bunch of other stuff, you know. I was the tutor, you know. And not just for Native students. I was the tutor for a lot of students and even medical students… You know, and having people at first, you know, think that I was there, you know, to fill a quota and because they needed a Native student, you know. And, you know, and all of a sudden them realizing that that wasn’t the case at all, and then that changing the way they even looked at Native people… And, um, - but when I was at Hennepin County, there was these – there were these two girls from Germany that, that were there. And you know, when we started on the six-week rotation, you know, they both thought that same thing: that I was there to fill a quota, that I wasn’t be – gonna be good at what I did, that I came from out West and I rode a horse. And, um, and in that six weeks, by the
time they left, they, they actually came up and they both of ‘em together told me, ‘You totally changed the way we look at Indian people.’ (George, 2012).

Vickie shared with me her experiences while in graduate school about having to change perceptions about her as being a Native woman. Sometimes. Or sometimes I had to change my, um – the way I would, um – the way people in charge, um, perceived me. But I didn’t wanna change myself. And it’s very hard to do anyway, because – I mean, there comes a point where you can’t really fool people anyway, and they – just know who you are and where you come from, and if they’re the kind of people who would think that you were less, they’re going to think that anyway. (Vickie, 2012).

Kokopeli Man shared,

But I do like to surprise people when they think I’m just an old dumb Native dude, you know. I’ll listen to them for awhile and then open my mouth, and then they know that okay – ten seconds, they know they’re [laughter] – wait a minute. We’re dealing with someone we didn’t think we were, you know… I love when that happens [laughter]. It doesn’t happen very often, but I love it when it does, you know [laughter]. (Kokopeli Man, 2012).

**What success means.** When I asked participants what success means to them almost everyone mentioned family. The majority of them also stated that they felt that their professional success was an obligation to give back to their families and communities. When I asked Suzie what success means to her she told me,

I think by setting a goal and then having the motivation to complete that goal and finish. I think that’s success in one form. You know success could mean – for
me I think I’m successful in my family because I have great kids and a good husband. That’s successful. (Suzie, 2012).

In my interview with Cheryl, she expounded on the time she became pregnant at fourteen years old and had a baby at fifteen years of age.

You know I might have made it difficult at the end by choosing to have a child young. My parents still supported me, allowed us to live in the home. They didn’t have to. You know what I mean? There’s no expectation they have to take care of me with a child, but they did. I guess I never took it for granted that, you know, being a part of a family does come with obligations. I wanted to make them proud. I wanted them to feel like it was worth it, and I wanted them to feel that, um, you know, maybe the path was a little crooked now and then, but it led to the right place in the end anyway. Um, so and I saw how hard they worked, and it wasn’t my success. It was all of ours. They owned it as much as I did. (Cheryl, 2012).

George spoke to me about his father’s suicide and how that made him stronger. He shared with me his love and value for his family.

My father’s suicide was a gift. It’s the only thing he could give me and, uh, you know, to make me stronger. And, and, you know, and - you know, and I have all that, and I have, you know, I have a wife that I love and a son that I love, and you know, this job that I love. (George, 2012).

**Being a role model.** All of my research participants are currently seen as role models within their communities due to their academic and career achievements.

Everyone was humble in their responses to me about this role model status and most felt,
again, that there was a sense of obligation that goes with a title in helping others to see that success is possible if they are willing to work. Kokopeli Man shared with me when I asked him how it made him feel to know that he is a role model,

I don’t know. I – I think, first, I’d have to accept that I am because it’s – you know – there’s a – there’s a humble, modest part of me that won’t look at it that way. But I do know that I’ve always – and I will continue to be that way. If any of these Native young people come up and talk to me, I’m more than willing to help them professionally or personally. (Kokopeli Man, 2012).

George stated,

There’s other Native students, you know – Native medical students even – that you know… that have traveled more than 1,000 miles, you know to come and spend time with me, to – just hang out and we just do clinic days and talk about stuff, and you know, and I let ‘em know that they can still – you know, that they could still be who they are. They can have their traditions. They can still do medicine the way everybody else does it. You know, they can be competent. You know, they can be accepted by their community. And they can – you know, people can have doctors that look like they do, you know, um, be happy you know and be truly, you know fulfilled and, and, you know, that’s – that is success. (George, 2012).

Suzie shared her thoughts on being a role model in her community and how her role model status affects her own family at times.

It’s very empowering. But, I think, you know, my nieces, and maybe my friend’s daughters. You know, when they know that I’m a nurse, I think maybe then they
think, ‘You know, well, if she can be a nurse, I can be a nurse.’ And I always say that to people. ‘Hey, if I can be a nurse, you can be a nurse. We can be anything we want. If I want to switch my career right now and go do something else, I’m sure I can do it. I just have to go to school, sign up, and do it.’ (Suzie, 2012).

**Family acknowledgement of their success.** One of my last questions focused on how participants’ families see them now that they are professionally successful versus when they first went off to college. Participants confirmed that their family members don’t see them as any different with the passage of time and the addition of degrees attached to their names. Of course, they shared with me that their families were proud that they made it through college and graduate/professional school and have their professions of choice, but that they really didn’t perceive them as really changing. Maybe this was due in part to their being raised with value of humility. Cheryl shared with me,

You know I doubt any of this is surprising to them. Do you know what I mean? It’s just a little bit more of the same. Do you know what I mean? And, you know, it’s an evolution certainly, but, um, their expectations for me are probably no different than my expectations for them. You know? You want people in your life to be happy, and healthy. And, I know my family is proud of me, but their pride stems just as much as because I’m a product of their success. Do you know what I mean? They get to own a part of what I do because they know that – they are a part of it, and I couldn’t have done it without them. So my success is their success, too… And, the nifty part about it is they kind of have this feeling that we’re all in it together. That the strength of our collective identity and that we’re
all in it together is one of the things that keeps it all in a healthy perspective. And, when it’s hard, you know, they got your back, and they’re all in together.

(Cheryl, 2012).

George answered,

I don’t know that they see me a whole lot – well, no, ‘cause, you know, ‘cause I write and – so I have a column and then there’s the film. There’s a – I guess I’m on TV a fair amount sometimes, depending. But, um – you know, so people see that – you know, that, you know, I haven’t seen for a long time, that I grew up with, that are friends of mine – that they’re pretty proud of that, you know, that – and, and they weren’t, you know Native people.

But, you know, I think my family, for the most part, doesn’t – I don’t think it affects them one way or another. I don’t think it’s any different. Maybe it is. I’m really close with, uh, my one of my brothers and one sister, and we’re over there most of the time. But [coughs] I don’t know that from a [coughs] from a doctor’s standpoint other than that they know I have to – you know, I can’t make it to dinner sometimes ‘cause I’m delivering a baby or something. Um, I don’t know that – that that’s different. I don’t know that they see me as a doctor, you know. And, you know, the rest of my family that’s been kind of, you know, ‘you think you’re better’ sort of stuff, you know, I’ve – you know, I mean I’ve just have had to distance myself from that. So, um, you know, so I don’t really, you know – I guess I did maybe go away and leave ‘em and, um -.”
Then George, while addressing this made a self-reflection by stating, “I don’t know that, you know, that that, that core part of me I don’t think is any different. Maybe it is, but I don’t think so. (George, 2012).

**Analysis Conclusion**

As I reflect back on my interviews and the patterns that emerged surrounding participants’ lived experiences on their journey of walking in two worlds, I felt that some of the twelve patterns could be integrated into broader themes. My rationale is due to the similar components within the twelve patterns between each participant. I found that a few of the patterns were similar in scope and that they could go under one topic. These broader, condensed or combined, patterns turned into blended themes that relate to the participants’ lived experiences, which include federal Indian boarding schools, family upbringing, college experience, and success. Federal Indian boarding schools is a pattern that stands alone. However, the family upbringing theme includes ideas of strong family influence, growing up identity strong and the absence of American Indian role models and professionals while growing up.

The college experience theme blends family encouragement regarding college, the participants’ transition to college, how Native faculty, staff and students helped create a sense of community, how participants’ didn’t feel the need to compromise themselves or their values during college and professional/graduate school, and their need to change racial perceptions and assumptions of other campus members about them. All of these factors, either negative or positive, played a major role in the academic and professional success of these individuals. The last theme of success includes how participants’ viewed success. Now that they are successful in their professions, they shared their feelings on being viewed as role models.
within their communities, and the participants’ family’s acknowledgement of their success.

The one consistent cultural thread that intertwines throughout each of these cultural patterns and themes is *family*. The importance of family plays an significant role in every aspect, transition, and with traditional values of the participants’ lives, whether it is in regards to particular family members who have been supportive, values learned during upbringing, personal and familial acceptance during college years, and/or wanting to honor or obligate those within the family after finding professional success. What follows are fuller explanations of these broader, cultural themes.

**Boarding Schools.** Every participant that I interviewed had a parent, or both parents, and/or a grandparent who was sent far away from their homes, families and communities to attend a federal Indian boarding school. This government enforced act designed to assimilate Natives was detrimental to the future of many American Indians because it broke the connection between parents and their children. From this separation and loss of identity, culture, language and sense of community developed. Each participant was affected in some way even though this direct action didn’t personally happen to them. They felt the ripple effects from their parents or grandparents’ negative experiences with boarding schools while they were growing up.

Gail shared with me one of her experiences during her upbringing that she wanted to learn the language from her grandmother. She wanted to record her grandmother talking to her in the language. She knew her grandmother was fluent. However, her grandmother didn’t want to share the Ojibwe language with her grandchildren.
… Relatives would come over and they’d be, you know, conversing in their language and, uh, I think after awhile – well, they definitely didn’t pass it on to my mom’s generation because of the boarding school situation and she didn’t want them to, to, uh, suffer more than they already would be in the boarding school, so they didn’t. Well, actually, she said what they said was you’re gonna learn English, that’s what – that’s what, uh, that’s what my grandma told my mom, your gonna learn English [clears throat], because they - that generation felt that was the way to go, you know, uh, that was best for the kids… My mom said because of her experience at the boarding school, that she would never send us to boarding school, so we never went to boarding school. (Gail, 2012).

George shared a similar story with me about his maternal grandfather who was sent away from his family to attend boarding school. He shared with me that his mother’s parents were both Ojibwe and fluent in the language but since his grandfather had gone on to boarding school as a young child that he wanted to spare his children of the mistreatment of living the Ojibwe lifestyle and ways.

And, um, and I don’t know if it – all this stuff’ll come out later, but she (his mother) had, um – my grandfather was in boarding school and he didn’t want, um, any of his kids or any of his grandkids to speak Ojibwe or do Ojibwe things because he didn’t want them to be mistreated. And because of that she ended up running away from home when she was 15 years old. (George, 2012).

**Family.** The cultural theme of importance of family, growing up identity strong, even if they lived off-reservation and/or without the cultural traditions, and absence of Native role models and professionals made an impact on each participant. Most
participants experienced loving and encouraging families. Some participants grew up without learning the traditional cultural ways because of the introduction of Catholicism/Christianity earlier in their family histories, while some grew up with parents who followed traditional ways but wouldn’t share that information with their children. Most participants recognized family members who acted as their role models, but outside of most families, there were no Native role models or Native professionals. This absence likely made it harder for them to grow up without having someone to follow, by example, from their Native community. This can play a role in a person’s success, especially during their upbringing because they may have had no one that “looks like them,” inside or outside of the family, that they can model after and/or even believe that they, as Indian people, could aspire to emulate. But again, family members, can be key in the support and success of other family members as seen through Cheryl’s experience. She shared how the strong women in her family influenced her and shaped how she wanted to become.

Um, you know what? You know, you look back and you kind of think of the people who had influence on you. And, I wouldn’t say that necessarily I had people around that I emulated in terms of wanting a profession, but I definitely did in terms of the people around us and the values that they had, and their more interpersonal qualities. I had the benefit of a lot of strong women around me. My mother. I had a godmother who was a professional woman, and I saw her making her way through the world. I had my aunties, um, that were down there. And, those women were protective, they were strong, um, they were resilient. Um, each of them had their own different kinds of struggles that would have been a
handy excuse not to have the strength that they had, but there was something in them that made them into formidable women. And, it never really occurred to me that you couldn’t be that way. And, in hindsight, I’m grateful for every one of them, because I’m the accumulation of their influence. You know? It’s never really not dawned on me not to speak my voice, not stand up for my family. You know? To be fearful of people, to accept bullying behavior, and you know misogyny and all of that other stuff. I mean, those women would have kicked some ass. Um, figuratively and literally, if they needed to. Do you know what I mean? And, so, you know, I am who I am because I watched all of them. They took care of what they needed to take care of – themselves, and their families. I didn’t have to go through a lot of the things I see a lot of young women go through where they need to find their voice, and find out who they are, and just kind of really struggle with role and place in society. I really got to take a lot of that for granted. You know? And, that’s a real gift to me. (Cheryl, 2012).

Many people in the family and extended family played an important role in how each participant was influenced within their upbringing and throughout their lives to be the people that they have become. Aunties, uncles, fathers, mothers, a grandparent, a ‘grandma’ next door, and even a godmother – Native and non-Native family members guided, informed, taught, and inspired the participants to strive to be more than they were.

**College Experience.** My interviews with most of the participants matched up with some of the literature regarding American Indians who transition away from the cultural home to attend college have a challenging time with acculturating to their new
environment because of either finding themselves the only Native in the classroom, they weren’t prepared for the academic rigor, or they didn’t have the support of Native faculty or staff during their first try at college. Based on our conversations and time together, I believe all but two participants dropped out of college at least once before trying to go back again. One of the two wanted to drop out but her father wouldn’t let her.

Kokopeli Man, who happened to grow up in the heart of the reservation and the birthplace of his parents, tried two or three times at college before he got serious about getting his degree. He shared with me about the first time he applied for college and had to fill out the application himself and there was only an acknowledgement from his parents that he was going to be going away for college. He shared that even though his father was proud of him in his own way, even though he never encouraged or pushed secondary education. Kokopeli Man shared, “But yeah, there wasn’t no big sendoff. And I only lasted a year at XXXX State anyways ‘cause I was either Kokopeli Man, yeah, we’re going to ask you to withdraw, so I withdrew.” When I asked why he had to withdraw, he told me, “There were two groups of people; partiers and the studious ones. I got hooked up with the partiers. That was a tumultuous, fun time.”

Although the majority of the participants had tried college a couple of times before they got serious, many of them were supported by their family members to go to college and earn a degree. There were only two that were not encouraged by close family members that could have held them back on their academic journeys if they would have listened to them. And like Kokopeli Man’s father, who was proud of him for making that decision, didn’t outwardly show that love and pride to his son, like a few of the other participant’s family members. Many participants were encouraged and fully supported
by their immediate families and this helped immensely when making that decision to take that next step in their academic and future careers.

**Success.** Success, for many of the participants, was what George called an “evolving target” or a “moving target.” His meaning of success has changed throughout his lifetime. One consistent symbol of success with almost all participants was a happy and loving family. Many found that being professionally successful was an obligation for them to give back to their own families and/or their communities. Their success within their professions have allowed them to naturally become role models within their own communities and how this fact was hard for some to grasp due to their value system of being humble and not wanting that title. Also, the majority of the participants felt that their families didn’t see them any different now from when they began their academic and professional journey. Although, Gail had stated that her family saw her as “making it” or “making something of herself.” I think all of the participant’s families thought this even though not all of the participants expressed it. Many of the participants were the first, amongst their siblings and/or, in their entire families to become professionally successful. This is why I believe that their parents’ would feel that they truly made something of themselves, professionally speaking.

Binesii Kwe shared with me about how her father was reserved, but happy with both of her graduations. For her Master’s graduation, she shared a personal interaction with her father.

Um, as far as my dad goes, I mean, it’s just like – he’s just – he was just so amazingly like glowing like every time he went to one of my graduation ceremonies. I mean, he just was like glowing and just could not stop smiling, um,
just so happy, and I remember when I, um, [clears throat] remember when my
diploma for my master’s came in the mail – I’ll say this really quick – um, he
grabbed it and he, and he smiled really big and he said, um, ‘I’m gonna go put this
in my drawer,’ and I haven’t seen it since, and that was because he was so excited
and so happy about it. (Binesii Kwe, 2012).

I mentioned above that George saw success as an evolving target. When he was
young he saw success in the form of a truck driver. When he became a physician and
started to make money and was able to buy a brand new car for his wife by writing a
check, then that was success. He came to the realization that a lot of the things that he
owned, actually started to own him. After that realization he found his true meaning of
success, which he shared with me,

And then – and, you know – and there came a time when, you know, I had all of
this – that I actually had all this stuff and, you know, realized that I didn’t really
want it. And, um, and it’s, and it’s not, it’s not that what makes success, you
know. And if it is, if that’s success, then I had it, you know. And – but it’s not. I
mean success is – you know, what I’ve finally come to realize is that, you know,
that I have been given a gift, you know, and not like a gifted child. I mean like I
have been given this gift, you know.

My father’s suicide was a gift. It’s the only thing he could give me and,
uh, you know, to make me stronger. And, and, you know, and – you know, and I
have all that, and I have you know, I have a wife that I love and a son that I love
and, you know, this job that I love. And, you know, and I, and I have bad days,
and, you know, and I have busy days, and I have hard days, and I have more
phone calls with more people asking for things than you can believe. And, you know— but I help people.

And, you know, and I have days when I go— when, I’m driving home from work and I’m just beat— that I, that I think, “I helped every single person that walked through that door.” (George, 2012).

When I asked Cheryl what success meant to her she explained, “Um, a happy family. A happy, healthy family. The ability to be self determined and provide that opportunity for your loved ones. And a feeling that your time contributes to making the world a bit of a better place.”

These four cultural themes of boarding school, family, college experience, and success are threaded together like an Ojibwe floral beadwork patterned design. Each theme has it’s own colored bead placed on a piece of thread that connects the next theme/bead until all four themes/beads are placed next to each other to create the intended design. Sometimes the beadwork artist, much like a researcher, doesn’t know how the colors or patterns will work together until he or she starts to see or understand how all pieces or ideas come together at the end.

Chapter 5 includes interpretive detail and what my assumptions or expectations were going into the project and how some of those assumptions were wrong, and how my interviews coincided or didn’t coincide with the research I reviewed from authors on the subject surrounding Indian education. I will also reflect on what the future holds for this research and what other areas of research could be done in the future regarding Ojibwe, or American Indian education, important life transitions, and professional success while
walking in two worlds – the cultural world of the Anishinaabeg and dominant Western culture.
5.0 Conclusion

This research project began nearly nine months ago and it’s fascinating and enlightening to see the progress from the inception of the project’s focus, to the process of researching authors who have written on similar topics, to gaining inside knowledge through the method of qualitative interviewing seven Ojibwe professionals, and finally the process of analyzing the information gathered from those in-depth interviews. It’s been both a challenging and fulfilling experience.

This project began through a discussion with my husband about potential research project ideas. We came up with the idea of examining the life transitions of Ojibwe professionals who have left their traditional Ojibwe homes and families to attend college and graduate/professional schools to become successful. These life transitions, that occurred while these Ojibwe people walked in two worlds, were examined by looking at their family upbringing, moving away from the family to attend college, becoming a college student and sometimes being the only Ojibwe student in the classroom, advancing their degrees with graduate school or professional school, and starting a career. Other concepts that are interwoven through each of these life phases have included examining if, and how, the participants grew up with a strong cultural identity, and looking at the family influence that encouraged or discouraged their personal advancement. I wanted to find out if these seven Ojibwe professionals had to compromise their cultural identity to become successful either in their education or in their careers and I wanted to find out what success meant to each of them. The last thing I wanted to examine is how their families perceived them now, and if they are looked at differently by their families and close friends, from when they first left for college.
I conducted in-depth interviews with seven Ojibwe tribal members, who live and work in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Each of the participants interviewed for this project was selected through my knowledge and/or friendship/familial ties to them. Two were male while the rest were females. All were in their late 30’s to late 50’s. All had families of their own and they themselves grew up with, and/or had knowledge of, traditional beliefs and values either learned by a parent and/or grandparent. Each participant went to college and received their bachelor’s degrees and five out of the seven received their graduate/professional degrees. All have professional careers.

My rationale for researching these concepts was to create a new intercultural understanding and meaning about the experiences that Ojibwe youth and adults have when they make the decision to go to college and achieve educational and ultimately, professional success. Also, I was interested in looking at some of my own cultural assumptions of Ojibwe experience and what it means to walk on that bicultural road to success. I found a couple of my own cultural assumptions were wrong.

**My Assumptions.** One assumption was that the majority of the participants grew up on the reservation, but only two out of the seven actually did. Looking back on this assumption, I find it kind of funny that I would assume this as I know many American Indians grow up in urban cities and rural townships and also on the reservation.

Another of my cultural identity assumptions dealt with the fact that most of the participants never compromised who they were as Native people during their college and graduate school education. Going into this project I believed that most of the participants would feel the need to change who they are to feel accepted and, ultimately, to become academically and professionally successful. I actually found myself internally struggling
with this compromising assumption during my interview with Kokopeli Man, who is a full blood Ojibwe and grew up on the reservation with tribal traditions. I found myself re-clarifying my “did you feel you had to compromise your cultural identity to fit in at college” question to him. He replied several times that he never compromised who he was – that he was Kokopeli Man back on the reservation, and also during college and even into his professional career. He stated that it was because of the strong virtues and morals that he grew up with that made him not want to compromise his cultural identity for anyone, including a group of White fisherman on the North Shore. Gail, the other participant who later in her teens lived on her reservation, was the only participant who strongly stated that she felt that she had to compromise her identity during college to feel like she fit in, but that she was unwilling to compromise during her professional career. She shared with me this personal reflection,

> Yep, I had to be a little chameleon, because I wanted people to take me seriously, you know, and not treat me poorly, so I would change my vocabulary, you know, maybe the way I dressed or whatever, depending on where – what – who I was interacting with. Did I speak with a rez accent or not? You know, no, I didn’t if I was in with this group, around this group or whatever. (Gail, 2012).

Gail shared when she had an interaction with a Native university employee who worked at the University’s TRIO program office about her hardship in trying to fit in at college. Gail stated, “I think she was the first one that said ‘you walk with a moccasin and a high heel,’ that’s what she’d say, you know – and sometimes you get off balance, you know, and you got to figure out what do you wear when, what do you do.”
I went into this project thinking that most of the participants would reveal to me a version of Gail’s scenario of identity negotiation. Only two participants hinted at the idea of negotiating their cultural/racial identities during their college years and/or within their careers. I guess I based this assumption after having personal experiences similar to Gail’s and seeing my Native friends in college be themselves in the Anishinaabe Club room, but then seeing another side of them in front of a professor or elsewhere. Also, from reading Sherman Alexie’s book, “An Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian…” to where the protagonist felt more comfortable back home on the reservation amongst his family and his only friend where he could be himself, than when he went to the all white school in Spokane.

**Joining the ranks.** I am in my last semester of graduate school. I am looking forward to my graduation and “joining the ranks” of the Ojibwe people that I interviewed for this project. I’ve worked very hard at going to school part-time, working more than a full-time job, and with my role as a mother and wife. I received my undergraduate degree twenty years ago. I went to college right after graduating high school. I left my parents on our rural Minnesotan farm for the big city of Duluth, Minnesota, to attend the University of Minnesota-Duluth. It was my first time living alone as I didn’t live on-campus. I truly felt I was independent. I didn’t have a lot of support from my family. In fact, I feel that most of the time, I supported them financially and emotionally from the time that I moved away. I know that my mom was probably proud of me even though she never stated it to me until I officially graduated college. After graduation, I was unemployed and living with my best friend Sue until I found a job six months after graduation. I found my own place and felt really independent now that I was making a
salary and living on my own again. Twenty years later, and I am nearing the end of my graduate school education. I have been married over 16 years and we have a fourteen-year-old son. I’ve been working full-time for 20 years.

Looking back on my own personal experiences throughout my life, I have realized a few things conducting this research. I didn’t grow up identity strong like many of the participants. I grew up confused about my racial identity. It was not until my late teens that my mother reconnected to our Ojibwe heritage and culture. Before that, I identified myself as “black, with a little Indian,” but I also realized that most of the time I identified with those that were around me, including my friends and my mixed race family, and that was being “White.” I remember times when I was young where I would come home from school and look into the bathroom mirror and not see a brown face looking back at me. I would trick myself into seeing a white face. I wanted to be White. I felt prejudice and racism because of my skin color, and I negotiated my racial identity to fit in. But since my and my mother’s re-connection to our Ojibwe culture, I have strongly identified with being Ojibwe as well as African American and White.

I wasn’t really supported, or encouraged, by my family during my undergraduate years, but now that I am a graduate student, my mother is one of my biggest cheerleaders and motivators. During my undergraduate years, I had to compromise my identity as a person of color in certain situations, while during graduate school my racial identity has been front and center and I have never compromised who I am to fit in or to be accepted. However, I feel I was different when it came to the Ojibwe value of not being competitive. There is an Ojibwe traditional teaching that states everyone and everything has a purpose and people should live in harmony with all natural beings. Being
competitive with other people, goes against this teaching. Interestingly, I wasn’t in competition with my classmates, it was that I was in competition with myself to always be the best that I could be within my classes and coursework. The only other time I have felt this inner-competition is within my professional career.

**Future Research.** This particular research project examined the lives of seven Ojibwe professionals and their experiences with the cultural, interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions and transitions involved when they advanced themselves academically and professionally while walking between two cultures; their Ojibwe culture and dominant culture. I was interested in how these individuals dealt with their cultural identity through this process of living, being educated and working in dominant culture while still holding on to their Ojibwe identity and culture. Littlejohn and Foss (2008) state that the Communication Theory of Identity examines three contexts of understanding in how individuals interact with the self, within their community, and within larger society, and how communication plays a role in shaping their identity (p. 90). This project demonstrates through the participants own voices how they saw themselves during certain life transitions, how they experienced interactions within their own communities and as well as within dominant culture. Most participants felt and feel good in their own skin. Most were supported by their families and communities. Most have found their way in succeeding in dominant culture even with barriers, along the way, by members outside of their culture, and even the misunderstandings within their own families about education.

The seven Ojibwe people that I interviewed were in their late thirties to their mid fifties in age. Exploring and examining younger Ojibwe participants could provide a
richer picture. Those that are in their mid-twenties who have graduated from college and graduate school can lend insight because they are one more generation removed from the boarding school experience. Even though they would be more separated from the experiences of their grandparents or great-grandparents – I believe that all generations can feel and experience the negative ripple effects of the boarding school experience. But maybe with the passage of years, the weight of this negative experience will lighten.

Only two participants of this research were full-blood Ojibwe people, and of the seven, only two grew up on the reservation. Interviewing only full-blood Ojibwe people who grew up on the reservation who had gone on to receive their graduate degrees/professional degrees may provide further insight on a variety of cultural practices, including experiences with prejudice and racism, transition from living entirely among the same cultural group, experiencing life in dominant White culture, and examining the support or non-support of family members. One barrier to conducting this research would be finding the participants to interview. Intermarriage between Ojibwe and Whites, African Americans, other tribal nations, and others has been a consistent aspect of intercultural interactions. Throughout history, we are finding less and less full-blood Ojibwe people living today. Another barrier is there are not a large number of full-blood Ojibwe people who hold graduate/professional degrees in this geographic region.

Another suggestion is to conduct a comparative study between Ojibwe and other racial/cultural groups to examine the possibility that Ojibwe people experience the educational and professional transitions, familial support issues, and the potential of experiencing identity negotiation differently than the others. I briefly mention in chapter one about a gathering of multicultural students at the university where I work, on how
they see their own identity and issues of familial support regarding their undergraduate education. Two bicultural students shared that their black fathers didn’t encourage them to continue with their education while their white mothers did. So much could be examined with various cultural ways of living and knowing, and explore the ways that these cultures are similar and different.

Finally, another direction for future research on this topic would be to explore the role gender/sex plays in negotiating cultural and racial identity. While this research did not focus on gender or sex and so cannot draw any definitive conclusions about how male and female Ojibwe value tradition and negotiate identity in graduate/professional education and careers, the sample (five females, two males) and the emergent themes identified here, suggest there may be distinct ways and experiences for males and females.

What does this all mean and why is this research important? When I started this project I really didn’t know what the outcomes would be. I had some preconceived notions and assumptions on what I would find about how Ojibwe professionals who have navigated the educational systems to find their careers. All of the participants interviewed grew up identity strong. The majority of them were encouraged and supported by their families to seek out and finish their undergraduate and graduate education. Many of them didn’t compromise their Ojibwe identity and traditional Ojibwe values trying to fit in at college, and in fact, a couple of them felt the need to change the racial perceptions that other non-Native people had of Native people in college. All but one participant mentioned family as their meaning of success, and many found that the
families that they grew up with didn’t see them any differently now than when they started college.

Since 1492, Ojibwe people have lived in an intercultural and ever-growing multicultural society with non-Natives who have differing worldviews. Ojibwes, and other American Indians, have been marginalized within dominant White culture through political, religious, mediated, and educational means for generations. According to the late Vine Deloria, Jr. (1991), “From the very beginning first missionaries and later government teachers sought to erase the cultural backgrounds of Indian children with the naïve belief that once a vacuum was created, western social mores and beliefs would naturally rush in to replace long-standing tribal practices and customs,” (p. 34). There have been intercultural misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and cultural myths about who the Ojibwe people are. Through extremely negative anti-Indian displays, these actions have blurred the understanding of who Ojibwe people really are, and have had a negative impact on self perceptions of many Native people. Ojibwe people are barred by dominant Western society from certain privileges that have been afforded to others easily. Even so, most Ojibwe people that grow up culturally identity strong have a core set of central values and morals that their parents and/or elders have taught them. Even confronted with these huge barriers, Native and Ojibwe people break through to become integral parts of our multicultural communities, both small and large. Examining the lives of those Ojibwe who have gone on to become “successful” professionals can help teach about intercultural understandings and meanings, and therefore continue to break down those barriers. In this way, younger Ojibwe people can know that this type of success is attainable.
I have also learned that educational systems need to become more inclusive in their teaching approach to include multicultural learning and perspective. Teachers and instructors need to be open to learning more about the diverse ways in which American Indian and multicultural students learn and participate in the classroom so that all students have equal opportunities to learn and excel. This understanding and much needed awareness will help retain current and future multicultural students in becoming successful in graduation and finding careers. Deloria (1991) ended his book entitled, *Indian Education in America*, with his summation of what is needed to change in education,

> Instead of boring us with another tedious recital of the failure of the federal government to educate Indians – which is embarrassingly obvious – the Secretary of Education would do well to find some way to confront the reality of Indian culture, community, and history and devise an educational program to meet this specific challenge. If traditional institutions, programs and teaching have to be changed, so be it. After five centuries of contact it does not seem too much to ask non-Indian educators and institutions to come to grips with the reality that is the American Indian,” (p. 70).

Deloria wrote this back in 1991, but his sentiment continues to ring true. Educating students more inclusively and earlier on will be a key to the success of increasing Native/Ojibwe youth and adults to consider higher education and professional careers.
References


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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Did you grow up in a traditional Ojibwe family unit that followed traditional Ojibwe lifestyle and beliefs? Did you grow up on a reservation or in an urban setting?

Follow up: Tell me more about the place that you grew up in. If Urban, were there other Natives that lived around you and/or that you knew?

Share with me about your family when you were growing up. Can you reconstruct one of the days when one of your favorite memories happened that included family?

As a young person do you remember if you wanted to emulate someone, and why? Growing up did you have Native role models? Share with me if there were any Native professionals (ie. School teachers, medical professionals, etc) that you interacted with while growing up.

Share with me about the first time you first thought you could go to college? Can you reconstruct that day for me?

How did people (family/friends) around you respond when you decided to go to college? Celebratory or negative from the people in your life?

How about when you moved away to start college? When you went home on school break, what kind of response did you get?

Do you think that the positive/negative words and input given to you by the people in your life impacted your decision to follow through on something you believed in?

Share with me about your student experiences of attending college. Can you reconstruct a typical day or one that is memorable for you?

Also, talk about your values while being an Ojibwe student in college? Did your values change?

Did you feel like that you had to change who you are to “fit in” during college or professional/graduate school? If so, explain how.

Follow up: Please reconstruct one of those experiences with me.

Did you ever feel hopeless or want to give up? And if so, what changed that?

What does “success” mean to you?

Now that you are seen as being successful, share with me how the people in your life see you now versus how they saw you in the process of going to college?
Request for Review of a Student Research Project

All student research projects involving human subjects must undergo a review process for human subjects' protection. In many cases, the research will likely be exempt from further review. However, in order to facilitate the initial review, please complete this application and send it to the IRB Coordinator (only one copy needed). Questions should also be directed to the IRB Coordinator.

Section A: Applicant Information and Assurances

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<th>Yvonne &quot;Ivy&quot; Vainio</th>
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<td>Student Address</td>
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<td>Title of Proposed Research</td>
<td>Anishinaabeg Voices. Negotiations of Identity, Culture, and Values of Native Americans in Post-1850s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty Advisor</td>
<td>Martha J. Einerson, Ph.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty Phone #</td>
<td>715-394-8077</td>
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Student's Assurance:
I (we) certify that the proposed research includes only those activities described in this application.
I (we) certify that the research will not be initiated until written approval from the IRB Coordinator.

Student(s) Signature: Yvonne "Ivy" Vainio
Date: 9/24/12

Faculty Advisor Assurance:
I have examined the proposal, and I take overall responsibility for the conduct of this research. I agree to report any significant and relevant changes in the research proposal to the IRB Coordinator.

Faculty Advisor Signature: [Signature]
Date: 9-25-12
Section B: Exemption Criteria Checklist

Many student research projects will qualify for a streamlined “Exempted” IRB review. Please use the exemption criteria checklist on this page to determine if your research qualifies as exempt. If applicable, please place a check mark beside any category that describes your research.

Please note, to qualify as exempt, the risk to the subject must be no more than minimal. The federal rules define minimal risk as a risk of harm to the subject from participation in the research that is no greater than the risk encountered in normal day-to-day activities or during routine physical or psychological examinations. Research classified as involving more than minimal risk may not be exempt from review. Also, if the project includes any research activity with human subjects not listed below (e.g., finger prick, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, etc.), the research is not exempt and further IRB review is required.

**First:** Does your research meet the above definition of minimal risk? [ ] Yes [ ] No

If your answer is no, please go directly to Section C. If your answer is yes, continue with Section B and mark an appropriate category, if applicable. To be classified as exempt, the research project must involve only the types of research methods noted below.

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, observation of public behavior, <strong>unless</strong> the information is obtained and recorded in such a manner that the human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation.</td>
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**Note:** The exemption for survey and interview research (2 above) does not apply to research in which the subjects are children, except for research involving observation of public behavior where the researcher does not participate in the activities being observed.

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<td>3.</td>
<td>Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under item (2) above; if the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or federal statute(s) require without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available, or if the information is recorded by the Researcher in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified directly, or through identifiers linked to the subjects.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of Department or Agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine methods and procedures of public benefit or service programs.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, if wholesome foods without additives are consumed, or a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or an agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the FDA or approved by the EPA or the USDA.</td>
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## Section C: Review Criteria Checklist

Please answer the following questions, even if you think your research qualifies as exempt.

1. Does your research involve minors (under the age of 18)?
   - Yes [ ] No [ ]

2. Does your research involve any pregnant women, infants, prisoners, or cognitively impaired human subjects? If yes, please identify the subject group.
   - Yes [ ] No [ ]

3. Does your research involve any people who are psychiatric inpatients or institutionalized (e.g., mental health facility, nursing home, halfway house)? If yes, please identify the subject group.
   - Yes [ ] No [ ]

4. Does your research use deception of the subjects by the researcher?
   - Yes [ ] No [ ]

5. Could any disclosure of a research subject’s identity or responses outside the research environment reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject’s financial standing, employability or reputation (e.g., illicit drug use, alcoholism, gambling, perpetrator of abuse)?
   - Yes [ ] No [ ]

If you answered “yes” to any of the above questions, your research is subject to review by the full IRB.

6. Does your research involve surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, or program evaluations? If yes, please attach a copy of these materials to this form.
   - Yes [x] No [ ]

7. Does your research involve collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings?
   - Yes [x] No [ ]

8. Does your research involve collection of biological specimens by noninvasive means (e.g., hair and nail clippings, saliva, skin cells collected by swab or mouth washings, sweat)?
   - Yes [ ] No [x]

9. Does your research involve collection of blood samples by finger stick or heel stick?
   - Yes [ ] No [x]

If you answered “yes” to questions 6-9, your research may be eligible for expedited review, if not already deemed to be exempt.

10. Will the study target or exclude a particular gender or ethnic or racial group? If yes, please identify.
    - Yes [x] No [ ]

11. Will your data be collected and recorded in such a manner that the human subjects can be identified, either directly or through identifiers linked to the subject?
    - Yes [x] No [ ]

12. Will this study use advertising, brochures, or recruitment posters or letters to recruit subjects? If yes, please attach a copy of these materials.
    - Yes [ ] No [x]

13. Will you conduct any part of this research outside of the United States? If yes, please indicate where.
    - Yes [ ] No [x]
Section D: Project Description

Briefly, but completely, answer the following questions.

1. What is the purpose of the study? What is your research question?

   Purpose: Explore how American Indian adults talk about cultural ways of knowing in their professional development?
   RQ1: How do adult American Indians talk about traditional community?
   RQ2: How do adult American Indians talk about their professional education & experience in non-traditional community?

2. How will you conduct the research? Describe all procedures that will involve subjects and estimate how long each procedure will take. Please attach surveys, interview questions, focus group questions, or other instruments that will be used in your research.

   I will conduct the research by completing individual, depth interviews. Each interview will last between two and three hours. Please see attached interview schedule.

3. Describe the participation of human subjects in the research. Who will they be? How many will be involved? How will you select participants? Will this study target or exclude a particular ethnic or racial group?

   Six to eight adult American Indians will be interviewed. They will be contacted through personal contact and a snowball process of acquaintances, friends, and family members related to the initial contacts.

4. What are the risks to human subjects associated with this project (e.g., breach of confidentiality) and how will these risks be minimized? What are the benefits of this study?

   Risks are minimal to human participants. I will minimize the risks by keeping confidential information under lock and key. There will not be a breach in confidentiality.

5. How will you record the data collected in this study? Will it be anonymous (no identifiers between Subject and data) or confidential (you will be able to link data to a specific individual, but you will not reveal this information to anyone outside the project)? How will you store the data to ensure privacy is maintained? Who will have access to the data?

   I will audio record the interviews with a digital voice recorder. After the interviews have been transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed. All information from the interviews will be kept confidential and will be analyzed by myself and my thesis chair only.

6. How will you get consent from the participants? If you want a waiver of written informed consent, please indicate that here. [A waiver of written consent is appropriate when the only record linking the Subject and the research is the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. The waiver does not eliminate the need to obtain verbal consent from the research participant.]

   See attached written informed consent form.
7. How will your research findings be disseminated? Please check all that apply.

☑ Classroom presentation/paper  □ Poster presentation outside the classroom

□ Presentation at a workshop or conference  □ Publication

□ Other (Please describe) ________________________________

Appendix A: Interview Schedule
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form
APPENDIX C
CONSENT FOR RESEARCH STUDY

1. Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to explore how American Indian adults talk about cultural ways of knowing in their professional development. The results are intended to provide insights into how American Indians experience life in a traditional community as they transition into their professional education and experience life in non-traditional community.

2. Procedure:

We will complete a one-on-one interview, and engage in conversation about and related to the above-stated purpose. Our entire interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis in research. I will keep all recordings and transcripts secured under lock in my home.

3. Time required:

Your participation will involve one interview session lasting approximately 2 - 3 hours.

4. Risks:

It is not anticipated that this study will present any risk to you other than the inconvenience of the time taken to participate.

5. Your rights as a participant:

(i) The information gathered will be recorded in anonymous form. Your actual name and identity will be held confidential and secure throughout the research process, as well as in any final research report or publication resulting from this interview. Data or summarized results will not be released in any way that could identify you.

(ii) If you want to withdraw from the study at any time, you may do so without penalty. The information collected from you up to that point would be destroyed if you so desire.

(iii) At the end of the session, you have the right to a complete explanation ("debriefing") of what this study was all about. If you have questions afterward, please ask your interviewer or contact my research chair:
Student Researcher/Interviewer: Ivy Vainio, UW-SUPERIOR, (218) 390-9931 or the Research Chair: Dr. Martha J. Einerson, Department of Communicating Arts, UW-SUPERIOR, (715) 394-8077. Also, once the study is completed, you may request a summary of the results.

6. If you have any concerns about your treatment as a subject in this study, please call or write:

Jim Miller, IRB Coordinator   Telephone: (715) 394-8396   Email: JMILLER@uwsuper.edu

This research project has been approved by the UW-Superior Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, protocol # ________

**I have read the above information and willingly consent to participate in this study.**

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ______________