THE NATIVE AMERICAN DEAF EXPERIENCE:

CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, AND

EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the United States there are boroughs in which reside large groups of Deaf people. These are referred to as Deaf communities. "A Deaf community is a group of people who live in a particular location, share the common goals of its members, and in various ways, work toward achieving these goals. A Deaf community may include persons who are not themselves Deaf, but who actively support the goals of the community and work with Deaf people to achieve them" (Padden, 1989, p. 5). Some of the largest communities are found in Rochester, New York; Los Angeles, California; and in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C. Each of these communities is uniquely affected by its location. For example, "The Los Angeles Deaf community is shaped by the fact that it is located in one of the largest urban areas in the United States. A great many Deaf people are employed in this area and thus make up a very large and powerful community" (Padden, 1989, p. 5).

In addition to the larger communities, most cities and towns, have smaller Deaf communities. These smaller communities often revolve around the residential school for the Deaf. The communities, whether large or small, have

their own clubs, sporting events, civic and religious organizations, publications, and businesses.

While these communities are clearly defined geographically by the nature of their location, there is a larger Deaf community where boundaries are less evident. The national Deaf community shares certain characteristics and reacts to political and social forces which influence them as a group (Padden, 1989). The national Deaf community exists through the networks of the larger and smaller Deaf communities throughout the country. And, while there may exist incidences of discrimination within local groups, there exists an interconnectedness among members within the national Deaf community, a solidarity which transcends ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.

One obvious reason for this view is the common language used by members. The Deaf community places a high value on language -- an important aspect of any culture (Padden, 1989). The language of the Deaf community is American Sign Language (ASL). Wilcox, (1989) gives the following description of ASL:

> ASL is a visual-gestural language used in the United States and Canada by Deaf people. It is not universal and it is not English; it has its own phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. It can only be signed; one cannot speak or write ASL. Literature in ASL is necessarily 'oral' literature not preserved in a

permanent medium like writing, but handed down from one signer to another, one generation to another. (p. 183)

I have been a member of the Deaf community in Oklahoma for more than a decade. As a hearing parent of a Deaf son, my membership became possible when I acquired fluency in American Sign Language. I am also involved, from time to time, with the national Deaf community. My Deaf son, though, has been a member of the Deaf community since birth, although we did not realize it at the time. "Deafness, like race and like sex, is assigned to an individual, not something one chooses to be" (Meadow-Orlans, 1989, p. 235).

Deaf community ties are vital for most Deaf people because it is serves as a source of strength and support. However, most Deaf people function competently in the culture of the hearing majority on a daily basis. In the fields of Deaf education and rehabilitation, this is referred to as being bicultural, and many professionals in these fields have this as a goal for their students and clients.

Although bicultural ability is a goal that is achieved quite readily by most Deaf people, not all live in Deaf communities, nor do they necessarily access the national Deaf community. Not all Deaf people know and use American Sign Language. There are many factors which contribute to isolation and limit access to Deaf communities including residency patterns, hearing status of parents, and ethnic background (Cohen, 1993).

Isolation as the result of hearing loss has distinct educational and social ramifications. The greatest problems faced by Deaf individuals continue to be related to matters of communication with the dominate society and to the insensitivity of most hearing individuals (Moores, 1996). Deaf individuals may:

- Live in an environment without communication, even within the family, which severely limits his or her chances to acquire language skills.
- Have difficulty learning English; usually the greater the hearing loss, the greater the difficulty.
- Miss enormous amounts of world knowledge; for example, social conventions that they cannot gain through overhearing conversations at home, in school corridors, on the streets, etc.
- Feel lonely and isolated, without enough peers for normal information exchange and social opportunities all children need.
- Never see or interact with a Deaf adult.
- Lack a sense of belonging to a social group in educational and community settings.

Not since the 1930s have census data been gathered related to the number of Deaf individuals in the United States. Instead, the census collects data which groups people into generic categories of disabilities. However, if this data were available it would probably reveal that in addition to concentrated populations of Deaf people in urban

areas, there is a population of Deaf people widely dispersed throughout the country. Nearly every community has Deaf residents, and if they live in rural areas, they tend to be more isolated than those in urban areas because they are usually the only Deaf person in their community. They are isolated because of limited communication within the family unit and community. In addition, professionals usually lack adequate knowledge about the disability. And last, services such as interpreters for the Deaf and assistive technological devices are non-existent. For these reasons there tends to be a migration toward cities and large urban areas for many adult Deaf people.

Hearing status of parents is another factor which often leads to isolation. A majority of Deaf children are born to parents with normal hearing. Most have never known a Deaf person. According to Meadow-Orlans (1990):

> Hearing parents confront two related problems when their child is diagnosed as Deaf. First the parent must cope with the shock of learning about the unexpected disability. Second, they must face the difficulties of communicating with their child in the absence of a common (spoken) linguistic system. That is the central feature of the early experiences of Deaf children. The language readily available to Deaf children is not used by their parents. (p. 285)

When Deaf children learn American Sign Language, they are learning the natural language of Deaf people. It is considered the natural language or natural "voice" because it is a visual representation of language and the most efficient language for Deaf people to use. The language of the home is most often learned at a later time by specific language instruction by non-familial individuals. Because of this phenomena, Deaf children of hearing parents are unique. They are the only population in which the spoken language of the home is not their natural language. In addition, for many Deaf children, the spoken language of the home does not become their first or native language. Hearing parents of Deaf children are faced with the task of learning a new visual language in order to communicate with their child.

Unfortunately, a majority of hearing parents never become proficient in any form of sign language. Most only master survival signs which offers minimal communication with their child and leads to isolation within the family unit.

Another factor which contributes to isolation is ethnicity. Only recently has research focused on Deaf people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Variation in the racial and ethnic backgrounds of Deaf people in the United States means that a large and significant number of Deaf people are among the most multicultural people in this country (Humphries, 1993). Cohen (1993) stated that urban Deaf communities tend to be centered around the values of the majority culture; that they are predominantly white.

Studies of African-American Deaf (Cohen, Fischgrund, & Redding, 1990) and studies of Hispanic Deaf (Delgado, 1984; Gerner de Garcia, 1993) have brought about increasing awareness of these populations and the cultural and linguistic diversity they bring to the Deaf communities and educational institutions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to open up discourses related to the Native American Deaf experience. Dialogue requires us to re-examine our own presuppositions and to compare them with quite different ones: to make us less dogmatic about the belief that the way the world appears to us is necessarily the way the world is (Burbles & Rice, 1991). The primary focus will be the lived experience of Native American people who are Deaf. Information will be gathered regarding their daily lives and how they interact with family and community members in order to answer the question: *What does it mean to be Native American and Deaf?* This study will provide greater insight and better understanding of this group of people as well as individual perspectives on issues related to identity, cultural participation, linguistic preferences, and educational experience.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in several ways. First and foremost, this population has been excluded in research up to this point; their voices have been silent. According to Burbles and Rice (1991), by broadening our understanding of others we broaden our understanding of ourselves. Stories of lived experience are generally left unrecorded and are not considered relevant in curriculum development; therefore, it is not surprising that factors related to the lived experience of Native American Deaf people, including their experiences in the educational system, are absent from educational research and curriculum development initiatives.

Through this study I hope to expose various groups to the unique circumstances related to the Native American Deaf experience. Because of this exposure a better understanding should occur, and as a result, certain benefits may arise. First of all, society may benefit from a greater understanding of Native American Deaf people. It is anticipated that through this research a greater understanding and awareness will develop within the Native American communities regarding Deaf tribal members. Simultaneously, it is anticipated that a greater awareness will develop within Deaf communities regarding the multicultural aspects of the Native American Deaf experience. Respondents may also benefit as a result of reflection on the interview questions and discussion of their personal

experiences. Furthermore, educational institutions may find the information useful when considering curriculum and other educational activities which promote a greater understanding and awareness of cultural diversity. The greatest benefit, though, will be to the researcher who will gain, through personal experience, insights and increased understanding of the unique individuals in this study.

Study Limitations

As with most research, there are limitations to the methodology. Every effort should be made to avoid making generalizations based on the conclusions of this study. The findings describe the individuals involved in this study and do not represent the totality of the Native American Deaf experience. In addition to limitations there are biases which I wish to reveal. I have close ties to both the Deaf community and the Native American community. My ties to the Deaf community are through my Deaf son and through my experiences as a teacher of Deaf children. In addition, I am presently a member of the faculty of the Deaf Education program at the University of Tulsa. My ties to the Native American community are through my ancestors who were "Old Settlers" of the Cherokee Nation. I grew up in the community of Qualls approximately thirteen miles south of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, which serves as the capitol of the Cherokee Nation.

Definition of Terms

American Sign Language

A visual language used by Deaf people in the United States and Canada, with semantic, syntactic, morphological and phonological rules which are distinct from English.

American Indian Sign Language

A visual sign language system used for communication among indigenous tribes of Native American people who did not have a common spoken linguistic base.

Bicultural

Membership in two cultures, such as Deaf culture and hearing culture.

Bilingual

Being fluent in two languages. For some Deaf children this will include the use of ASL and English.

Trilingual

Being fluent in three languages. For some Deaf children this will include the use of ASL, English, and the native language of the home when it is different than English, e.g., Cherokee.

Deafness or deaf

In medical terminology, to be deaf with a lower case "d" is to have a severe to profound, bilateral, sensorineural hearing loss so severe that educational performance is adversely effected. Residual hearing, if present, is

supplemental to vision which is the primary avenue for receiving information.

Deaf

Many people who are Deaf and are members of the Deaf community see themselves as a population of Americans tied together by a common heritage, a shared experience, a multi-generational history, and most of all, that key factor of any culture, a language, i.e, American Sign Language. These individuals often refer to themselves as "Deaf" with a capital "D" (Padden & Humphries, 1988).

Deaf Community

The community of people whose primary language is American Sign Language. These individuals share a common identity, a common culture, and a common way of interacting with each other and the hearing community.

Degrees of Hearing loss

Audiometrically, hearing loss may be mild [26 dB to 30 dB], moderate [31 dB to 50 dB],severe [71 dB to 90 dB], or profound [91 dB or more].

Five Civilized Tribes

The Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma are: 1) the Cherokee, 2) the Creek, 3) the Seminole, 4) the Choctaw, and 5) the Chickasaw. These tribes were originally from the southeastern part of the United States in what is now Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama.

Native Americans

Individuals belonging to the tribes of "indigenous people who have lived in the Americans since at least 18,000 B.C." (Mankiller & Wallis, 1993, p. 259).

Signed English

Sign systems, such as Signing Exact English, which were developed in the 1970s for educational purposes. These systems use the signs of American Sign Language along with additional invented signs in English word order.

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I includes an introduction to the research project. Chapter II includes a review of the relevant literature, studies, and texts concerning both the Native American experience and the Deaf experience. Chapter III contains a discussion of the methodologies used to conduct this research and of the criteria developed for the selection of respondents. In addition, discussion of procedures for data collection and theme analysis are included in this section. Chapter IV is comprised of the findings of the research project including a historical introduction to each tribal affiliation represented by respondents, summarized narratives of the conversational interviews, theme analysis of the data, and anecdotes of lived experiences. In the final chapter, Chapter V, I have presented a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Education of Deaf People

References to Deaf people have been traced as far back as ancient times, recorded in the Justinian Code, and in the [Christian] old and new testaments (Scouten, 1984). Deafness was a common affliction in the early modern period as it was a side effect of such diseases as mumps, measles, meningitis, scarlet fever, smallpox, and even the common cold (Mirzoeff, 1992). High prevalence of deafness brought about terms to describe this population. In most of the languages of the world there is a term which equates to the English word, "Deaf." For example, in German the word is *Taup*, in French the word is *Sourd*, in Spanish the word is *Sordo*. There are also references to Deaf people in some of the earliest manuscripts documenting Native American languages.

Even though there are references in ancient times to Deaf people, the education of the Deaf was not attempted until the 16th century in Europe. During this time the primary purpose of education was religious instruction for nobles (Mirzoeff, 1992).

One of the first documented efforts to educate Deaf children occurred in Spain during the 1500s. According to

Moores (1996), deafness was a common occurrence as a consequence of consanguineous marriages among Spanish aristocracy. For example, the presence of the recessive gene for deafness in the wealthy Velasco family resulted in five out of eight of their children being deaf.

During this time, in order to be a landowner, one must have been male and able to read and write using the Bible as text. These efforts were successful and the Velasco men became heirs to their family's estates assuming full responsibility as members of Spanish land gentry (Scouten, 1984). Education of the Deaf in Spain was not for the masses as it was in France.

The first public institution for the Deaf was established in Paris, France in 1755 by the Abbey de l'Epee. He was the first to recognize that Deaf people should be taught using sign language (Moores, 1996). The original source of Abbey de l'Epee's sign language has been a topic of debate. Some believe that signs originated in Trappist monasteries; the monks interpreted the precept of St. Benedict literally, keeping perpetual silence and using an elaborate system of manual signs through which they could express their needs and keep in social contact (Furth, 1973; Moores, 1996). Fisher (cited in Moores, 1996) reports a misconception that de l'Epee invented sign language. In fact, de l'Epee merely modified the existing sign language of Deaf people for instructional purposes. Regardless of the origin of signs, the Abbey de l'Epee's influence was great,

and by 1789 his students had established twenty-one schools for the Deaf in France and Europe (Sacks, 1989).

After the Abbey's death his predecessors continued his work. The most notable, the Abbey Roch Ambroise Sicard (Sacks, 1989), became director of the National Institution for the Deaf. Under Sicard's tutelage, the school was highly successful and served students from throughout France. Members of the aristocracy, as benefactors of the school, were often provided with demonstrations of the students' abilities to write and understand French (Lane, 1984).

In 1814, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a recent graduate of Andover Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, met a young Deaf girl, Alice Cogswell, the daughter of his neighbor (Moores, 1996). He became enthralled with the aspect of teaching Deaf children and decided to travel to Europe in search of teaching methods to bring back to the United States. Gallaudet was shunned in England and traveled on to France where he was greeted with open arms (Lane, 1984). Eventually, Reverend Gallaudet convinced a Deaf student from the National Institution for the Deaf to immigrate to the United States to become a teacher. Laurent Clerc, seeing no future for himself in Paris, agreed (Moores, 1996). He and Gallaudet arrived in Boston in 1816, after a 52 day trip during which Laurent Clerc taught Gallaudet sign language and Gallaudet taught Clerc written English (Scouten, 1984). Together Gallaudet and Clerc established the first school for the Deaf, the American Asylum for the Deaf and the Dumb

(today the American School for the Deaf) in West Hartford, Connecticut.

The education of Deaf children flourished during the next six decades as other schools were established in White Plains, New York in 1818; in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1821; and in Lexington, Kentucky in 1823 (Gannon, 1981). It wasn't until 1880 at the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED) held in Milan, Italy that the tides began to turn (Lane, 1984). At this conference, all but the Americans voted for a resolution establishing the dominant philosophy in the education of Deaf children as the oral method of lipreading and speech, and denouncing the use of sign language whatever the nation (Lane, 1984). This resolution had serious consequences during the next 100 years. In the aftermath of Milan, "pure oralism" washed over Europe like a flood. The cry of Milan was "*viva la parola*" (Lane, 1984).

Until 1880, Deaf people had been in leadership positions at schools for Deaf children. Most schools had Deaf superintendents and the majority of the teachers were Deaf. But, after Milan, their roles changed. Instead of leadership positions, Deaf individuals assumed more subordinate positions such as house parents, janitors, cooks, and groundskeepers. Those who used American Sign Language were viewed as illiterate even though they may have been well educated. Deaf people who could develop speaking skills, generally those who were hard of hearing or became Deaf after

language had been well established, were presented to the public as success stories.

The oral method dominated the education of the Deaf from 1880 until 1965 when William Stokoe, a researcher from Gallaudet University, validated American Sign Language (ASL) as a formal language (Radefsky, 1994; Sacks, 1986). More than thirty years have passed since the publication of Dr. Stokoe's research. During these years, it appears that a paradigm shift has slowly occurred bringing different views of Deaf people and new teaching philosophies to the forefront. However, upon introspection, it is apparent that the teaching philosophies being proclaimed today as innovative and "on the cutting edge" were the methods denounced by the Milan convention. They are not new nor are they innovative which supports the theories that education functions on a cyclical path.

The Education of Native American People

As the first residential schools for Deaf children were being established, the United States government was considering how they would deal with Native Americans. In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act forcing the relocation of all eastern tribes to lands in the western part of the Louisiana Purchase (Mankiller & Wallis, 1993). Hundreds of treaties were negotiated between the United States government and the tribes: Many of the treaties included educational provisions for the purpose of civilizing

Native Americans. Initially, missionaries educated Native American children, but when the schools were established the quality was impecunious (Reyhner, 1994). "The mission schools were not as concerned with academic instruction as bringing heathen brethren into the fold of Christianity, which included the accouterments of Western civilization" (Lomawaima, 1994, p. 2).

Mission schools were the first institutions to educate Native American youth in Oklahoma. These schools were generally for local students who went home at the end of the day to their families, thus retaining their culture, traditions, language, and ties with the family. There were many Native American mission schools in Oklahoma established to educate children from the local area. One school, the Rainy Mountain Mission School in Kiowa County, Oklahoma, was established by missionaries in the early 1900s for the purpose of educating the Kiowa youth in that area.

N. Scott Momaday, a well-known member of the Kiowa tribe often tells of the landscape of his ancestral home in Kiowa County, in southwestern Oklahoma (Palmer, 1990):

> Driving south down state highway 115, the Wichita Mountains appear chalky and pastel against the horizon. To the east, across the plains, is Rainy Mountain. For the traveler, there's little left here to tell of the one hundred years the Kiowa tribe spent hunting buffalo on the plains of Oklahoma or to show the glory of that age. (p. 28)

The story of the Rainy Mountain School has been excluded from Oklahoma history texts; however, remnants of the foundation still remain where the stone, single story school once stood. The stories of those who were students or staff at the school remain to be discovered and written in recorded history.

In 1879 the federal government began establishing its own boarding school system -- Protestant-influenced and located off reservation lands. "The first and most famous was the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania" (Lomawaima, 1994, p. 4).

"To Kill the Indian and Save the Man"
Captain Richard Pratt, Carlisle Indian School
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

This was the purpose of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools (Reyhner, 1994). "They set out to mold a 'successful' student--obedient, hardworking, Christian, punctual, clean, and neatly groomed--who would become a 'successful' citizen with the same characteristics" (Lomawaima, 1994, p. 129). The naive belief was that if Native American youth were removed from their parents for just a few years and placed in boarding schools, they would assimilate into Euro-American society, thus solving the "Indian" problem (Reyhner, 1994). However, instead of melting into Euro-American society, most Native American children returned to their home communities. Between the years 1879 and 1920, thousands of Native American youth were

sent to boarding schools where "they were not allowed to speak their native languages or practice native singing, dancing, or religion" (Lomawaima, 1994, p. 5). As long as people have a language,they practice culture, and imbedded in Native American culture are religion and traditions. But without their language, heritage, and culture, Native American people ceased to flourish.

By 1880 the Board of Indian Commissioners insisted that industrial boarding schools were far better than mission day schools for Native American children. They viewed proximity as a disadvantage (Lomawaima, 1994). Instead of educating Native American youth for the purpose of salvation, as did the mission schools, the training institutions' purpose was to acculturate Native American people into mainstream Euro-American society. The schools forbade the children to speak their native languages and taught them only English. "Most of the students could not speak a word of English when they first went to the school [Sequoyah Training School], and they were whipped for speaking Cherokee" (Mankiller & Wallis, 1993, p. 7).

The federal government's efforts to deracinate native people and extinguish their languages, religions, and cultures continued for several decades. "By 1899, the Bureau Indian Affairs reported that 24 off-reservation boarding schools were in operation with an average daily attendance of 6,263 students" (Indian

Affairs Bureau, cited in Lomawaima, 1994, p. 6). Because of allegations of abuse and neglect, Lewis Meriam (1928) conducted an investigation of Native American boarding schools. The Meriam Report stated that removing Native American children from their home and family life was detrimental to their well being and in opposition to modern views of education and social work which regard the home and family as essential social institutions from which it is generally undesirable to uproot children.

The influence of the Meriam Report is debatable. Off-reservation boarding schools for Native American students remained the most popular source of education until the 1960s. One of the largest schools was Chilocco (Lomawaima, 1994), built in 1882 in Indian Territory and located in present day north-central Oklahoma adjacent to the Kansas state line. Today the grounds and buildings where these schools once flourished are empty except for a few tribal programs which have taken up temporary quarters in buildings which skirt the margins of the campuses.

This discussion of the history of the education of Deaf people and the history of the education of Native American people is presented so that intersections and commonalties may be revealed. On the surface it may appear that these two distinct groups have very little in common, but as one investigates further it is clear that they share many themes, especially relating to educational history. Native American

people were viewed by the dominant society, especially Euro-American missionaries as savages. Deaf people were also viewed as savages and in some instances as devil possessed (Lane, 1984). For example, Alexander Graham Bell, who ironically had a deaf mother and deaf wife, called for the sterilization of Deaf people to protect society from their reproduction (Lane, 1984).

Native American tribes as well as Deaf people were strongly influenced by religious organizations who were compelled to improve society through the education of their youth. The efforts of these religious groups, while undeniably influential, failed to obliterate native cultures, traditions, religious ceremonies and languages. N. Scott Momaday writes of how his grandmother, Aho, became a Christian, but prayed each night in Kiowa before she went to bed (Palmer, 1990). Another example of the presence of Native American religions is evident at the San Ildefonso Pueblo near Espanola, New Mexico. A Catholic mission built over two centuries ago stands towering over the adobe homes. Indications of a strong Catholic faith is present in the homes of the Pubelo people who live there. However, located in the plaza, is the center of their traditional, religious ceremonial activities, the Kiva. These two religious centers exist side by side. The Kiva exemplifies the resiliency of Native American spirituality and traditions which have survived despite efforts to eradicate them.

Both Native American and Deaf children attended residential or boarding schools and in many ways the schools were similar. Many of the original founders were missionaries of European descent. They represented various faiths, and a strong religious emphasis permeated the curriculum. Students were taught to read, write, and speak English in order to participate in religious ceremonies, e.g., go to confession or to be baptized. Native American students were not allowed to speak their Native language and traditional ceremonies were forbidden. Deaf children were forbidden their natural language, American Sign Language, and those caught signing were often punished. An older Deaf gentleman from a southern state once told me of his childhood experiences.

> The boys and girls were segregated--even in the cafeteria the boys sat on one side and the girls on the other. If you were caught signing to your sweetheart or anyone else for that matter, you were sent up the hill to attend classes with blind children. There, no one could communicate with you. We were taught speech and lipreading. Many of us couldn't do it, so we helped each other. We would sign in secret places out of view of the supervisors.

Without a language there is no culture. Both Native American people and Deaf people have been denied their language, culture, and heritage.

The multilingual nature of many Native American homes and the monolingual, English focused school systems bring certain complexities to the education of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. A cultural mismatch often occurs between the home and the school (Wong-Fillmore & Meyer, 1992). Additional complexities are involved when hearing loss becomes a factor. There have been attempts by researchers to investigate deafness as it relates to culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Their activities have usually focused on urban areas involving the African American and Hispanic populations, (e.g., Cohen, Fishgrund & Redding, 1990; (Delgado, 1984; & Gerner de Garcia, 1993). Cohen (1993) reported that "Deaf children represent a variety of ethnic minorities in addition to their cultural identity as Deaf people. Therefore, Deaf children who are members of ethnic groups have dual ethnic group membership, often compounding their role confusion and identity crises" (p. 56). Humphries (1993) stated that "variations in racial and ethnic backgrounds of Deaf people in the United States means that a large and significant number of Deaf people are among the most multicultural in this country" (p. 10).

While there exists abundant literature pertaining to the Native American population in general, and while there is an increasing amount of research activity pertaining to the Deaf population, there is limited information regarding how

deafness impacts the Native American population. Generally, Deaf people view themselves differently from the majority culture: They perceive that they function in a world of [hearing] others (Humphries, 1993). Deaf children of diverse cultures "may be faced with the acquisition and maintenance of a delicate personal balance among the home culture, the dominate culture of the school, and the culture of the Deaf community" (Christensen, 1993, p.23).

Demographic and Prevalence Data

Before looking specifically at hearing loss in the Native population, census information regarding the Native population and the Deaf population, in general, may be useful. In 1990 the Native American population of the State of Oklahoma was 252,420 (United States. Department of Commerce, 1990). Residency patterns reveal that approximately 50 percent reside in urban areas and 50 percent reside in rural areas with Tulsa county having the highest concentration of Native American people.

Using the broadest definition, it is estimated that of the total United States population, 22,630,000 people have hearing losses and of that number 1,053,000 or 1.6 percent are under 18 years of age. A prevalence rate of nine percent has been established nationally (National Center for Health Statistics, 1992).

Projections of population change estimate that the Native American population will increase nationwide at a rate

of 1.5 percent as compared to 0.9 percent for whites (United States Department of Commerce, 1990). As the Native American population increases, the population of Native American Deaf people will also increase. A report submitted to the Oklahoma State Legislature by the Study Committee on Education of the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (1993) revealed the following data:

Ethnic Background of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in Oklahoma

Euro American- 71%	African-American - 12 %
Hispanic - 3 %	American Indian - 12 %
Other - >1 %	Asian/Pacific Islander - 1 %

O'Connell (cited in Hammond & Hagar Meiners, 1993) reported that sensory impairments are disproportionately high among Native populations when compared with the general population, i.e., Native Americans are three times more likely to be hospitalized for conditions of the ear. There has been other research of the high incidence of otitis media which results often in conductive hearing loss among Indian children (e.g., Gregg, Roberts, & Colleran, 1983).

Hereditary deafness occurs at a very low rate in the Native American population even though historically there are records of genetic incidences of hearing loss occurring within isolated, homogeneous populations that intermarry (Moores, 1996). For example, the inhabitants of the island of Martha's Vineyard, located off the coast of Massachusetts,

had little contact with the mainland and intermarried for generations. The incidence of deafness there was ten times higher than in nearby areas; in one area of the island the incidence of deafness approached 25 percent (Groce, 1985). Deafness was so prevalent that all the residents of the island used two languages, i.e., English and sign language (Groce, 1985).

There have been unpublished speculations by researchers in the field of deafness that American Indian Sign Language may have developed not only as a tool for communication among various tribes, but also to communicate with Deaf tribal members. However, this has not been documented. Mallory (cited in Moores, 1982, p. 28) noted that "among the North American Plains Indians, young Deaf children easily used sign language."

Today hereditary deafness occurs at a rate of ten percent within the Deaf population; ninety percent of Deaf children are born to hearing parents, most of whom have no known deafness in their family history (Vernon & Andrews, 1990). When the latter occurs the reaction of parents to the discovery that their child is Deaf is similar to the reactions of all human beings to the psychological trauma of facing any serious irreversible disease or other life tragedy. Vernon and Andrews (1990) describe the typical parents' reactions:

> There is initial shock or disbelief. Denial insulates against the emotional impact of the

situation, but it is soon followed by a developing awareness of loss. Grief and depression are experienced. Then comes the phase of mourning which is preparation for the eventual facing of reality. (p. 102)

Summary

I have presented in this literature review information related to the history of Native American people and Deaf people as it relates to the topics of study. In addition, a discussion of multicultural issues related to Deaf people from culturally and linguistically diverse groups has been provided, while exhausting current literature on this topic. Prevalence and demographic information looking at national statistics, as well as Oklahoma census data provides a numerical look at this population. And, a discussion related to the family's experiences with deafness provides a basis for comparison.

The dearth of published information related to the Native American Deaf experience does not impede my desire to research the lived experience of this group. In every group, past experiences with oppression and domination distort the participant's perceptions of the present. However, by beginning my initial investigations on the basis of a historical framework, I hope a better understanding will emerge and that relevant themes related to language, identity, culture, and education will be revealed as they occur in the fabric of the Native American Deaf experience.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter I will describe the methods utilized for this study of Native American people who are Deaf. The basic assumptions underlying this study did not lend themselves to statistical measurement, scientific hypothesizing utilizing probability or predictability, or standardized quantitative methodologies. Researching the lived experience of individuals or groups requires the utilization of human science research methodology. The methodological process for this research project is phenomenological. Phenomenological research is the study of human experience and aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our every day experiences (van Manen, 1990). As a guide, the following six research activities were utilized as suggested by van Manen (1990):

- turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;

- describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and,
- balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (p. 31-32)

Historical analysis and conversational interviews were utilized to gather data regarding issues of identity and linguistic, cultural, and educational perspectives of Native American people who are Deaf. In utilizing this methodology, my time, work, and effort has increased implicitly. Conversational interviews and historical analysis are time consuming methods of research; however, both yield information that cannot be obtained through methodologies which are less time consuming.

Dr. Meadow-Orlans (1990) stated, "[In the field of deafness] it is important to guard against research that takes only the perspective of the hearing world. Any researcher whose background, experience, or culture is different from that of the subjects of study must guard against an ethnocentric point of view" (p. 235). Most research on Deaf individuals has been conducted in the school setting due mainly to demographics. The low incidence of deafness means that homes are widely scattered and may be difficult for researchers to reach; therefore it is more convenient to locate groups for testing or observation in schools (Meadow-Orlans, 1990).

Although Native American communities are widely scattered in urban and rural areas in Oklahoma, it is vital that the research activities be conducted as close to the individuals' homes as possible in order to glean relevant data. Setting up a meeting place other than in the individuals' communities would be artificial and would less likely produce the information needed for this type of methodology. Phenomenological research does not only look at responses on paper, but tries to enter the lifeworld of the persons whose experiences are relevant to the study (van Manen, 1990). This would not be possible if the interview took place in an unfamiliar setting.

As with most research, there are limitations to the methodology. Every effort should be made to avoid making generalizations based on the conclusions of this study. The findings describe the individuals interviewed in this study, most of whom represent different tribal affiliations. They have varying degrees of hearing loss and have been educated in various placements including local education programs and/or residential settings. Residency patterns also vary.

In addition to limitations there are biases which I wish to reveal. I am a parent of a Deaf child and I am a member of the Native American community. As a member of the group being studied, I utilized my lived experience in order to interpret the lived experience of others. Dorinne Kondo (1990) has drawn attention to the double hermeneutic implicit in studies of society. She refers to this as the "Eye/I";

What our eyes "see" in the process of data collection and analysis is shaped by who we are as individuals within a particular set of historical and socioeconomic circumstances.

Researchers engage in a dynamic process of identity negotiation, filtering our experience through a series of lenses supplied by our professional and personal cultural codes (Bem, 1993). Cultural codes are what goes on in each individual's internalized conversation. Each individual puts cultural codes into play, shaping the other as identity is negotiated; the words themselves, the patterning of words, the patterning of gestures and body movement is an intricate dance of researcher and respondent (Bem, 1993). Cultural codes shape all our perceptions. Likewise, information respondents offer is grounded in their own cultural codes. Because of the varying cultural codes of researchers and respondents, it will be difficult to establish reliability.

This research strives to discover commonalties and uniquenesses, looking at sameness and difference as being in constant interaction with one another. Pinar (1988) wrote that it is the researcher's "eye", the capacity to penetrate the surface of situations - the language of the participants, their public intentions, and their observable behavior - to qualities discernible, but not yet present, which makes possible understanding.

Language

The greatest barrier in Deaf people's lives is not the lack of sound but lack of communication (Johnson, Liddell, Erting, 1989). During this project careful attention was given to ensure that no language barriers existed. The interviews were conducted in the native language used by the individual. The native language was determined after briefly meeting with the respondent during the first interview. American Sign Language, a signed English system, or spoken English were the language options in this study. Careful consideration of the preferred language or communication mode ensured that communication barriers did not exist. I have been studying American Sign Language for more than twenty years, and currently have an Advanced + rating on the Signed Language Proficiency Interview (SCPI) which rates individuals fluency in American Sign Language on the following scale: Novice, Novice +, Survival, Survival +, Intermediate, Intermediate +, Advanced, Advanced +, Superior, Superior +. Most individuals who score in the Superior range have American Sign Language as their native language.

In cases where an idiosyncratic or invented home sign system was used, assistance from a family member was necessary to ensure correct interpretation of responses.

Selection of Respondents

This study is restricted to the state of Oklahoma. All of the Native American/Indian Nations in Oklahoma were included in the research. It is important to note the cultural and linguistic diversity among the Native American tribes of Oklahoma. Although the tribes may have portions of their histories in common, such as forced removal and experiences with boarding schools, there remains a multiplicity of linguistic and cultural factors which make each tribe unique. Hodge and Edmonds (cited in Hammond & Hagar Meiners, 1993) reported that no two tribes share identical cultural characteristics.

In addition, there are varying constellations of factors related to deafness. Hearing loss may be sensorineural or conductive, congenital or acquired. It may range from mild to profound, be unilateral or bilateral, and have a multiplicity of other factors which influence the way sound is perceived. To be Deaf, though, is not solely based on audiological data, but is an attitude and an identity (Padden & Humphries, 1988).

Native American Deaf individuals involved in this study were listed on tribal rolls and acknowledged by their tribe as members. All tribal affiliations in Oklahoma recognized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) were eligible for inclusion in the project.

No minimum specification for blood quantum was established for this study because blood quantum is not always an appropriate predictor of living traditional ways and participating in cultural activities and events. For example, an individual with 1/8 blood quantum, may live near other tribal members and readily participate in cultural activities. While participation in cultural activities and traditional events is not a prerequisite for this study, preference was given to individuals who maintain close ties to their tribe and traditional ways, i.e., those not fully assimilated into the majority culture.

As anticipated, identification of individuals was difficult because of several factors including logistic constraints, i.e., the rural nature of the state. Residency patterns reflect that at least 50 percent of Native Americans in Oklahoma reside in rural areas (United States Department of Commerce, 1990). Since deafness is a low incidence disability, it was difficult to identify individuals to include in the study. In addition, obtaining access to individuals was extremely challenging. For example, in Adair county in northeastern Oklahoma, a county with a high density of Native American residents, 24 percent of the households are without phones (United States Department of Commerce, 1990). Access is also a barrier due to the closed nature of this group of people.

I found that the only way to access this group was through the endorsement and recommendation of a Native

American Deaf person. I was fortunate to have my first interview with an individual who was enthusiastic about the project. She, in turn, gave me names and addresses of several Native American Deaf acquaintances and gave me permission to use her name when contacting them. Without this initial approval, the project could have taken years to materialize. I interviewed the individuals she referred to the project. They, in turn, supplied me with other names of individuals. Therefore, I was assisted in this project by the "snow-ball" method (Ostrander, 1984) whereby respondents supplied me with names of prospective participants. Because of the endorsement by my first respondent, I was well received by the people in this project.

Number of Interviews

It was predetermined that eight interviews (McCrackin, 1988) would be conducted for the project. Conversational interviews were conducted with the eight respondents; however, more than one contact with a respondent was necessary in order to obtain sufficient data. The first meeting served as an introduction to me and to the research project. During this meeting I explained the project in detail so that the respondents felt comfortable with the process. Sometimes initial meetings were held outside in the yard or in the case of inclement weather, in my car. By the second meeting I was invited inside the home and the interview continued in the respondent's living room.

Sometimes the interview began on that day, continuing during the subsequent visit, but frequently the interviews did not begin until the second meeting.

The initial interview usually continued for three hours; Subsequent interviews were less lengthy, usually lasting one to two hours. In some cases, additional contact was necessary in order to obtain clarification for questions which came up during review of the data or to gain further insight into a particular statement made by a respondent.

Procedures for Collection of Data

Historical analysis of census data, literature reviews, and historical documents provided a framework from which to begin an investigation of the lived experience of Native Americans who are Deaf. Historical research is concerned with the reconstruction of some part of man's past. It is impossible, though, to truly reconstruct the past accurately due to the ways in which historical documents have been developed. Texts written by Native American or Deaf authors were used when available. However, these texts are minimal when compared to the number of texts produced by non-Deaf, Euro-Americans. Thus, much of the historical information available has an anglicized, Euro-American, non-Deaf perspective.

Eight conversational interviews were conducted directly with Native American Deaf individuals. The interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes or in a neutral location.

Initially it was challenging to establish rapport and trust with the respondents; however, after a few minutes of informal discussion based on mutual acquaintances in the Deaf community, our conversation usually became affable.

According to van Manen (1994), interviews serve very specific purposes:

> 1) the interview may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon;
>
> 2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with an interviewee about the meaning of an experience. (p. 66)

During the interviews I kept notes of the discussion. However, because one cannot write and watch the signer simultaneously, the process required a great deal of time. I discussed this with the respondents initially, and they did not seem to mind the slow process. Because many Native Americans object to videotaping or filming and see it as an intrusion of their private lives, I did not videotape nor record any of the data by mechanical means. After the interviews I wrote my impressions of the interview and descriptions of the landscape of experiences I had encountered.

Procedures for Analysis of Data

Each respondent's interview formed the content for writing a summary of their narrative in Chapter IV. Every effort was made to maintain their point of view while writing of their experiences, their lives, and their personal stories. I began each interview with a set of interview questions (See Appendix). I gave a copy to the Deaf individual to look over as we continued the interview. However, the respondents often departed from the list and branched off in new directions adding new insights to the project data. It became clear that to adhere strictly to the interview list would limit the study significantly since the information volunteered was so rich with description and details.

After the interviews had been conducted, I organized the written notes and personal observations into narrative form. The narrative then became the data to be analyzed. Next, significant themes were uncovered which respond to the question: What does it mean to be Native American and Deaf? "Themes are like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes" (van Manen, 1994, p. 90). Additional analysis included determining whether themes were incidental or essential. According to van Manen (1994):

> The most difficult and controversial element of phenomenological human science may be to differentiate between essential themes and themes that are more

> incidentally related to the phenomenon under study. In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is. To this end the phenomenologist uses the method of free imaginative variation in order to verify whether a theme belongs to a phenomenon essentially (rather than incidentally). The process of free imagination variation can also be used to generate other essential themes.
>
> In the process of apprehending essential themes or essential relationships one asks the question: *Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon?* (p. 106-107)

The text was developed and written utilizing information gathered from theme analysis, personal observations, anecdotal narratives, and analysis of demographic and historical data.

Ethical Considerations

In order to conduct this research appropriately, it was necessary to have the confidence of the respondents during the interview process. Before conducting the interviews, I explained the purpose of the study and answered any questions the respondent had. I explained confidentiality procedures in detail. Consent forms were signed by the study participants. Most respondents were extremely concerned

about confidentiality and defamation of character in the Deaf community. To ensure confidentiality, separate lists of the names, addresses and other personal identifiable information maintained during the project were destroyed at its conclusion. Within the text, all references to individuals, cities, communities, etc. have been either changed or omitted in order to protect respondents' privacy.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This section provides a narrative description of the lived experience of the individuals included in this study: Native American people who are Deaf residing in the state of Oklahoma. Each portrayal will include a summary of his or her tribal history, because when striving to understand an individual and his or her perspectives on issues, one must first understand the past and from where the person originated. Also included will be a description of the community in which the individual lives and residency pattern shifts that have occurred over the life-time of the individual. Responses related to family structures and caregiver descriptions will assist in building a knowledge of the family organization and each individual's function within the family unit.

Three areas were emphasized during the course of the investigation. The first area was language. There are numerous Native American languages spoken in Oklahoma. While in the past, Native languages were discouraged and often abandoned for the language of the majority, there has been a resurgence of interest in Native languages among many tribes

and an intense effort at their preservation. Individuals responded to questions related to the Native language/s of the home, their use of American Indian Sign Language, and the utilization of American Sign Language. Because isolation is one of the greatest negative factors in a Deaf individual's life, discussion of family communication and community interaction unfolds in each story. They discussed hearing loss, perceptions of etiology, age-of-onset, traditional medicines used to treat the hearing loss, and the impact it had on their lives. In addition, a discussion of the family's response to the hearing loss was provided by each individual.

The second area of study focused on cultural issues. Each individual discussed the culture of the home and community, relating particularly to tribal or group events in which he or she participates. Deaf culture was discussed, as well as individual or organized group affiliation with Deaf people. The third area of this study focused on education and literacy. Each individual recounts his or her own experiences with the educational system, as a student in the mission schools, Indian training schools, residential schools for the Deaf, or in public schools, and makes suggestions for those who work in the educational systems today. Individuals were not confined, though, to the list of questions asked by the researcher. Both the respondent and the researcher felt free to branch off and discuss other questions that were relevant to the research project. And last, each individual

shared possibly the most salient aspect of this study: a reflection on the most difficult problem/s one faces as a Native American Deaf person. Each story is unique and now has voice so that others may come "to understand ourselves, others, and the possibilities life holds for us" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 10).

In the normal course of human science research it is customary to change the name of individual respondents in order to protect their rights to privacy. However, during this research project I did not feel comfortable following this protocol because names are particularly important and often sacred to Native American people. The names of Native American children often reflect an occurrence during their birth night. According to Debo (1972),

> Choctaw children were usually named after animals, or for some incident connected with their birth. Later in life they received new names as a recognition of some special achievement, or from some incident or adventure, or as an indication of some personal characteristic. Traditional Choctaws are extremely reluctant to pronounce their own names. The wife is also forbidden to speak the name of her husband; when it was necessary for them to distinguish him, she referred to him by the name of her child, as Ok-le-wo-na's father. (p. 17)

In Kiowa Culture, the manner in which children receive names is also interesting. Names given newborn babies might be acquired in several ways. A name could be given as a

result of a deed or act performed by the father. Sometimes, an occurrence at the time of birth, or the first thing either of the parents saw after the birth, gave them an idea for the child's name. In certain instances, names were given by an older tribal member as a means of honoring a respected name (United States Department of Interior, 1994).

In a similar way, Deaf children receive name signs. In the case of Deaf children with Deaf parents, name signs are given at birth. If a Deaf child is born to hearing parents, the name sign is generally given to the child by a Deaf person they encounter such as a teacher or dorm counselor. Name signs may be arbitrary or descriptive. Arbitrary name signs are generally formed by utilizing the fingerspelling alphabet and placed on or near the body. An example of an arbitrary sign name would be the first letter of the name Keith, "k" placed on the left shoulder. Descriptive name signs are derived from distinctive physical features such as a mole on the cheek or a cleft chin (Smith, Lentz, Mikos, 1988).

The Native American Deaf respondent may have three or more names, i.e., an anglicized name such as Karen, a Native American name such as Blazing Sun, and an arbitrary name sign such as a "k" handshape touching the elbow of the left arm. All of the respondents in this study have anglicized names one would associate with the majority culture; however, I felt that providing pseudo anglicized names would not necessarily enhance this project. Therefore, no reference to

personal names was used in this study. I chose, instead, to refer to each respondent with a code such as R#1 (Respondent Number One).

Nine individuals were contacted to be interviewed, eight of whom agreed and one declined. Limited data from one interview occurred due to the low language level of the individual being interviewed. In this situation, the data includes a description of the individual's lived experience and information from interviews with relatives.

Eight interviews were conducted with Native American Deaf people residing in Oklahoma. The following table provides the respondents' characteristics in four areas: tribal affiliation, blood quantum, hearing loss, and area of residency.

TABLE I

SUMMARY OF RESPONDENTS' CHARACTERISTICS

Tribal Affiliation		Blood Quantum	Hearing Loss	Area of Residency
R#1	Chickasaw	4/4	Profound	South-Central
R#2	Creek/Eskimo	1/125 + 1/4	Severe	Northeastern
R#3	Creek	4/4	Severe	Eastern
R#4	Creek	4/4	Profound	Northeastern
R#5	Cherokee	4/4	Profound	Northeastern
R#6	Cherokee	1/8	Profound	Northeastern
R#7	Cherokee	9/64	Profound	Northeastern
R#8	Cherokee	4/4	Profound	Northeastern

Ikhapǫwaklo, to be deaf.

Ilbak ishtanompoli, to use American Sign Language.

Ilbak ishtaǫli, to use American Indian Sign Language.

The Chickasaws are of the Muskogean linguistic family and one of the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma. Chickasaw, is the approved anglicized form of *Chik' asha*, the Choctaw name for the tribe. The name Chicsa, Chikasha or Chickasaw has been said to signify rebellion (Wright, 1986) or rebel (Malone, 1922). The Chickasaws were always a comparatively small tribe but became noted for their warlike disposition which brought them into frequent conflict with neighboring tribes (Wright, 1986). The Chickasaws were the last of the Five Civilized tribes to be relocated to Indian Territory from their homelands which were located in northeastern Mississippi. The removal west occurred in 1837 (Hale & Gibson, 1991).

From 1855 until statehood in 1907, the Chickasaw Nation held land lying east of the ninety-eighth meridian, between the Canadian and the Red Rivers in what is now south-central Oklahoma (Wright, 1986). They established the capitol of the Chickasaw Nation at Tishomingo.

The land that became the Chickasaw Nation has a varied landscape. The Arbuckle Mountains, one the oldest mountain ranges in the United States, serves as centerpiece with grasslands extending out in each direction. The Canadian

River provides the northern boundary and the Red River the southern boundary. Both rivers carry the red sandy loam soil which eventually empties into the Mississippi River.

The Oklahoma School for the Deaf, the state residential school for Deaf children, was moved from Guthrie to Sulphur in 1909. It is located on land which was formerly part of the Chickasaw Nation. Today, within the town of Sulphur, the Chickasaw National Park provides solitude for travelers as well as a sanctuary for animals within the town proper. Rippling creeks run throughout the park, originating from underground sulphur springs which many people believe have healing powers. Throughout the area are buffalo wallows, large indentions in the earth, where for years buffalo herds slept during migrations across the plains. Circling the buffalo wallows are hiking trails which meander up and around the hillside where, according to local legend, the Wichita and Caddo Indians once camped during hunting excursions.

Interview #1

Respondent #1 (R#1) is female and 33 years of age. She is beautiful and stoic with long black hair and dark skin. She is full-blood (4/4) Chickasaw; however, official tribal records lists her as one-half. Although her father and mother were both full-blood (4/4) Chickasaw, blood quantum on tribal rolls does not recognize R#1 as full-blood because paternity has not been legally established as of this date.

R#1 graduated from the residential school for the Deaf, having entered the school at the age of six. She prefers to communicate in American Sign Language and written English. She does not use her voice or any spoken language. Her signs are clear and complex indicating a high level of language proficiency. She operates the telephone readily by utilizing a special text telephone, i.e., a Telecommunication Device for the Deaf (TTY) and using relay services which allow her to make phone calls to hearing individuals via an interpreter. She resides in south-central Oklahoma in an area once owned by the Chickasaw Nation, in a rural part of Oklahoma 95 miles from the nearest metropolitan area. R#1 came from a large family. In her mother's family there were nine children. All of the aunts, uncles, and cousins are very close. R#1 is the oldest of three children; she has two brothers and no sisters. She was born in Ft. Sill Indian Hospital and became deaf at six to eight months of age from a high fever.

In the late 1950s, R#1's mother moved to California looking for work. Many Native American families were leaving Oklahoma during that time because of the Indian Relocation Act. While in California, an Aunt found out she was deaf when she compared R#1 to her cousin of a similar age. This maternal aunt continued to be a major caregiver in R#1's life. Communication with the aunt occurs mostly through written English. The majority of the family communicates in an idiosyncratic sign language, built on the basis of

American Indian Sign Language, which they invented when R#1 was young. Her brother, whom R#1 taught sign language, and her mother [now deceased] were the most fluent in communicating with her.

R#1's education was of utmost importance to her family. Her mother wanted to enroll her in the Ft. Sill Indian Training School because her aunt worked there and because they were familiar with the school and its mission. It was also important for her to attend a school for Native American people. R#1's mother wanted family near to protect R#1 and to oversee her education. Her aunt worked in the dormitory and could watch over R#1 in the evenings.

R#1 met the entrance requirements for Ft. Sill Indian Training School, but as the family investigated further, they realized that it was not the best placement for her. All of the students were hearing, and even though at the Ft. Sill Indian School she could learn American Indian Sign Language, her mother was reluctant to enroll her there. When R#1's mother heard of the residential school for the Deaf, she decided to visit there. The residential school for the Deaf was closer to the mother's home than Ft. Sill Indian School. After comparing the two schools, R#1's mother decided she should go to the residential school for the Deaf because it was a special school for Deaf students.

While at the school, R#1 missed all of her family: her mother and brothers, her nine cousins, and her two aunts. R#1 recalls her mother and aunt crying when they left her at

the residential school, and she recalls how she longed to be with them. After a while she got used to being there and was tolerant of the fact that she could not go home every weekend. At the residential school she learned the sign language of Deaf people. Her brother, who is nearest to her age, also learned sign language because R#1 taught him. Her other family members, though, did not learn sign language because they depended on her brother who assumed the role as the family interpreter.

R#1 believes that schools should realize the close relationships that Native American children feel with their extended family members. She believes that she would have been better able to cope with being away from them if she could talk to teachers about how she felt. She believes that when she left home to attend the residential school for the Deaf, she went through a period of depression caused by severing the bond she had with her family. As a young child she did not have adequate language to understand what was happening. She did not realize that she could go home in two weeks; she was afraid that she would never see her family again. R#1 suggested that young children have a family album of pictures which they could keep with them, and when they felt lonely, they could use the album to talk with the teacher, house parents, and other students.

R#1 feels that the education she received at the residential school for the Deaf was adequate. Some of the teachers could communicate adequately, but most could not.

Most used signed English, but could not understand her when she used American Sign Language. In the dormitory, communication flowed freely since most of the house parents were either Deaf or were children of Deaf parents. It was in the dorm that she developed skill in American Sign Language.

R#1 was active in many tribal events. On two occasions she competed for the title of Miss Chickasaw; however, she was unsuccessful. She felt that the other contestants had an unfair advantage because she did not have an interpreter. R#1 also participated in the Miss Deaf Oklahoma pageant.

R#1 did not participate in Pow-Wows because she did not have an interpreter and did not feel included. But at other events she did not feel any different: she felt the same as the others. "People know that I am Deaf and accept me." After high school, R#1 did not further her education which is common in her family. However, one of her aunts went to the Haskell Indian Institute in Kansas for a brief time.

R#1 is a homemaker and married to a hearing man. They have three hearing children. She believes that there are three other Deaf people in her tribe; however, there does not appear to be a hereditary trait for deafness in the Chickasaw Tribe. Today R#1 also works part-time as a sign language instructor and holds an office in the nationally recognized organization, the Intertribal Deaf Council.

The biggest obstacle for R#1 is lack of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). She has applied for numerous jobs in her rural community, including most

recently, a job as a rural health assistant. This job requires weekly visits to elderly people's homes to help them with cleaning their home and basic cooking, and by taking them to the store, etc. She was told that she did not qualify for the job because she cannot hear. She feels that she could do the job because she has had a great deal of experience taking care of elders in her own family.

The Creeks

Po'heko, to be deaf or deafness.

Ciyayetv, to be silent.

According to Wright (1986), the name Creek is from the Ochese Creek of the Ocmulgee River in Georgia. The Creek made their homes along the upper course of the river until removal to Indian Territory. The Creek are also referred to as the Muskogee. Ethnologists believe that this name may have been derived from the Choctaw, *'m-uski-algi*, meaning the cane people; or *humaskogi*, meaning red cane people or red sticks (Wright, 1986).

The Creek Nation belongs to the Muskogean linguistic family and are one of the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma. From 1866 to 1907 they occupied land in eastern and central Oklahoma, north of the South Canadian River and west of the Arkansas River. The area of the Creek Nation was broad and vast, the earth retaining rich oil reserves. Tulsa, the second largest city in Oklahoma was founded by the Creeks on the banks of the Arkansas River.

The present day capitol of the Creek Nation is in Okmulgee, Oklahoma which is 38 miles south of Tulsa. Approximately 50% of the tribe is composed of mixed-bloods (Euro-American and Native American) (Wright, 1986). There are also full-blood Creek families, many of whom have become wealthy from the oil and natural gas reserves on their property. Creek Nation Bingo, one of the largest bingo halls in Oklahoma, is located on the Arkansas River near Tulsa, Oklahoma and serves as a major source or revenue and place of employment for Creek people. However, a majority of the Creek, especially full-bloods, live in rural areas within the Creek Nation lands and earn their living as farmers or ranchers.

Interview #2

Respondent #2 (R#2) is male and 43 years old. He is tall and with light skin and hair. He is on the tribal rolls of the Creek Nation and has Alaskan Eskimo ancestry; his maternal grandfather was 1/2 Creek and his maternal grandmother was Alaskan Eskimo. The specific Alaskan Eskimo tribe is unknown, but R#2 described his grandmother as being full-blood with dark skin, dark, elongated eyes, and speaking predominantly her native language. Documented blood quantum on Creek tribal rolls for R#2 is 1/125, and though unrecorded, he feels his ancestry includes 1/4 Alaskan Eskimo.

R#2 postulated that his maternal grandfather and grandmother met during a Pow-Wow and were later married. His grandfather spoke the Creek language and English, and his grandmother spoke her native Eskimo language, Creek, and English to a limited degree. She taught R#2 the two handed [English] fingerspelling alphabet and communicated solely with him through that method.

R#2 is also of German and Dutch descent. His paternal great-grandfather staked claims in the 1800s for the land which now makes up the family farm. R#2 is self-employed and is the fourth generation to work the family farm which consists of approximately six thousand acres of Arkansas river bottom land.

R#2 was the first Deaf person born in his family. Hearing loss etiology is unknown. At age two and one-half his mother drove him to Oklahoma City for a hearing test which confirmed his severe hearing loss. At age four his mother enrolled him at the residential school for the Deaf where he attended for 15 years, graduating in the early 1970s. When he first enrolled in the school, his mother stayed in Sulphur for a week to make sure her son adjusted to living at the residential school. She had grieved deeply when the initial diagnosis was confirmed and did not want to leave her son at the residential school; however, it was impossible to move because of the family farm. The family was uneasy about their son living so far from relatives, so the maternal grandmother decided to move to the community in

which the school was located and oversee R#2's education. He continued to live in the dorm, but every afternoon she would check on him or he would go to her house to visit. It was comforting to know she was near.

R#2's educational experience at the residential school for the Deaf was marked by both good times and bad times. He commented that his education was, at best, only fair. He did mention two teachers whom he really liked, however, he commented that, "Most of the teachers turned me off. I was often in trouble and in the superintendent's office." In class all of the teachers communicated orally and wrote on the board. They did not use sign. He believes now that the school has improved, "At least the teachers and house parents can sign pretty well." He learned to sign in the dormitory from other Deaf staff, yet sometimes the students made up their own signs. "We were more free to sign in the dorms because the hearing house parents let us." R#2 vividly recounts two ghost stories with which he had personal experience. They occurred while he was a student in the old Sequoyah dorm, which has been demolished. He said that most of the students didn't believe in ghosts, but all the Native American students did. R#2 feels very strongly that schools for Deaf children should teach about Deaf history and Native American history: through the study of the past, children learn to be proud of their heritage.

His grandmother and grandfather continued to have a great influence throughout R#2's life; during the summers

they took him on vacations to Alaska where he learned to drive a dog sled and to ice fish. They also attended Pow-Wows every summer in Pawhuska, OK. His grandmother danced, but he never did. He wanted to join in the event, but felt that his deafness prevented participation. He spent most of his time just watching and feeling the vibrations of the drums.

When he was at home with his family his favorite activity was hunting. He usually hunted with his brother who could communicate well with him. According to R#2, his maternal grandfather taught him to hunt with guns and a bow and arrow. His love for hunting continues and there are trophies of deer, bobcat, and other wild animals in his home.

He also loved to ride appaloosa horses, every year going on a three day, 25 mile trail ride. He commented that when he went to the school for the Deaf he was very disappointed because he couldn't take his guns and they didn't have any horses. Therefore, he couldn't hunt or ride.

At the residential school for the Deaf he did not feel homesick even though it was more restrictive and confining than home where he had a lot of freedom. But, when he left home to go back to school he always felt flushed; as the bus went up and down the hills he felt his temperature simultaneously go up and down. The four boys who rode with him always dreaded seeing the sign for the town because they knew the school was near. But, after they arrived at the school and started playing, everything was okay. Although it

had been 15 years since he graduated, taking his own two children to enroll at the residential school brought back the same emotions.

R#2 is married to a Deaf woman from the northwestern part of the United States. They have three children, one female and two males, all of whom were born in W.W. Hastings Indian Hospital in Tahlequah, OK. The recessive genetic trait for deafness is apparent because all three children have hearing losses. The oldest two are Deaf and attend the residential school for the Deaf, while the youngest son is hard of hearing and attends the neighborhood school. The youngest son, though, expressed an interest in attending the residential school for the Deaf so that he could be with his siblings.

R#2 feels that the greatest obstacle in his life is communication with hearing people. "It is difficult to get interpreters in a rural area. And even when one is scheduled, they often don't show up." There are around 10 Deaf people who live in the same community as R#2, and most are unemployed. "Companies don't want to hire Deaf people because they can't communicate with them and have concerns about job safety." R#2 feels that most Deaf people get some kind of training, but that training is worthless unless they also get a job. He feels lack of communication with hearing people and lack of employment are the two greatest barriers in most Deaf people's lives.

Interview # 3

Respondent #3 (R#3) is male, in his early 40s, and currently resides in a full-time nursing/care facility for profoundly mentally disabled individuals in a small, rural town in eastern Oklahoma. He is tall, over six feet in height, with dark hair and dark skin. Prior to the interview I reviewed high school yearbooks from the residential school for the Deaf and found that R#3 had been involved in sports: varsity football, track, and basketball. He joined clubs; "O" Club, VICA, and Lettermen. He was involved in the football homecoming queen coronation as an escort. R#3 looked very normal and athletic. R#3 was in the yearbooks from '70 - '73 but not in the yearbook for 1974, the year he should have graduated. While at the residential school for the Deaf, several staff commented about my research and highly recommended that I interview R#3, feeling he would be a good example of the Native American Deaf experience. R#3 is full-blood Creek [blood quantum 4/4] and from a traditional family. I sent a letter addressed to him with only the town and zipcode. Within a week I was contacted by R#3's sister who called to set up the interview in his mother's home at two o'clock, Sunday afternoon.

I drove two hours from Tulsa to a very rural area of Oklahoma, following the directions provided by the sister. I drove through the small community of approximately 200 people until I reached a dirt street in the shape of a "U" around

which Native American homes had been built. The small, brick, ranch style homes all looked the same and were in need of maintenance. Several cars where parked on the grass in the front yards, some jacked up or on blocks awaiting repairs. A pack of dogs ran from house to house sniffing for scraps of food. The last house on the left was R#3's mother's home. The yard was full of cars, so I parked along the dirt road. After a few minutes, R#3's mother approached my car accompanied by one of her sons. She informed me that she had not picked up R#3 today and that I should go to the nursing home where arrangements had been made for my visit. She made no excuses and handed me the signed consent form. Wanting to let me know a little about R#3 before I met him, his mother said he had become violent after his father was killed in an automobile accident. Because of his violence she couldn't take care of him anymore and put him in the nursing facility. During our conversation as I asked her a question, she would discuss it in the Creek language with her son before responding to me in English. We continued our conversation for about 15 minutes.

After talking with R#3's mother, I drove ten miles to the next small community in which the nursing home was located. A nurse met me at the door and asked for identification; she had been expecting me and I was informed that I could conduct the interview in the lobby. When they brought R#3 to me I was shocked because of his appearance, lack of eye contact, and level of communication. He sat down

in an arm chair across from mine. I discovered quickly that he could communicate only on a very limited basis, appearing to have forgotten most of the sign language he had learned at the residential school for the Deaf. As we talked he continually flapped his legs and sometimes pulled his ears--self-stimulation mannerisms indicative of individuals with severe autism and other mental disorders. R#3 often appeared to withdraw into his own world, but was able to answer a few questions. He told me that he was Deaf and volunteered his sign name. He talked about attending the residential school for the Deaf and said that he graduated in 1974. After looking at several yearbook pictures from the residential school for the Deaf, he could pick out people he remembered and show me their sign names. I asked him about playing football and he told me that he played linebacker for the defense team. When asked about his dad, R#3 responded that his dad had had a heart attack, which contradicts his mother's response. After about one hour, R#3 appeared to tire and it became more difficult to communicate with him, so the nursing staff came to take him to his room. I asked the nurse how they communicated with him and they responded, "By pointing and leading him." As I departed, R#3 tried to go with me, following me to the front door.

Interview #4

Respondent #4 (R#4) lives 65 miles from the nearest urban area in a small town, which is also headquarters for

the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). He has resided in this community all of his life. R#4 is a 42 year old male with blood quantum of (4/4) and is a member of the Creek Nation. He is tall and thin with dark hair and skin. He lives with his elderly father and performs the duties as primary caregiver for him. His father, in his late 1980s, spoke clearly and responded to questions directed to him. He told me that his native language was Creek, but that he only spoke the language in the home with his daughters and not around strangers. R#4's father attended an Indian boarding school when he was young where they discouraged him from speaking Creek.

R#4 has never worked outside the home. When he returned to his home community from the residential school for the Deaf, he spent most of his time at home performing various duties for his parents. He is the youngest of seven children: 4 girls and 3 boys. R#4 became deaf from a high fever which occurred when he was one year old. There are no other Deaf people in his family. According to his father, the fever was associated with the flu, but he also said that R#4's mother thought he was marked during pregnancy. R#4 was born in W.W. Hastings Indian Hospital in Tahlequah. He did not appear to have any disabilities at birth, but R#4's maternal aunts felt that something was wrong with him. Approximately two years after the illness, he was seen by an audiologist at this same hospital who identified a profound hearing loss.

When R#4 was first diagnosed, his father's friend who was Sioux and worked for the BIA, taught the family American Indian Sign Language. They communicated using these signs until R#4 went to the residential school for the Deaf. There did not seem to be much shame associated with the deafness, although expectations on the part of the parents for R#4 to live independently are low. I asked R#4 what he will do after his father passes away; he responded, "My sisters will live with me."

Three years after the initial diagnosis by the audiologist at the age of six, his parents enrolled R#4 in the residential school for the Deaf. He continued in the school, but attendance was irregular. Sometimes when he was supposed to go back to school, he would stay home and catch the bus a month later. He left the residential school during his junior year and did not graduate.

After learning American Sign Language, R#4 continued to use American Indian Sign Language at home, but tended to mix the two languages. R#4's younger sister was the most competent in communicating with him. "I depended on her to tell everyone what I wanted, and I would ask her to explain what was going on." Today, R#4 does not wear a hearing aid and communicated with me in American Sign Language. His use of American Sign Language remains competent and proficient. Maintenance of his language occurs because there are at least five Native American Deaf people living within a 20 mile radius of his home. And, although visits are infrequent,

they socialize together whenever possible. R#4 communicates with his father through gestures and American Indian Sign Language, but communication is extremely limited.

R#4 does not participate in any activities sponsored by the Creek Nation; although when his mother was alive and the children were young they did attend cultural activities as a family. R#4 explained, "I liked to go when I was a child because all the kids played games, but when I got older I didn't want to go because I felt left out. Everyone was doing their own thing and didn't want to hang around with me. Sometimes I just sat in the car."

When R#4 discusses his education he becomes quiet and withdrawn. He feels his education is about the same as the other Native American Deaf people. He stated, "I didn't like to go to the residential school for the Deaf, but when I got there it was okay. We had lots of toys and books, and I liked to play sports. I was always ready to leave, and going back was always hard, but I would try to be patient until I could come back home again. Finally, I just quit. Some of my friends quit too. I prefer to be at home."

R#4's biggest challenge in his daily life is communication with hearing people. Sometimes when he tries to make a relay phone call, people don't understand what he is trying to communicate. For example, when he tries to order a pizza, sometimes when it arrives it is not what he ordered. At other times when he makes calls, people just hang up on him. This, according to R#4 is due to his lack of

ability to express his thoughts in English. At the residential school for the Deaf, English was emphasized in all his classes; however, he was not successful. Although he feels very strongly that his lack of education is related to the frustrations he experiences in communication, his only recommendation for schools is to help Deaf students learn to communicate in writing.

R#4 appears content in his life and in his role as caregiver for his father. At the same time, he is very aware of the problems Native American Deaf people face with integrating into their communities.

The Cherokees

Di-gi-li-e:-na. Tsu-li-e:-na. He/She is deaf.

The Cherokee Nation is the largest tribe in Oklahoma having 72,000 members (Perdue, cited in Mankiller & Wallis, 1993). The Tribe is governed by an elected Chief and a council representing the seven clans of the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokees originated from the southern branch of Iroquois family which once occupied the mountainous portions of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia (Malone, 1922). According to former Chief Mankiller and Wallis (1993) the Old Settler families migrated of their own free will to an area in the far reaches of Arkansas and beyond, which later became Indian Territory. The voluntary migration occurred two decades before the federal government forced the Cherokee people along the Trail of Tears.

The capitol of the Cherokee Nation is Tahlequah, located in the northeastern part of the state. The land is marked by rolling hills and forests of blackjack oak, hickory, and dogwood. Wild plum thickets, grapes, and blackberries grow abundantly, and huckleberries blanket the flint ridges hidden under the forest canopy. Abundant rainfall creates underground springs, rivers, and lakes surrounded by lush vegetation. Today this area is referred to as "Green Country."

The first effort to teach deaf and blind children in Oklahoma was at Ft. Gibson in 1880. The school educated children of the Five Civilized Tribes (Gannon, 1981) and was established at Ft. Gibson because the fort served as a holding area at the end of the Trail of Tears. After the Territorial School for the Deaf was opened in Guthrie by a Deaf couple named Mr. and Mrs. Ellsworth Long, Deaf children from Ft. Gibson were transferred there (Gannon, 1981).

Interview #5

Respondent #5 (R#5) is a 31 year old female with 4/4 blood quantum. She lives in the northeastern section of Oklahoma in a small town with a population of approximately 15,000, most of whom are Native American. The area is economically poor with high rates of unemployment. She lives alone with her young son in a small rented house in an impoverished area of the town. There was a late model car parked in the front yard which she later told me, she herself

had bought. Several small children were playing around the front of the house. As I approached the door, R#5 was sitting just inside the open doorway. I greeted her in sign language and she came outside to talk to me. R#5 was born in the old W.W. Hastings Indian Hospital in Tahlequah in 1965. She is petite (about 5 feet tall, 100 lbs) with long (highlighted) brown hair stylishly combed. She wore a sweatshirt tucked in her faded jeans.

The respondent's family lives about ten miles from her in a rural country community. She is the youngest of 11 children and has five brothers and five sisters. There are approximately 60 people in her extended family, and she is the only Deaf person [a statement which she later contradicts]. She was born deaf because her mother had chicken pox or measles while she was pregnant. R#5 has some feelings of animosity for her mother, as she was near people who were infected with a virus while being pregnant. However, R#5 mentioned that she has one Deaf cousin in Missouri who is about 55 years old, thus there appears to be a genetic trait for deafness in her family. She wears a hearing aid in her left ear so that she can hear her son, but is totally deaf in the right ear.

She started explaining that her eight year old son has liver cancer (a malignant tumor was removed) causing her to drive to Oklahoma City for chemotherapy every two weeks. When she takes her son for chemotherapy at the hospital in Oklahoma city, she gets an interpreter. She continued to

talk about her family and her life. I explained to her about the project and she signed the consent form, eager to discuss her life and answer questions. She was, though, very concerned about confidentiality and asked several clarifying questions regarding the consent form. We talked outside in the yard even though it was a very cold day; later she asked if we could sit in my car. She seemed very excited and enjoyed the conversation.

R#5's language is sophisticated and complex. She used American Sign Language and some signed English. At first when we talked she used her voice and tended to sign in English because I am hearing. Later, after she had confidence in my ability to understand her, she used predominately American Sign Language.

R#5 feels that her family is ashamed that she is Deaf, and she has had some serious problems with one sister. R#5 told her sister, "If you get pregnant and your baby is Deaf, I will refuse to help you." The family does not allow her to use sign language in public when they go to restaurants and stores. Her family does not use American Sign Language, but they do use an idiosyncratic, home sign language when communicating with her. Most of the time, though, they write notes. Her mom speaks both English and Cherokee, the latter often being spoken in the home. Her grandmother [now deceased], who lived with them, spoke only the Cherokee language. R#5 did not learn Cherokee because her mother thought that it would be too hard for her to understand.

R#5 and her family go to some Pow-Wows and stomp dances locally, but she does not dance because she is Deaf and feels she can't participate. R#5 did not run for princess, a contest sponsored by the Cherokee Nation annually whereby a young Cherokee girl is selected to preside over the Cherokee National Holiday and continue her reign throughout the year, because she feels that she can't do it and because there are no sign language interpreters in her community.

She went to the residential school for the Deaf when she was seven years old and graduated in the 80's. The first day was very scary for her, but they had lots of toys and she slowly got used to being away from family. Her family was not upset when they left her because they realized that the school was appropriate for her. She stated that the residential school did not give her a good education because the teachers spoiled the students and did not make them study. R#5 has been very disappointed with her education and now has problems reading and writing. She mentioned two male teachers at the residential school who were her favorites: one was Deaf and the other was of Native American descent.

After graduation from the residential school she married an anglo, hearing man. They had one child, but divorced after two weeks because her husband abused her. She has no job, but would like to receive training in computers. She does not understand the vocational rehabilitation system and feels that communication would be a problem if she went to that office. Presently, she draws social security, aid to

dependent children, and receives medicaid and food stamps. She has trouble with her finances and works to make ends meet. Her only friends are Deaf friends but, she has to limit the time she spends with them because she must focus on her son and his medical needs. Her closest friend is another Native American Deaf female, of the same age, with whom she shares child care responsibilities.

The biggest problem she faces everyday is communication, especially with the family. R#5 talked emotionally about her family who thinks she can't do anything. They would prefer she live in her mother's house, but she refuses to live with them, preferring to live independently. They would not let her drive because they thought Deaf people can't drive cars, so she did not start driving until she was 25 years old. The family checks on her often, but the relationship between them is strained. She feels they do not trust her to live independently.

Several cultural conflicts were apparent. When she lived at home, Deaf people would sometimes just show up to visit, which is very common in Deaf culture. When they left, her parents would fuss at her for letting the Deaf people linger on.

She did not learn any Native American traditions from her family because there was no communication. She feels if she learned from them, she would better understand her family and their ways, and perhaps their relationship would be more congenial. However, there is a lot of frustration because

she does not understand their culture and they don't understand about Deaf culture.

The family stops by her home to check on her because she does not have a phone. R#5 has special equipment to use with a phone, a text telephone (TTY) that she received from the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation, but she does not know how to use it. Someone trained her, but it was a waste of time because she does not have a phone. When needing to call someone, she usually goes two houses down and writes a note to an elderly Cherokee woman. However, the elderly woman speaks mainly Cherokee with limited English. R#5 hates to bother her neighbors and would prefer making the calls by herself. She continued, for two hours, talking about the frustrations she feels with everyday communication and family relationships.

R#5 wanted to talk to her Deaf friend to see if she'd be willing to be interviewed the next morning at R#5's house. She told me to wait while she drove down to her friend's house to check with her. In about 15 minutes she returned with an affirmative response. We could complete her interview the next morning and begin the interview with her friend.

The next day I arrived at 9:00 a.m., as requested. R#5 was waiting for me when I arrived; she greeted me warmly and invited me into the house. Her young son and his female cousin were watching cartoons in the living room. R#5 had a special chair for me in the kitchen which adjoined the living

room. During this conversation she stood where she had a view of me, as well as the young children. While we waited for her friend she continued talking about her life and perspectives on issues. She clarified several questions I had and continued talking for about one hour while waiting for her friend who never showed up.

Interview #6

Respondent #6 (R#6) is a 32 year old male and lives in a small community of less than 1,000 people in northeastern Oklahoma. The community is one of the oldest in Oklahoma, near the intersection of three major rivers, and played an important role in the relocation of the Five Civilized Tribes to Indian Territory. It was also the site of the first school for the Deaf established by the Cherokee Nation.

R#6 is medium in height and has light skin and dark hair. He called me utilizing Relay Oklahoma, a special telecommunication service that Deaf people use to call hearing people. R#6 had been contacted by a friend regarding the interviews and was eager to be involved setting up an appointment with me for the following Saturday afternoon. He gave me directions to his home, which is located 65 miles from the nearest metropolitan area. I noted that R#6 used the relay system competently and that his written message was clear although his English grammar was substandard.

The modest home was located in the center of town, and at one time it had been one of the nicest in the area. When

I arrived, R#6 was expecting me and met me at the door. He invited me into the living room. He was very cordial, communicative, and seemed to enjoy having the company. R#6 currently lives with his aging father who, according to R#6, suffers from Alzheimer's disease. I observed little communication in the home. His father does not know sign language and the only communication between the two of them was through very basic gestures and pointing. His father joined us in the living room and sat patiently, observing the interview. From time to time, R#6 requested that I ask his father a clarifying question. His father eagerly participated and responded coherently.

R#6's father told me that his mother was 1/2, he is 1/4, and R#6 is 1/8 blood quantum on the Cherokee rolls. However, I noted that R#6's father's physical appearance and mannerisms appeared to be of much greater blood quantum. For example, R#6's father never looked directly at me, i.e., there was no eye contact. Even though the language of the home is English, he spoke in a very reserved, guttural voice with intonations indicative of the Cherokee language. All family genealogy records, though, have been lost. R#6 proudly stated that his father had served the community as former postmaster and mayor.

R#6 was born premature, weighing two pounds at birth he was required to remain in the hospital for 60 days. His mother [now deceased] was 42 years of age at the time of his birth. When he was a young child he was diagnosed as

profoundly deaf with muscle dysfunction from cerebral palsy. He has marked impairment of the lower legs, but is able to walk without assistive equipment. He is the only Deaf person in his family, and other than hearing and mobility problems, R#6 appears normal. His mother was a homemaker and served as his primary caregiver until her death. According to R#6 she seemed to accept his deafness.

R#6 has several siblings including three sisters and two half brothers. The brother closest to his age knows signs and serves as R#6's primary communication link with the family although one sister can use fingerspelling.

R#6 never considered leaving his home to attend the residential school for the Deaf. His father commented, "We don't send kids away from home." He first entered school in his local community when he was four, but after a short period of time he was transferred 15 miles away to a larger town with a program for children with disabilities. The small cooperative program with five Deaf children utilized the oral method. During this time R#6 believes that he learned nothing at school. In the early 1970s the program began using Signed English, which helped to some extent. R#6 remained in the program until 9th grade when he dropped out. He spoke vehemently about the education he received and stated, "School did not match my needs. My signs went over the heads of the teachers who could not communicate very well. It was boring and did not challenge me. I saw no reason to stay in school." His suggestions for improving the

educational system included increasing teachers' sign language competence, having challenging classes which help students develop English competence, and when Deaf children are in mainstream programs, providing at least one-half of the school day in a special classroom for Deaf children where they will have communication without an interpreter and be with other Deaf children. In addition, R#6 commented that communities need to become more accessible for their Deaf residents. He would like to see more text telephones for the Deaf (TTYs) in public pay phones.

R#6's education was in public schools, having never attended nor visited the residential school for the Deaf. He has never participated in Deaf cultural events or activities where large groups of Deaf people congregate, but has participated in Native American cultural activities on a limited basis. Prior to his mother's death, they frequently drove to a small community in eastern Oklahoma where the Evening Shade stomp dances were held, but R#6 felt he could not participate because he was Deaf. They also attended the Cherokee National Holiday events at Tahlequah, although they have not participated since his mother's death.

R#6 displayed competency in his use of American Sign Language, though a few English signs appeared infrequently. Since there are so few deaf people in the area (R#6 is the only deaf person in the community), I asked him who taught him sign language. R#6 responded that a Deaf couple, who were hired by his parents as tutors, taught him signs in

1972. He never used American Indian Sign Language. R#6 explained that he uses English signs because of his public school experience; however, I noted a strong usage of American Sign Language. His signs were rapid and complex with advanced receptive skills. Language usage was not indicative of an individual isolated from others who use American Sign Language. Further questioning revealed that R#6 drives to the town in which he was educated, meeting with other Deaf friends, all of whom are Native American, representing various tribes and educational backgrounds including both public schools and the residential school for the Deaf.

Questions pertaining to identity revealed several conflicts. R#6 lives predominantly in the hearing community and in a hearing family. He identifies himself as Deaf, but feels that Deaf people are inferior to hearing people. He would like to be hearing so that he could communicate with others in his community. He feels a strong connection to Cherokee people, yet feels his deafness precludes participation in that culture. R#6 had difficulty describing himself to me and at one point commented, "I don't fit in with hearing people, [white, African American, Native American-- regardless of their race]. I am most comfortable with Deaf people, but there is a big problem with rumors and gossiping among Deaf people, so I don't go over there very often."

R#6 seemed to accept his life and did not exhibit any notable hostilities or aggressions. He's never been employed and receives social security. Daily activities include taking care of his father, driving to the post office to get their mail, riding his motorcycle on a dirt bike track in the country and swimming in the summer.

Interview #7

Respondent #7 (R#7) contacted me by text telephone, using a TTY, to see if she could schedule an interview with me. She had heard about my research and wanted to volunteer for the study. I agreed to meet with her during the initial visit in my office; The second visit would be in her home.

R#7 is a 33 year old female. She is tall with light skin and light hair. Her official card from the Cherokee Nation lists her blood quantum as 9/64 Cherokee. She believes that her paternal grandmother, whose family came to Indian Territory from Georgia, was full-blood (4/4) Cherokee. She signed that her grandmother, who spoke Cherokee and did not associate with people other than immediate family, was "strong" Cherokee, which translates to mean, she followed traditional ways. R#7 stated that her grandmother had a strong spirit. She reported that her father was one-half Cherokee and that her mother was Jewish. Her mother was young when she and her two siblings were born, and in many ways, neglected them.

R#7 grew up in a small community of less than 1,000 people in northeastern Oklahoma. The community is one of the oldest in Oklahoma, being the site of the first school for the Deaf established by the Cherokee Nation in the 1800s. R#7 remained in this small community until she was five years of age, when her parents were divorced. After that, she lived with her mother in several small towns throughout Oklahoma, moving frequently because her new step-father was a truck driver.

At the age of one and one-half R#7 had a high fever from complications of chicken pox. Soon afterwards, her aunt discovered she was Deaf. Her mother was crushed and asked a local doctor where R#7 should go to school. The doctor recommended the residential school for the Deaf, and R#7's mother enrolled her when she was three years old; She stayed at the school for seven years. Her brother, who is hard of hearing, also attended the residential school, being sent with R#7 for the purpose of learning sign language, so that he could serve as R#7's interpreter. As a result, communication with family members, except for a few home-made signs, flowed through this brother.

At the residential school R#7 had lots of problems in the dormitory. There were not enough house parents to watch and discipline the children; therefore, fighting and harassment occurred frequently. She was very frustrated at the residential school and every time she went home, begged to stay; however, that was not possible since there were no

neighborhood schools for her to attend. In addition to problems in the dorm, R#7 felt frustrated in the classroom. Most of the teachers were ineffective and taught students only with pictures and drill, not teaching the students to write or read. In 1973 she was allowed finally to leave the residential school.

Although her mother had custody, in the summer she stayed with her father and new step-mother. The blended family had six children in all. The summer after she left the residential school for the Deaf, R#7 recalls her step-mother tutoring her in math and English. R#7 has mixed emotions about this situation, feeling that her step-mother was unduly rigid and inflexible forcing her to stay inside and learn. On the one hand she feels, she was cheated out of an education as a young child at the residential school, and as a consequence, needed to study all summer to catch up and be ready to enter public school. However, on the other hand, she feels that the step-mother's actions were extreme and abusive. That fall she entered a public school program in a larger town about 15 miles from her home because they had a special program for Deaf children. It was an oral program, though, and R#7 felt extremely frustrated. The teachers later began to sign using Signing Exact English (SEE) which was confusing and alien to R#7 since her native language, learned at the residential school, was American Sign Language. In the classrooms she recalls, "The teachers did all the talking/signing without facial expressions, i.e.,

'dead faced.' I was used to facial expressions, which are a vital part of American Sign Language, so I often did not understand what the teacher signed." The children were not supposed to talk or sign in class: They were to be quiet and watch the teacher. When the students did attempt to communicate with the teacher, she did not understand them. Sometimes they were mainstreamed into regular classes with an interpreter, most often into English classes.

In 1980 she went to live full-time with her father. She was ready to go to high school, but the school district offering a Deaf education program denied her transfer. Therefore, she had to attend high school in her small community where she was very lonely and depressed, though she tried to be patient. The school provided an interpreter for her, and R#7 graduated in 1983 from her neighborhood school.

When I asked her questions about identity, she responded, "I am Deaf." Her best friends are Deaf and she speaks fondly of their times together. She is married to a Deaf young man whom she met at a camp for Deaf students while in high school. They have no children. Questions related to Native American culture revealed that she feels a strong connection to Cherokee people. She frequently goes to Tahlequah to visit the Cherokee Nation's museums and observe other activities, however, she does not participate directly in any tribal activities.

Her greatest obstacle in life is the oppression by hard of hearing people. She perceives their culture as more

powerful than hers. I asked her if this oppression related to her brother, and she responded, "Yes." She feels that hard of hearing people and Deaf people often misunderstand each other, and these misunderstandings cause cultural tensions. "The two groups are very different. Often hard of hearing people are successful when compared to Deaf people, and it is not fair." She discussed the Gallaudet University protest of 1988 and commented that she wants to be like those Deaf people, advocating for the rights of Deaf individuals. She also believes that Deaf people should be taught about history. At the residential school she learned no history and in the public schools she learned only a little. In recent years she has studied history at the local community college and feels that this study brought about a greater understanding of self. As she strives to understand the plethora of events which have influenced the lives of Native American, as well as, Deaf people, a greater awareness of cultural tensions and conflicts has occurred. Now she has greater pride and esteem which, in turn, reduces feelings of inferiority.

R#7 has lived in an urban area for 13 years to be near her husband's family. Her husband is employed full time while she receives social security and support for her education from the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services. When she finishes her education she wants to be a teacher of Deaf children.

For schools, her recommendation is to help students prepare for work. "Teach them about careers and help them learn to survive working for hearing people. Help them learn to write back and forth to express their ideas and needs. Many, many Deaf people are frustrated because they can't find permanent employment." The residential school should prioritize what they teach. "Sure, sports and activities are important for social development, but preparation for work and getting jobs are the most important in Deaf people's lives."

Interview #8

Respondent #8 (R#8) is a young female in her early thirties, and is extremely shy and reserved. She is full-blood (4/4) blood quantum and is tall, slightly plump with long, thick, black hair that she wears in a braid at the back of her neck. Her eyes are bright and dark. When communicating, she uses complex features of American Sign Language. She does not wear hearing aids and does not speak. Today she is dressed in sweat pants and a t-shirt. Eye contact is indirect at first and more direct as the interview continues.

The first appointment to interview her was planned at a friend's house; however, R#8 did not show up. The second appointment was scheduled in the same way, but prior to the interview I mailed her a card reminding her of the interview. Although she was about 15 minutes late, she eventually

arrived with her three children. The children, who are approximately 8 to 10 years of age, played outside while the interview took place. R#5, who encouraged her to interview with me, watched curiously from the kitchen. R#8 did not seem to mind and seemed to depend on her support.

R#8 lives in northeastern Oklahoma in a small town with a population of approximately 15,000, most of whom are Native American. R#8 is from a large family of 12 children: 6 girls and 6 boys. R#8 has lived in several different small Native American communities in northeastern Oklahoma during her life time. She was born in W.W. Hastings Hospital in Tahlequah and grew up on the land which was allotted to her family by the Dawes Commission. Several individuals, including her maternal grandmother, maternal aunts, and her mother shared caregiving roles. Her deafness was identified by one of her aunts when she was two years old. The reason is unknown, but the family told her that she became deaf from high fever when she was six months old. When asked if there were other Deaf people in her family, her response was, "Yes." She has two Deaf cousins: one who is older, and one who is younger.

Her parents realized she was deaf and received audiological services from the Indian Health Services; however, hearing aids did not help and she did not like to wear them. When she was young, her older cousin came to visit and taught her sign language. He did not visit often, though, and when he left she had only her younger brother, whose signs were a mixture of home signs and the sign

language of her older cousin, with whom to communicate. No one else in her family learned to sign. School compulsory laws require school attendance, so at six years of age, she entered the school in her small, rural community. Her younger brother, age five, entered school too, even though he was not yet of school age, so he could help her. The teacher was pleased that he was there because he served as an interpreter for his sister, being the only one who could understand sign language and communicate with her. Her brother did not seem to mind interpreting, but sometimes he would forget to tell R#8 what was going on. Other times he would listen and then explain briefly what the teacher said. "It seemed to work fine. Every evening when we got home my brother would tell mother about school. I think my brother felt a lot of pressure from my parents and he also felt responsible for me." Because they moved often, R#8 and her brothers and sisters changed school frequently; consequently, there was a history of truancy. This created a problem for her as she tried to adjust to new teachers. At the same time, her brother got older, and began to resent having to help his sister. He wanted to spend more time with his friends. By the time R#8 entered eighth grade, her brother no longer wanted to be her assistant. Rebelling against the pressures of home, their relationship began to deteriorate. He tried to avoid her in and out of school. The next year, R#8's parents sent her to the residential school for the Deaf, a four hour drive from her home. R#8 does not know how

her parents learned of the school, but she hypothesized that they may have received information from the Department of Human Services (DHS). The residential school for the Deaf, as a state run facility, was a part of DHS at this time.

She arrived at the residential school for the Deaf in September to begin her eighth grade. However, the school felt that she was not ready for eighth grade work and placed her in the sixth grade. She was very afraid during the first days at the residential school and commented that she felt abandoned. She was also intimidated by some of the children in the dorm. "I never really adjusted to being away from my family. I grieved for them and wished to be at home." During long weekends home, she never wanted to return to the residential school. Sometimes her parents would let her stay home; therefore, she had a high absentee rate. By the tenth grade, she dropped out and never graduated from high school. She lived with her parents and aunts in a rural community and helped them with daily living activities such as cooking and cleaning until her marriage when she was 18 years old.

R#8 has never been employed, depending on social security to supplement her husband's salary. She is married to a Hispanic man whom she met at a Native American church. His native language is Spanish. She mentioned briefly that she must be careful because her husband does not trust her. R#5 fears that R#8 is in an abusive situation. When asked if her husband knew sign language she responded, "He can understand me okay, but my oldest son usually tells him what

I am saying or me what he is saying." The greatest obstacle R#8 faces is caring for her three children. For example, sometimes she has to go to school and talk to the teachers because her husband does not like to go. Not wanting to write notes because she has difficulty with the English language and there being no sign language interpreters in her community, she must depend on her oldest son to help her. Sometimes her children do not want to go to school and she does not feel that she should force them. She also does not take them to school when she has a doctor's appointment at the Indian hospital; I assumed that she needed their assistance to access services.

She did not have any recommendations for schools, but stated, "I never liked school and feel that I did not benefit from going."

Theme Analysis

Twenty-four themes, 21 essential and 3 non-essential, emerged in the analysis of the conversational interviews, but as I examined them I found that one theme often builds on or connects to another, forming an interconnected or intertwined path, circling back to original themes. This concept coincides with my travels which were solitude journeys, often began at one point, meandering through rural areas, then circling back to my place of departure. As I traveled to rural, remote areas in Oklahoma, long periods of time elapsed. These hours alone gave me the opportunity to immediately reflect on the interviews and the experiences

which unfolded during the day. My research was conducted predominately in the eastern one-half of the state which, before statehood, was Indian Territory.

Characteristics of the respondents in this study in many ways were similar, but in many ways varied greatly. The following analysis identifies the themes which emerged from the textual description of the conversational interviews and from my personal experiences during this study.

Theme 1 - Lack of Awareness of Genetic Deafness as Etiology of Hearing Loss

The hearing losses of the respondents were similar, indicating severe to profound sensorineural hearing loss although many respondents were unclear regarding the age of onset. Only one respondent, R#2, did not know the etiology of his hearing loss. The others reported either high fever, prematurity, or measles/chicken pox. None of the respondents considered their deafness hereditary; however, during the interview they would refer to a Deaf relative or to a hard of hearing brother. Apparently, they did not make the connection between their deafness and the recessive gene for hearing loss: No one concluded familial genetic deafness even when there was a sibling with a hearing loss. Of the three tribes represented in this study, i.e., the Chickasaw, the Creek, and the Cherokee, hereditary deafness was apparent in the Cherokee and Creek tribes. This is an essential theme because it indicates a lack of knowledge related to genetic causes of deafness.

Theme 2 - Use of Traditional Medicines to Restore Hearing and Cure the Deafness

Several of the respondents reported the use of native herbs to remedy the hearing losses when they were young, but no other traditional medicines were used. This was not a common occurrence, happening perhaps only once when the respondent was a young child. This is a non-essential theme and has little impact on the lives of the respondents.

Theme 3 - United States. Indian Hospitals as Place of Birth

All of the respondents interviewed were born in Indian Hospitals, such as the Indian Hospital at Ft. Sill or the W.W. Hastings Hospital in Tahlequah, where they received medical interventions and assistive devices which were intended to ameliorate the hearing impairment. However, hearing impairment of this type is irreversible and often hearing aids do not provide adequate benefit. This is a non-essential theme because the respondents' hearing losses are not related to their place of birth and, being born in an Indian Hospital does not impact greatly on respondents' lived experience.

Theme 4 - Limited Use of Assistive Devices

Only two of the individuals (R#2 and R#5) wore hearing aids, possibly because they have the most residual hearing. Four of the respondents used special text telephones in order to communicate with non-deaf people; however, R#5 discussed how she did not understand the complexity of the device and

wanted further training. Although she was the only respondent who made this statement, it is an essential theme. These devices are distributed across the state and are intended to reduce isolation, providing telecommunication accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing people. However, unless adequate training is provided when the state agency distributes the device, they may not be useful to the Deaf individual. Lack of assistive devices or lack of ability to use the devices prevents individuals from communicating with others via text telephones and contributes to isolation.

Theme 5 - Identification of Hearing Loss by Maternal Aunt

Three of the respondents reported that a maternal aunt had been the first to identify their hearing loss. This is a non-essential theme, but worthy of inclusion because it is an example of how the extended family works together to raise Native American children.

Theme 6 - Residency in Rural Areas of the State

Seven of respondents in this study lived in rural areas. Geographically, the lived space of the respondents appeared open, free, and uninhabited because the communities of their youth were located in rural areas of the state with a low population density. There was a tranquillity which permeated the communities: no five o'clock rush hour, no lines at ATM machines, no malls. Instead of these aspects of the hectic pace of urban life, the communities generally had one main street in the town center. On each side of the main street

were a few small stores and shops, providing sufficient products to sustain the community. In some of the smaller communities, dirt roads branched off from the main road and led to small residential neighborhoods of Native American people. As I drove through a town, the residents realized a stranger had entered their community, and by the time I reached my destination, everyone knew I was there.

This is an essential theme because census data reveals that approximately 50% of Native Americans live in rural areas while 50% live in urban areas. In this study, 87.5% of Native American Deaf people live in rural areas, while 12.5% live in urban areas. Therefore, if you are Native American and Deaf you are more likely to live in rural areas than in urban ones.

Theme 7 - Lack of Residency Shifts

Of the eight respondents, seven live in their native community: the place of their birth. Among this seven there have been no residency shifts [enrollment in the school for the Deaf does not constitute a shift in residency since it was temporary]. As documented in Theme 6, there is limited migration to urban areas even with the greater availability of social services. If an individual moves to an urban area, they only stay for a short time before moving back to their home community. Perhaps this results because of the historical interconnectedness that Native American people have with the land.

Native Americans who are Deaf are compelled to live in their home communities among their family members, unlike the majority of Euro-American, African American, and Hispanic Deaf people, who most often leave their families and migrate to cities to integrate into Deaf communities. This is an essential theme. Not only are there greater numbers of Native American Deaf people who live in rural areas, they tend to live throughout their lifetime in the community of birth.

Theme 8 - Isolation

My personal reflection on the experiences which unfolded brought forth one overwhelming, obvious theme, permeating all of the lives of respondents--isolation, and the greater the blood quantum, the greater the isolation. This theme is perhaps the most essential theme of this study. It is interconnected in many ways to other themes such as Theme 9 - Shame and Theme 10 - Communication Barriers. Native American Deaf people with blood quantum of 4/4 live sequestered lives on the fringes of society. They are marginalized by their own people because there exists so little knowledge within the Native American community related to deafness.

This theme of isolation is paradoxical. On the one hand, Native American Deaf people are compelled to remain in their communities of birth where their roots run deep. On the other hand, their community contributes to isolation and loneliness.

Theme 9 - Shame

Native American Deaf people are often ostracized as in the case of R#5, who spoke bitterly of the embarrassment her family felt due to her deafness. She described the ways they tried to cover up her deafness, to hide the irreversible flaw. Deafness is a disability that often goes unnoticed until one attempts to communicate. Because of this, her family tried to prevent her from signing, forbidding movement by her hands and restricting her voice, so as not to draw the attention of others. R#8's husband does not want her to sign, preferring her to try to talk even though she does not feel confident doing this.

Shame is an essential theme in this study. And, while shame was not revealed in all of the interviews, it is an appendage to many of the respondents' stories. Shame brings with it self-doubt, self-denial and feelings of inadequacy. It brings with it a mask of pretense.

In some instances Native American Deaf people were hidden from others, as in the case of R#3. After returning home from the residential school for the Deaf, he was institutionalized in a nursing facility. This case is not an isolated incidence; There are countless other instances of Native American Deaf people who are hidden, sheltered by the family, out of the view of society.

I should point out that the children of the all of the respondents in this study did not exhibit shame towards their parents.

Theme 10 - Communication Barriers Exist in All Elements of Life

Native American Deaf people choose to remain in their home communities even without having access to individuals in the community, for the communication barriers not only exist in the homes, but also in the hospitals, businesses, churches, and schools. In none of the rural areas do people know sign language and there exists a paucity of interpreters willing to drive to remote areas. Those who are willing are often undependable.

R#5 told of her personal experience in her home community at an Indian Hospital's emergency room:

Anecdote # 1

I got up in the middle of the night because I sensed that something was wrong. My son was sweating and had a high fever. I gave him some Tylenol, but the fever continued to escalate. I knew I had to take him to the hospital, so I picked him up and put him in the car. Because I don't have a phone, I couldn't call for EMS to come to my home. But even if I had a phone, we don't have 911 here, and even if we had 911, they probably would not have a text telephone for the Deaf (TTY). So, what good would a phone do me? I drove quickly to the emergency room and honked my horn as I approached it. One paramedic met me at the door and kept asking me something. I told him over and over again, "I am Deaf." I'm sure he could not understand my speech, but I pointed to my ear and shook my head. He seemed to be afraid

of me. Finally, I showed him my son in the back seat of the car. I took out a pad and wrote: "Please help my son. He has a high fever." The paramedic acted like he didn't want to read my note. Finally, I got my son out of the car and walked into the emergency room. I guess I made a lot of noise because people started to approach me. I tried to explain about my son. I felt very frustrated and at the same time angry. Those people don't know how to respond to a Deaf person. I don't mind writing notes, but I need someone who will read them! After several trips to the hospital my son was eventually diagnosed with liver cancer. By then, they knew me when I arrived and responded a little better, but I still needed to be able to communicate with the doctors. When my son was transferred to another hospital in Oklahoma City, the hospital made sure that I had an interpreter. It was great having someone there to help me communicate with everyone, but there was so much I needed to learn about the disease and the treatment process.

In each of the interviews, respondents were asked: *What is the most challenging aspect of your life?* In seven out of eight instances it was communication with hearing people. It begins with their parents. None of the parents of respondents learned to communicate in sign language although one grandmother did use the two-handed English alphabet. This failure to learn a common language and establish a communication system between parent and child creates serious voids in the early stages of the developing parent/child

relationships and interferes with bonding. It contributes to isolation within the family unit.

Theme 11 - Sibling Serving as the Deaf Child's Interpreter

In all of the interviews, respondents mentioned a sibling who functioned as the family interpreter. This sibling was usually the child closest in age to the Deaf individual. At first the shared language was idiosyncratic--an invented language used among family members. Later, as the Deaf child brought home the language of the school and taught it to the sibling, their shared language became more sophisticated. The sibling, who served as the family interpreter, often functioned within a trilingual environment. For example, five of the respondents reported that a Native American language was spoken in the home. It was also reported that some of their elders spoke only their Native language. In addition, English was spoken because the hearing siblings attended schools where instruction was in English. With the addition of American Sign Language, the sibling was required to function within three separate and distinct languages.

This is an essential theme because the role of interpreter for the family carries with it a significant amount of responsibility, and this, I believe, begins very early in the child's life. From the responses it appears that the sibling/interpreter played a major role in the inclusion of the Deaf child into the family. However, as R#7 explained, her brother did not volunteer, but was chosen by

the family to serve in the capacity of interpreter. He entered the residential school for the Deaf although he was hard of hearing, not Deaf, and could have attended his neighborhood school. His parents enrolled him specifically for the purpose of learning sign language so that he could interpret for his sister. And eventually, he relinquished his role, possibly due to several factors including shame. These two preceding themes, i.e., failure of parents to learn to communicate with their child and the sibling serving as family interpreter, are not unique to the Native American population. These occur with frequency in the Euro-American, African American, and Hispanic populations.

Theme 12 - Utilization of American Indian Sign Language

A unique characteristic of the Native American population as it relates to communication is the use of American Indian Sign Language. In two of the interviews, respondents [R#1 and R#4] commented that their families had used American Indian Sign Language as a communication mode when they were young. And while the use of this language is unique to only two respondents, it is an essential theme because of the ramifications this situation presents.

Children whose parents communicated with American Indian Sign Language had an early form of communication. There also appears to be a greater acceptance of the disability among these families. This tendency seems to increases with westward migration. In other words, the farther west one travels, the greater number of Native American Deaf people

utilize American Indian Sign language when communicating with Deaf family members. R#1 and R#4 live more westwardly than the other respondents, and their families used this language. Perhaps this occurs because the use of American Indian Sign Language was more prevalent among the plains tribes which were relocated to areas in western Oklahoma.

Theme 13 - Orality of Native American Culture Precludes Participation by Native American Deaf People

Within this environment, dominated by isolation and sequestration, Native American Deaf people experience cross-cultural tensions including those presented by the orality of Native American culture. Traditionally, Native American languages, folklore, and history were shared orally and passed down to younger generations by elders in the tribe. Deafness precludes participation in oral traditions and this lack of knowledge creates cultural tensions. This is an essential theme because deafness presents a barrier to respondents learning about their people, customs, traditions, histories, and the lifestories which make up their unique way of life. R#5 and R#7 felt that if they had been taught the ways of their people, perhaps they would be more accepted and treated less like an outsider. Without this understanding, Native American Deaf people only understand what they are able to see, and do not comprehend the abundance of auditory information expressed orally.

Theme 14 - Lack of Cultural Identity

Of the eight respondents, two individuals lived in seclusion away from contact with other Deaf people. In addition, three other respondents had contact only on an extremely limited basis. They were not amalgamated with Native American culture or Deaf culture. This is an essential theme because individuals living as exiles is a unique characteristic of the Native American Deaf experience. R#3 had been put in an institution by his mother, and without anyone with whom to communicate in sign language, his signing skills deteriorated to a point where communication was impossible.

Of the eight respondents, three identify strongly with other Deaf people. However, two respondents' place of residency, i.e., in rural areas, precludes contact on a frequent basis.

Theme 15 - Deterioration of Communication Skills

R#3 had forgotten how to use sign language and could only communicate minimally. Likewise, R#8, who has limited exposure to the Deaf community, experienced language deterioration. Signing was a drudgery, not swift or efficient. Both of these individuals attended the residential school for the Deaf and were proficient in American Sign Language when they departed from the school.

Visualness, the ability to see the details and nuances of sign language, is a salient aspect of being Deaf, and

without interaction with other individuals who are Deaf, this visualness diminishes. This is an essential theme because language and culture are inextricably linked: Without language, Native American Deaf people disengage from their social identities as Deaf people.

Theme 16 - Lack of Cultural Participation

All of the respondents attended tribal events at some point in their lives, but as adults, the participation has been halted. The frequency of attendance appears to be associated with their caregivers. While the caregivers were alive, the Deaf family members would attend, accompanying them, if only as a bystander or guest. But when these caregivers passed on, the respondents no longer felt the need to attend. When asked why they did not participate the all answered, "Because I am Deaf." This is an essential theme because it amplifies the theme of isolation.

Last summer while attending a Pow-Wow in the western part of Oklahoma, I observed this event:

Anecdote # 2

They gather from all over the plains every year in August as a finale to the long, hot summer. As the heat from the day begins to fade and the sun slips slowly below the horizon in the western sky, the dances begin and continue into the summer's night which offers the only respite from the intense Oklahoma heat. They take turns dancing. First the young men, then the women. The males are attired with

brightly colored costumes ornamented with feathers, beaded straps, and bells which jingle as they stomp the patterns of their intricate dances on the parched, grass-covered earth. Their costumes resemble huge mythical birds filled with fury and emotion as they communicate tales of victory and defeat, abundance and famine, and life and death.

After the young men, the women move slowly to the dance arena. The women's dresses, in sharp contrast to the men, are made of soft chamois in subtle earthen shades like that of clay and sand. Onto some of the dresses are sewn hundreds of shiny ornaments resembling small metal cones. They carry hand embroidered shawls draped over one arm. In the other hand they hold a feather fan with ornate beadwork encircling the handle. Their dark hair, neatly plaited, hangs in long braids through which strips of leather, feathers, and beaded ribbons have been woven. While the male dancers are unrestrained and emotional, the women dance with their upper bodies held motionless, stoically looking into the distant skies. The only movements made are the intricate patterns of their feet in time with the rhythm of the singers as they beat the singular drum in unison.

As they dance, a young child with large dark eyes combed the crowd for a familiar face--a member of his family. Seeing no one familiar, he sat motionless, patiently waiting for their return. Others around did not notice him because he seemed to fade into the natural landscape of people who had come from hundreds of miles to participate in the

festivities. The observers were enchanted by the music, their bodies pulsing to the familiar rhythms. But neither these words nor the rhythmic verse penetrated the child's world. The child is Deaf. Slowly the child rose and approached the drummers. He crawled between two elders and placed his small hand on the side of the drum lightly touching the stretched, taut leather which covered it. The drummers did not pause nor acknowledge that the child was there. From this unobtrusive location he felt the vibrations of the voices: He felt the beat and the rhythm of the ensuing song. From this location he felt the passion of the voices in unison and touched the spirits which were released from within his soul. Without lifting his hand and without seeking permission, he crouched his small, agile body into a low position. With his knees bent and shoulders rounded, his head bowed and eyes closed, he began to move his feet. With each strike of the drum he stomped his small feet into the parched soil--first one then the other. He raised his head toward the sky and released a cry which permeated the voices and echoed into infinity through the far distant plains. He bowed his head again and repeated the movements, his moccasins providing sure footing as he, for a fleeting moment, connected with his culture and people. Then, slowly, before the dance ended, the child withdrew his small hand, rose, and walked away, absorbed into the crowds.

This anecdote serves as an illustration of the conflict that Native American Deaf people feel with their culture.

They attend, yet no one sees them; it is as if they are translucent. Although they cannot explain it, they feel strongly that they are excluded from participation because of their deafness. Six of the respondents in this study live in the margins of society and do not feel membership in either Native American Culture nor Deaf culture. Perhaps the other two respondents who are active in Deaf culture are influenced by their husbands who are Euro-American.

R#1 is the only respondent that approaches life from a bicultural vantage point. However, now that her mother is deceased, she no longer participates in tribal activities, preferring to be involved in the Deaf community's activities on the state and national level.

Theme 17 - Changing Sites of Educational Programs

Seven of the respondents attended the residential school for the Deaf, entering between the ages of four and seven. Their enrollment in the residential school for the Deaf occurred prior to the passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) in 1977, which promoted the concept of mainstreaming in local schools. After federal regulations were clarified, many Deaf children, including Native American children, remained in their home communities and attended special cooperative programs for Deaf children, as did R#6 and R#7. This is an essential theme because those who attended the residential school for the Deaf became more aware through the process of education and cognizant of the social isolation they experience (See Theme 20).

Theme 18 - Abandonment

The respondents who entered the residential school for the Deaf at a young age and did not have family members nearby, expressed feelings of abandonment. Because there was no shared communication system between the child and the adults, there was no way of communicating to the child that he or she would be going home in the near future. It was only after the child had experienced the routine of traveling home on weekends and traveling back and forth to school, that there was understanding and the feelings of abandonment subsided. As explained by R#2, going back to the school was often an emotional experience.

This is an essential theme because each individual vividly recalled the feelings of abandonment and the psychological duress from the experience. Not only were the children isolated at home, they felt abandoned by their families. Five of the students discussed in detail how they felt abandoned at the residential school for the Deaf. It was a traumatic experience for them. R#8's experiences are woven into the following anecdote:

Anecdote #3

It took two cars for all of the family members to take the young child to the residential school for Deaf children. The grandmother, aunts, and three cousins accompanied the mother, father, and brother and sisters on the four hour drive to a place where they would leave her. They had to

leave before dawn in order to arrive in time to register the child in the school. There was a solemn look on the adults' faces as they drove along the two lane highways stopping only briefly at noon at a roadside park to eat a picnic lunch of sandwiches and soda pop. To the children this was a treat and a divergence from the day to day activities to which they were accustomed. After eating, the children played tag while the adults cleaned up the eating area and prepared to resume the journey.

It was the Sunday before Labor Day, and the summer sun beat down on the cars with intensity. They drove with the windows down in order to feel some relief from the heat. Finally, departing from state highway nine, they turned south. After driving for seemingly hours, they arrived at the destination. There was a highway sign which helped them locate the school. Driving into the lane, which formed a "U" between several buildings, they parked in front of one of the buildings displaying a sign which read, "Registration."

Everyone kept looking at me as we walked into the building. I did not realize it at the time, but the trip had been for me. I was the first child in my family to ever leave the county of my birth. I didn't know it at the time, but I would be left with strangers to be raised and cared for in an unfamiliar environment.

At the registration table my father had to sign a paper to enroll me in the school. The adults huddled around the paper discussing several items before he signed it. My aunts

seemed to encourage my father who became hesitant as he picked up the pen. The white women at the table looked at them strangely. After he signed the paper they left the building and went to the car. From the trunk he removed a card board box and took it to the dormitory.

As the adults visited with the house parent on duty, the children played on the playground equipment. I could see the people's mouths moving, but I did not understand what they were saying. Then my father walked to the playground and took my hand. He guided me back to the house parent and put my hand in hers. There was a look of anguish on his face as he fought back the tears. My mother and aunts were weeping as they gathered up everyone and left on their long journey home. I couldn't understand why they left me and cried out for them as they drove away. The house parent would not let me run after them. She continued to hold my hand while trying to comfort me. I was frightened in the new environment with all the white strangers. She picked up the card board box and took me into the dorm. I think she realized that if she left me outside I would run away. Inside the dormitory the walls were painted light shades of green and everything was clean and bright. Smells of disinfectant filled the air. She took me to a room with six small beds and put my box on one of the beds. I was so frightened and I clung to her leg while hiding my face in the fabric of her dress. That evening more children arrived. They all moved their hands and looked at me, but I never left

the house parent's side. That night, she held me until I went to sleep, then slipped me into my designated bed. I was used to sleeping with my sisters and brothers, so it was scary to be in the bed alone in a strange place. This was the beginning of my education.

The feelings of abandonment continued until the children realized that school was a routine which could not be changed: It was a requirement. The length of emotional upheaval varied for each respondent. R#7 responded that she cried for at least three years when she had to go back to school.

Although the children felt abandoned by their families, life-long friendships were made at school. These friendships and bonds have continued for their life-time even when friends may not live in close proximity.

Theme 19 - Family Members to Oversee Education

Although this is not common to all of the interviews, this essential theme is an important aspect of the family's involvement in the child's education. Two of the respondents had family members who moved to the small town in which the residential school for the Deaf is located in order to maintain family ties and oversee the child's education. R#2's grandmother moved in order to watch over him and ensure his safety. She moved back home when he was ten years of age, old enough to take care of himself. In this case, R#2 did not feel abandoned even though his parents were more than

a three hour drive away. R#7's brother was sent to the school with her so that he could learn to communicate in sign language and watch over her. This theme may appear incidental, however, it is actually essential. It is essential because this is one of the reasons why so many Native American families today keep their children at home and educate them locally, unwilling to send them to the residential school for the Deaf. During the past two years, several Native American families with Deaf children have discussed with me the importance of the caregiver and how they would never relinquish this role to strangers. One Comanche grandmother stated:

> We raise our children collectively. Indian children don't have just one caregiver. We [the family] all work together to care for the children. If one went away, it would be like they were dead. We just would not do that. I realize that the residential school for the Deaf would offer a better education for my grandson, but the problem is we would have to move there and leave all the other family members and our community. We don't want someone else to raise our children, so we keep them at home and do the best we can.

Theme 20 - Greater Awareness Increases Anger

Another interesting phenomenon occurs with Native American Deaf students who were educated at the residential school for the Deaf. It appears that these individuals are

more aware of cultural conflicts. In some cases there were greater tensions in family relationships as exemplified by the experiences of two of the respondents (R#5, R#7). They appeared more assertive, fighting for their independence. For example, R#5 reported repeatedly that her mother and father wanted her to live in their home, so they could take care of her and she could help to care for her father who had recently suffered a stroke. But their daughter told them she wanted to live independently, heedless of her parents who doubted her capacity to manage her own judgments. Thus, tensions associated with independence were revealed between individuals and their parents. On the one hand, the individual wants to become more self-sufficient, while the parents want them to remain dependent and in their custody.

The respondents who had more amicable relationships with their families, such as R#2, R#4, and R#7, exhibited increased awareness of cultural conflicts even though they were less aggressive and less angry than the others. They discussed situations they had experienced or incidences which happened to their friends which revealed awareness of cultural conflicts.

Observations of individuals who were educated in their local communities revealed less tensions with family members possibly because they are less aware of cultural conflicts. They appear powerless, more passive, and domesticated.

This is an essential theme and related to several of the previous themes, e.g., Theme 10 - Communication Barriers

Exist in All Elements of Life. Students who were educated at the residential school for the Deaf realize that communication barriers do not have to exist. They have experienced free and open communication, even if only among students and a few staff at their school.

Theme 21 - Societal Role As Caregiver

Regardless of the site of the respondents' education, their role as caregivers forms an essential theme in this analysis (see Table II). Only one of the respondents is employed, one is in school, and one is cared for in a nursing facility. Five of the respondents' function within their social structure as caregivers as illustrated by the following table:

TABLE II

CAREGIVER ROLES OF RESPONDENTS

R#1	Caregiver to three young children.
R#4	Caregiver to elderly father
R#5	Caregiver to medically fragile child
R#6	Caregiver to elderly father
R#8	Caregiver to three young children

It is apparent that families of Native American Deaf people are the caregivers until a certain point, then the role shifts and the Deaf individual becomes the caregiver.

There is overt action from Native American parents to keep their children at home unlike Euro-American families who strive for their children to become independent and self-sufficient. There are no expectations on the part of the family for the Deaf individual to live independently. The respondents who were educated at the residential school for the Deaf realize that Deaf people have the potential to live independently because they have seen Deaf employees at the school who serve as role models for the students. This, I believe, forms the basis of the cultural conflict many of the respondents reported. Native American families who enroll their children at the residential school may not have come in contact with these Deaf individuals, since they most often function in subordinate positions. However, many Deaf staff work in the dormitory, and it is in this situation that Native American parents may have had the opportunity to meet Deaf individuals who function independently. Native American families who keep their children at home and educate them in their community schools most likely would never have the opportunity to meet another Deaf individual who functions independently and self-sufficiently. Thus, without this experience, their expectations remain low.

Theme 22 - Lack of Educational Achievement

Lack of educational achievement is an essential theme of this study. Five of the respondents harbor feelings of resentment towards the school/s they attended, feeling they were duped or cheated out of their education. Seven of the

respondents look back on their years in school with vehemence. R#6 reported that the teacher could not sign very well and that his parents had to hire a Deaf couple to tutor him and teach him sign language. By the time R#6 was in the ninth grade, he had disconnected from the public school classroom and dropped out, never continuing in the educational system. R#7 discussed returning to her local school and not being able to communicate with the teacher of the Deaf even though this individual was reputed to be the "expert" with a degree in Communication Disorders.

Therefore, compounding the lack of communication in the home was a lack of communication with professionals. Several of the respondents blamed the schools for their current lack of education. R#5, R#6, R#7 all reported that they felt illiterate and unable to write well enough to have a conversation with a person from the majority culture. R#7 responded, "My English is inferior. I can't make other people understand when I write, then I feel so ashamed and embarrassed. When I write English incorrectly, the majority culture looks down on me. I feel there is no respect from the majority culture due to lack of proficiency in the English language." These individuals feel victimized by the educational system and believe that they suffer injury due to lack of educational achievement. R#6 explained that his education was sacrificed to oralism, while R#2 felt that the teachers turned him off. R#7 feels she was duped out of an

education, and R#7 told this anecdote of her experiences in the educational system:

Anecdote # 3

We all walked from the dorm to the school building at 8:00 each morning and sat in small chairs which formed a half-circle at the front of the classroom. The teacher was a hearing woman who wore high heels. She always looked mad. As we sat in the chairs, the kids picked on each other. We would sign things like, "I hate you" to each other. The teacher did not know very much sign language, but she knew the sign for hate. If she caught us we would get punished, but she didn't catch us very often. I could not understand anything she said, but she talked all the time. Sometimes she would write on the board and point to the words. We all tried to say the words she pointed to while she talked; She did not notice that we did not understand. Most of the time we just played games with each other. For example, one student would be "it." If the student who is "it" caught you looking at them, they would sign, "I caught you", then you would be it. After the teacher talked a long time, then we could go to our desks and copy words off the board which was my favorite part of the school day. When writing was over we went outside to play. At noon our house parent came and got us and we ate lunch in the cafeteria with her. After lunch we had physical education. That was a lot of fun. One of the assistant teachers was Deaf and she could sign fast. When we returned to the classroom, the teacher continued

talking and sometimes reading a book. One girl, who was hard of hearing, sometimes explained what the teacher said, but most of the time the teacher told us to stop talking. We were not punished for signing, but the teacher could not sign and we did not like her. As I got older I noticed we never got beyond second grade text books. It didn't matter if you were in the eighth grade, still your text books were second grade. I hated school and was eager to return to my home and go to school in the community school with my brothers, but I was so far behind, my step-mother had to tutor me all summer in preparation for entering public school.

In addition to discussing their feelings of resentment towards educators, the respondents also discussed other aspects of their educational experience. For example, when looking at the demographics of the staff in both the residential and mainstream programs, an overwhelming majority of the teachers were hearing and Euro-American. Respondents recalled that there were no African American, Native American, or Hispanic teachers in any of their educational programs. Only a few Deaf people worked at the residential school, holding subordinate roles in positions such as house parents, cafeteria workers, janitors, teacher assistants, or recreational workers.

Theme 23 - Lack of Employment Opportunities

An outgrowth of inappropriate education and lack of literacy is the absence of employment opportunities. R#2,

R#4, R#5, and R#7 mentioned employment being one of the greatest barriers they face in their daily lives. They feel unprepared, lacking sufficient knowledge and skills to compete in the work place. Seven or 87.5% of the respondents are unemployed. Having employment is directly linked to living independently and contributes to an individual's feeling of self-worth. Therefore, lack of employment opportunities is an essential theme of this study.

Respondents feel they were not given the opportunity to develop work skills which could translate into employment opportunities in their home communities. Because of the absence of skills, they are ill-equipped to deal with the majority culture. R#1 talked passionately of her desire to be a home health care aide, but she was denied the opportunity even on a probationary status. She felt that it was not only lack of preparedness, but also the ignorance of the majority culture.

Theme 24 - Translucency

A powerful and essential theme in this study is the theme of translucency. Translucency is when someone looks, but does not see. Translucency may be connected to feelings of denial. For example, a Native American mother and father may be denying that their child has a disability, choosing only to see the child before them without confronting the disability.

In order to illustrate this final theme of translucency, I will recount an experience I had last year:

Anecdote #4

I had been invited to sit on an advisory board at a local community college in an urban area which provides support services to Deaf and hard of hearing students. Enrollment figures revealed that there were approximately 65 students enrolled in the program at that time. As the meeting continued, demographic data was exhibited in a series of slides. A breakdown by ethnic groups listed six categories, but did not include Native American. I commented that because this region has the largest population of Native American people in the United States, some of the students in the data were probably tribal members or of Native American descent. The coordinator agreed to do some follow-up to determine the number of Native American Deaf students enrolled in the college. To his surprise, he located eight students with tribal identification cards. Blood quantum revealed 1/2 or less, but individuals identified themselves as belonging to Native American communities. The coordinator told me that he had just overlooked the students, identifying them with the majority culture in his demographics.

The translucent gaze is not restricted to postsecondary programs. This theme permeates all of the educational institutions, including the residential school for the Deaf and local public school programs. Perhaps professionals are so focused on the lack of hearing that they cannot see the child beyond the deafness. In some ways it may be easier to

overlook the child than to see the child as a member of a diverse cultural group. If you don't ask, you won't know. If you don't know, you don't have to react or respond. Van Manen (1994) stated that, " . . . there is nothing so silent as that which is taken-for-granted . . ." (p. 112).

Summary of the Data

Twenty four themes: 21 essential and 3 non-essential were revealed during the process of data analysis. Of the 21 essential themes, one theme is interconnected and interrelated to a majority of the others. Theme 8 - Isolation, is a consequence of 17 out of 21 or 81% of the essential themes; therefore, isolation transcends or over-arches a majority of the findings in this study. Isolation occurs in the following areas which are described below:

Cultural Isolation

Native American people who are Deaf are isolated from their culture due to a variety of reasons. The orality of Native American culture and the lack of communication with family and community members breeds isolation and limited understanding, for language and culture are inextricably linked. This lack of learning about culture prohibits them from understanding their heritage, traditions, and religions. Without this understanding as a basis of knowing what it means to be Native American, there exists a void in cultural identity. In addition, there is absence of cultural

identification as a Deaf person due to the ruralness of their home community, lack of residency shifts, i.e., respondents did not choose leave their home community, and the lack of proximity to others who are Deaf.

Native American Deaf people tend to live marginally, sequestered on the fringes of both Native American and Deaf culture, not maintaining an identity with either. Deafness also begets shame and disgrace in some families, resulting in feelings of inferiority and damaged self-concepts. Sometimes the feelings of shame are so prevalent that Native American Deaf people are institutionalized, out of the view of others. Shame, though, is not as prevalent in families who embrace American Indian Sign Language for there is an element of acceptance among these families.

Linguistic Isolation

Communication barriers in the community and lack of communication in the family isolates the Native American Deaf individual from not only communicative interaction, but also language development and the nuances of social interaction. Lack of communication interferes with the natural bonding between a child and his or her parents. And even though a sibling, serving as an interpreter, facilitated communication among family members, he or she was not a substitute for parent/child communication and interaction.

Language deprivation has severe repercussions. Language is the foundation for all forms of literacy including the

ability to read and write. And, although seven of the eight respondents attended the residential school for the Deaf where they became proficient in American Sign Language, no one in their home communities could communicate with them in this language. Respondents who did not interact with other Deaf people in American Sign Language tended to be less able to communicate; their signing skills and visualness deteriorating due to lack of communication opportunities.

Educational Isolation

Educationally, several themes related to isolation emerged during the process of analysis. Educational isolation is concomitant with the general dissatisfaction respondents voiced related to literacy attainment and their ability to function within the majority culture. They were isolated from their families and, in addition, were isolated from their teachers due to the teachers' inability to communication proficiently.

Isolation is related to the feeling of powerlessness and lack of ability to change events or situations even when one desires to do so. Respondents revealed the frustrations they experience related to their struggle to live independently in their home communities. Their frustrations are expressed through anger, hostility, and resentment. Some of the respondents were angry due to lack of literacy and lack of employment opportunities. Most had been assigned the societal role of caregiver, regardless of the location of their education.

Perhaps the most salient theme though, within the realm of educational isolation, is that of translucency, i.e., the gaze that looks but does not see; It may exist at all educational levels. The gaze of Native American teachers and administrators may perceive deafness as translucent, suppressing the needs of these children, whereas, the gaze of teachers and administrators serving Deaf children may perceive the Native American ancestry translucently. Both seek to blend the child into their existing educational milieu without considering the necessity for language and culture.

The ideas and perceptions of eight Native American Deaf people resonate throughout the text of this study: The text provides a vehicle for their viewpoints and brings to the forefront critical concepts related to culture, language, and educational issues. It is not their voices, though, that we are hearing in the text, for their voices are silent and cannot express their desires or views. Instead, we see their signs, intricately woven together and presented to me. My role in this study has been as an interpreter, first to interpret their language into English, then to find meaning within the text.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Historically Native American people and Deaf people, representing two distinct groups, have been viewed as savages, lacking human characteristics. But, what are the characteristics which our society views as human? According to Falk (1994) "To be human is to be capable of reason, to exercise free will, to have the ability to solve mathematical problems, to possesses a visual system that perceives depth, color, and movement in particular ways, but above all, to be human is to have language" (p.49). In other words, to be human means to be educated, empowered, literate, sighted, hearing, and possessing a spoken language. Allman, (cited in Nieto, 1992) states that, "Language is the palette from which people color their lives and culture. Intimately connected to the human experience, language oils the gears of social interactions and solidifies the ephemera of the mind into literature, history, and collective knowledge" (p. 131).

Language is central to everything we do. It is the framework that human beings use to communicate with others and is the bond that links people together, binding them to their culture. However, we know that "languages, like species, come into being, grow, change, are sometimes grafted

to each other, and occasionally become extinct; they have their histories and, in the written record, their fossils" (Bolton, 1994, p. 3). Language is built into that which exists in our daily lives, yet most people take this ability for granted, never considering its richness and complexity. Without language and communication, one would be restricted to learn only from that which is directly experienced. Language and communication is, therefore, a central area of investigation in this study.

The language used by the Deaf community, American Sign Language and Native American languages have been fertile ground for ethnocentricity. According to Bolton (1994), ethnocentricity is:

> A point of view in which one culture and language is at the center of things and all others are marginalized, more or less 'off the target' either because they never got on target (are too primitive), or they have wandered away from it. When another people's language is different in more than just small ways, we are inclined to doubt the native intelligence of those who use it, its adequacy for serious purposes, or both. (p. 15)

Educational institutions, including university teacher preparation programs, should identify language practices, both subtle and obvious, that promote ethnocentricity and exchange those practices with "cultural relativism," the

opposite of ethnocentricism. Included in this investigation should be the identification of particular languages which are prohibited or denigrated, thus silencing the voices or shackling the hands of those who speak or sign them. If the languages students speak [or sign with their hands]...are either prohibited or given a lesser status in their education, the possibility of school failure is increased (Nieto, 1992).

The development of language is a crucial aspect of the lived experience of Native American Deaf people and influences all subsequent areas of investigation. From this central concept has spawned a multitude of themes and sub-themes which are, within the broad context of language and culture, interconnected and dependent upon one another. Within the element of language, the theme which transcends all others is the theme of isolation. Isolation occurs in all facets of the lived experience of the respondents in this study: at home, at school, and in communities. Although the individuals may have a rich and expressive language, their language and culture is alien and unfamiliar to those around them.

With passion and remorse each respondent revealed the frustration and isolation which occurs because of limited communication. Without communication, Native American Deaf people are perhaps the most marginalized people of all. They exist in the margins of both Native American culture and Deaf culture sequestered by the ignorance of, not only the

majority culture, but also their own families and community members. This phenomenon also exists with non-Native American Deaf people, but the difference is related to the self-imposed sequestration. Non-Native American Deaf people who are born in rural, isolated areas tend to migrate toward communities where they become members of Deaf communities and have opportunities for cultural, social, and political participation. Native American Deaf people do not experience residency shifts: They do not leave their rural communities. This phenomenon occurs, primarily because of family values and expectations. In this study, the families expected all their children, including the Native American Deaf individual to live in their home communities. And, in the case of the Native American Deaf individual, their role in society is predetermined: Their assigned role is to be a caregiver for family members. This does not preclude the need for further education and social service support for Native American Deaf individuals. However, if continuing education, independent living skills training, etc. are to be offered to Native American Deaf individuals, greater efforts must be made to reach out to them in their home communities because their ties are too strong to uproot and move. Offering educational and social services only in urban areas is a subtle form of discrimination and indicates lack of respect for and knowledge of this culturally and linguistically diverse group. Agencies should examine policies which require individuals to relocate to urban areas or drive great

distances to access services, because it is the most economically disadvantaged who will not have adequate transportation or means to engage in this activity. In addition, agencies should refocus efforts to include community based services in targeted rural areas. Caution should be heeded though, because sending in community workers who are Euro-American and reflect the majority culture would not be worth the effort, for Native American communities, for the most part, are extremely closed to outsiders.

In order for outreach education and social services to be successful, families with Native American Deaf individuals as well as the community at large must be included in the program because there is so much ignorance regarding deafness. For example, in several situations families felt shame regarding their child's hearing loss and inadvertently tried to mask it, cover it up, and prevent the Deaf individual from openly signing or speaking in public. Others kept the Deaf individual isolated or hidden from the majority culture. This shame spawns low self-esteem and low opinion of self-worth. The Native American family must be given the opportunity to look at deafness through the lenses of Deaf people. They should be presented with not only the medical model of deafness, but also the model which depicts Deaf people as a culturally and linguistically diverse group. From this different view of deafness, Deaf people emerge as self-sufficient, contributing members of society.

Respondents who had been educated at the residential

school for the Deaf saw themselves through the lenses of Deaf people. They felt more anger, perhaps because they were more aware of cultural bias and tensions. An African-American doctoral student at Oklahoma State University once stated, "To be black and Deaf in America is to be in a constant state of rage." This also applies to the Native American Deaf people in this study, for those who had been educated in the residential school for the Deaf were more "aware" than those educated in their home communities. Further research should focus on cultural tensions and cultural variables and the extent that these impact on the lived experience of Native American Deaf people. The goal, of course, is not to remove the Native American Deaf person from their community, but to educate the community and make it a more accessible place for the Native American Deaf individual to live and prosper socially, culturally, and spiritually.

Educational institutions need to be aware of salient factors that relate directly to educational advantages and disadvantages. The first factor is cultural negotiation. Native American Deaf individuals live in a vibrant, rich culture; however, they do not participate because they perceive themselves as "observers only" of the events which take place. They are "observers" at the family dinner table because they are unable, in most instances, to take place in the conversations which unfold. They are "observers" in tribal events, possibly because of the orality of activities: events generally involve music, singing, dancing, and oral

storytelling. Physical presence does not equate with participation, and while Native American Deaf people are present, at the same time they are absent. They are deprived from the deep meanings of richness in their culture. Further research should look at ways in which Native American Deaf people can become fully participating members of their families, communities, and culture reflecting on the transformative possibility of integrating previously marginalized voices.

Language and communication, which cannot be separated from culture, are vital for full participation. Several respondents referred to an invented language,i.e., idiosyncratic home signs, evolving out of necessity to communicate with the Deaf child. The individual most proficient with home signs was most often the sibling, closest in age to their Deaf sibling. This child, assuming the role of interpreter to the family, expressed through his or her voice the needs of the Deaf child. In addition, the mother, although not as proficient as the sibling, generally understood the home sign language and could converse with the Deaf child when needed. However, when the sibling/interpreter was available, communication flowed through this child even though they were often bridled with a responsibility that they sometimes resented. This resentment was not apparent in non-Deaf children of Deaf adults also served as interpreters for their parents, as in the case of

R#5. Her son appeared to assume the role proudly at an early age.

In two of the homes, American Indian Sign Language was the language base of the idiosyncratic signs developed by family members. American Indian Sign Language is not to be confused with American Sign Language, although both are visual forms of communication. Seton (cited in Skelly, 1979) defines a true manual system as an established code of logical gestures to convey ideas without reference to words or letters of a language. He points out that the distinctive difference between American Indian Sign Language and the sign language used by Deaf people, is that the latter assumes a knowledge by signer and viewer of a common language, while the former conversely assumes the absence of a shared spoken or written language. He adds that the majority of signs in the Deaf system are arbitrary or conventional, while in American Indian System, the gestures are never arbitrary, but rather the product of the slow evolution of ages of use, with roots deep in human behavior and, therefore, so logical and reasonable that they are easily and quickly understood, learned, and used.

Even with the powerful influence of oralism on the education of Deaf children for nearly a century, American Indian Sign Language's use continued among this population, perhaps because it has a stronger history and tie to Native American culture. Because of the influence of American Indian Sign Language in the culture and history of native

people, Deaf children born into a Native American family have an advantage over Deaf children born into hearing Euro-American, African-American, or families representing other ethnic groups. This advantage is not due to an acceptance of the disability: All respondents discussed how their families mourned their deafness and of how they grieved the loss of hearing. Their grief was analogous to other families who experience a grieving process similar to the death of a child (Vernon & Andrews, 1990). The advantage for a Deaf child born to a Native American family is one of opportunity. Because American Indian Sign Language is a part of the culture and history of Native American people, there is a positive attitude toward its use. The stigmatization of American Sign Language, which is experienced by many Euro-American, African-American, and Hispanic families of Deaf children as a result of years of oralism, is thus avoided. Because American Sign Language has been perceived as an inferior language, many families begin signing only after years of failure utilizing the oral method. This is not the case with Native American Deaf children whose families utilize American Indian Sign Language as a communication mode.

American Indian Sign Language emerged due to a need for a basic communicative method among tribes to transcend the different spoken languages of native people (Skelly, 1979). Consequently, it does not incorporate speech nor does it incorporate a grammar. Although this language may be

unrefined by our standards, communication does exist within families who utilize it. However, not all the tribes use American Indian Sign Language. Those tribes that have intermarried with Euro-Americans are more likely not to use American Indian Sign Language. As reflected in this study, the use of American Indian Sign Language with Deaf individuals increases in a westward progression. Tribes that tend to value American Indian Sign Language are those which marry Euro-Americans less frequently. It is the children of these tribes who benefit from an early communication system that forms the basis upon which other language systems are learned.

Today American Indian Sign Language is known only by the elders in some tribes and is often reserved for ceremonial events. It is no longer used for communication among tribes; the language used today for that purpose is English.

The movement for an "English only" language system in the United States has been detrimental to the preservation of Native languages including American Indian Sign Language. Native American traditions are largely oral and great efforts have been undertaken in the last century to eradicate Native Languages from use. According to Skelly (1979) American Indian Sign Language has undergone similar obliteration.

Use of American Indian Sign Language by Native American Deaf children should be respected and encouraged, especially if it is a language already known by family and community members. Educational institutions should support the

family's efforts because, according to Nieto (1992), "students whose language and culture are valued within the school setting pick up affirming messages about their worth" (p. 125). Further research should be initiated to determine to what extent the early exposure to American Indian Sign Language benefits students and ways in which American Indian Sign Language compliments and enhances future visual language learning.

The theme of isolation is not only restricted to language and communication: Other themes related to isolation emerged during the interviews. The theme of abandonment and isolation from the family emerged as it relates to early school experiences at the residential school for the Deaf. I believe this experience is similar for all young Deaf children who are left by their families to become residential students. However, for the Native American Deaf child, this is an experience in cultural collision. The child is taken from a predominately Native American community with a large network of extended family members, to a school setting which is made up of strangers, a majority of whom are Euro-American. Schools should strive to reduce the feeling of abandonment by allowing the family to stay at the school, perhaps for a week, while the child adjusts to life in the residential school.

Native American people should be involved in the child's education as teachers or perhaps as mentors. Although all of the respondents in this study, with the exception of one,

attended the residential school for the Deaf, currently a growing number of Native American Deaf children remain in their communities to attend school. In this situation, it is not the Native American culture and language which needs to be addressed, but American Sign Language and Deaf culture. In both instances it will be necessary for schools to put forth a great deal of effort to educate staff in order to see the child as more than a medical defect, but a child with unique linguistic and cultural needs. The greater challenge for schools, though, is to avoid the pitfall of "not seeing" as in the theme of translucency, for deafness is an invisible disability. Likewise, as was discussed in chapter four, the residential school and postsecondary institutions tend to overlook the Native American Deaf student blending them into the majority culture. The result of this "lack of seeing" is loss of self: Individuals who struggle with their identity. Schools should investigate institutional practices that foster oppression and initiate an examination of power in education and social systems to reveal inequities that lead to marginalization and alienation.

Although this study did not take place in educational institutions, respondents were asked specific questions regarding their educational experiences. Their responses were filled with animosity and passion. In general, respondents felt that their education was inferior and lacking. As they struggle to integrate into their communities, they face daily obstacles which relate back

directly to educational voids. Those who dropped out of school are self-critical, but insist that schools could not relate to them as individuals. The most obvious reason lies in the reality that during the 1960s and 1970s, the period of time when most of the respondents were educated, teachers could not communicate efficiently in sign language. Part of the dilemma during this time period was the focus on Deaf students as English language learners or a "deficient" English speaker/writer. Clearly this view of a deficient individual has serious repercussions. Even with the development of English based sign systems, production of written English was the measuring stick of success and potential to integrate into the majority culture. After failure upon failure by Deaf people, English became the adversary, associated with Anglo/hearing values, oppression, and feelings of inadequacy. Cummins (cited in Nieto, 1992) states that:

> The crucial element in reversing students' failure is not the language of instruction but rather the extent to which teachers and schools attempt to reverse the institutionalized racism of society as a whole. This statement is not meant to downplay the great benefits of native language instruction, unless bilingual education becomes "anti-racist education", it may serve only to provide a veneer of change that in reality perpetuates discriminatory educational structures. Effective pedagogy is not simply teaching subject areas in another

> language but rather finding ways to use the language, culture, and experiences of students in their education. (p. 51)

Future research should focus on identifying effective pedagogical strategies within classrooms which build respect for individual students. In addition, future research should include studies of language acquisition and how the intersection of American Indian Sign Language, American Sign Language, Native (oral) languages, and English can occur simultaneously and effectively to increase students' success with functional language. Current methodologies grossly fail to achieve this goal; however, merely assisting the student in linguistic competence with the surface structures of English will not accomplish much without the transformation of the deep structures of racism and ethnocentrism in our schools and society, (Wong-Fillmore & Meyer, 1992).

The tendency has been for educational institutions to view themselves as efficient, not deficient, pointing the finger of blame for illiteracy to the child and their social class or ethnic group.

> Many people prefer the explanation that some groups are inherently less capable than others in the first place and are, therefore, less able to take advantage of what the school and society have to offer. Such an explanation absolves the society and their schools of the responsibility for serving all students equally. The danger is that what is believed gets incorporated

into policy, which in turn supports practice . . .(Wong-Fillmore & Meyer, 1992, p. 654)

Educators must abolish ethnocentric attitudes that foster the "melting pot mentality" and the hegemony of Anglo values. McCarthy (1990) in Race and Curriculum, discusses the cultural competence approach to multicultural education. In this approach, teachers help students develop ethnic identities, knowledge about different cultural groups, and competence in more than one cultural system in order to prepare students for cultural negotiation. Sonia Nieto (1992) stated that cultural and linguistic maintenance seems to have a positive impact on academic success. In other words, a school should not expect a student to give up the culture and language of the home for the culture of the school. Educational institutions should investigate the disjuncture between what children learn at homes and what they learn at schools. It is the negotiation of cultures, the ability to navigate among them, that classroom teachers should facilitate in their students. Bilingual, bicultural education is progress, but often is limited in scope and insufficient to accomplish this goal. Students live in a multi-lingual, pluralistic society, and future initiatives should be focused on broadening bilingual, bicultural programs to include comprehensive multicultural education, where cultural and linguistic diversity is respected and affirmed. In addition, it is vital that schools seek ways to involve the parents of Native American Deaf children, to the

maximum extent possible, in their children's education. This means that schools cannot hibernate on their campuses, but must reach out to rural communities.

This study, looking at the Native American Deaf experience, has only begun to scratch the surface of a wealth of information available to researchers interested in this unique population. The study is the first one to examine this group, and as the first, forms a basis for future research initiatives. From this research I have gained an abundance of personal experiences, and for that I am grateful to the eight respondents who participated in this study.
If we are as a profession to move forward in our thinking about culturally and linguistically diverse groups within the field of Deaf Education, three key implications become clear. We must first reconceptualize language learning to embrace other languages and cultures within the context of the classroom; second, we must make bilingual/bicultural programs comprehensive multicultural programs which affirm student diversity rather than erasing the language and culture of the home; and third, we must stretch our thinking of educational delivery systems in order to reach those representing diverse groups who live in rural communities.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Respondent #_____

1. Describe the part of the state in which you live.

2. Tell me about your family. Who cared for you when you were a child? Who acted as your primary caregiver?

3. What languages are spoken in the home?

4. How does your family communicate with you?

5. Do you experience any communication barriers? Explain.

6. How would you describe your hearing loss?

7. What was your family's reaction to your deafness?

8. Are there other family members with hearing loss?

9. Were you treated with traditional medicine? Did you receive audiological services?

10. How would you describe the culture of your home or tribe?

11. Tell me about group or tribal events in which you participate?

12. Do you know any other Deaf people?

13. Have you heard of Deaf culture?

14. If yes, do you feel any cultural conflicts?

15. Where did you go to school and how were you treated there?

16. How do you feel about residential schools for Deaf or Indian students?

17. Do you have any suggestions for educational programs which educate Native American Deaf students?

18. What is the most difficult problem you face as a Native American Deaf person?

VITA

Sharon Baker

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: THE NATIVE AMERICAN DEAF EXPERIENCE: CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, AND EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

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Education: Graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Deaf Education from the Oklahoma College of Liberal Arts, Chickasha, Oklahoma in 1974. Graduated with a Master of Education degree in Educational Administration from the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma in 1982. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at Oklahoma State University in July, 1996.

Experience: Assistant Professor of Deaf Education at the University of Tulsa, 1995 - present. Previous positions include teaching at Jane Brooks School for the Deaf, a private school for Deaf students in Chickasha, Oklahoma; teaching high school Deaf students at Chickasha High School, Chickasha, Oklahoma; teaching Deaf adults at Moore-Norman Vocational Technical School, Norman, Oklahoma; serving as special assistant to the president of the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind, Spartanburg, South Carolina; and Outreach Consultant for the Oklahoma School for the Deaf, Sulphur, Oklahoma.

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OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

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Proposal Title: THE NATIVE AMERICAN DEAF EXPERIENCE: CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, AND EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Principal Investigator(s): Kathryn Castle, Sharon Baker

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

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Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reasons for Deferral or Disapproval are as follows:

Provisions received and approved.

Signature: John H. Wyckoff Date: February 19, 1996

Chair of Institutional Review Board