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ANIYVWIYA ANISGAYA DINEDEYOHVSGI DIKANOHEDI GETSILVQUODI

HONORING INDIGENOUS MALE PROFESSORS' STORIES:

LOOKING INTO THEIR JOURNEYS WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION

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BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to highlight the stories of Indigenous male professors in higher education institutions, focusing on what those stories could unveil, how they perceived and defined success, and what model could be created from the stories they shared. This qualitative study employs an Indigenous methodological approach to better understand their journeys as faculty members in U.S. higher education institutions. Utilizing Sharing Circles and individual interviews to collect stories, Kovach's thematic analysis was used to analyze themes, while Tribal Critical Race Theory provided the lens for this study. Further, Tso-i Anadaly, or The Three Sisters, provided a metaphorical emphasis and guided each chapter as a metaphor throughout (e.g., Selu or corn is equated to the literature review, Tuya or beans is the methodology, and Squashi or squash is a part of the stories unfolding).

Fifteen Native men Storytellers participated in this study, with their ranks ranging from assistant professor to full professor and with diverse expertise in fields such as environmental justice, pharmacy, higher education, and educational leadership. The findings reveal five main themes – or lessons – in this study: Stories from their Journey, which explores the support they received throughout their higher education journey while attuning to the various paths taken; the Challenges Endured, which examines the obstacles of racism, tokenism, microaggressions, and more; Defining Success, which discusses how these Native male professors defined success through community impact, establishing presence, and visioning for the future; Conversations About Masculinity, which delves into their perceptions of masculinity, the influence of colonialism, and their efforts to redefine what it means to be a Native man. Finally, the fifth lesson shares what has sustained them, culminating in the Balancing Through the Seasons: Sustaining Indigenous Faculty Model. The study suggests the necessity to expand Indigenous

perspectives of success to challenge westernized notions of success, enhance support systems for Native male faculty and future Native male faculty, and for higher education institutions to better implement cultural competence to support Indigenous presence on campus. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of Indigenous male faculty, honoring their experiences and stories.

Keywords: Indigenous men, Native men, Indigenous male faculty, Indigenous masculinity, support systems, Native faculty

Awisvnyv (A Garden) – Prelude

As I have journeyed throughout the dissertation process, I have thought about it a lot like a garden. There are many parts to it, ways you must attend to it, the storms you must endure, and sometimes you must guide creatures, critters, and the alike in other directions so it doesn't affect the harvest. Similarly, the pathway to the Ph.D. is a lot like that and then some. This process has built me into the person I am. Others have enacted complex reflections, and I have had to readjust my intentions and plans to return stronger. Regardless, I have thought about giving readers my words, thoughts, intentionalities, and more. I often asked myself how to get others to "see" what I see with the visuals in my mind's eye. And, most importantly, how do I honor the Storytellers centered here? The more I spoke with my committee and community, the more I returned to the garden idea. But not just *any* garden, specifically The Three Sisters (Tso-i Anadalv): Selu (corn), Tuya (beans), and Squashi (squash).

Tso-i Anadalv has sustained many Tribal Nations. If you listen, you will hear many stories about the connections, lessons, and relationality they bring. A commonality we share is the recognition and understanding that they are gifts. For my tribe, Selu is a reminder of cycles, sacredness, and love when we tend to our Corn Mother and give her the care she deserves. In return, she and her sisters give us nutritious meals, community, and reminders to walk in balance and be good relatives. In storying with my co-collaborators, sustainability, growth, attending to the soil, and more kept falling back into my mind. So, arriving at a garden with all its intricacies, relationalities, and responsibilities made sense.

So, dear reader, journey with me as I walk you through the last few years of planting seeds, praying, hoping, readjusting, adapting, learning, and eventually (and finally) arriving at The Harvest. Idalena (Let's Begin).

Introduction



Figure 1: First, the Soil is Tilled

I do not consider myself an expert gardener, though I have more than enough experience to be confident when I do. When I first started, I was nervous until an elder from my community reminded me, “Seeds are just like us. They just want a chance to grow. Stop worrying so much

about everything else and give them a chance.” Long story short: do *not* overcomplicate it. Yes, there *are* technicalities, but your job is to give the seeds that chance and let them do the rest. Before starting a new planting cycle, I was taught to acknowledge my relationship with Mother Earth, recognizing and honoring her power. After all, she gives us everything we need to sustain ourselves. Though we know we will fall short, we are responsible for reciprocating that endearment. Regardless, she loves us anyway, so express your gratitude, offer her a gift, and hold her sacred.

Secondly, it is crucial to work *with* the land instead of against it. I’ve taken this to mean if you do not have to reconstruct an entire place’s natural area and can develop a way to ensure it’s sustainable, then do that. So, we must ask, what is our responsibility to gadohi (soil)? Relationality and accountability are paramount as you work towards sustainability. You will want to till it, ensuring you do not dig too deep where it disrupts the organic matter. It’s more about being strategic, mindful not to be invasive, and working towards mounds. Gadohi must be smooth in your hands as you work with the area. It would be best to address any weeds that may overtake what you plant (e.g., Bermuda grass). Consider all the “technicalities” now: do you have a water source? When you place the seeds in their new home, will they get enough sunlight? Do they have the space to flourish and grow?

Everything is about preparation – “the groundwork,” no pun intended. Numerous steps are taken to prepare you for the journey ahead. Remember that the seeds only want a chance to grow; keep it simple. Similarly, we are expected to do the same in research. Readers need to understand the what, how, when, and where you came into this topic. Most critically, why do we care about what is being talked about in the first place? Thus, this first chapter is about “tilling

the soil” and preparing the reader for the ins and outs of this research study, similar to how we do the prep work for a new planting cycle.

First, I’ll introduce myself to let others know where I come from and who I am. It is too easy to summarize myself as a Native man in higher education working towards completing my Ph.D. in Adult & Higher Education. Yet, my story begins in Park Hill, where I grew up in the fourteen county districts of Cherokee Nation: Osiyo nigada. Tsalagi gvdi Taladu daquadoa, James D. Wagnon daquado yonega gvdi. Tso’(i)sgohi iyagwadetiyyda. Daliqua, Ogalahoma digegv’i. Norman, Ogalahoma tsinela. Tsitsalagi. Aniwodi digiyvwi. Agitsi Tammy Turner dudoake agidoda James David Wagnon, Sr dudoa. Agilisi Mozelle Buzzard udoake agidudu Roy Turner dudo. Hello, everyone. My Cherokee name is Taladu. My English name is James David Wagnon Jr., and I am thirty years old. I am from Tahlequah, Oklahoma. I currently live in Norman, Oklahoma. I am Cherokee. I am a member of the Paint Clan. My mother’s name is Tammy Turner. My father’s name is James Wagnon, Sr. I am the grandson of Mozelle Buzzard and Roy Turner. Let me tell you how I arrived in this space as we work with the soil.

Centering My Story

Growing up, I do not recall having a choice in whether I would attend college. My mother was a stubborn Native woman. She came from humble beginnings. She was the oldest of twelve children. I remember her as unwavering, like a tree unwilling to be uprooted, even in the fiercest storms. She was determined to make sure her kids had a better life than she did. However, this approach often came at the expense of strict parenting, pushing our perceived limitations in class and life, and she overwhelmingly and constantly challenged us to strive for greatness. “I don’t care if you’re working as a janitor or a CEO. You’ll still need to put in the work,” she’d say. Or, when it came to our grades, and we received anything less than an A, she

would challenge us with, “Is that what you think you deserve? Is that *all* you think you’re capable of?” She was fierce. My mother wanted to ensure we understood from a very early age that life would not present itself through rose-colored glasses, and she liked to ensure we didn’t victimize ourselves or settle.

In the eyes of others, Tammy’s children epitomized focus, drive, and passion. However, beneath that perception, I grappled with the fear of failure, of letting my mother down, of being less than exceptional, and a longing for patience and understanding. Mom’s intensity about our education, I believe, stemmed from a deep-seated sense of shame she internalized from her youth about her family, a sentiment she would never articulate outright to them. Her approach was often subtle but could be bluntly direct to us. For example, she’d use my aunts, some who battled to make ends meet – or my uncles – some who struggled to maintain steady employment, were into drugs, or were consistently in trouble with the law, as cautionary tales. For her, education was the beacon that promised deliverance from the grips of our EBT lives and the commodities we received from Cherokee Nation’s Food Distribution Program. Even as a child, I always thought, *don’t be like your uncles, and you’ll be fine.*

I think my siblings and I embodied for her what could be – an indicator that her parenting was effective and did *not* reflect the truth of *her* parents or siblings. Mom took great pride in documenting our academic success, meticulously assembling albums of our triumphs. Everything from awards for perfect attendance, science, English, Valedictorian honors, and sports accolades were preserved behind plastic films or displayed on her shelves for the world to see. They were proof of potential. Upon hearing my initial memories, it is natural to judge Mom as extreme or always trying too hard. Nevertheless, it’s essential to understand her perspective.

You see, higher education has been a challenge in my family. Neither Mom nor Dad's side of the family has anyone who has achieved a degree beyond a master's, a milestone I reached only a few years ago. Educational aspirations have often gone unfulfilled in my family's history. My father's academic path was interrupted, and he earned a GED due to life's challenges. Financial struggles, family obligations, and unpredictable events halted my mother's dreams of attending Northeastern State University. Although a few members of my family have earned associate degrees and various certifications, and a select few have achieved bachelor's degrees (three of us, to my recollection), higher education has been more of an exception than a norm. Therefore, education was of utmost importance to my mother.

As a result, school was easy for me – not that I had much of a choice. I recall blazing through my formative years quickly. Of course, if I needed help, I knew to use my resources because our household would have no excuses. If I did not understand something, I worked at it. If I needed to relearn things, I took the time. I wasn't sure what I would do or who I would become back then, but I knew that taking on anything that came my way would require me to remain consistent, patient, and to put in the work. It, unfortunately, and fortunately, has stuck with me in my adulthood.

Yet, despite all that, what stood out to me throughout my childhood was that I never recalled seeing prominent male teachers. It is common in many schools that the person who teaches history also coaches a sport. Looking back, I realize I have only had a few men who acted as my teachers, mentors, and professors throughout my academic career. I can count them all on two hands. Meanwhile, the men in my family served as a thousand examples of what *not* to do. Some were heavily into drugs, some seemed like they could not stay away from jail, some of my uncles struggled with alcoholism, and some seemed like their battles were internalized –

constantly fighting from within yet never in flow or balance because of the trauma endured without reconciliation throughout their lives: angry, suppressed emotions, stoic. Not all of my uncles, but a good handful were on Mom's side. They were a little older on Dad's side, so the relationship dynamics always felt peripheral. Besides being Cherokee, we're matrilineal, so we spent more time with Mom's side.

In high school, my experience was similar. Most of my teachers were strong women, and at Sequoyah High School, where I played football, the men I encountered were primarily coaches. These coaches doubled as teachers of core classes like history, using sports as a metaphor for life's challenges and preaching a resilient mentality for navigating twists and turns. However, being just kids, their lessons didn't fully resonate with us until after graduation. It's reminiscent of how our parents advised us to cherish our childhood because it passes quickly. We would roll our eyes then, associating adulthood with freedom, never admitting they were right.

I felt a deep sense of community at Sequoyah, partly because it moved operations under the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to the Cherokee Nation's control. However, transitioning to the University of Oklahoma (OU), with its student body of over 20,000, was overwhelming. There was no BIA or Cherokee Nation to guide me. Fortunately, I connected early on with Native leaders on campus who introduced me to organizations like Sigma Nu Alpha Gamma (now Iota Gamma) and the American Indian Student Association (AISA), which helped me find my footing.

Despite these supports, the constant for many of my Native peers was the harsh reality of systemic obstacles. I watched my fraternity brothers struggle financially, personally, and academically. My curiosity about these systemic barriers deepened during an encounter marked

by microaggression. When I expressed my desire to major in Native American Studies to my advisor, he dismissively said, “Well... let’s just focus on what will get you graduated since Natives don’t usually make it through college.” His words were a slap in the face. I remember clenching my fists, fighting the urge to react more forcefully as he awkwardly attempted to justify his comment with statistics. I left his office feeling dismissed and angry. Being a first-generation student, I felt powerless then, but it fueled my determination to defy the odds. The transition to OU was nothing like home, where my community, family, and friends affirmed my identity. I knew things would be different here, and I was ready to meet that challenge come hell or high water.

At the same time, I was conflicted about pursuing an academic career. I often told myself that I would apply to programs and continue with my life, aware that I was up against a world where change, primarily through laws and policies, is painstakingly slow. It’s ironic because, during my master’s degree at Northeastern State University, I felt I had struck the right balance between my community, family life, cultural obligations, and academics. I was content.

As I was nearing the completion of my master’s degree, I was invited to speak on a panel for middle school students. I reluctantly agreed, thinking I would share my experiences and guide those needing it. After the event, as I was packing up, a young Native boy with his hair fully braided approached me. He seemed nervous, so I initiated the conversation to ease his anxiety. “Hey, can I help you with something?” I asked. He took a deep breath and gathered his courage before speaking. “I liked what you said about school and all that stuff. I just wanted to tell you that I’m going to become a lawyer,” he declared with newfound confidence, his chest puffing out as if ready to take on the world. I gave him my contact information, offering to help however I could.

Yet, as he walked away, my heart sank. His ambition was admirable, but I was painfully aware of the challenges he would face. I couldn't, in good conscience, let more Native kids enter this space without preparing them for what lay ahead. That moment was transformative for me; it reinvigorated my commitment to education because I recognized how crucial access, resources, and support are. Could I provide that support for others? This experience made me more strategic about addressing educational topics, knowing I was responsible for these young minds. "It sounds like something you could accomplish with a PhD," a mentor told me when I shared the story with her.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic struck. At that time, I had applied to several PhD programs but was unsure of my next steps, and honestly, I had no real intention of continuing my education. When lockdowns began, my heart and mind longed to be home. I rationalized, "The world has proven it can operate from Zoom, so I'll just pause until then," knowing I didn't plan to return to any campus. "You need to get your PhD," my brother urged, but I resisted.

Ironically, during this period of uncertainty, the organization that provided my scholarship sent an email. They acknowledged the potential impacts of the pandemic and indicated that academic institutions were likely to shift to online formats. They urged us to secure our funding for the academic year to avoid losing our scholarships. Despite my reservations, the pressures mounted. My brother, my mentor, the scholarship organization, and the voices from my community persisted. Even the echoes of my mother's advice from my youth about the value of higher education reverberated in my mind. Reluctantly, I accepted my place in this program. I thought of that young Native boy who had approached me, my lack of Native male mentors, and the sacrifices my family would have to make. With a deep breath, I committed to moving forward.

So, here we are, finding ourselves in this space, at this time, within these contexts. As I progressed through my degree program, I knew I needed to find a way to contribute to the Native community – it is ingrained in our culture, who we are, and how we think. However, the path was not clear at first. Reflecting on my personal experiences, I recognized that the scarcity of male role models stemmed not only from personal but also systemic and historical issues, particularly the impacts of colonialism. Delving into the literature, I encountered the works of scholars like Poolaw (2018), Still (2019), and Burnham (2023), who discuss the experiences of Indigenous men. This realization sparked a thought: It wasn't just *my* experience. I also explored bell hooks' (2004a) work on men, masculinity, and love, finding her insights profoundly influential. This lens led me to question why the presence of Indigenous men was not as prominent as that of our sisters and aunties. As I delved deeper, I saw that narratives *on* Native men often depicted them as exceptions, as victims of their circumstances, or as incapable of proving themselves in academia (Brayboy et al., 2017). Yet, I knew there were brothers, uncles, and grandfathers whose stories deserved to be told and whose contributions and influences needed to be highlighted. This realization set the stage for this very study. Let me share what I know.

Statement of the Problem

The underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in higher education is known. However, there is limited research and understanding of the experiences of Indigenous male faculty, an essential aspect of this issue. According to Shotton et al. (2013) and the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (PNPI) (2021), Indigenous students comprise only 1% and less than 0.6% of the undergraduate and graduate student population, respectively. Within these minor subsets, the presence of Indigenous men dwindles even further, mainly when talking about faculty.

According to Walters et al. (2019), Indigenous faculty constitute 0.5% of the total faculty in higher education. Issues such as challenges of lacking mentorship, inadequate funding, self-tokenization, racism, resistance to fulfilling cultural community responsibilities, and more are linked with Indigenous faculty who are lucky enough to enter these spaces (Park & Bahia, 2022).

For Indigenous men, the internalization of colonization has resulted in detrimental effects. For example, Poolaw (2018) speaks about how such internalization affects the psychological, social, and personal well-being of Native men. Meanwhile, Still (2019) documents how Indigenous men encounter enforced stoicism and avoidance of vulnerability, which in turn influences the way some Native men form meaningful, sustainable relationships as they enter higher education.

It is often the case that national studies and data collection efforts do not include Indigenous faculty, which makes their experiences invisible. Brayboy et al. (2015) have explored the consequences of this invisibility, such as high turnover rates, negative impact on student success, institutional burden, misunderstanding of tribal histories and cultures, and hindrances in practical research and community work. Moreover, non-Indigenous researchers tend to see the institutional and systemic barriers faced by Indigenous people as their problem alone, which paints them as helpless and unable to move forward independently (Shotton et al., 2013).

The absence of Indigenous male faculty in higher education impacts Indigenous students. Their absence deprives role models and marginalizes the unique insights, knowledges, and narratives of Indigenous men. Also, Indigenous faculty often struggle with a lack of policy and institutional support, burdened with the expectation to fulfill institutional and community service demands while representing *all* Indigenous people (Brayboy et al., 2012). In Cherokee culture, the concept of utiyvhi, or balance, is central. However, this balance is disrupted by the skewed

representation and understanding of Indigenous men in higher education. This gap provides an incomplete picture of the academic landscape. Despite the strides Indigenous scholars have made in elucidating the experiences of Indigenous people in higher education, a substantial gap persists regarding Indigenous male faculty. This gap diminishes their representation, perpetuates stereotypes, undermines the power of storytelling as an advocacy tool, and restricts the potential for transformation within higher education.

Consequently, the experiences of Indigenous male faculty need to be uncovered. This endeavor can broaden the limited literature, challenge stereotypes, enhance visibility, and initiate systemic change. By delving into the experiences of Indigenous male faculty, the academic community can transition towards a strength-based approach that honors their accomplishments and contributions, paving the way for future generations who identify as Indigenous male scholars.

Purpose Statement

The primary aim of this study was to delve into and illuminate the experiences of Indigenous male faculty in higher education. Existing literature significantly lacks this perspective, often addressing Indigenous men's experiences through a deficit lens by emphasizing barriers and perceived failures. This study intended to shift the narrative, moving beyond marginality – as outlined by hooks (1989) – to a more encompassing approach that acknowledges, celebrates, and amplifies Indigenous men's accomplishments and successes in academia and their broader communities.

This research aligns to support Indigenous futurity. Kulago (2019) writes, “Futurity is not a simple thought about what the future might look like, but rather deeply implicates the styles of thinking about the future, the types of practices that content to a certain future, and the logics

behind how present actions are legitimized or guided by specific futures” (p. 243). In other words, Indigenous futurity emphasizes envisioning and manifesting spaces where Indigenous success and well-being evolve from mere aspirations to tangible realities.

This study sought to enhance Indigenous men’s visibility in academia by fulfilling these aims. As a result, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of their experiences in higher education. Moreover, the potentiality could instigate systemic changes that foster environments promoting the success and well-being of Indigenous male faculty and, by extension, Indigenous students and communities. Furthermore, this research is crucial in restoring balance and understanding within Native communities. By providing a more comprehensive understanding of Indigenous men’s academic experiences, this study helps counterbalance the deficit lens and promote a more strength-based perspective and new knowledge.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. What can the stories of Indigenous male faculty reveal about their experiences in U.S. higher education institutions?
 - a. How do Indigenous male faculty personally perceive and define success?
2. Based on the experiences of Indigenous male faculty members, what model can be developed to enhance and foster perceived personal and professional success, thereby supporting future generations of Indigenous men who pursue careers as faculty members in higher education institutions in the U.S.?

Methodological Overview

This qualitative study utilized an Indigenous methodology, chosen for its ability to draw upon Indigenous research paradigms while addressing the historical impacts of colonization,

including acts of genocide, settler colonialism, and imperialism (Kovach, 2021). Traditional methodologies often apply deficit lenses or conduct studies “on” Indigenous peoples; in contrast, Indigenous methodology emphasizes relationality, responsibility, relevance, and respect (Wilson, 2008).

Stories were collected through four in-person Sharing Circles (Tachine et al., 2016) and subsequent individual interviews via Zoom. I engaged fifteen Storytellers who met specific criteria: self-identification as Indigenous and male, holding a faculty position, possessing a doctorate from a U.S. higher education institution, participation in a Sharing Circle, and agreement to a one-on-one interview. While I knew two of the Storytellers, most were selected from online directories based on their apparent fit with these criteria and their willingness to engage in this study. Once I identified a group of Storytellers within the same region (usually comprising about four individuals), I arranged the Sharing Circles at a location and time that were geographically convenient for them, ensuring easy access and participation.

The protocol for the Sharing Circles was crafted with the principles of TribalCrit (2005) in mind. Although the individual interview protocol was initially designed to delve deeper into each Storyteller’s experiences based on insights from the Sharing Circles, it was used flexibly, allowing me to adapt and weave in emergent findings from the initial gatherings. This approach ensured that the methodology remained dynamic and responsive to the narratives shared by the Storytellers. Utilizing Kovach’s (2021) six-step model, data analysis began after approval.

Significance of the Study

This study critically enriches existing scholarship by examining the under-researched experiences of Indigenous male faculty in higher education. While a body of research exists on the experiences of Indigenous students and faculty generally, there is a gap within the unique

experiences of Indigenous male faculty members. By exploring Native men's faculty experiences, this study addresses this gap.

Incorporating Tribal Critical Race Theory (2005), this study uncovers distinct insights into the systemic challenges Indigenous men face in academia. This theoretical lens allows an understanding of their experiences within the overarching narrative of colonialism and systemic racism. Moreover, it highlights the resilience and strength of Indigenous men as they navigate these challenges. This study's contributions to the higher education field are expansive: primarily, it amplifies the voices of Indigenous male faculty, ensuring their stories, perceived successes, and accomplishments are acknowledged and made visible.

Additionally, this study offers critical insights into the unique challenges and barriers Indigenous male faculty encounter in higher education. These findings could instigate institutional changes that endorse and enhance Indigenous faculty representation and success. For example, institutions could revise their policies to recognize and honor tribal community responsibilities, alleviating the cultural strain often experienced by Indigenous faculty (Brayboy et al., 2015).

Lastly, by focusing on Native men, this study bolsters representation in a limited area. This increased representation holds implications that extend beyond the confines of academia and resonate within Indigenous communities. It lays the groundwork for future generations of Indigenous students and scholars, offering them relatable role models and reaffirming the invaluable place of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in higher education.

Organization of the Study

If you've made it this far, I assume you've grasped how this dissertation unfolds. Comprising six chapters, each part of this work corresponds to elements of Tso-i Anadalv, or the

Three Sisters, which guide the structure of the study. Chapter One, this introduction, is analogous to “tilling the soil.” It sets the stage for the others that follow. In Chapter Two, the literature review is compared to Selu (corn), which lays the foundational stalks for growth, mirroring the role of the literature review in setting a scholarly foundation of past works.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology, paralleling Tuya (Beans), which climbs the sturdy cornstalks. Similarly, the methodology builds upon the groundwork laid by the introduction and literature review, acknowledging and utilizing that established base to support its structure. Chapter Four introduces the Storytellers with the initial findings, which I equate to Squashi. Archibald (2008) describes how stories can unfold in compact or expansive forms, offering various lessons and insights. This chapter provides the initial stories from the Storytellers. Chapter Five continues with the stories collected from the Storytellers, spreading out like Squashi to cover the ground with their significance and reach. The themes or lessons shared by the Storytellers highlight the commonalities and unique aspects of their experiences. Finally, Chapter Six covers discussion, implications, and suggestions for future research, representing The Harvest. This concluding chapter reflects on the journey undertaken, distilling the insights gained, and guiding future scholars to cultivate a more robust and sustainable Harvest.

Explanation of Terms

The following is a list of definitions that are utilized in this study.

Collective Terms: “I, We, Us, Our”

In this study, I frequently use personal pronouns such as “I” and collective terms like “we,” “us,” or “our” when discussing Indigenous peoples and Native men. While I acknowledge that I cannot and do not speak for *all* Indigenous communities, I have a deep connection to this

research, stemming from my journey towards obtaining a Ph.D. and my aspirations to join the professoriate as an Indigenous man. When I mention Indigenous students in higher education and use “I,” it reflects my own stories and experiences. Similarly, “we,” “us,” or “our” pertains to shared experiences and narratives within this context.

Colonial Patriarchal Masculinities

Colonial patriarchal masculinities refer to a specific form of masculinity that developed within colonial contexts, influenced by the intersection of colonial power dynamics and patriarchal values. In these environments, masculinity was shaped and perpetuated by the colonizers’ aim to establish dominance over colonized peoples and territories. This concept involves understanding how gender roles and expectations, particularly those associated with men and male behaviors, were impacted and enforced by the combination of colonialism and patriarchy. It typically entails the promotion of certain ideals of masculinity that prioritize power, control, and often racial and cultural superiority while marginalizing and subjugating others based on gender, race, and ethnicity (Inness & Anderson, 2015).

Indigenous/American Indian/Native American/Native

I use the terms Indigenous, Native American, American Indian, and Native interchangeably. Each of these terms refers to the Indigenous peoples of North America and those who identify as Native American or Alaska Native and also include members or descendants of both federally and state-recognized tribes. (Shotton et al., 2013). The terms listed are used interchangeably to reflect the relationship that Native people have with the U.S. government as both a racialized and political group and also to reflect their sovereign right to identify themselves.

Indigenous Masculinities

Indigenous masculinities refers to the concepts and expressions of masculinity found within Indigenous cultures and communities. These masculinities are shaped by the unique traditions, values, and social structures of each Indigenous group, often emphasizing roles and responsibilities that differ significantly from those promoted by dominant or colonial societies. Indigenous masculinities can involve a deep connection to community, land, and spirituality, and they might prioritize respect, care, and collective well-being over individualism and dominance (Inness & Anderson, 2015). Understanding Indigenous masculinities requires recognizing the diversity among Indigenous cultures and the impact of colonialism on traditional gender roles and identities.

Men or Male

In this study, the terms ‘men’ and ‘male’ reference individuals who self-identify as such, regardless of their sexual orientation or biological sex. I use these terms consistently throughout my research, focusing on those who identify as Indigenous male faculty or Indigenous male professors. It is crucial to recognize that the Western construct of gender has been historically imposed upon Indigenous peoples, sometimes obscuring the rich diversity of gender identities within these communities. While this study focuses on those who self-identify as men within the binary gender distinction, it acknowledges the existence and significance of diverse gender identities within Indigenous communities.

Storyteller(s)

In many Indigenous communities, “Storytellers” are esteemed individuals who convey lessons, experiences, observations, and deeper understandings about life, personal worldviews, and more. Stories are shared and honored in diverse and significant ways. To reflect the reverence and importance of this role, and in alignment with the intentionality of this study, I

employ the term “Storyteller(s),” capitalizing it as a mark of respect when referring to those who are partaking within my study. This approach serves as a more fitting and respectful alternative to solely relying on Western-centric terms such as “participants,” “human subjects,” or “research participants.” However, I recognize the academic setting I am in and the “necessity” of such terms, but I lean more on this term over the latter.

Success and Perceived Success

I define success as an Indigenous person achieving a doctorate from a higher education institution that is not primarily for Indigenous peoples and then using that education to serve their Native community meaningfully. This service can take many forms, including, but not limited to, education, mentorship, leadership, research, policy-making, or cultural preservation initiatives. This broader view of success recognizes the significant impact such individuals can have on tribal nation-building and other students through avenues such as mentorship and how they believe they have acquired personal success (Poolaw, 2018).

Two-Spirit

Two-spirit is a term some Indigenous communities use to describe individuals embodying masculine and feminine spirits. Many Indigenous cultures respect and recognize this identity as a unique and integral role beyond Western gender concepts. Two-spirit individuals often have specific roles in their communities, such as healers, mediators, or keepers of traditional knowledge, reflecting their culture’s distinct views on gender and spirituality. This term highlights the diversity of gender identities and emphasizes respecting each person’s experience and expression within their cultural heritage (Smithers, 2022).

Summary

The contributions of Indigenous men to higher education are significantly underrepresented in scholarly discourse. This oversight perpetuates a narrative that often overlooks the real and substantial input these men provide. This study sought to challenge and expand this narrative by illuminating the stories of Indigenous male faculty, thereby highlighting their contributions, navigating their challenges, celebrating their resilience, and recognizing their successes. Although much work still needs to be done, this chapter lays the foundational “groundwork” for the study – pun intended. Having prepared the soil and familiarized ourselves with this garden’s “technicalities,” our hands are now dirty, and gadohi is ready. It is time to plant Selu, symbolizing the beginning of growth and the deep rooting of Indigenous knowledges within the academic field.

Literature Review



Figure 2: Selu is Planted Next

After preparing the soil, the planting begins with Selu. She is revered as the eldest among The Three Sisters. She rises with assurance, setting the stage for her siblings, not out of vanity but from a deep understanding that her robust stalks lay down the essential framework for the others to flourish. Her growth is not just a display of height and strength but an act of leadership.

She paves the way with power and courage. Because she'll be planted first, you must ensure she has space. Her power will become prominent as the earth tilts its axis toward the sun come the equinox. Depending on your zone or region, she is placed in her home between mid-March and early April. She also likes to be near others for cross-pollination and ear development; they encourage each other.

In the realm of academia, the literature review holds a similar role. The literature review underpins the entire research process, offering a solid base upon which everything else will grow. It provides readers with a map of the existing research landscape, historical context, and a glimpse into the future directions of inquiry. Like Selu, the literature review is interdependent; it synthesizes existing knowledge while highlighting the gaps that gesture further exploration. Again, Selu does not stand alone; she thrives with her sisters. Likewise, while the literature review is a pivotal starting point, it is part of a more extensive, interconnected research system. Selu and the literature review are similar in that regard. Thus, to lay the foundation and deepen our understanding, we must acknowledge the contribution of others who have helped shape these processes and bases.

Numerous Indigenous scholars have endeavored the challenge to reevaluate and further our understanding of Native men, especially in contemporary contexts (Inness & Anderson, 2015; McKegney, 2014; Tengan, 2008). However, there is still much work to be done. Recently, Native scholars have begun to explore the impact of colonial patriarchy on Indigenous men in higher education (Burnam, 2023; Poolaw, 2018; Still, 2019). This literature review extends this investigation and is pivotal for understanding key concepts and realities for Native men in the current educational landscape. I delve into gender, masculinities, Indigenous peoples' histories in the U.S. education system, faculty experiences, and notions of success. Furthermore, I discuss

the importance of a guide for future generations of Native male scholars. I encourage others to contribute to this dialogue, enriching our collective understanding and cultural wisdom.

“Before Contact”

Indigenous societies flourished with rich realities of customs, beliefs, and practices across diverse Tribal Nations, even before encountering European influence. Among Indigenous men, roles varied, with some dedicated to warrior duties while others focused on providing sustenance through farming, fishing, and other communal endeavors. However, a common thread among these diverse roles was the foundation of relationality, grounded in the principles of the Four R’s: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility toward Mother Earth and all living beings (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Despite this shared reality, the uniqueness of each tribe was shaped by a myriad of factors, resulting in a richness of cultures and traditions among the more than five hundred tribes on Turtle Island.

Within her work, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*, Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) delves into the intricate realities of tribal cultures across different regions, shedding light on our distinctive ways of life. She delves into agricultural practices, particularly the significance of corn cultivation for various Tribal Nations and the use of herbal medicines and hygienic rituals. The settlers who later arrived were struck by the longevity and vibrancy of Indigenous life, characterized by abundant ceremonial and recreational activities. Furthermore, Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) discusses Indigenous governance, highlighting decision-making based on consensus rather than majority rule, a concept that confounded colonizers accustomed to hierarchical structures.

In their book chapter titled *Indigenous Men in Higher Education*, Poolaw and Burnam (2024) emphasize the significant role of origin stories in shaping masculine roles and

expectations. They discuss how these narratives often portray idealized versions of how men should carry themselves and the challenges they are expected to overcome. Poolaw (2018) details the tale of young male twin warriors who, through their journey, encounter adversities and tests of endurance. These stories highlight their bravery and commitment to protecting their people and preserving their cultural identity, embodying the virtues expected of men in their communities. These origin stories do more than recount past deeds; they reinforce men's responsibilities within their families and communities and underscore the importance of relationality – with each other, with resources, and with the land – central to our worldviews.

Indigenous peoples inhabited and cultivated every corner of what is now called America, engaging in sophisticated trade networks and adapting ingeniously to diverse environments to sustain our communities. By critically evaluating Indigenous societies before colonization, the narrative challenges oversimplified portrayals propagated by colonizers and reveals the advanced, organized, and intricately interconnected systems before colonial disruption.

Complementarity

The reality of complementarity held significant importance before colonial disruption, and, as I will elaborate on later, it remains crucial even in contemporary contexts. Souza (1997) defines complementarity as “the contribution of both male and female as necessary to create the whole, thereby granting both men and women important relationships and responsibilities in the household and community” (as cited in Sneider, 2015, p. 63). This framework did not reinforce gender binaries but instead recognized the vital contributions of *all* community members, rendering individual sex irrelevant to societal roles. Poolaw and Burnam (2024) elaborate on how each person's significant roles and responsibilities spanned labor, economic and political

authority, and spiritual balance, highlighting that relationality has always been a cornerstone within Tribal Nations, underpinning their social structures and cultural standards.

Sneider (2015), in her book chapter *Complementary Relationships: A Review of Indigenous Gender Studies*, delves into how complementarity supports principles of responsibility and relationality, which are crucial for maintaining social and communal balance. She highlights how Ojibwe societies, through their inclusive power distribution accommodating gender variance, exemplify these principles. Similarly, Chippewa traditions integrate the roles of men and women, demonstrating the practical application of these concepts in everyday life. For some Tribal Nations, complementarity meant positioning Indigenous women in leadership roles or at the center of societal structures. Bell (2002), in her work *Gender in Native America*, discusses how kinship systems – whether matrilineal, patrilineal, or bilateral – are understood beyond mere biological sex, power, authority, or gender distinctions, offering a broader, more inclusive view of societal roles. Additionally, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy exemplifies this through their Clan Mother system, where women held significant power in decision-making processes, including the right to appoint and depose chiefs.

While discussing complementarity, Indigenous peoples maintained a delicate equilibrium among themselves. Tribal Nations prioritized relationality, valuing the diverse roles, expectations, and responsibilities within their communities. Consequently, there was a pervasive sense of holding each other as sacred. However, the advent of colonialism did not merely disrupt these relationships; it altered them extensively, leaving an immeasurable loss that continues to reverberate through the present day. Further elaboration on this topic will be provided in the next section.

Colonialism

Veracini (2011) articulates that colonialism fundamentally represents “exogenous domination” (p. 1), differentiating it from other forms of dominance or territorial control. This distinction is pivotal as it separates colonialism from settler colonialism – a specific form where settlers not only relocate but also aim to control and transform the land permanently. This intent to permanently settle represents a profound divergence from the more transient objectives of traditional colonial conquest.

Understanding the varied impacts of colonialism on Indigenous peoples is essential. The invasion of European explorers, most notoriously marked by Columbus’ arrival, introduced diseases and initiated a cascade of destructive colonial practices. These practices included the imposition of Christianity, the creation of rigid hierarchical structures, and the systematic use of violence to enforce these new orders. Such changes disrupted the intricate web of relationality that characterized Indigenous communities, fundamentally altering their social and cultural landscapes.

As I delve deeper into the specific ramifications of these colonial incursions, I will examine how they enforced concepts of masculinity and rigid gender binaries. This exploration is crucial as these altered perceptions have had long-lasting effects, influencing the lives of Native communities for generations. I will discuss how colonial notions of power and gender have been internalized and contested within Indigenous communities, highlighting both the resilience and the challenges that have shaped the modern identity of Native peoples, but in this case, Native men. This expanded narrative provides historical context and connects these profound changes to ongoing struggles within Indigenous communities, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the colonial legacy.

Masculinity

Masculinity encompasses the qualities or attributes traditionally associated with boys or men. Yet, it is crucial to understand that masculinity is not a fixed trait but is socially and culturally constructed and influenced by factors like hierarchy, race, class, and ability. With the onset of colonization, the diverse and interconnected aspects of Indigenous people's lives – including their relationships with the land, each other, and their gender dynamics – were deemed immoral, uncivilized, and abhorrent by colonists, as highlighted by Inness and Anderson in their 2015 edited work *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration*.

Morgensen (2015), in his book chapter *Cutting the Roots of Colonial Masculinity*, delves into the intricate concept of colonial masculinity and its pivotal role in asserting dominance over Indigenous populations. According to him, colonial powers constructed a specific masculine identity to justify their control over Indigenous lands and bodies, linking masculinity with power and domination. This imposed masculinity entailed the subjugation of land, women, and children, coercing Indigenous men to adhere to foreign norms, often at great personal peril and with dire consequences. Many Indigenous individuals found themselves compelled to adopt heteronormative behaviors as a means of survival amidst colonial oppression – a point underscored by Barker (2017), who argues, “Imperialism and colonialism require Indigenous people to fit within the heteronormative archetypes of an Indigeneity that was authentic in the past but is culturally and legally vacated in the present” (p. 3). In her book *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*, Barker (2017) not only affirms the coercion, conforming, and compliance imposed on Native peoples to adhere to heterosexual norms but also ties back to colonialism. She reiterates that Indigenous bodies, minds, and authentic expressions of Indigeneity cannot fully exist without colonality erasing or delegitimizing Indigenous

understandings and realities of gender and sexuality. This truth leads to a disconnect between traditions and present realities.

Meanwhile, in *Reclaiming Two-Spirits: Sexuality, Spiritual Renewal & Sovereignty in Native America*, Smithers (2022) further explores how Spanish colonizers perceived Indigenous cultural identities, highlighting their derogatory characterization of specific Indigenous individuals as “sodomites,” despite these individuals’ significant roles within their communities as holders of sacred knowledge, ceremonial leaders, and educators. This misrepresentation exemplifies the colonial agenda to undermine and reshape Indigenous social structures.

Morgensen (2015) emphasizes that gender and sexuality were not incidental but rather integral to the colonization process, fundamentally reshaping Indigenous ways of life and imposing a rigid, oppressive framework on their identities.

Through these oppressive acts, hegemonic masculinity expected and even incentivized Native men to adopt its traits. Innes and Anderson (2015) observe, “As a result of the colonization of their lands, minds, and bodies, many Indigenous men not only come to accept these perceptions but also come to internalize them” (p. 10). Consequently, Native men were encouraged to assert dominance over Indigenous women, women of color, white women, and other Indigenous men deemed physically or intellectually inferior, as well as those who diverged from heteronormative identities. Innes and Anderson (2015) further assert that adherence to these hegemonic masculinity ideals is essential for men to attain and uphold male privilege to its fullest extent. A reality that hooks (2004) in her book *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* says shapes our culture, system, schools, and religious institutions (p. 23).

Gender

Gender is a multifaceted construct encompassing socially constructed characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys. Dancy and Hotchkins (2015) stress that gender is not a fixed identity but a dynamic enactment process. This process aligns with Simone de Beauvoir's assertion, "One is not born a woman but rather becomes one." Before colonization, Tribal Nations did not adhere to Western gender norms; these were imposed through colonialism and imperialism. Such imposition not only reinforced hierarchical structures but also facilitated gender-based violence, including sexual violence, as a means of domination and intimidation. Consequently, the weaponization of gender perpetuated systemic inequalities, particularly evident in the treatment of Native women, children, and land.

Smithers (2022) highlights how heterosexuality has been wielded as a tool of racism, pressuring Indigenous peoples to conform to Eurocentric ideals. Indigenous women were expected to assume subservient roles mirroring European gender norms, while Two-Spirit individuals faced violence for resisting imposed gender identities (Smithers, 2022). These acts of violence were rationalized as efforts to "civilize" Indigenous peoples, reinforcing colonial agendas through coercion and brutality.

Moreover, gender has been instrumentalized to perpetuate the systemic exclusion of Indigenous women. Embracing colonial patriarchal norms, Native men perpetuated gender disparities, viewing the elevation of their status as interchangeable with the marginalization of Indigenous women, as highlighted by Antone in his 2015 chapter titled *Reconstructing Indigenous Masculine Thought*. This internalization of gender inequality reinforced colonial agendas aimed at disempowering Indigenous communities. Despite centuries of disparities, economic inequalities, and legal frameworks, social hierarchies have continued to perpetuate

gender imbalances, exemplified by the historical exclusion of Indigenous women from educational institutions.

Indigenous Masculinities

Given the historical contexts and the impact of colonialism on Indigeneity, scholars have engaged in conversations about Indigenous masculinities. While it is not a straightforward dialogue, some authors approach the topic with caution, acknowledging the importance of these discussions and recognizing the potential significance of Indigenous masculinities for Native men or gender fluid individuals. However, because the field is still relatively new, its direction remains ongoing with research contributing to its development. For instance, recent studies by Grahovac (2012), Salvador (2015), Poolaw (2018), Still (2019), and Burnam (2023) have examined Native men's experiences and explored Indigenous masculinities within educational contexts. Before these works, research on this topic had been largely overlooked.

Outside of the academic sphere, scholars such as Tengan (2008), McKegney (2014; 2021), and Innes and Anderson (2015) have critically explored colonialism's historical impact and the interplay of gender, race, and place. They have also examined possibilities for reimagining future Indigenous masculinities through storytelling, celebration, and empowerment, as highlighted by McKegney (2021). This section will discuss critiques and analyses of Indigenous masculinities and the benefits noted by scholars.

Critiques and Analysis of Indigenous Masculinities

Given the historical contexts explored and the impacts of colonization, there is a call among some authors for a critical examination and deeper engagement with Indigenous masculinities. For instance, Fa'avae et al. (2021) argue that current definitions of Indigenous masculinities often rely on Eurocentric perspectives, leading to the emergence of what

Hokowhitu (2012) terms “elite Indigenous masculinities.” This lens suggests that Indigenous masculinity has, in many instances, evolved to resemble the dominant forms of masculinity imposed by colonizers, challenging the notion that Indigenous and invader masculinities were entirely opposed. Furthermore, Hokowhitu (2012) aptly highlights that masculinity is a performance shaped by historical constructs rather than inherent traits. This reality raises questions about the necessity of defining Indigenous masculinity if traditional knowledge and understandings already exist within certain peoplehoods. Who benefits from defining Indigenous masculinity, and for what purpose?

Furthermore, because Indigenous masculinities can be inherently intertwined with coloniality, scholars critique how these constructs may reinforce heteronormativity and the gender binary. For instance, in *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*, Barker (2017) discusses Tengan’s (2008) perspective, emphasizing the need for decolonization efforts to masculinize Indigenous men through traditional practices. However, Barker (2017) argues that this approach inadvertently perpetuates heterosexist ideologies, which contribute to conditions of imperial-colonial oppression. Barker’s (2017) analysis highlights the complexities within discussions of Indigenous masculinity and decolonization. While there is acknowledgment of the historical emasculation of Indigenous men due to colonialism, there is also a risk of further marginalizing those who do not conform to normative heterosexual masculinity by solely focusing on remasculinization through traditional practices. This exclusionary approach may reinforce the cis-heteronormative nation-state, which has historically utilized the death and disappearance of Indigenous bodies and unique identities to establish itself as the norm, as noted by Scott and Kinanâskomitinâwâw in their 2024 chapter titled *In the Spirit of Relation and Kinship: Supporting Indigenous Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Relatives*.

This emphasis significantly restricts the comprehension of Indigenous masculinities, particularly when considering the profound impact of colonialism on contemporary perceptions and expectations of ‘womanhood’ and ‘manhood.’ In many Indigenous cultures, roles and responsibilities were not determined by biological sex, gender, or sexuality but by relationships, communal duties, and roles within the community (Inness and Anderson, 2015). Defining Indigenous masculinities – or enacting Indigenous masculinities – instead, without acknowledging these pre-colonial expressions, may inadvertently undermine tribal knowledge and perpetuate Eurocentric perspectives, thereby continuing to marginalize our Two-Spirit, non-binary relatives, and Indigenous women.

An integral aspect of this discourse is the examination of intersectionality and power dynamics. While the contributions of scholars to this conversation are invaluable for readers and academics delving into these topics, it is crucial to acknowledge that this discussion has been primarily disregarded until recently. This oversight can be attributed, in part, to the struggle of Native scholars to gain recognition and legitimacy within academic circles, as exemplified by the pioneering work of Indigenous scholars like Deloria’s (1988) *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, Momaday’s (1968) *House Made of Dawn*, Allen’s (1986) *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, and Smith’s (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, among others.

Additionally, Indigenous peoples have been preoccupied with surviving the oppressive structures that these conversations aim to dismantle. Therefore, it is only in recent times that we have begun to unpack the complex intersections of Indigenous masculinities with gender, race, class, oppression, racism, and disparities – considering that we are grappling with five centuries of enduring colonization. Hence, engaging with Indigenous masculinities holds minimal

significance unless Native men confront the covert and overt intricacies and nuances that need to be unpacked first.

Revisiting Indigenous Masculinities

Poolaw (2018) asserts that colonial patriarchal notions of masculinity are incompatible with Indigenous ways of life. He advocates for Native men to reclaim their traditional Indigenous masculinities as a means of restoring the social equilibrium necessary for the survival and continuity of Tribal Nations. For Poolaw (2018), this reclamation involves redefining the essence of Indigenous manhood, reassessing societal roles, and exploring avenues for healing and reconciliation among Native men. Specifically, he envisions a space where Native men can express emotions, forge connections with others, engage in nurturing roles, and collaborate effectively with Indigenous women while critically reflecting on their responsibilities and relational dynamics. Furthermore, Poolaw (2018) suggests that reclaiming Indigenous masculinity offers insights into how Native men have internalized certain patriarchal norms, shaping their perspectives and roles in society, including their experiences in higher education, as examined in his research.

Scholars highlight the potential advantages of reclaiming Indigenous masculinities, with cultural empowerment as a significant benefit (Burnam, 2023; Poolaw, 2018; Still, 2019). For instance, in Poolaw's (2018) research, Storytellers, despite grappling with the influence of colonial patriarchal masculinity, expressed how their cultural identities and connections to Indigenous communities empowered them. Drawing strength from traditional knowledge, they navigated challenges in their academic pursuits with resilience and adaptability, ultimately enhancing their academic performance. Similarly, Still (2019) found that the Storytellers in his study experienced support and encouragement from brotherhoods associated with Historically

Native American Fraternities and Sororities (HNAFS). Rooted in Indigenous Knowledge Systems, these brotherhoods fostered cultural empowerment through shared standards, reshaping individuals' perceptions of Native manhood. For instance, Fred emphasized the importance of vulnerability, stating, "It takes a real man to be able to cry because we're actually showing who we really are" (p. 116). Such instances underscore the significance of cultural empowerment in providing Native men with a space to explore the depths of Indigenous masculinity, particularly within the framework of Native brotherhoods. Burnam (2023) affirmed these realities, highlighting how Haudenosaunee men turned to cultural teachings to surmount obstacles. Burnam's (2023) *Storytellers* frequently drew upon Haudenosaunee concepts of masculinity, such as ironwork or lacrosse, to reconnect with traditional community roles and responsibilities.

Engaging with Indigenous masculinities has sparked discussions about intersectional understanding. Henry (2015) underscores this complexity by stating, "The world is not constructed on differences of gender alone. Race and class must also intersect to move the discussion of masculinity from the global to the regional" (p. 184). Burnam (2023) corroborates this notion, illustrating how Haudenosaunee men navigate complex social and cultural identities that overlap and intersect, shaping their experiences. Dancy and Hotchkins (2015) add to this perspective by describing manhood as a multifaceted web of identities constructed from self-expectations, relationships, and responsibilities to others. They critique the limitations in many studies within higher education, emphasizing the importance of recognizing institutions as nested within broader social contexts, especially for men of color whose experiences are shaped by communities beyond academia. Barker (2017) addresses the challenges of decolonization within these social realities, highlighting the gridlock that occurs when discussing the redefinition of Indigenous manhood and masculinity within intersecting systems of oppression. Barker (2017)

suggests addressing this challenge could involve promoting better imagery through media representation and reclaiming Indigenous teachings about men's and women's interdependence and power. In short, delving critically into conversations about Indigenous masculinities is paramount.

Numerous scholars have highlighted the potential for healing and reconciliation in discussions of Indigenous masculinities and masculinities in general, whether through dialogue, solidarity, or affirmation (Inness & Anderson, 2015; McKegney, 2014). In their introductory chapter, Innes and Anderson (2015) underscore the devastating impact of colonization, noting that Native men have not only come to accept but also internalize the perceptions imposed upon them, affecting their lands, minds, and bodies (p. 10). Similarly, hooks (2004b), in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, elucidates how violence often becomes a tool for men to assert their patriarchal manhood, a grim reality in cultures entrenched in violence (p. 49).

While violence may not always be overt, the studies conducted by Poolaw (2018), Still (2019), and Burnam (2023) reveal the lived experiences of stoicism, the stigmatization of vulnerability, and the constriction of self-expression among Indigenous men. However, within these works, the collaborators speak to the transformative power of creating spaces for brotherhood and cultivating meaningful relationships, demonstrating the potential for healing and reconciliation, especially within the confines of higher education.

Critical analysis is essential for approaching Indigenous masculinities, as it allows for the deconstruction of complex intersections of gender, race, class, and power dynamics. Moreover, recognizing the importance of Indigenous masculinities provides an opportunity to carve out spaces within higher education and beyond, countering efforts that seek to erase Indigenous

identities. These spaces and conversations offer avenues for nurturing and celebrating diverse expressions of masculinity, contributing to broader healing and reconciliation efforts.

Indigenous Masculinities and Future Directions

Many scholars advocate for a fresh perspective on Indigenous masculinities (McKegney, 2021, Sneider, 2015). In *Carrying the Burden of Peace: Reimagining Indigenous Masculinities Through Story*, McKegney (2021) poses thought-provoking questions:

Can a critical examination of Indigenous masculinities be an honour song – one that celebrates rather than pathologizes; one that holds people and institutions accountable but seeks diversity and strength rather than evidence of victimhood; one that struggles to overturn heteropatriarchy without centering settler colonialism; one that validates and affirms without prescribing the terms of engagement? Can a critical examination of Indigenous masculinities be an embodied enterprise? Be creative? Be inclusive? Be erotic? Be funny? (p. ix).

McKegney (2021) presents a compelling argument about Indigenous masculinity throughout his work. He begins by challenging the notion that masculinity is inherently linked to negative traits inherited from settler colonialism. Instead, he argues that this idea has serious implications, limiting the positive affirmations available to individuals who identify as male or with masculinity. McKegney (2021) calls for envisioning forms of masculinity that transcend colonial definitions, liberated from biological determinism, anthropocentrism, and the complexities of gender, race, and power (p. x). He emphasizes masculinities as ethics rather than identities, underscores the importance of creation stories and gender complementarity, advocates for redefining media representations of masculinity, and discusses the regimes of Indigenous imagery. Additionally, he urges a reevaluation of the body, advocating for the honoring of all

bodies, including those of Indigenous men and boys, without excluding those who identify otherwise that coloniality sought to erase. He also explores the critical creation of spaces for community-building among Indigenous men, particularly in the context of roles, responsibilities, and the reterritorialization of relationality with political, spiritual, ecological, and gendered dimensions.

In the discourse surrounding Indigenous masculinities and its future trajectories, it is crucial to acknowledge the absence of perspectives, opinions, and insights from Indigenous male professors in the existing literature. This absence highlights the significance of initiating this conversation and underscores the existing gap in scholarship. Therefore, further research in this area is imperative.

In the upcoming section, I delve into the perpetuation of colonial expectations imposed on Indigenous communities, particularly Native men. Colonizers, through genocidal acts, endeavored to enforce their cultural norms and values onto Indigenous populations, seeing education as a tool. By weaponizing education, Europeans harbored the belief that Native peoples could be “saved,” “changed,” or assimilated into mainstream societies. Each era witnessed sociopolitical shifts that not only continue to impact Indigenous peoples but also reinforce and legitimize itself through the laws and policies enacted to maintain dominance, assimilation, and control over Native men navigating these systems.

The History of Indigenous Peoples and Education

Indigenous peoples have had a tumultuous history with the U.S. education system. In *Native American Higher Education in the United States*, Carney (1999) writes about the three prominent eras involving Indigenous peoples, critical policies, and the U.S. laws that have shaped the current reality of Indigenous students in higher education today. He writes:

The history of Native American higher education is seen as comprising three eras: The colonial period, featuring several efforts at Indian missions in the colonial colleges; the federal period, when Native American higher education was largely ignored except for sporadic (and frequently interrupted) tribal and private efforts; and the self-determination period, highlighted by the recent founding of tribally controlled colleges (p. xi).

These eras have been influenced by colonialism, imperialism, and cisheteropatriarchal values, which in turn, have greatly affected Indigenous men. Thus, to better understand their journeys in higher education, it is essential to discuss how each era provided unique challenges that gave rise to the context many people recognize and understand today.

The Colonial Period

This period is categorized as initial contact with Europeans until the end of the Revolutionary War. Carney (1999) emphasizes several points: 1) colonizers viewed Indigenous peoples as savages needing to be civilized, 2) the European-Christian model was utilized to convert and ‘save the souls’ of Indigenous peoples, 3) western education was considered vital in sustaining civilities; therefore, Ivy League schools originated with the purpose to help assimilate ‘the Indians,’ and 4) the earliest formations of higher education gave rise to the curriculum, administration, and philosophy that persists to this day.

For Native men during this era, it foreshadowed a profound transformation of identities. Innes and Anderson (2015) articulate how the pervasive colonization of land, minds, and bodies led to the internalization of imposed perceptions by Indigenous men. Bitsoi and Lee (2014) further highlight the humiliation and emasculation experienced by Native men, compounded by the introduction, and imposed hierarchies of superiority. However, a particularly significant aftermath of this era pertained to the disruption, severance, or destruction of relationships. The

essential bonds with families and communities, cultural heritage, language, and history were all threatened. Equally jeopardized were the relationships with ceremonies and the land, representing a significant upheaval in the lives of Indigenous men.

The Federal Period

This period, spanning the end of the American Revolutionary War to the mid-1960s, was marked by landmark legislation and events that drastically impacted Indigenous peoples. Among these, the Marshall Trilogy, the Civilization Fund Act, and the advent of boarding schools were particularly transformative.

The Marshall Trilogy, composed of three Supreme Court rulings, significantly shifted the status of Indigenous peoples. As Carney (1999) elucidates, these rulings transitioned Indigenous peoples from being seen as private citizens to wards of the state, culminating in recognizing their status as sovereign nations. Native men experienced severe disruption to their traditionally held communal roles as leaders, providers, and protectors, eroding their status and influence within their communities. With the U.S. government's persistent erosion of tribal rights, Native men's guidance and leadership over their lives, communities, land rights, and tribal sovereignty were diminishing.

Parallel to this was the Civilization Fund Act of 1819, a government-funded initiative to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream society by establishing boarding schools. American Military Officer Henry Pratt famously declared the schools' intent to "kill the Indian to save the man" (Pratt, 1892/1973, n.p.). The profound effects of this policy included the forced diversion of Native men and boys from their cultural roles as hunters, warriors, and spiritual leaders to adopt 'agrarian' lifestyles. Indigenous boys were removed from their families, with

some losing their language and culture as they were subjected to forced English instruction and Christian indoctrination.

Indigenous children experienced horrific abuse in these boarding schools, including physical and sexual violence. Lomawaima, Child, and Archuleta (2000) document instances of cruel practices, such as forcibly cutting boys' hair, substituting traditional names with Anglicized versions, and punishing children for speaking their Native language or practicing cultural traditions. The emotional and cultural loss these children experienced is immeasurable.

Furthermore, Indigenous men were expected to assimilate through industrialization or military service, further perpetuating colonial patriarchal violence. Morgan (1995) explores the shifting societal perceptions of Indigenous men, from the "Vanishing Indian" trope to the romanticized image of "The Warrior." These narratives have reinforced the stereotype of Indigenous men as stoic, physically strong, and emotionally resilient, a trait often associated with 'savagery' while simultaneously valorizing their 'heroic' defense of 'once-owned' lands. This paradoxical portrayal has conditioned some Indigenous men to conform to these expectations, often inhibiting emotional vulnerability and creating misconceptions about masculinity in higher education. I delve deeper into this topic in the 'Indigenous Peoples and Education Today' section, drawing upon the studies of Burnam (2023), Poolaw (2018), and Still (2019).

The Self-Determination Era

This period is the last and current era, beginning with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which reversed U.S. policies favoring Indigenous assimilation and recognized the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination. Although Carney (1999) notes that this foundational law set the stage, the real impact of self-determination on higher education was not fully realized until the 1960s. During this time, the first tribal college was founded in 1968 – Navajo

Community College (now Diné College). Additionally, this era saw increased access and support for Indigenous peoples in higher education. For instance, Carney (1999) discusses the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, which granted Indigenous peoples the right to govern their children's education. Additionally, the movement led to amendments to the Morrill Act in 1994, further bolstering support for tribal colleges.

During societal transformations, Indigenous men have faced myriad challenges. As hooks (2004a) highlights, indoctrination into patriarchal rules involves enforced emotional suppression. These struggles amplify as Indigenous men seek identity redefinition in a society diverging from their traditional norms. The reality of identity and meaning struggle remains complex. Displacement and disrupted roles introduced psychological issues and societal challenges, leading some Indigenous men to internalize and propagate patriarchal values within communities and education (Poolaw, 2018; Still, 2019).

These behaviors, though, stem from emotional conflict and societal pressure, intensified by mainstream media, education, and historical trauma (hooks, 2004b; Inness & Anderson, 2015). Indigenous men consequently wrestle with educational access, historical trauma burden, identity formation, cultural reconnection, and balancing tradition with mainstream demands. These struggles translate into practical implications, affecting Indigenous men's attendance, retention, and graduation rates in higher education, leading to their academic underrepresentation. Understanding these challenges is the initial step towards inclusivity and equity but also gives context into Native men's underrepresentation and current realities with higher education today.

Indigenous Peoples and Education Today

Indigenous students often face systemic barriers in their pursuit of education. However, prevailing narratives tend to depict Indigenous peoples as failing within the education system, rather than shedding light on how the institutions themselves fail us. Shotton et al.'s (2013) *Beyond the Asterisk: Understanding Native Students in Higher Education* helps to disrupt this perspective, emphasizing factors that foster resilience and success among Indigenous students. Non-Indigenous scholars often attribute attrition rates to academic unpreparedness, cultural conflict or discontinuity, financial struggles, and challenges in transitioning to university life. Yet, these viewpoints often overlook the historical roots of such issues – roots deeply embedded in assimilative and colonial structures. Notably, Indigenous scholars underline the importance of family support, a nurturing network of faculty and staff, self-efficacy enhancement, and the maintenance of cultural connections (Shotton et al., 2013). By refocusing the narrative in this way, the conversation shifts toward the enrichment of Indigenous students' educational experience. Regardless, it is essential to keep these in mind while reading the reported realities and statistics on Indigenous peoples.

Native Undergraduates

In 2013, Shotton et al. highlighted that Native students typically constitute less than 1% of the overall undergraduate student population. This statistical imbalance continues into higher education, with the American Indian College Fund noting that 14% of American Indian and Alaska Natives aged 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree. This figure contrasts starkly with the U.S. population's 30.3% bachelor's degree attainment rate (AICF, 2019). Fast forward to the fall semester of 2020, and the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (PNPI) found that Indigenous students accounted for just 0.6% of all postsecondary enrollments. Furthermore, these figures

show a steep decline since the Fall of 2010, with overall Indigenous enrollment decreasing by 37% and undergraduate enrollment dropping as much as 40% (PNPI, 2021).

However, as mentioned earlier, these systemic barriers did not just happen. They are entrenched in specific historical and social structures. Brayboy et al. (2015) highlight how feelings of alienation, instances of racism, and perceived cultural disparities can instigate discomfort and a sense of dislocation. Consequently, these experiences can lead Native students to exit their educational journeys prematurely. Moreover, the authors illustrate how the campus environment, encompassing elements like curriculum, pedagogical practices, and extracurricular activities, profoundly shapes how Indigenous students navigate their space and experiences. Mainstream institutions often tacitly require Indigenous individuals to reshape themselves to conform to Western or mainstream academic settings. This demand can lead to cultural discontinuity and a failure to acknowledge Indigenous students' unique perceptions, values, and worldviews, as Castagno & Brayboy (2008) point out. Several authors, including Shotton et al. (2013), Brayboy et al. (2015), and Waterman (2019), have noted the prevalent emphasis on competition and individual success in mainstream institutions. These values can leave many Native students feeling unsupported or unfairly tested, primarily since they often come from community-centered backgrounds.

Another layer of complexity is that many Native students are first-generation students. They face the daunting task of navigating unfamiliar and complex structures within higher education. This unfamiliarity can compound their confusion and struggles, particularly in the absence of adequate support staff or campus programs specifically designed to assist them (Brayboy et al., 2015). Additionally, a larger part of this conversation is how these experiences are gendered too (Brayboy et al., 2015; Shotton et al., 2013).

Indigenous Men at the Undergraduate Level. Within community colleges, a notable trend emerged in Fall of 2020 when Field (2021) reported a 21% drop in attendance among Native men. This decline goes beyond mere numbers. As Bednarikova (2021) has pointed out, Indigenous men trail behind Indigenous women in degree attainment at all local, regional, and national levels. The gender gap in education for Indigenous male students is a recurring theme in academic literature, prompting calls for more extensive research (Brayboy et al., 2015; Shotton et al., 2013; Waterman & Lindley, 2013). Yet, in the broad landscape of higher education, only six Indigenous scholars have focused on Native men's experiences (Burnam, 2023; Grahovac, 2012; Salvador, 2015; Poolaw, 2018; Still, 2019) leaving a substantial gap.

Within the field of undergraduate education, Still's research (2019) is unique for its exclusive focus on the undergraduate experiences of Indigenous men. His work employs an Indigenous Storywork methodology and interviews 22 Indigenous men attending four-year public colleges and universities. His findings shed light on how perceptions of Native identity and masculinity impact these men's navigation of higher education. Importantly, Still (2019) emphasizes the essential role of support systems for Native men. These include the influences of mentors, family, culture, community, and Historically Native American Fraternities and Sororities (HNAFS).

Still (2019), in his communal stories, disclosed the frequent feelings of disengagement experienced by Native men when interacting with non-Native individuals. These feelings were characterized by isolation, misunderstanding, fear, self-doubt, and harm. Consequently, these men often found themselves suppressing emotions and appearing stoic, viewing this as a survival strategy in their institutions. Moreover, Still's (2019) Storytellers equated seeking help with displaying weakness, which led to feelings of emasculation and inferiority. This mindset often

resulted in their reluctance to utilize university services or resources, leading to silent struggles and a detrimental impact on their academic performance. The influence of societal expectations and patriarchal masculinities was evident in these narratives. The Storytellers often felt compelled to conform to unrealistic expectations. However, they also found empowerment in their culture and community, recognizing the reclamation of Indigenous masculinity as essential. They saw the balance between Native men and women as an aspiration *and* a necessity. Still (2019) emphasized the empowering effect that leaning on their communities, culture, and support systems had on these Native men, showcasing the significance of these elements in their academic journey.

Contrasting with Still's (2019) approach, Burnam's study (2023) encompasses a broader educational spectrum, including individuals from various educational backgrounds, not just those pursuing undergraduate studies. Similarly, Poolaw's work (2018) diverges by focusing on the graduate and professional degrees attained by Native men. I delve into these studies in the next section.

Native Graduates

According to Espinosa et al. (2019), between the academic years of 1995-1996 and 2015-2016, the enrollment of American Indian or Alaska Native graduates remained consistent at approximately 0.4%. Brayboy et al. (2015) shed light on the unique experiences of Native graduate students, differing significantly from their non-Native peers. Their distinguishing factors include a compelling desire to give back and serve their communities and having the highest average ages among doctoral recipients. This trend could be attributed to Native students' firm commitments to their families and communities, responsibilities less emphasized in other life stages. Limb (2001) corroborates these findings, observing that Native students,

compared to other groups, are more likely to bear caregiving responsibilities for children or other family members. Brayboy et al. (2015) elaborate on the numerous influencing factors for degree completion among Native graduates. Indigenous graduate students not only juggle time, academic, financial, and personal challenges but also face obstacles like their undergraduate counterparts. These include financial strain, social stressors such as feelings of isolation, academic and cultural alienation, experiences of racism, a lack of academic guidance, and the balance of proximity and service to tribal communities (Brayboy et al., 2015; Shotton et al., 2013). Additionally, finances emerge as the most significant systemic barrier for most Indigenous graduates. It extends to funding opportunities such as fellowships, grants, research assistantships, and personal resources (Hoffer et al., 2007). More research and a call for more representation remains a constant (Shotton et al., 2013)

Indigenous Men at the Graduate Level. While comprehensive studies focusing exclusively on Indigenous male students at the graduate level are lacking (Brayboy et al., 2015), research that includes them does exist. Notably, Poolaw's (2018) and Burnam's (2023) studies offer valuable insights. By analyzing these studies, the authors provide valuable insights in the Indigenous men's experiences.

Poolaw's (2018) study delves specifically into the successful experiences of Indigenous men who earned master's degrees or professional qualifications from non-Indigenous institutions. Applying Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (2017) and an Indigenous storytelling methodology, he interviewed eleven Indigenous men across the U.S. to gain deeper insight into their graduate school experiences. The key themes he uncovered include Tribal Nation Building, Reliance on Support Networks, Warrior Mentality, and the Reclaiming of Indigenous Masculinities. Regarding recommendations, Poolaw (2018) urges further exploration

into areas like Indigenous fatherhood (Burnam, 2023), the experiences of gay Indigenous men, Indigenous men in different stages of higher education programs, and the establishment of graduate support programs. He also advocates for continued efforts to reclaim Indigenous masculinities.

Burnam (2023) employs Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008) and Critical Race Methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to delve into the experiences of 13 Haudenosaunee men navigating their perceptions of Indigenous masculinities. His study encompasses a diverse group of co-collaborators varying in their educational journey – ranging from those who have completed their bachelor’s degrees to others pursuing advanced degrees such as master’s, doctoral, or law degrees. Burnam’s (2023) findings highlight that Haudenosaunee men often view masculinity as a multifaceted concept, associating it with responsibilities such as caring for their families, contributing to their communities, and sustaining Indigenous nationhood.

The study also explores the varied paths these men took to college, categorizing them into three primary pathways: student-athletes, academically driven individuals, and military service veterans. The men reported challenges such as loneliness, hostility from peers, faculty, and staff, and the struggle to find community while fostering a sense of independence rooted in their cultural values. They drew significant strength from their cultural and community connections, underscoring these as crucial supports.

Burnam (2023) calls for further research to deepen the understanding of the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and Men of Color in higher education. This study sheds light on the complex identity negotiations of Indigenous men in academic settings and underscores the profound impact of cultural ties in navigating these challenges. However, the gap in Indigenous male faculty experiences remains prominent.

Native Faculty

Walters et al. (2019) highlighted that Indigenous peoples constitute a mere 0.5% of the total faculty in higher education. This study identified five central themes concerning institutional climate: mentorship, family-work balance, cultural taxation and role stress, and discrimination (Walters et al., 2019). However, a significant gap persists in research focused on Indigenous faculty, as Brayboy (2015) emphasized. Notably, these faculty members grapple with challenges stemming from their low representation. They often face increased mentoring responsibilities, which consequently limit opportunities for promotion tied to publishing. Given the prevalent lack of understanding within higher education institutions regarding Indigenous history, culture, legal status, values, and goals, educating others frequently falls upon Indigenous faculty. Brayboy et al. (2015) underscored the critical role of Native faculty, pointing out their indispensability for the educational and economic progression of tribal communities. Nonetheless, higher education institutions sometimes dismiss or undervalue the academic pursuits of Native faculty. Such institutions might label their contributions as lacking “objectivity.”

Other Scholars of Color. The experiences of other male faculty of color demonstrate a similar experience. For instance, Ford (2022) discusses the prevailing deficit models and negative narratives surrounding Black men in academia. Often, they are portrayed in a negative light, facing feelings of isolation, and encountering racism. Ford (2022) interviewed seven early-career faculty members and acknowledged these realities and underscored the need for academic environments to evolve. The narratives advocate for creating more inclusive, responsive, and transformative academic spaces.

Similarly, Salinas et al. (2020) explored Latino male faculty's mentoring experiences and perspectives in higher education. Through a phenomenological approach, the research revealed themes including family values, the role of mentoring in higher education, and a strong inclination to reciprocate the mentorship they received.

Indigenous Male Faculty. Tippeconnic-Fox (2005) noted a significant lack of research concerning Native faculty. Fast forward to 2024, this research gap remains largely unaddressed. While some studies discuss the collective experiences of Native faculty, specific research on the experiences of Indigenous men in faculty roles is sparse, though a few notable exceptions exist. Nunpa's (2003) work provides a poignant example. He chronicles his challenging journey over a decade at a state university, navigating pervasive racism, survival, and myriad professional experiences. The level of racial prejudice was so profound that Nunpa (2003) considered pursuing a racial discrimination lawsuit against the institution. His account encompasses everything from the tenure process to program cuts under a new university leadership and personal interactions with students and fellow administrators. His narrative sheds light on the often fraught path of a Native male professor.

Pewewardy (2013) underscored the urgent need to boost the presence and support of Indigenous faculty role models in higher education. Reflecting on his journey as an Indigenous male professor, he observed the evolution of the academic realm. He highlighted that only five Indigenous professors qualified as external reviewers for his materials at the time of his tenure and promotion process. Throughout his chapter, Pewewardy (2013) emphasizes the acute scarcity of Indigenous faculty role models, stressing the significance of Native students interacting with Indigenous educators for representation, guidance, and validation. He candidly shares his academic journey, highlighting how education shaped his critical consciousness. He

articulates the challenges of being an Indigenous beacon in conventional colleges, particularly given the grueling demands and extended working hours. Moreover, he observes that institutions might exploit an individual's "diverse status," positioning them as representatives for all Indigenous communities. This expectation can push Indigenous role models towards assimilation within the predominant academic culture.

Pewewardy (2013) addresses issues like racism, ethnic fraud, and the importance of cultivating holistic energy. While a significant portion of his work consists of personal exchanges with fellow Indigenous scholars, it offers a window into the potential experiences of other Indigenous male faculty. However, such insights remain primarily uncharted in dedicated studies. Due to the limited representation in the literature, studies have often overlooked how Native men perceive success and whether their perspectives align with Westernized or Indigenous viewpoints. It is crucial to explore this, which I will address in the following section.

Defining Success

The term "success" is flexible and deeply personal, inviting a wide array of interpretations, particularly within higher education. Some equate success to tangible milestones: attaining a degree, graduating, and securing employment. Success could be as profoundly simple, yet brave, for others, as stepping out from traditional homelands to embrace new educational horizons. Regardless, the notion of success is a malleable concept, its shape and form largely dictated by unique experiences, cultural contexts, perspectives, and many other factors at play. Given this diversity, clarifying what I mean by "success" or "attaining success" becomes imperative. Higher education institutions often have clear-cut benchmarks such as attendance, retention, and graduation rates. In contrast, the interpretation of success can diverge significantly for Indigenous communities. Their definition might include the following:

- Venturing away from home.
- Preserving cultural connections while navigating new environments.
- Sustaining relationships across vast distances.
- Persisting in the learning of our languages alongside other obligations.

This section challenges the conventional perception of success within higher education.

This paradigm has historically been shielded by settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and the concept of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993; Patel, 2021). By delving into varying definitions of success, I intend to offer a nuanced exploration of this concept, underpinning my endeavor to redefine success beyond the traditional confines imposed by higher education institutions.

Westernized Concepts of Success

In 2010, Brock postulated that despite a substantial increase in access to higher education over the previous forty years, measures of student success – predominantly gauged by persistence and degree attainment – had stagnated. This study proposed strategies and practices to enhance student persistence and degree completion across racial categories, mainly ignoring the systemic barriers. Baum, Kurose, and McPherson (2013) similarly examined broad metrics of college persistence and outcomes, emphasizing the increased need for remedial education to aid poorly prepared high school students. These authors attributed successful “quality education” to the orchestration of strategies, access to resources, self-efficacy, and integration of information technology.

Engle (2007) added to this discourse, asserting that a college education was pivotal to achieving economic success and social mobility within American society, with higher levels of education associated with increased income and decreased unemployment rates. While I do not

dispute the importance of education, I question the criteria for its significance and the beneficiaries in this manner.

A casual Google search will reveal numerous articles attributing success to many factors, such as outcomes, strategies, and information. However, what remains unaddressed is the specific set of skills, requirements, and knowledge these articles implicitly endorse. Leigh Patel's (2021) critique of higher education's foundation as being entrenched in colonialism is illuminating. She contends, "Colonialism has specific ideas about what counts as success and how to achieve it. When achievement is upheld as the key standard rather than learning, it brings with it a toolkit of measurements, remediation programs, expulsion policies, and meritocratic explanations of who achieves and how" (pp. 22 – 23).

Yet, this reality is not new to society. 'Just pull yourself up by your bootstraps' is deeply ingrained in the American psyche. It perpetuates deep into some individuals' collective subconscious, where most people equate 'success' solely with the accumulation of wealth and property. It is further sustained through racist capitalism in deciding who gets to own land, who gets to attribute knowledge, whose 'standards' the institutions follow, and what is considered legitimate knowledge. Further, this narrative thrives on individualism, wherein socioeconomic success hinges on personal effort, effectively overshadowing the systemic barriers that impede equal access to opportunities while disregarding or questioning how institutions got theirs in the first place. Thus, it is not only good to problematize but necessary.

Indigenous Perspectives on Success

Pidgeon (2008) initiates the dialogue by posing a critical question: what does it mean to be successful in higher education? She focuses on the shared vision among Indigenous peoples, emphasizing that education is not sought solely for individualistic goals. Instead, the collective,

encompassing communities and tribes, is kept at the forefront, viewing higher education as an essential instrument for directing us toward the pillars of self-governance and self-determination.

Pidgeon (2008) further argues that our ambitions in higher education interweave with broader societal concerns, particularly those of social justice and equity. She critiques the prevalent higher education systems, indicating that they privilege and propagate a singular perspective, limiting the space for Native people to nurture and expand their ancestral wisdom. Echoing these sentiments, Wilson (2008) reiterates the Indigenous worldview, underscoring the intricate connections we share, the Earth, all its life forms, and even the cosmos.

Consequently, Pidgeon (2008) elucidates the frequent compromises Indigenous peoples often make to assimilate into the current educational system. Her concluding thoughts underscore the urgency of persistently pushing against institutional barriers, striving to integrate our knowledge, theories, and perspectives into the fabric of the academic world, transcending disciplines, and levels of governance.

Building on this discourse, Gallop and Bastien (2016) delve into how Aboriginal students perceive “success” as tantamount to assimilation – adopting mainstream values and behaviors. However, they underscore that pursuing higher education is not an exercise in adaptation but a vehicle for capacity-building, instrumental in assisting their communities. They argue that an enriched understanding of Indigenous experiences should permeate both faculty and institutional levels for institutions to cultivate a supportive environment and relationship with their students. Waterman (2019) further explores the historical contexts that have shaped Indigenous peoples’ current relationship with higher education. She criticizes the deficit approach often used when addressing Indigenous communities. She posits that the measures of success like recruitment,

retention, and graduation rates should center around community health and the pursuit of self-determination and tribal sovereignty, drawing on the work of Brayboy et al. (2012).

Furthermore, Waterman (2019) highlights the significant role of higher education in strengthening community and nation-building efforts. She emphasizes that such endeavors are undertaken without compromising cultural integrity, pointing to the importance of Indigenous ways of being. In her analysis, elements like place, home, land, family, and community become pivotal for most Indigenous students to find success. She underscores that these fundamental elements should be recognized and valued within the educational system.

The necessity to problematize prevailing definitions of success within higher education is vital, particularly considering how they might be reimaged and repurposed for Indigenous communities. Current definitions of success often marginalize and dismiss our experiences, painting a picture of an education system that privileges and prioritizes a specific type of person as worthy of success (Suresh et al., 2024). Hence, it becomes imperative to scrutinize current policies and practices and challenge the entrenched power structures that have been in place for centuries. This approach ensures a comprehensive consideration of the beneficiaries of the current system.

Conversely, this critique could catalyze the emergence of new notions of success that the academy does not typically account for, such as personal growth, well-being, community involvement, and cultural preservation. Though not conventionally measurable or directly linked to economic gain, these elements are nonetheless essential facets of the success paradigm. They embody attributes that do not simply equate success with economic or career advancement but rather foster a more holistic, community-focused, and culturally sensitive approach to achievement. By centering these overlooked yet invaluable components, higher education

communities could cultivate an academic environment that more authentically supports and nurtures diverse definitions of success.

Faculty Guides and Models of Success

Higher education, while often heralded as a beacon for social mobility and knowledge construction, is not without its intricacies and pitfalls. Its foundation, embedded in systems of oppression, perpetuates the marginalization of certain groups. This truth is especially evident when one peels back the layers and recognizes its legacy as a byproduct of settler colonialism. At its core, navigating higher education can feel like a game. Success often depends on having the right resources: financial means, specific privileges, or access to insider knowledge. Particularly for faculty of color, there is an implicit assumption. Despite their extensive training and education, they are expected to swiftly decipher the unwritten codes that govern promotions, tenure, and other milestones within academia. This gatekeeping, symbolic of the Ivory Tower's exclusive nature, favors those already equipped with these means.

This reality brings us to a crucial point: the potential value of a guiding framework. While no guide can be exhaustive, it can provide invaluable support to those who need it most. In this case, Native men. Thus, this section – taking into the ways “success” is defined – considers how cultural knowledge might lend itself to empower other Natives while also attuning to the challenges in higher education.

Current Models and Frameworks

While limited models or guides are available for faculty navigating higher education, some resources do exist. For instance, Merrilatt and Scheibmeir (2016) provide strategies aimed at faculty success, though their focus leans towards “quality improvements” intended to “optimize” achievement. Similarly, Howell et al. (2004) delve into faculty motivators, offering

insights for university administrators on crafting strategic plans that are “more effective” and ensure “program success.” On a broader scale, the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD) presents advice, strategies, and tools to aid faculty in achieving success within the academic realm (NCFDD, 2024).

While several models and guides suggest ways for faculty members to achieve success in academia, they often have limited scope. Lumpkin (2011), for instance, highlights attributes that contribute to a successful mentoring program for new university faculty. Drawing from a wealth of literature, this model underscores approaches like design, development, and evaluation, emphasizing the importance of nurturing relationships through regular interactions. Similarly, Stupnisky et al. (2017) proposed a model examining pre-tenured faculty members’ teaching and research achievements. Drawing from the literature on early-career faculty and the self-determination theory, they hypothesized that balance, clear expectations, and collegiality are crucial for success, fostering autonomy, competence, and intrinsic motivation. Their study included data from 105 pre-tenured faculty at two research universities.

These models align with institutional definitions of success, offering optimized strategies and addressing the technical expectations of academia, especially concerning promotion and tenure. However, they fall short of recognizing the privileges and complexities of intersectional identities. They do not fully address the systems of oppression or offer cultural awareness tailored to marginalized communities. Although higher education often prescribes a “standard” to adhere to, many Indigenous individuals may resist, redefine, or seek alternative paths if these standards do not resonate with their identity. Therefore, there is a pressing need for more culturally sensitive, intentional, and purposeful models that genuinely cater to diverse experiences and backgrounds.

Indigenous Models and Frameworks

Several Indigenous scholars have called for better ways to support Indigenous faculty (Brayboy et al., 2015; Lopez, 2019; Shotton et al., 2013). Some have even introduced models tailored explicitly to Indigenous communities' unique experiences and backgrounds. A notable example is the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (TIPM) presented by Pewewardy, Lees, and Minthorn (2022). This model critically addresses the historical and ongoing erasure of Indigenous peoples, particularly emphasizing the reinforcing systems present in higher education.

The book delves deep, providing innovative principles and guidelines to reshape education to serve Indigenous students, faculty, and staff. It rigorously assesses various educational approaches, tactics, and strategies, pushing for the decolonization and Indigenization of practices. The ultimate goal is to promote collective engagement, foster critical thinking, facilitate healing, and prioritize cultural restoration for the holistic well-being of all students. Moreover, the model serves as a call to action, urging educators and individuals to introspect and identify if they unknowingly perpetuate ethnic stereotypes, engage in racist behaviors, endorse deficit-based ideologies, or contribute to recolonization. Throughout the book, readers are provided with tangible examples of how the TIPM has been applied across diverse educational environments, ranging from early childhood education to higher education and educational leadership.

The Modern Warrior Model. Poolaw (2018) introduced a model grounded in the narratives of Indigenous men, designed as a compass to guide future Indigenous men in navigating the complexities of higher education, particularly within graduate and professional programs.

Symbolized by the four-pointed Apache Star, the model consists of:

1. Tribal Nation Building: This emphasizes the innate desire to contribute to Native communities.
2. Warrior Mentality: Highlighting the intrinsic powers that Indigenous men possess, necessary for their success.
3. Reclaiming Indigenous Masculinities: A reminder that for Indigenous men to truly succeed, they need to reconnect with and reclaim their traditional masculinities.
4. Communities of Support: Acknowledging the pivotal role of mentors, family, and community. The author noted how Native men heavily leaned on these support structures during their educational pursuits (Poolaw, 2018, pp. 199 – 200).

Rather than focusing on barriers, Poolaw's (2018) model accentuates the strengths that propel Indigenous male success. He envisions this model as a tool for Native men, aiding them in more effectively navigating their graduate and professional journeys toward achievement

A Guide for Indigenous Faculty. Navigating the complexities of higher education, especially as an Indigenous faculty member, can be daunting, given the lack of tailored guides to address the unique challenges they face. Drawing inspiration from the critical essence of TIPM and the practicality of The Modern Warrior Model, I saw potential in merging their principles to craft a holistic guide. My vision was for this guide to lean on Indigenous male faculty's communal stories and experiences, incorporating the techniques and strategies they have used to carve out their success. More than just a roadmap, this guide would highlight the cultural knowledge and holistic approaches that have sustained Native men through their academic journeys. Envisioned as a legacy for future Indigenous scholars, this gift might have some

answers, but it aims to bridge a significant gap. It serves as a starting point, a foundation upon which future Native researchers can refine, expand, or even craft their models.

Theoretical Framework

In this research project, I utilized Brayboy's (2005) Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) as the foundational theoretical framework. This study centered on Indigenous male faculty, so TribalCrit emerged as particularly relevant. This theory resonates with Indigenous paradigms of knowing, being, having, and doing. Therefore, it offered a lens to foster new understandings and a connection to the extensive knowledge regarding Indigenous peoples.

Tribal Critical Race Theory

Brayboy (2005) writes that TribalCrit gives a unique viewpoint for Indigenous people in the United States, especially regarding the education system. It acknowledges our place in a unique and complex space, both politically and culturally. TribalCrit captures and honors Indigenous peoples' historical, cultural, and political lived realities.

Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) extends the principles of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which focuses on the pervasive influence of racism in legal systems and policies. CRT, as described by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), underscores the significant role of race in the U.S., highlighting the country's foundations in 'property rights.' Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that the intersection of these factors offers a critical tool for understanding societal inequities, which consequently manifest in our educational systems.

TribalCrit further expands this framework by incorporating unique Indigenous knowledge systems, examining colonization's historical and ongoing impacts on Indigenous peoples. Brayboy (2005) states that many discussions about racial issues tend to concentrate on the black-white binary, often excluding the experiences and perspectives of other ethnic and

racial groups. TribalCrit was developed to fill this gap, providing a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between Indigenous peoples and the U.S. federal government. It acknowledges Indigenous peoples' distinct legal, political, and social status and underscores their liminal position within the dominant society.

There are 9 tenets of TribalCrit. Brayboy (2005) lists them as the following:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures for our identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on a new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups
8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real, and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work toward social change (pp. 429 – 430).

TribalCrit has been employed in various studies to illuminate the experiences and challenges of Indigenous peoples within the realm of education. Shotton (2008) used TribalCrit to speak about the underrepresentation of Indigenous women pursuing Ph.D. degrees. Her study highlighted the layers of adversity, racism, sexism, and systemic issues Native women confront in their academic journeys. Similarly, Tachine (2015) applied TribalCrit to understand the complex systemic and structural forces shaping Navajo students' educational pathways. The study underscored the interplay of sociocultural, personal barriers, and systemic challenges encountered by these students.

Furthermore, Castagno and Lee (2007) leveraged the analytical lens of TribalCrit to critique the limitations of diversity policies in higher education institutions. They argued that while such institutions may actively promote a certain degree of diversity, their efforts often fail to challenge the status quo significantly. They further contended that universities frequently shun "critical, social justice-oriented policies" (p. 3) as they threaten the established racial order and the institutions' privilege and power. This reluctance often manifests in policies that enable issues like using Native mascots and ethnic fraud to occur.

In the context of my research, I used TribalCrit as an instrumental tool for exploring the experiences of Indigenous male professors more profoundly. Considering my first research question (What can the stories of Indigenous male faculty reveal about their experiences in U.S. higher education institutions?) TribalCrit shed light on the myriad barriers, manifestations of racism, and intricate interplay of systemic structures and cultural values, as illuminated by tenets 1 and 6.

Regarding my sub-research question (How do Indigenous male faculty personally perceive and define success?), tenet 7 of TribalCrit provided pertinent insights. This tenet

allowed an understanding of how cultural backgrounds can shape the perception of success. It acknowledged that while Native men may engage with western concepts of success, such as promotion, tenure, and salary, their cultural roots inevitably influenced their approach. In other words, TribalCrit underscored that many Indigenous peoples pursue higher education with the broader goal of community upliftment instead of solely focusing on individual gain.

Lastly, concerning my second research question (Based on the experiences of Indigenous men faculty members, what model can be developed to enhance and foster perceived personal and professional success, thereby supporting future generations of Indigenous men who pursue careers as faculty members in higher education institutions in the U.S.?) tenets 5 and 7 offered valuable perspectives. These tenets not only addressed the experiences gained by Indigenous men as they navigated educational institutions but also explored how they bring their cultural understandings to these spaces, shaping their decisions and actions. Therefore, within this research, TribalCrit offered a robust lens to explore these varied facets of Indigenous male faculty experiences.

Further, Tribal Critical Race Theory served as the ideal theoretical framework for this research project due to its unique, intricate understanding of Indigenous experiences within the colonial contexts of the U.S. Its emphasis on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the experience of colonization allowed for an in-depth culturally sensitive exploration of the experiences of Indigenous male faculty. I have found that perhaps other theoretical frameworks may offer insights into race, gender, or systemic issues but lack the specificity and intersectional understanding of Indigenous identities that TribalCrit provides. Furthermore, unlike many theories, TribalCrit explicitly acknowledges community upliftment and self-determination as central goals, aligning with the motivations of many Indigenous peoples in higher education.

Notably, TribalCrit recognizes storytelling as a legitimate source of data, honoring Indigenous traditions and enabling an approach that best fits the Indigenous methodology of this research. Therefore, while other theories provided valuable perspectives, TribalCrit offered a different depth, specificity, cultural sensitivity, and alignment with research methods, making it a good fit for this study.

Tribal Critical Race Theory, as a theoretical lens, offered critical and substantive insights essential to guiding this research project. Moreover, it aligned well with the intentional steps and measures I implemented in this study, particularly in reverencing the narratives of Indigenous men. Through applying this lens, it strengthened the value of this project.

Summary

Numerous research endeavors have illuminated the experiences of Indigenous men in higher education, drawing upon historical contexts to inform contemporary realities. Indigenous scholars are actively discussing the complex interplay of colonialism, gender, masculinities, and the paths forward. Importantly, traditional models of success and effectiveness are being critically reevaluated and reshaped to serve better and reflect the needs of Indigenous communities. This adaptive approach is part of a broader movement towards tailoring strategies and frameworks to enhance the agency and visibility of Indigenous peoples.

Selu, analogous to the literature review in academic research, lays the foundation for further analysis. Just as Selu's robust stalks support her sisters, enabling them to thrive and expand, the literature review establishes a solid base of existing knowledge and theoretical insights. It symbolizes leadership and courage, guiding subsequent exploration and growth. With Selu's foundation in place, we move to Tuya (beans) to further deepen the relational connections essential for holistic understanding and growth.

Methodology



Figure 3: Tuya Climbs Selu's Cornstalks

Tuya is planted next. In accordance with tradition, I learned that beans should be planted once the corn has reached a height of about 4 to 6 inches. This practice symbolizes the knowledge and support Selu, the Corn Mother, offers her younger sister. As Tuya grows, she utilizes her sister's stalk as a sturdy support, wrapping around it for stability and growth. In

reciprocity, Selu provides steadfastness during winds, offering guidance and support as her younger sister matures and adapts. In return, Tuya enriches the soil and her sister's nourishment with nitrogen, fostering their shared growth within their community.

Similarly, the research methodology mirrors Tuya's role in the relationship. Much like beans climbing and protecting themselves with the sturdiness of corn stalks, a well-crafted methodology offers structural support for the research process. It serves to underscore and guide the collection and analysis of data, aligning with the research objectives and questions. Just as beans enrich the soil, a well-chosen methodology enriches the study, nurturing the growth of knowledge. Moreover, like Selu and Tuya acknowledging the inevitability of winds, a methodology ensures consistency and steadiness, mitigating unsteady irregularities in the research process.

Methodological Overview

This chapter explores the rationale behind selecting an Indigenous methodology for my research. I begin by outlining the development and purpose of my research questions, detailing how they emerged and guided the overall study. I then discuss receiving IRB approval from my institution. The section on Storytellers discusses the criteria established for participation, the recruitment strategies employed, and the Storytellers' demographics. I then address the data collection process. This part explains why Sharing Circles (Tachine et al., 2016) were chosen as the appropriate method for conducting interviews and facilitating story-sharing with the Storytellers. I also describe the measures taken to ensure consent, confidentiality, and anonymity throughout the study.

Following this, I discuss the interview guides used and how memoing and observation were integral to enhancing the analysis. The data analysis section explains the selection of

Kovach's Six-Step Model (2021), its relevance to the study's Indigenous framework, and its effectiveness in capturing and honoring the shared stories facilitated by MAXQDA software. Trustworthiness is discussed next, highlighting the roles of member checking, triangulation, and reflexivity in assuring the study's rigor. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations and reflections on how these insights might inform and improve future research endeavors. This comprehensive approach ensures that each methodology component supports and enriches the research, mirroring the nurturing and supportive relationship between Tuya and Selu and fostering a robust and culturally attuned scholarly contribution.

Indigenous Methodology

To guide this research, I selected an Indigenous methodology. Rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems, Indigenous methodologies draw from our own epistemologies, ontologies, axiologies, and relationships (Wilson, 2008). While sharing certain aspects with qualitative methodologies, Indigenous methodological approaches distinguish themselves from Western intellectual tradition (Kovach, 2021, p. 25). They confront the legacy of colonization, assimilation, and the erosion of our cultural integrity, brought on by various acts of genocide, settler colonialism, and imperialism. Smith (2012) articulates the tension Indigenous scholars often grapple with, as we are sometimes pressured to conform to a deficit research paradigm. This approach conflicts with our worldview of interconnected relationships and the responsibilities they entail. It also highlights how "dominant" research methodologies fail to appreciate, recognize, or validate the entirety of Indigeneity.

For this research, I recognized my responsibility to conduct this study in a way that respected and honored those involved. Wilson (2008) perceives research by and for Indigenous peoples as a ceremony that unifies relationships (p. 8). This research was not an act of

information extraction but rather an opportunity to share and honor stories and foster meaningful relationships with the Indigenous men who shared this journey with me.

While it was possible to utilize other methodologies, as Smith (2012) points out, such approaches often stem from outside the community and tend to “study” Indigenous issues rather than cultivate relationships. They risk overlooking the crucial element of relational accountability. Therefore, my choice to employ an Indigenous methodology did not merely serve as a guide for this research; it signified the respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy I wanted to enact. These principles, as outlined by Archibald (2008), honor the relationships built throughout this process.

Indigenous methodologies can be applied in a multitude of ways. For instance, some scholars lean on community research to construct meaning collectively (Smith, 2012). Others draw from their personal tribal teachings, using them as a compass to navigate stories and build relationships with their co-collaborators (Still, 2019). Some scholars underscore the practice of storying with peoples and communities (Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). Despite the diversity in approaches, all these works are woven together by a common thread: the centrality of stories. Waterman (2019) posits that stories disrupt the dominant narrative. For instance, Minthorn, Nelson, and Shotton’s 2022 publication, *Indigenous Motherhood in the Academy*, highlighted the diverse experiences of Indigenous mothers. Through their collection of stories, they showcased these women’s non-homogeneous but interconnected journeys, challenging the colonial structure of academia. Archibald (2008) asserts that sharing acquired knowledge is a revered Indigenous tradition, often taking the form of a personal life story. Such sharing is done with compassion and deep empathy for others.

Similarly, Kovach (2021) states that if research aims to enhance the well-being of Earth's inhabitants through learning and discovery, then storytelling is a form of research. Stories grant insights drawn from observations, experiences, interactions, and intuition, thereby aiding in formulating theories about certain phenomena (p. 161). In essence, the power of stories is undeniable, and their role in this study was crucial.

To honor the unique cultural contexts of each Storyteller, I applied an Indigenous methodology. I aimed to implement protocols that reflected this respect and showcased the interconnectedness inherent in their narratives. It is important to note that there would be no dissertation without their contribution. Thus, this study is not a title with my name but a shared journey with them. It is a collaborative exploration of their experiences, not a one-way transformation transfer. Indigenous methodology has shaped and guided this research by adopting this approach and intentionality.

Research Questions

The primary objective of this research was to deepen our understanding of the experiences of Indigenous male faculty. In line with the principles of Indigenous methodology (I.M.), which prioritize relationality and storytelling, this approach proved ideal for uncovering and honoring the narratives of the Native men I interviewed. Through I.M., the focus remained firmly community-centric. As discussed in the literature review, it was assumed that topics like success would be framed within the context of their personal experiences of community well-being and the collective success of future generations.

Furthermore, by employing TribalCrit (2005), stories were regarded as legitimate data sources, informing both theory and ways of being. This approach highlighted their experiences and embraced a strength-based perspective, countering deficit narratives often perpetuated by

non-Indigenous scholars. Recognizing the novelty of this study, it became evident that the experiences of Indigenous male faculty had been significantly overlooked within the literature. This realization underscored the need to examine their stories from a broader perspective, acknowledging that this research marks just the beginning of a dialogue. Additionally, this approach emphasized that the study intended to illuminate the experiences and stories of Indigenous male faculty, highlighting their successes as a means to deviate from Westernized notions. In doing so, it provides a guide that starts conversations about initiatives and interventions aimed at sustaining Native faculty in the future. Thus, the research questions were informed by these lenses.

To recap, here are my research questions. This study was guided by asking the following:

1. What can the stories of Indigenous male faculty reveal about their experiences in U.S. higher education institutions?
 - a. How do Indigenous male faculty personally perceive and define success?
2. Based on the experiences of Indigenous male faculty members, what model can be developed to enhance and foster perceived personal and professional success, thereby supporting future generations of Indigenous men who pursue careers as faculty members in higher education institutions in the U.S.?

IRB Approval

As with any project, receiving IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval was critical in proceeding with this study. The IRB process ensured that my research adhered to ethical standards and protected the rights and well-being of all the Storytellers involved. I submitted my application in late October and received approval in early November. Additionally, I received an exemption from a full IRB review since my study did not present any greater risk than usual. For

reference, see Appendix A. Upon receiving approval, I moved forward with reaching out to potential Storytellers and began recruitment.

Storytellers

Archibald (2008) describes individuals who share their stories – narratives filled with lived experiences, thoughts, and emotions – as Storytellers. Through a blend of traditional knowledges, truth, and respect, they breathe life into their narratives, captivating both listeners (Storylisteners) and readers. In this research project, I assumed the dual roles of Storykeeper and Storylistener as my Storytellers shared their stories.

Criteria

Criterion sampling was utilized for this study. Criterion sampling is a purposive sampling method where individuals are selected based on specific predetermined criteria or characteristics. The eligibility criteria for this research study was carefully established to focus on the unique experiences and challenges of Indigenous male faculty in U.S. higher education institutions. To participate in this study, individuals had to meet the following conditions:

- Self-identify as Indigenous.
- Self-identify as male.
- Currently hold a faculty position.
- Possess a doctorate from a U.S. higher education institution.
- Be willing to participate in a Sharing Circle.
- Agree to engage in a one-on-one interview.

These criteria were established for several reasons. Firstly, self-identification respects and allows space for cultural identity and autonomy, acknowledging the diverse identities within Indigenous communities while avoiding the imposition of colonial notions often associated with blood

quantum criteria found in tribal memberships. Additionally, through the self-identification criteria for male-identifying individuals, this research aimed to explore the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by Native men. Moreover, given the significant gap in the literature, Indigenous male faculty were selected to highlight their experiences. Hence, no specific criteria were set regarding their faculty position or rank (e.g., assistant, associate, full professor, etc.) to maintain flexibility. At the outset of recruitment, considering the limited representation of Indigenous peoples in higher education, I aimed to ensure flexibility in recruitment processes, allowing for diverse representation and ensuring that stories could be heard and honored.

Recruitment

Storytellers were recruited through personal networks, direct outreach, targeted email communications, and public institution directories. Initially, I focused on institutions across the U.S. known to have significant populations of Indigenous men. This approach involved searching through public directories such as Native American Studies/American Indian Studies, American Indian History Departments, etc. Additionally, I explored public directories of tribal colleges or universities within those states. Furthermore, I reached out to two Storytellers I knew, inviting them to participate in the study. All communication with potential Storytellers began with initial emails or conversations to introduce myself, explaining the study, and informing them of its purpose.

As interest in the study grew, a list was compiled to identify clusters of interested individuals. If two or three individuals were located near each other or attended the same institutions, Sharing Circles were organized. Based on geographical convenience, these circles provided a platform for Storytellers to share their experiences and insights. A Qualtrics survey

was utilized to gather information from potential co-collaborators, ensuring they met the study's specific criteria and obtaining their initial consent to participate.

Storytellers' Demographics

Fifteen Storytellers, ranging in age from 35 to 75, participated in this study. They belonged to state-recognized tribes or were enrolled members of federally recognized tribes. Their expertise varied, with some holding assistant professor positions, a majority having associate professor rankings, and the remaining serving as full professors. Their diverse backgrounds included experience in higher education leadership, environmental justice, and health. Additionally, they represented a variety of institutions, including public and private institutions and tribal colleges.

Data Collection

This research employed a culturally responsive, two-fold approach to data collection. It commenced with Sharing Circles (Tachine et al., 2016), followed by individual interviews. This approach was chosen to first create a communal and supportive environment through Sharing Circles, allowing Storytellers to build trust and share collectively, before moving to individual interviews to explore deeper, personal insights. Tachine et al. (2016) describe Sharing Circles as grounded in an open-structured conversational style that respects the tradition of story-sharing within tribal cultural protocols (p. 278). Although often compared to focus groups in Western research due to their qualitative data collection function, Sharing Circles are distinguished by their roots in Indigenous epistemologies, which prioritize tribal cultural protocols and storytelling

Establishing relationships and fostering communal sharing was paramount. At the onset of each Sharing Circle, I introduced myself in my Cherokee language. Through grant funding, I

provided food for each Storyteller, allowing them to eat as they pleased while I managed the logistical aspects of the research, such as signed consent forms and transparency regarding the study's intentions and our expectations. Before delving into story-sharing, I presented each Storyteller with cedar from my homelands to convey my commitment to cultivating and sustaining our relationship. It was essential to emphasize that I approached this role as a community member and relative first before assuming the role of a researcher. The Sharing Circle took place in four different states, respective of each Storyteller. As previously mentioned, I scheduled locations that were geographically most convenient for them. The Sharing Circles lasted between 90 minutes to 120 minutes.

After the collective experience of the Sharing Circles, I conducted individual interviews to explore each Storyteller's journey further. These interviews provided a private setting for them to reflect and expand upon their experiences. Additionally, they allowed me to ensure the accuracy of their words, thoughts, and stories while also providing an opportunity to delve deeper into emerging themes identified during the Sharing Circles. The individual interviews were conducted via Zoom, scheduled at the most convenient day and time for each person, and typically lasted between 30 and 80 minutes.

Consent, Confidentiality, & Anonymity

The participation process began with interested individuals completing an online survey via Qualtrics. This survey assessed their eligibility, gathered initial consent, and confirmed their agreement. Subsequently, the informed consent process consisted of both signed documentation and verbal confirmation. Before the Sharing Circles, Storytellers were required to sign consent forms. These forms confirmed their agreement to audio recordings during the Sharing Circle and clearly outlined the study's expectations, ensuring Storytellers were fully informed about their

role. I scanned these forms for confidentiality and security purposes, storing the digital copies in a password-protected database on my computer. The Storytellers were given the option to receive a copy of their consent forms. The original physical documents were then shredded to safeguard their privacy further.

Before each Zoom interview, I obtained verbal consent from the Storytellers, reiterating their right to opt-out at any time and for any reason, ensuring their autonomy and comfort were prioritized. Confidentiality was of utmost importance throughout this study. All audio and video data were securely stored on a password-protected computer, with access limited solely to myself. To further safeguard the identities of Storytellers, they were given the option to choose pseudonyms, which were used in all transcriptions and documents throughout the research process. Furthermore, measures were implemented to ensure the confidentiality of Storytellers when presenting or publishing the research findings. For instance, in the Findings Chapter, Part I, identifiable information such as tribal affiliations or specific institutions was removed or altered.

Additionally, upon completion of the transcription process, all audio and video recordings were permanently deleted to further guarantee confidentiality. Considering the potential challenge to privacy and anonymity posed by hosting Sharing Circles with individuals from the same campus and given the small sample size, safeguards were put in place. The signed consent form distributed included a confidentiality agreement section emphasizing the importance of maintaining confidentiality and anonymity for the Sharing Circles. By signing the agreement provided in physical copies, Storytellers agreed to keep shared information confidential. Additionally, before commencing each Sharing Circle and recording, we emphasized the cultural significance of confidentiality, highlighting the importance of respecting and being good relatives to one another.

Interview Guides, Memoing, & Observation

The study employed the Sharing Circle Interview Guide and the Individual Interview Guide (see appendices F and G). The Sharing Circles Interview Guide encompassed questions exploring the journey to becoming a faculty member, the influence of cultural background on views of success, and the personal strengths or skills Storytellers have refined. In contrast, the Individual Interview Guide delved into specifics regarding challenges posed by policies, curriculum, demographics, and suggestions for institutions to support Native men better overall. It is noteworthy that while the Sharing Circles Interview Guide remained the primary framework, emergent themes from various Storytellers across different locations and insights from TribalCrit (2005) prompted a deeper exploration of those findings. Consequently, the Individual Interview Guide was a supplementary resource, offering additional prompts to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant topics.

Memoing proved invaluable throughout this process. Before each interview, whether a Sharing Circle or an individual interview, I reviewed the questions and jotted down any initial thoughts or reflections to stay attuned to my thought processes. During the interviews, I diligently documented body language, identified emergent themes, and noted any key points to revisit later. Following the interviews, I revisited the recordings or notes taken during the sessions to keep the information fresh in my mind. This process facilitated ongoing reflection and internal dialogue regarding the Storytellers' narratives. It ensured a thorough understanding of the shared stories and fostered critical thinking about their implications, broader contexts, and nuanced details.

In addition to memoing, observation played a crucial role in my process. Particularly during the Sharing Circles, I paid close attention to the engagement levels of the Storytellers as I

posed various questions. In instances where Storytellers were meeting for the first time or were not acquainted, I observed the dynamics of their interactions to ensure everyone felt comfortable and gleaned insights from their nonverbal cues. While conducting interviews over Zoom presented some challenges (e.g., in-person dynamics allowed individuals to feed off each other's energy, which was less feasible in Zoom's virtual environment) in observing body language compared to in-person interactions, I still tried to gauge the Storytellers' reactions and engagement levels. This approach allowed me to identify which questions sparked interest, which concepts resonated most with the group, and which areas required further exploration. By observing these dynamics, I could adjust my approach and tailor subsequent Sharing Circles or interviews accordingly.

Data Analysis

The data was organized using MAXQDA, a qualitative software tool, while thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes. As Kovach (2021) pointed out, thematic analysis within an Indigenous context can effectively articulate Indigenous knowledges through voice and stories, grounding them in Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The emergent themes from this analysis reflected the experiences of Native men, thereby aligning the findings with Indigenous knowledges and systems.

Kovach's (2021) six-step thematic analysis model guide the analysis process:

1. Familiarizing oneself with critical Indigenous theoretical perspectives.
2. Identifying the narratives and experiences shared (first-level analysis).
3. Establishing connections between these narratives (relational analysis).
4. Grounding the analysis in Indigenous theory (weaving Indigenous theoretical frameworks).

5. Deriving at themes.

6. Acknowledging ‘coyote codes’ or outlier findings that provide unique insights (p. 208).

Her approach to thematic analysis was chosen for several critical reasons that align with the project’s Indigenous framework. Firstly, she presents thematic analysis as one way to uncover relationality in stories, emphasizing flexibility and adaptability in narrative exploration. Secondly, she asserts that thematic analysis, grounded in Indigenous philosophy, can align seamlessly with an Indigenous conceptual framework, despite being rooted in conventional academic traditions. And she highlights the reflexivity embedded in the thematic strategy when it incorporates Indigenous thinking. Unlike the linear perspective common in Western methodologies, her approach promotes a cyclical, circular understanding that aligns with Indigenous philosophy. This way of thinking respects and centralizes Indigenous perspectives, making thematic analysis an excellent tool to honor, present, and center the narratives I collected and heard.

Kovach’s (2021) six-step model is further designed to ensure an Indigenous researcher, as a Storykeeper, upholds these principles. She prompts researchers to reflect on the stories and their relationships at each level. For instance, at the first level of analysis, the critical question is, “What are the stories and experiences telling us?” At the relational analysis stage, the query evolves to, “What are the relationships between the experiences arising from the stories?” (p. 208). Moreover, she calls for an intentional pause before distilling themes, urging researchers to continually ask if the stories’ interpretation aligns with Indigenous theory and ways of knowing, being, having, and doing. This critical introspection ensures that the analysis process respects and centers the stories, often resulting in Storytellers feeling genuinely seen, heard, and accurately represented. Therefore, given her approach’s compatibility with Indigenous research

philosophy and its potential to facilitate authentic representation, I selected her six-step analysis model as the road map for this study's data analysis (Kovach, 2021).

MAXQDA

MAXQDA is a comprehensive software program for qualitative and mixed methods data analysis. It enables researchers to organize, analyze, and visualize qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, and textual documents. The software offers robust tools for coding, memoing, retrieving coded segments, and a built-in organization tool that streamlines the upload and analysis of transcriptions.

For this research, MAXQDA was used to organize the Sharing Circles and individual interviews. Following Kovach's (2021) six-step analysis model, I uploaded all transcriptions into the software. The first step involved familiarizing myself with the content of the transcriptions. During the initial level of analysis, I used MAXQDA's color-coded tools to highlight similarities within the Storytellers' narratives. As I began recognizing commonalities among the stories, I moved to step three, grouping the color-coded segments based on shared relationships. I then used my theoretical framework, TribalCrit (2005), to ground these stories within its framework.

Since thematic analysis is an iterative process, I continuously reviewed the transcriptions, memos, and recordings to ensure I accurately captured the Storytellers' experiences. This involved regrouping codes, expanding descriptions of potential themes, and adjusting categories until each part accurately and concisely reflected the stories coherently. Following Kovach's (2021) recommendation, I took a four-day break from the analysis to recenter myself before returning to review and refine the codes. After this pause, I re-engaged with the data to ensure the accuracy of the captured themes, then progressed from categorizing to distilling the final themes.

MAXQDA was chosen primarily for its organizational capabilities. I knew I needed to stay organized with the stories I collected, and I felt confident using software that provided the necessary tools to support my data analysis. MAXQDA also offers two additional features: Creative Coding and the Smart Coding Tool. The Creative Coding feature was particularly beneficial when categorizing and regrouping codes, as it allowed me to visualize the data and ensure the coded segments aligned with my research journal notes. The Smart Coding Tool helped me connect to other stories or codes I might have overlooked, proving effective throughout the analysis.

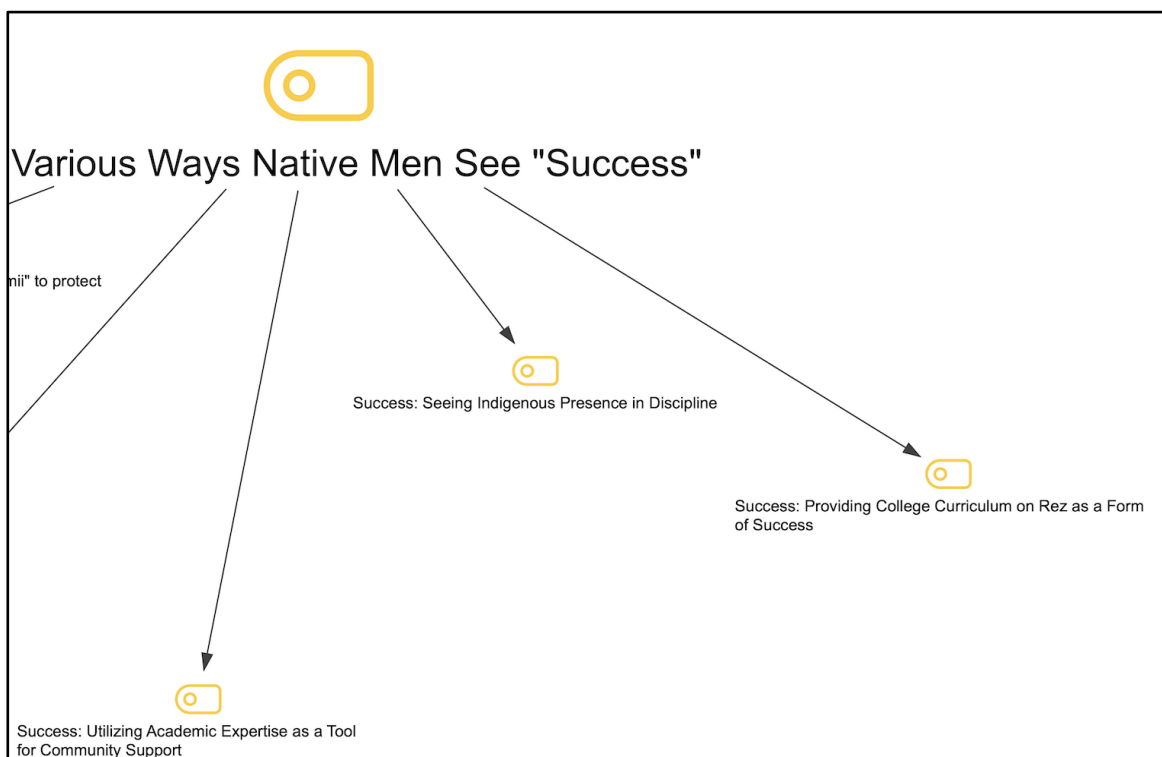


Figure 4: MAXQDA – Creative Coding Feature

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a fundamental aspect of qualitative research. It serves as a measure of rigor, certifying that the research meets established criteria and can be considered robust and reliable (Anney, 2014). This approach also includes ensuring the credibility and reliability of the

study's findings. For this research, I upheld trustworthiness through several stages: member checking, triangulation, and reflexivity, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member Checking

To reinforce the credibility of this study, I deployed several strategies, with member checking taking a central role. This method enabled Storytellers to review and verify the transcriptions and preliminary interpretations of their narratives, ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of their accounts. Kovach (2021) considers this step fundamental and a mandatory measure in Indigenous-focused research. Complete transparency at every research stage is crucial if the primary objective is to uphold the tenets of Indigenous methodologies. By sharing each process phase, I gave Storytellers full autonomy over their narratives.

While specific perspectives may interpret this level of “participant control” as a potential discredit to the research, Tachine et al. (2016) emphasize that a lack of such involvement has typically led to mistrust between Westernized research and Native communities. Therefore, member checking guaranteed the accuracy of the captured stories and ensured that the research findings genuinely reflect the experiences and viewpoints of the Storytellers. This active engagement of my co-collaborators, in turn, greatly enhanced the credibility of the research, as it demonstrates the study's commitment to representing the Storytellers' experiences faithfully and respectfully. Thus, member checking was vital for achieving trustworthiness.

Triangulation

Triangulation, a robust method in qualitative research, aims to bolster the validity of findings by converging information from multiple and diverse data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this research, I employed triangulation by integrating data from varied sources such as interviews, observation notes, and relevant literature. Implementing triangulation enables one to

view a theme or perspective from multiple angles, illuminating its various dimensions and nuances. In analyzing Indigenous narratives, the triangulation process involved validating data across individual stories, broader community contexts, and established theoretical constructs or literature within Indigenous studies. This comprehensive approach validated the research findings and enriched the study's depth and rigor. The insights derived from this approach were skillfully woven into the research narrative, enhancing the study's richness and conclusions.

Reflexivity

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), reflexivity is a fundamental aspect of ensuring trustworthiness in a study. It requires the researcher to explicitly disclose the biases, values, and experiences they bring to qualitative research. This transparency allows readers to understand the unique perspective from which the researcher undertakes the study. Weiner-Levey and Popper-Giveon (2013) expand on this idea, emphasizing that researchers must disclose their past experiences, biases, and prejudices that may have influenced their interpretation and approach to the study. Thus, the importance of continually documenting and discussing any connections from these past experiences and perspectives throughout the research process is underlined. For my part, I facilitated this ongoing reflexivity by maintaining a research journal. This tool recorded and reflected upon my personal biases, values, and experiences as they related to the study, promoting transparency and enhancing the overall trustworthiness of my research.

Furthermore, in engaging in reflexivity, I recognize that by selecting an Indigenous methodology, approach, and intention, I have chosen a specific lens through which to view my research. To some researchers, this could be perceived as a lack of "unbiased" perspective. This may be true to some extent, as this research is deeply personal to me. My intention for community impact, my chosen topic as I aspire to enter the professoriate, and my passion for

increasing Native men's representation through various avenues all contribute to this potential bias. However, Wilson (2008) reminds us that research is like ceremony, reaffirming our connection with each other and the larger role we play in the greater cosmos. Additionally, Kovach (2021) highlights how historically, research conducted by non-Indigenous peoples has often claimed to address biases through an objective lens. In reality, this approach has frequently severed relationships and disconnected researchers from the communities they study "on."

Kovach (2021) encourages Indigenous scholars to proudly proclaim their positionality and the motivations behind their research. For me, this research project is approached from the perspective of a Native man aspiring to join the professoriate. This could be seen as a strain or deficit in the research project to some. However, my insider knowledge provided a unique lens of understanding and context that external researchers might lack. This connection enabled me to approach the research with a level of empathy, cultural sensitivity, and authenticity that helped lead to more impactful and nuanced understanding. By openly acknowledging my position and intentions, I wanted to contribute authentically and meaningfully to the academic and Indigenous communities.

Limitations

In this section, I explore the study's limitations. While this study offers a fresh perspective on Indigenous male faculty in higher education, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. I have identified some limitations and how they could benefit from more research.

Potential for Self-Selection Bias

The recruitment process and the criteria for self-selection in this study may introduce a potential for self-selection bias. This bias arises because the Storytellers who chose to engage typically had unique experiences or perspectives that motivated them to share their stories.

Consequently, the narratives of those who did not participate – potentially due to differing experiences or reluctances – are not captured, which might skew the representation of experiences within the broader Indigenous academic community. It is critical to acknowledge this limitation when analyzing the data and consider it when generalizing the findings from this study. This awareness will help ensure a more nuanced interpretation and application of the research outcomes.

Transferability

This study's findings are focused on the experiences of Native male faculty within the U.S. higher education system. It is important to note that the results may not apply to other demographic groups, such as non-male Indigenous faculty or faculty based outside the U.S. Therefore, the outcomes of this research should be considered exploratory and illustrative rather than offering definitive or universally applicable conclusions.

Despite these limitations, the study is significant in revealing Indigenous male faculty's specific challenges and experiences in U.S. academia. The study fills a gap in current research and highlights the need for further studies. Future research should broaden the scope to include diverse Indigenous identities and extend beyond the U.S. context, which can enhance understanding of Indigenous academic experiences. Such expansions are vital for developing more inclusive academic policies and support systems that recognize and address all Indigenous faculty members' unique needs.

Small Sample of Indigenous Male Faculty

The involvement of fifteen Storytellers has provided valuable perspectives to this study. However, it is essential to acknowledge that this sample size has limitations. Although the Storytellers have diverse experiences, they represent only a fraction of the Indigenous male

faculty in academia. There are 574 federally recognized tribes and numerous state-recognized tribes in the U.S., which means that this sample does not fully represent the different tribal backgrounds that Indigenous male faculty members come from.

Researchers must employ strategies to reach diverse co-collaborators to ensure more comprehensive and applicable research. Some practical approaches may include partnering with Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which can help others collaborate with colleges and universities that serve large Indigenous populations and facilitate access to a broader pool of potential participation. Utilizing snowball sampling techniques can also help leverage current members' networks to reach further into the community and identify additional Storytellers who bring varied experiences and perspectives. Additionally, researchers could engage with National Indigenous academic organizations such as the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) to provide connections to a wide range of Indigenous academics across different disciplines and institutions.

By expanding the participation base in these ways, future studies can achieve a richer, more nuanced understanding of the experiences of Indigenous male faculty. This broader perspective is not just beneficial, but crucial for enriching the academic discourse on Indigenous issues in higher education. It also plays a pivotal role in informing policy-making and educational practices that more effectively address the needs and challenges of this underrepresented group.

Incomplete Individual Interviews

Despite achieving data saturation through comprehensive engagement, it is crucial to recognize that two follow-up individual interviews still need to be completed. This issue arose due to scheduling conflicts and delayed responses from the Storytellers, which hindered the

timely execution of these interviews. Although this did not compromise the overall integrity of the study – thanks to extensive memo writing and the incorporation of initial narratives from the Sharing Circles – it nonetheless represents a limitation. The absence of these follow-up discussions means that certain depth and nuances in the Storytellers’ experiences may not have been fully captured. This oversight does not detract from the data analysis’s validity or the findings’ synthesis. Still, it highlights the importance of capturing the full spectrum of perspectives within the cohort of fifteen Storytellers.

To mitigate similar issues in future research, implementing more flexible scheduling options, considering alternative interview methods such as phone interviews, and enhancing ongoing communication with members are recommended. These measures would ensure that all potential insights are thoroughly explored, thus enriching the research outcomes and strengthening the study’s contribution to understanding the experiences of Indigenous male faculty.

Lack of 2SLGBTQ+ Representation

Though this study has a broad scope, it has a significant limitation due to the absence of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals among the Storytellers. The exclusion of explicit 2SLGBTQ+ perspectives limits the understanding of the interplay of gender, masculinities, and the historical and contemporary roles of Two-Spirit identities within Indigenous faculty experiences. This omission could lead to an incomplete portrayal of these individuals’ challenges and nuances within the academic landscape, particularly in discussions surrounding gender dynamics and inclusivity.

To ensure a more holistic understanding of the varied experiences of Indigenous faculty, it is crucial to incorporate 2SLGBTQ+ perspectives in future research actively. Researchers

should employ targeted recruitment strategies to engage the community, such as partnerships with 2SLGBTQ+ advocacy groups within Indigenous communities and outreach through platforms that cater specifically to Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous peoples. Moreover, adopting research methods that explicitly explore gender and sexual identity can provide safer spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ Storytellers to share their experiences.

Additionally, recognizing and addressing potential barriers to participation is essential. This approach includes providing explicit assurances of confidentiality and sensitivity towards gender and sexual identity, using appropriate and respectful language in research instruments, and ensuring that researchers are trained in inclusive practices. Future studies should not only include a more diverse range of voices but also explore the implications of these expanded perspectives for policy and practice within higher education institutions.

Summary

Archibald (2008) profoundly reflects, “We have three ears to listen with, two on the sides of our heads, and one in our heart” (p. 76). Embracing Indigenous methodology, I prioritize relationality, allowing me to deeply honor and respect the stories shared. This research stands firmly on the shoulders of numerous Indigenous scholars (Poolaw, 2018; Still, 2019; Burnam, 2023), whose foundational insights have intricately guided the development of my research questions, curiosity, and intentions. In this narrative, Tuya embodies the boundless potential, innovation, and expansiveness achievable when rooted in a strong foundation, symbolized by Selu’s nurturing support. The methodology employed in this study mirrors Tuya’s growth – brave, assured, and grounded. With Tuya firmly established and flourishing, the stage is set for planting Squashi, signifying the ongoing growth and richness of Indigenous knowledges and research practices through the power of story.

Findings, Part I



Figure 5: Tso-i Anadalv (“The Three Sisters”)

Squashi is the youngest sister, planted last after Selu and Tuya have cultivated their relationship. She grows mightily, her leaves outgrowing the size of your hand, spreading out to protect her sisters. Her responsibilities vary: she shields the ground from the sun, retains moisture, suppresses weeds, and her prickly vines deter small, unwanted visitors. During heavy

rains, her leaves protect her sisters from soil erosion. The Three Sisters seek balance, not competition. The findings of a study, much like Squashi, spread out and reveal a rich and expansive narrative. The prominent leaves resemble significant narratives in a study's findings, unfolding in non-linear, multifaceted patterns. Archibald (2008) emphasizes that Indigenous stories are dynamic, mirroring the non-linear unfolding of findings, providing substantial outcomes that lead to fresh insights. Supported by the literature review and methodology, findings articulate the study's impact, echoing how Squashi's presence provides foundation and shelter for her sisters.

Lessons as Themes

Inspired by Squashi's story, this chapter introduces the Storytellers and weaves the first theme throughout their introductions. Readers are invited into the Storytellers' initial insights and backgrounds. Archibald (2008) speaks about the depth within a story, emphasizing that each retelling can teach readers multifaceted lessons. As she reminds us, a story can be read multiple times, with new insights emerging each time. This is the intention behind the five themes shared by the Storytellers. In Cherokee, "a-de-lo-qua-s-di" means "to learn." I want readers to gather insights and catch details just as I did when I first heard these stories, treating the themes as lessons. Again, even if we think we fully understand a story, revisiting it always offers new learning opportunities.

Thus, there are five lessons. In this first lesson, "The Stories From Their Journeys," I delve into the initial insights from the Storytellers' academic journeys to understand their paths to the professoriate. Listening to their stories, it became clear that various influences shaped their educational pursuits. Whether they were encouraged by family members, community members, or mentors, the recognition of education as a transformative tool drove them to seek

opportunities for personal and professional advancement. Secondly, the non-linear paths of their journeys became evident. None of the Storytellers had a straight trajectory into higher education. No one started as an undergraduate and powered straight through to their graduate studies. Even those who did follow a more “traditional path” often switched their backgrounds and focus as they navigated higher education due to different encouragements, life circumstances, or new opportunities. Regardless, what remained constant was their desire to serve their communities.

The other four lessons – “The Challenges Endured,” “Defining Success,” “Conversations Around Masculinity,” and “Sustaining Indigenous Male Faculty” – are covered in Part II. For now, I wanted to acquaint readers with the Storytellers and the insights they shared from their journeys.

From Lessons to Storytellers

TribalCrit underscores the centrality of stories. Brayboy (2005) writes, “Stories serve as a way to orient oneself and others toward the world and life” (p. 439). This project was more than just having the Native men I interviewed recount their journeys into academia. While this approach had its benefits, I aimed to delve deeper into their stories so that others from the Indigenous community could engage critically with these experiences. The goal was to highlight the importance of storytelling, utilize the criticality of Indigenous epistemologies, and most importantly, recognize and honor the stories that stem from cumulative knowledge and reflective lived experiences. It provided a space for these Native men to share stories that had not been told before.

As these stories were gathered, their similarity to Squash’s protective and expansive nature became evident. The order of presentation emphasizes commonalities and lessons rather than a hierarchical sequence. To honor the Storytellers’ confidentiality, all personal and

locational identifiers have been transformed. Additionally, upon completing the Sharing Circles, they selected their chosen pseudonyms. With that in mind, I begin by introducing each Storyteller and sharing their stories.

Igyi Adeloquasdi | First Lesson: Stories from their Journeys

Introducing the Storytellers

Henderson

Henderson, an associate professor at a private research university, hails from a community in a state-recognized tribe on the East Coast. With a seventeen-year career, his research and teaching are deeply rooted in environmental justice and Indigenous rights, where he has made significant contributions through Indigenous Sovereignty initiatives. Henderson's commitment to these issues extends beyond academia, mirrored in his passion for the outdoors. An avid backcountry skier, paddler, and rock climber, he finds solace and inspiration in nature, often drawing parallels between his adventures and the environmental advocacy central to his work. This connection underscores a profound commitment to protecting and honoring the land that sustains his cultural heritage and adventurous spirit.

After we introduced ourselves and set expectations for the Sharing Circle, Henderson seemed as ready as I was to begin. He was eager. When I asked the group to describe their academic journey, he looked like he could not wait to tell his story. When it was finally his turn, he said, "What you all said about not having any male professor role models growing up resonates with me, too." Henderson shared that he had no interactions with professors before college or family in higher education. He said, "My grandmother was a long-time teacher. My father started out teaching middle school. So, that was always in the back of my mind." These memories felt like seeds planted by his family.

Though attending college was never a set plan due to financial constraints and lack of experience, it was not until he entered college that he realized his love for the outdoors. He said, “I love being outside. Skiing, paddling, climbing. When I got to college, I remember thinking, ‘Whatever job I’m gonna have, it’s just gonna support my adventures into the backcountry.’” Seeing his passion for the outdoors, one of Henderson’s professors from the geology department approached him and invited him to work with them. This mentorship provided Henderson with a new outlook on possibilities. With newfound confidence, he felt graduate school was the next step. However, unaware of the hidden curriculum within higher education, he did not inform his mentor or anyone else about his plans to pursue a graduate career. His only application resulted in rejection. Feeling defeated, Henderson entered the manufacturing industry for a couple of years.

Eventually, a friend mentioned an environmental science master’s and doctoral program, saying, “I know that you love being outside and I know you love the water. I’ll make some calls and you can come meet the faculty.” This opportunity proved worthy. With support, confidence, and resources, Henderson realized how different his educational pursuits and career could look. Encouraged by his mentors and wife, he decided to pursue a master’s and then a PhD. As he neared the end of his studies, he applied for faculty positions and has remained at his institution ever since.

Raymond White Horse

Raymond White Horse, an associate professor and museum curator at a public research university in the Southwest, is a descendant of a northern tribe and enrolled in a federally recognized tribe in the South. Specializing in material culture, his work spans textiles, baskets, nets, and more, reflecting a deep commitment to preserving and sharing the intricate stories of

the communities he serves. Motivated to make a tangible impact on his community, Raymond has dedicated thirteen years to teaching and curating. He utilizes his expertise to educate others and foster a greater appreciation for Indigenous artistry and history. His journey is marked by a passion for connecting people with the physical embodiments of culture, aiming to empower and uplift through the tools and resources his academic position affords.

When I opened with the first question of the Sharing Circle that Raymond was a part of, he let out a chuckle. My interest was immediately piqued. I had asked, “Can you describe your journey to becoming a faculty member?” When it was his turn, he sat up straight and said, “I guess I always think about these types of trajectories as not really linear things but rather more like ricochets.” Raymond told the group that his journey through higher education and life felt more like a series of redirections than a straight path. “I did not set out to be faculty or really care to focus on teaching,” he admitted.

He explained that although he had a passion for anthropology and archaeology, he wanted to address the field’s complicated and problematic history to benefit the Native people and surrounding communities he aimed to serve. “I operated from a perspective of really wanting to put anthropology to work,” he said. Raymond then spoke about his family, sharing that they played a crucial role in his decision to pursue higher education. “I think I benefited not just from having that drive cultivated in me, but also from watching my mother and grandmother power through higher education. That helped me to center my own drive.” Despite his initial hesitation about teaching and higher education, seeing his family pursue their goals and make a difference influenced him profoundly. These experiences ultimately solidified his desire to be in higher education and do the same.

Seysay R.

Seysay R., a full professor at a public tribal university, brings over thirty years of rich experience as an administrator and faculty member. A member of a southeastern tribe, his career is distinguished by the creation of numerous organizations and educational programs, along with his role as principal investigator for major grants. Seysay's dedication extends beyond academic achievements; he is deeply committed to striking a harmonious balance between his professional responsibilities, family life, and cultural heritage. At this point in his life, he is primarily focused on ensuring he impacts his relatives' lives.

In his Sharing Circle, Seysay was attentive, nodding as others spoke and reflecting critically on his experiences and adventures. Sitting at the table with his right leg crossed over his left and his hands intertwined on his knees, he patiently waited for his turn, eager to contribute to the group. When the question about his experience came to him, he removed his glasses, sat up straight, and scooted closer to the table. "I'll tell you all what. As you get older, you reflect on where and why things turn out the way they do," he said, smiling, ready to share his story.

He began by telling us about his mother, who was an elementary teacher and the last teacher in his state to work in a single-room schoolhouse, where she taught grades one through eight. He said, "I remember her just bringing tons of papers home. I didn't think anything about it, you know? But I saw her grading papers, staying up late at night. And so, as I think back on it now, I think that must have had an impact on me." From an early age, he admired people who could speak well and articulate themselves effortlessly. "I thought, 'Wow, that's what I'd like. I hope I can speak, think, and articulate myself like that.'"

But, as is often the case, reality had other plans for him. He proudly proclaimed, "I went to high school with other ideas. I thought I was gonna be the next Jimi Hendrix!" The rest of the

guys in the Sharing Circle laughed. He shared that he got drafted into the U.S. Army and ventured to Vietnam. Eventually, he made his way to a university, where he immediately took note of some of the professors. He recalled, “I remember thinking, ‘Wow! These guys are getting paid to teach these classes, to read books, and to talk about them to us? Man, that’s what I wanna do!’” Right then and there, he decided he wanted to be in higher education.

James Wayne

James Wayne, an associate professor at a public land-grant research university in a northern state, is enthusiastic about leadership, persistence, and applying Indigenous methodologies in academia. Enrolled in a federally recognized tribe, his work transcends traditional academic boundaries, deeply intertwining with his commitment to cultural learning and preservation. James’s passion extends significantly to mentoring Indigenous students, reflecting a dedicated effort to ease their transition into academic environments. He views mentoring as a responsibility and a vital part of his mission to empower students to navigate academic spaces confidently while staying connected to their cultural identities. James remains excited about ushering in the next generation of Indigenous scholars.

James Wayne’s path to academia was as unexpected as it was pivotal. It began with a challenge from the CEO of the non-profit where he worked, serving Native communities. “You have to figure out this thing called graduate school for Native students,” the CEO told him, planting a seed that would later take root in James’s career and life. During a crucial time when James and his wife were expecting their first child, they faced healthcare uncertainty due to budget cuts affecting Urban Indian Healthcare. “You’re gonna have to find something else,” a nurse warned them, highlighting the immediate need for change in their lives. Around this time, James stepped in for his boss to give a presentation at a graduate school, an opportunity that

sparked his journey toward higher education. Despite his initial reluctance to leave his job, circumstances and a change in leadership nudged him toward accepting a graduate position elsewhere – a decision that proved fortunate with the birth of his child.

At his new job, James expressed a desire to pursue a doctorate, a move that was unexpectedly supported. “If you’re in class that’s closely related to your work, then you shouldn’t have to take any time off,” his employers told him, aligning his academic pursuits with his professional responsibilities. James’s academic journey culminated in a doctorate defense that opened the door to tenure-track positions. Despite an initial offer from a university too far from home, he sought teaching experience at his previous institution. His proactive networking led to a call from a dean at another institution, securing him a tenure-track position under unanticipated circumstances.

Reflecting on his journey, James shared a touching moment of realization. While transporting a buffalo he and his uncle had butchered, a chance encounter with an older man driving a 1956 pickup at 50 miles an hour struck a chord. “1956! It’s a 1956!” the man exclaimed, his grandson smiling beside him. As James drove away, the weight of his achievements and the path ahead overwhelmed him, leading to tears of joy and accomplishment. “It was like in that moment, all of a sudden it hit, ‘Hey, you’re gonna do the faculty thing.’”

Dr. Fox

Dr. Fox, a full professor at a public research university, embodies dedication and resilience in his advocacy for Indigenous communities. As a member of a federally recognized tribe in the southwestern region, his educational journey and professional tenure – spanning over two decades at his current institution – reflect a profound commitment to academic leadership and community engagement. Dr. Fox brings a unique perspective to higher education with a rich

background that includes roles as an administrator, leadership program developer, history teacher, basketball coach, principal, and superintendent. Despite facing resistance to implementing policies benefiting Indigenous communities, he responds with innovation, crafting creative strategies to advance his goals. His unwavering determination to enact change showcases a deep-rooted passion for serving his community and enhancing the educational landscape for Indigenous students.

Dr. Fox was calm and quiet during his interviews. At first, I thought he might be hesitant, but after spending some time with him, I quickly realized that is just how he carries himself. When I asked him to share his faculty experiences, he paused, glancing up as though he was sifting through a plethora of memories. “Well, I’m not really sure how to answer this question,” he laughed. “I’ve done so much.” Dr. Fox began his career as a teacher, happily teaching at the elementary and high school levels for over 13 years. During that time, he served as a superintendent, varsity basketball coach, assistant principal, and Central Office Administrator. “I know it sounds like a lot,” he said, “but I wanted to serve my community and the Native students however I could.”

Eventually, the overwhelming duties and responsibilities took their toll. “I learned very early on, you know, I’m human,” he shared, prompting him to take some time off to recuperate and figure out his next steps. He realized that he could only do so much within an administrative position, so he decided to return to his local university. “During my doctoral program, I was a graduate assistant for a number of years, and I had an opportunity to take over classes for some of the professors in several different courses,” he shared. It was here that he quickly learned about historical contexts and how policy was influencing the current state of higher education. Through his upbringing and experiences, he saw how students of color were marginalized and

how systems were set in place to ensure that remained the reality. “I figured if I was going to take my next step, this was it.” He fully immersed himself in his doctoral studies, relying on his committee and peers to hone his newfound skills. Recognizing that he could use his position to influence policy and effect change, he decided he wanted to be a professor and grow his career from there.

MJ23

MJ23 is a professor in the School of Pharmacy in the southeastern region, where his tribal community is located. Inspired to pursue health professions since high school, he actively mentors Native youth, aiming to bolster their presence in healthcare fields. Before joining his current institution, MJ23 contributed his expertise at a nearby public research university, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to disease management and community well-being. His advocacy is driven by the belief that enhancing Indigenous representation in healthcare is essential for ensuring comprehensive and culturally sensitive disease management strategies for Indigenous communities.

When I first met MJ23, my initial impression was that he was tall, slender, and confident. As we introduced ourselves and prepared for the Sharing Circle, he spoke about his early experiences in the seventies and early eighties. I remember thinking, he’s been around the block and has the experience to back it up. MJ23 came dressed in a full suit and tie, as he was on his way to a board meeting after our interview. He opened with a joke, “My parents were educators, my oldest brother is a judge, my little brother is a physician, so I guess I’m the low achiever in my family.”

He shared that his most prominent memory was his high school encouraging summer programming. “We went around visiting medical schools and talked to healthcare providers. It

was a great experience, really successful.” He attended this program and several others with the intent of becoming a healthcare provider. So, when he enrolled in his undergraduate studies, he aimed to become a clinical dietitian. Yet, his path to medical school diverted once he saw his older brother going through it. “If this is what trying to get into med school is like, I’m not sure I want to do this,” he recalled.

He pivoted during his master’s program when one of his mentors suggested, “Maybe you should look into research.” He started working in the lab and quickly realized he did not enjoy working with mice studies. However, he recognized the value of the experience and exposure to the research world. His mentor encouraged him to apply for a PhD. He remained hesitant about his topic until he saw something in the newspaper. “I saw an ad and there were some scientists doing a study with cervical cancer on members of my Indigenous community.” His interest was piqued, and thus, he began his doctoral studies.

Seeing how he could combine both research and serving his community through health initiatives, he continued to be part of studies through postdoc work. This eventually led to collaborations in nutrition studies with Native elders and the State Health Department seeking his expertise. Eventually, some universities took notice and invited him to apply, leading to his tenure-track position.

Two Guns Arizona (TGA)

TGA, an associate professor at a public land-grant research university in the southwestern United States, brings a wealth of experience and cultural depth to his academic endeavors. Enrolled in a federally recognized tribe, his six-year tenure at his current institution has been marked by a unique synthesis of military training and cultural heritage, seamlessly integrated into his teaching, service, and scholarly publications. This blend of discipline and cultural

knowledge enriches his approach to academia, offering students and peers a nuanced perspective. Outside the university, TGA deepens his connection to his roots through fishing and cultural immersion, such as learning his tribal language, advocating for a balance between personal passions and professional commitments.

TGA's journey to academia is deeply intertwined with his upbringing and experiences. Raised in the environment of higher education, with both parents working at a small college, he was exposed to campus life from a young age. Reflecting on those formative years, he reminisced, "I got to see a campus from the ground up." His childhood was marked by visits to the campus, where he would accompany his father on errands, often stopping by maintenance shops and sharing coffee with the workers. Inspired by his mother's career as an educator, TGA initially pursued a degree in elementary education, aspiring to follow in her footsteps. He shared, "My mother, you know, she had a pretty rough go of it and she had to overcome a lot of barriers. So sometimes when I think about my challenges, it feels almost like, you know, minimal [laughs] compared to what my mom or maybe the family I've had before had to experience."

He further explained that his mother grew up in a one-bedroom mud house and endured severe hardships as a child, including the loss of her father to alcohol poisoning when she was twelve. He reflected, "And I think it's easier to think all this stuff is lost, life is lost, we're poor, dirt poor, we got nothing, you know? But she talked about how she made it to a group of Native college kids that came to our rez and told her she could go to college and she made that decision and effectively changed the legacy of our family."

TGA's path to elementary education was diverted when he decided to join the military, eventually serving in Iraq. While his time there had its positive aspects, it also took a toll on his mental health, prompting him to seek support upon his return. Despite his initial plans to resume

teaching, he found that the realities of war and the classroom did not align. “They didn’t gel together,” he reflected. Feeling the need for a change, TGA returned to higher education, encouraged by his father to pursue a Ph.D. and possibly transition into administration. Although he initially aimed to return to the college where his parents worked, some doors closed, leading him to explore other opportunities. Eventually, he found his way to his current institution, where he has remained.

Professor Rice

Professor Rice, a full professor and department chair at a tribal university, embodies a profound commitment to history, Indigenous education, and community service. As a member of a federally recognized tribe in a southern state, his work is deeply influenced by his cultural heritage and dedication to uplifting Indigenous perspectives within academia. With over sixteen years at his institution, Professor Rice values the unique environment of his university, highlighting the importance of student interactions, institutional support, and the sense of community as critical factors that enrich his professional experience. For him, teaching and leadership within the university not only advance Indigenous education but also strengthen the fabric of his community, showcasing the pivotal role of educators in nurturing the next generation of scholars and leaders.

Professor Rice had many role models and received much encouragement growing up. He began his introduction to the group by sharing that his grandfather was a medical doctor and his mother an attorney. Though he was not set on either of those paths, he initially went to college to study political science. He said, “I was determined to study political science, which is so laughable now. No slam on political science, but it’s funny considering where I ended up.” During his undergraduate years, he took philosophy classes and eventually history classes,

falling in love with the latter. As a result, he ended up double majoring in philosophy and history. As he neared the completion of his degrees, he thought, “Well, what now?” Conversations with mentors about graduate school led him to pursue a graduate degree in history.

Throughout his history program, he was mentored by a trailblazer in her field. Reflecting on his mentor, he said, “I started getting influenced by this wonderful academic, and it shifted my perspectives in regard to ‘American Indian History’ and ‘Regional History.’” This influence sparked his interest in Native Education History. Simultaneously, his stepdad encouraged him to make a career out of it, especially given his background, support from his mentor, and desire to explore Native educational histories. However, he remained hesitant. “I don’t want to stand up in front of a group of students and talk. No, thank you.” Despite his reservations, his mentor and department encouraged him to gain teaching experience. He began working as a GTA upon entering his doctoral program. “I never imagined myself teaching, and it really has been an amazing journey,” he shared. He has mentored countless Indigenous students, providing the same mentorship that was bestowed upon him, and has continuously sought to offer similar opportunities at his current institution.

William White Bear

William White Bear, a seasoned full professor with forty years of dedication to his current institution in the Mountain West subregion, stands as a pillar of commitment and leadership. As an enrolled citizen of a federally recognized tribe in a Midwestern state, his tenure is marked by a desire to uplift and serve Native students. As the head of his department, his leadership extends beyond administrative duties, embodying a steadfast commitment to fostering an educational environment where Native students thrive. William’s devotion to serving “in any

and every capacity” reflects a holistic approach to education, prioritizing the well-being, success, and empowerment of Native students as the core of his professional spirit.

When I asked William White Bear about his journey to becoming a faculty member, he responded with humor and honesty. He quipped, “Well, I started out actually going to be a lawyer, trained for that, but I discovered that the world doesn’t need another Indian lawyer.” His transition from pre-law to education, specifically teaching English, marked a pivotal shift in his career trajectory. After obtaining his teaching license, he ventured into public school teaching. However, a tumultuous situation at the school, culminating in a teacher strike, led him to reassess his career path. Reflecting on this period, he confessed, “I didn’t really want to be a teacher, or at least not a secondary school teacher.” Subsequently, he returned to school to complete his master’s degree in counseling. He mused with a hint of sarcasm, “I went into that mainly because I noticed counselors didn’t have to work very much. They just kind of sat around, drank coffee, and talked to kids. So, I figured I could do that.” However, his desire for hands-on experience prompted him to work for the government, specifically the Bureau of Reclamation.

A pivotal moment came when his state passed a law recognizing the value of American Indian culture and history. This led to an opportunity to teach ‘American Indian Studies’ at a junior college. Recalling this opportunity, he remarked, “The position paid \$10,000 a year. You have to recognize that \$10,000 then was a lot more than it is now.” Driven by familial responsibilities, he embraced the role with passion and dedication, leveraging his teaching and pre-law background to support the Indian Studies Law program. As times changed, he received advice to pursue a doctorate to advance professionally. This path led him to pursue a doctorate in Adult and Higher Education while continuing his role as an adjunct faculty member. Over time, he ascended the ranks, eventually becoming the department head, a position he has held for

forty-five years. Reflecting on his journey, William exuded a sense of fulfillment and amusement. “You’ve had quite the journey,” I remarked. With a chuckle and a smile, he replied, “Oh, yes. It has been fun.” His joy and satisfaction were palpable, a testament to the reward of his journey.

AB

AB, a full professor at a private university in the southeastern region, brings nearly three decades of extensive experience to his academic and community engagement efforts. As a member of a state-recognized tribe on the East Coast, his career has been characterized by diverse roles, demonstrating his versatility and commitment to education. From faculty member to administrator, English teacher, Upward Bound Counselor, and both co-PI and PI on significant NIH grants, AB’s journey reflects a deep dedication to enriching the academic landscape. His passion for giving back to his community and mentoring younger faculty and staff highlights his belief in the power of education to transform lives and strengthen communities.

AB and I first spoke on the phone. When I initially put out the call for this research project, he immediately emailed me to verify the legitimacy of my emails. Once I confirmed I was indeed a real person and genuinely interested in scheduling a Sharing Circle with him and others, he asked if he could speak to me. I figured he was trying to feel me out. But once we spoke on the phone and I answered all of his questions, he seemed to remove any resistance – especially when I mentioned my sole purpose for this research was to honor his and everyone’s stories. He said he looked forward to our conversation, and I told him we’d be sharing in about three weeks.

Fast forward to the Sharing Circle, AB came in confidently. He has a directness about him – not cockiness, but an assuredness. His experience and career speak for themselves, yet he

remains firm but humble. “I began work as a high school English teacher, and I worked summers as an Upward Bound Counselor,” he began when the question circled to him. AB said that’s how he got his start. It wasn’t until working with the students that he found an interest in counseling. So, he decided to go to college and pursue the counseling field. There, he met another Indigenous master’s student who introduced him to a professor in the field. “I can put you in contact with a professor and he’ll tell you about the field,” his new friend shared. AB and the mentor met up, grabbed a meal, and spoke about what he’d like to accomplish. AB told him he wanted to serve his community and make a difference. So, he applied for his master’s and got in.

Graduate school for AB was straightforward. He recruited students and participated in several different projects. It was during one of these projects that he met his future mentor. While collaborating on a school district project, his mentor asked AB what he wanted to do. When AB expressed his desire to be a principal, the mentor pushed back and asked why he would want to do that when he could become a professor and get his PhD. “That stuck in the back of my mind,” AB said. His mentor planted a seed. From there, AB applied for his PhD while working full-time. He completed his dissertation in five years. When he spoke to his academic advisor about next steps, he said, “I want to be a professor.” Networking opportunities emerged, and AB took advantage. Fast forward, and his first tenure-track job opened up. From there, AB knew he wanted to build his career and help others do the same.

Buzzy

Buzzy, an associate professor at a public research university in the Midwest, carries a rich heritage as a citizen of a federally recognized tribe in the South and a descendant of a Northern tribe. Specializing in ecosystems and natural resources management, his research contributions are pivotal in understanding and preserving the environment. Buzzy’s commitment is further

demonstrated through his involvement in securing numerous grants, including those from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture through the USDA, underscoring his dedication to applying academic insights to real-world challenges. Passionate about leveraging his academic position to support Indigenous communities, Buzzy focuses on natural resource initiatives, reflecting a profound commitment to serving the needs of these communities through sustainable practices and management strategies. He constantly seeks ways to bridge traditional knowledge with contemporary environmental science to safeguard natural resources for future generations.

In his Sharing Circle, Buzzy provided insight into the profoundly personal influences that shaped his educational journey. He recounted the challenges he faced during his formative years, including the passing of his grandparents, as well as the impact of addiction and violence within his family. For him, athletics was a pathway to move beyond his circumstances. He shared, “When I was 15, I had been taken in by a family through kind of the avenue or I guess the pathway of basketball.” He recounted how growing up in a border town next to a settlement naturally led to him playing with the team. “We traveled all over the place for tournaments,” he said. But what stood out to him most about those experiences was seeing his brothers and sisters from those experiences becoming college educated. Seeing them pursue college through athletics intrigued him. He thought perhaps he could do the same. “I had all these other examples of siblings that were attending, you know, school with absolute athletics. So I went initially for athletics.” Buzzy quickly realized higher education came with numerous systems he had to navigate, and he met challenges left and right. He said, “I think my first semester of undergrad I had a 1.2 GPA or something like that,” he laughed, “I didn’t know I had to go to class. You know, like I knew I had to go, but I didn’t know I had to go as often as I needed to go.”

Thankfully, what helped him persevere was the support of his community members, family, and mentors during his undergraduate years.

When he talked about getting a little more serious about his education, the turning point came from speaking with his brother and asking him what the tribe needed. When his brother responded that they were having trouble with the Native youth within his reservation, Buzzy pivoted his studies toward understanding the various dynamics of rural sociology. His approach remained the same throughout his higher education career: he'd ask what the tribe needed, adjust his approach, and align himself with this goal in mind. For example, for his master's, his brother mentioned how the tribe needed legal people to help. He recalled his brother saying, "We're paying a lot of fees for our lawyers that don't know anything about tribes." As a result, Buzzy took it upon himself to get his master's degree in Federal Indian Law & Policy to help his tribe.

As he continued, he received support and encouragement from professors who urged him to pursue a Ph.D. Initially hesitant, they told him what to expect, the ins and outs, and how they could be a resource if he needed help. He agreed, eventually finding himself in understanding ecological systems as he wanted to fuse his interests while honoring the Earth. Since then, he has remained at his current institution, helping other Indigenous students and communities do the same.

Z Carter

Z Carter, an associate professor at a public land-grant research university, brings his expertise and commitment to the forefront of Indigenous education and tribal nation-building. As an enrolled citizen of a federally recognized tribe in the Midwestern region, his work is deeply informed by his heritage and a keen understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Indigenous nations today. Active in local and national organizations, his research is centrally

focused on enhancing education for Indigenous nations, exploring pathways for empowerment, and developing sustainability through tribal nation-building. Through his work, Z Carter plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of education in Indigenous communities, advocating for culturally responsive strategies that are supportive of sovereignty and self-determination.

Z Carter's journey to academia was anything but direct. Reflecting on his early years, Z recalled the challenge of being "the poorest kid" in well-regarded schools his parents chose after relocating for his dad's job. This contrast was stark, with Z splitting his time between these schools and participating in ceremonies back in his homeland. Unsure of his future after high school, Z half-jokingly decided, "Being a wrestling coach sounds like fun. So, I guess I'll go be a history teacher," a decision that Professor Rice humorously remarked, "Yeah, that's where they put you."

Z's interest in history deepened in college, though he humorously noted his strategic approach to maintaining his GPA: "I was the type of guy that was doing the calculations. 'If I get an A in weights, then I can get a C in math, I can keep my GPA where it needs to be.'" To his surprise, he discovered a preference for writing essays over taking multiple-choice tests. This discovery revealed an unquenchable "itch" for learning, leading him to teach social studies as a substitute teacher for several years.

The turning point came when his wife finished her doctorate. Realizing it was now or never, Z decided to pursue his doctorate. Initially, he planned to focus on a conventional history project but soon questioned the lack of tribal perspectives in the curriculum. Z expressed frustration, saying, "It wasn't connected at all, the curriculum. It was like, 'Okay, I'm a teacher over here and then I'm an Indian over here.'" Determined to integrate these separate parts of his identity, Z successfully persuaded his committee to allow him to focus on tribal education. This

decision aligned his academic work with his identity and marked the beginning of a journey where he no longer had to choose between being a teacher and being Indigenous.

Dr. Kyle

Dr. Kyle, an assistant professor at a public land-grant research university in the southeastern region, represents a unique blend of heritage and academic pursuits. As an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe in a southern state and a descendant from a tribe in the southeastern region, he is committed to education and mentorship. Specializing in a subdivision of mechanical engineering, Dr. Kyle is not just an educator but a mentor for future generations in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). His dedication extends beyond the classroom as he is focused on guiding others through the complexities of STEM disciplines and actively encourages youth engagement in these areas. Dr. Kyle seeks to bridge cultural heritage with technological advancement through his work, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for Indigenous students and others in the STEM community.

Dr. Kyle has always had an interest in the sciences. He spoke about how growing up, he was always a curious kid, fascinated by how things functioned, why things operated the way they did, and the purposes they served. This curiosity has stuck with him even into his professorship. Sharing about his undergraduate experiences, Dr. Kyle spoke about securing several internships. “I wanted to see if I could get an internship somewhere to broaden my horizons a little bit.” He recalled a story about being unsure of his next steps but knew he wasn’t interested in aerospace engineering. “I went to an air show one time and everyone was oohing and aahing. And, well, I was just kind of bored.”

It was around this time in his undergraduate studies that he realized he didn’t have anything lined up for his next step. Fortunately, his academic advisor asked him if he had

anything planned for the summer and offered him an internship. He explained, “To some extent, it’s just going with the flow.” However, this experience exposed him to research, sparking a deeper interest. He realized the importance of exposing Indigenous students and other underrepresented groups to research opportunities, something he has focused on throughout his career.

Dr. Kyle expressed similarity to Henderson in not knowing about the hidden curriculum or the ins and outs of graduate school. He applied to multiple programs and was rejected by all except one master’s program. “I guess I’m doing that next,” he laughed. Dr. Kyle eventually secured an NSF GRFP, the Graduate Research Fellowship Program, and entered a PhD program. During his doctoral studies, he appreciated the freedom to study what he wanted and the flexible scheduling offered by the university, which led him to pursue a faculty route. He now holds a tenure-track position at his current university, where he continues to mentor and guide the next generation of leaders in STEM.

Reed

Reed, a full professor with an impressive tenure exceeding thirty-five years, is a significant figure in academic and Indigenous communities. As a citizen of a federally recognized tribe from the southern plains and a descendant of a tribe from the mountain west, his diverse heritage profoundly informs his approach to education and mentorship. Throughout his career, Reed has undertaken various roles – ranging from faculty and instructor to elementary teacher and principal to curriculum developer – garnering numerous awards and honors highlighting his dedication to academic excellence and community service. With a particular focus on mentoring Indigenous men, Reed is driven by a commitment to nurture and support the next generation, ensuring they find their place and voice in various academic and professional

spaces. His passion extends beyond mentorship; Reed is devoted to infusing Indigeneity into every space, topic, and class he engages with, advocating for the presence and recognition of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems within the broader educational landscape.

During our time together, Reed was very engaging. His personal and professional experiences shone through with his assurance, confidence, and humor. When I was going over the technicalities of the research with everybody, I could tell Reed was so used to these types of settings that he naturally fell into the groove of everything. When asked if he could describe his journey of becoming a faculty member, he laughed and opened with, “I never fathomed in my right mind that I would be a faculty member of any college or university or even in higher education.” He told us how this reality was not his initial pursuit. Reed said he fell into education “accidentally.” He initially applied to a program as an undergraduate just to see what was out there and what would happen. “I just didn’t know how to do higher education, you know? Because nobody in my family ever went to college. I had no guidance, no direction, no mentors – nothing, to help me out.”

Reed initially majored in elementary education because he thought he wanted to be a teacher for Native youth. Although this remains a passion of his, at the time of his undergraduate studies, he thought becoming a principal or superintendent was the way to go for his career. “I didn’t even know what I was doing! I’m telling you all, I just put it down because I knew I needed a degree at least.” Similar to the other Storytellers, Reed’s path to higher education was nonlinear, and he mostly went with the next opportunity that arose. However, the racism that Reed experienced was so great that he decided to leave his state to become a guidance counselor in a different state. There, he decided he’d become the principal of one of the schools. Reed eventually pursued a master’s degree, and that’s where he crossed paths with Native people who

had their doctorates. Particularly, he met a Navajo man who held a doctorate, and he shared, “I remember thinking, ‘This guy is really remarkable. He’s smart, traditional, and I want to be just like him! He’s my role model.’”

Reed became acquainted with him, and so began the conversations that expanded his network. He was meeting more Natives through conferences, research, and more. Eventually, he was encouraged by this small group of Native scholars to pursue his doctorate. “I remember thinking, you know, ‘If I’m going to do a doctorate, I need to do it now. I can’t wait till I’m older. I’ve got a family, and I need to take care of them.’” Motivated by familial obligations and support from this community, Reed applied and eventually completed his doctorate.

Levi

Levi, an assistant professor at a public land-grant research university in the northwestern U.S., brings a wealth of experience and dedication to his role. As a member of a federally recognized tribe from the Plains, his deep connection to his heritage informs every aspect of his work and life. With a diverse background as a principal, instructional coach, and superintendent, Levi has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to enhancing education for Indigenous students, even collaborating with U.S. government agencies to ensure their needs are met effectively. Beyond his professional achievements, Levi’s passion for his culture stands out. He is devoted to immersing himself in his people’s rich traditions, from participating in ceremonies to learning and preserving the language. This dedication to cultural learning enriches his personal life and profoundly influences his teaching, research, and advocacy approach. As a result, his students often feel supported and encouraged to navigate the higher education realm.

When I opened the Sharing Circle by asking the Storytellers to describe their journey to becoming faculty members, Levi started by saying he hesitates with labels like “career” or

“trajectory” because they’re foreign to him. “Rather than a career, I was always thinking about how I could help the community. To me, education was the best way to help. I always say if there was a better way to do it, I would’ve been involved in that.” He proceeded to tell us that he started as a classroom educator and instructional coach. It was during this time that he realized as much as he enjoyed and did well in these roles, he could only influence one classroom. “Our schools and our Native students deserved much more,” he said. So, he wanted to pursue more leadership roles.

As he progressed throughout his journey, Levi served as a principal and eventually as a superintendent. “Still, being in those roles, all I could think was how can I use it to influence our communities for the better? And create something better for the generations to come?” During this time, he realized the criticality of relationality within such spaces. He also served as adjunct faculty on and off at the nearby university. He knew he wanted to attend graduate school for the Educational Leadership program, so he did. “I love reading about leadership and Indian Education issues, so I was just excited to be in this field of study.”

He continued to tell us about having a mentor who asked, “This is great, but what do you want to do?” Confused, he replied, “What do you mean?” “What is next for you?” Levi admitted he hadn’t thought about it. No one in his family came with an educational background, let alone knew how to navigate these educational systems. His mentor, however, continuously pushed him to consider getting a doctorate. Levi admitted he remained hesitant, especially with familial obligations and community responsibilities. Eventually, opportunities presented themselves, he applied, and got through his doctorate program. Unfortunately, this was around the time the COVID-19 pandemic struck. “I remember feeling anxious, right? I had just passed on this non-tenured track position.” Thankfully, he did. He was offered a political appointment from the

White House to help the government better understand how to serve Indigenous students.

Eventually, he came back to his community where he applied for a tenure-track position, got it, and has continued to build since. With a deep breath and a feeling of gratification, he said, “It has been quite the journey.”

Lesson(s) Learned

Within the introduction of the Storytellers, their experiences reveal numerous insights. Influences on their education stemmed primarily from mentors, family, community, and overall support. Brayboy (2005) writes about the adaptability and power that come from individuals and communities, serving as a foundation for Indigenous peoples. In this case, the Storytellers had numerous individuals encouraging them in their educational pursuits. Conversely, factors outside of their control often forced them to pivot or realign their paths. While this could simply be categorized as “life,” TribalCrit (2005) explains that European American thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate present-day society. This domination explains why Henderson and Levi were unaware of the unwritten rules of graduate school, why accessibility was not prominent for TGA and his family, why Buzzy could not find the support he needed until he gained institutional access, and why Z Carter encountered a lack of Indigenous representation in his program. As Brayboy (2005) explains, Indigeneity is often diminished and removed from awareness within dominant members of U.S. society to ensure power dynamics remain in place for those who benefit (i.e., typically white cis-heteronormative wealthy men).

However, what has also been highlighted within these introductions, and what will continue to be unveiled in the next chapter, is the significance of Indigeneity and cultural empowerment. Dr. Kyle, Reed, and Levi emphasize the importance of integrating their cultural heritage into their professional lives. Sovereignty and self-determination are prominent in

educational pursuits, as seen in Buzzy's and Z Carter's backgrounds. Meanwhile, Levi and AB highlight the criticality of interconnectedness and relationality. These stories counter stereotypes by showcasing strength, agency, and empowerment.

Summary

In this first lesson, these narratives encompassed a spectrum of trajectories, revealing the resilience and adaptability of Native men in the face of challenges and unexpected detours. They delve into the intricacies of the Storytellers' roles as educators and individuals shaped by their cultural heritage and life experiences. Furthermore, they offer insights into the unconventional paths some take, shedding light on the obstacles encountered along the way. These stories illuminate the intersection of cultural identity, familial influences, and personal passions, providing a deeper understanding of the multifaceted journeys embarked upon by Native men in academia. Moreover, they serve as potent symbols of representation, reaffirming the value and potential of their contributions. TribalCrit (2005) underscores that storytelling holds profound power and subtleties in shaping perceptions. By showcasing the diverse paths of Indigenous men, I wanted to emphasize the breadth and diversity of possibilities – both past and potential – that unfold within these stories. Let us continue to watch Squashi grow.

Ayadolv Hisgine | Chapter Five

Findings, Part II

In Part II of the Findings, I delve deeper into the interconnected stories and experiences of the Storytellers. Kovach (2021) emphasized that within each step of thematic analysis, the researcher should continually seek connections and relationships among the stories and experiences. In this section, four lessons emerged from the Storytellers' narratives. "The Challenges Endured" highlights the obstacles faced by the Storytellers, showcasing their resilience and perseverance. Following this, "Defining Success" shifts the focus to communal interpretations of achievement, challenging conventional metrics. "Conversations About Masculinity" explores the complex interplay between colonialism and Indigenous cultural teachings. This leads to "Sustaining Indigenous Male Faculty," which emphasizes strategies for resilience and balance for future Indigenous male educators. Finally, I present the model, "Balancing Through the Seasons: A Model for Sustaining Indigenous Faculty." Together, these lessons weave a narrative of survival, triumph, success, impact, and the ongoing quest for balance, understanding, and pushing boundaries within and beyond the academic sphere. With this foundation established, let's continue with the second lesson.

Taline Adeloquasdi | Second Lesson: The Challenges Endured

The stories shared in the second lesson revealed the multifaceted challenges encountered by Indigenous men. TribalCrit (2005) highlights the assimilative intent behind educational policies, illustrating the tension Indigenous peoples face when introducing their cultural identities into environments misaligned with their values. The Storytellers detailed their struggles with systemic barriers and cultural dissonance, grappling with the disparity between the academic world's priorities and their community-focused values and beliefs. This section

includes discussions on the unwritten rules of academia, tokenism, the disconnect between institutional gatekeeping and community engagement, racism, microaggressions, and stereotypes. As I delved deeper through my questions, the complexities of these challenges unfolded further.

Systemic Barriers and Cultural Dissonance

Systemic barriers and cultural dissonance present significant obstacles, resulting in unequal access or exclusion due to institutional policies, practices, or procedures. Cultural dissonance highlights the profound discord individuals experience when their cultural values clash with assimilative practices within academic environments. Brayboy (2005) reminds us that governmental and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples have historically been aimed at assimilation, making the Storytellers' experiences neither new nor uncommon. Through my interviews with the Storytellers, I explored the challenges they encountered along their journeys. Some struggled to balance their professional duties – teaching, service, research – and familial obligations. Others contended with curricula narrowly focused on historical trauma, grappling with its implications for themselves and their students. For instance, Professor Rice shared:

Due to the challenges faced through colonialism and ongoing legacies thereof, there's a lot of depressing subject matter. And it's hard to be like, 'Okay, it's five o'clock, turn that off.' So you take that home. And I think, 'God, what have I left my students with?' I mean, I often try to be like, 'Okay, God, I know I just gave you a bunch of really negative shit to think about, but let's try and end on a positive note and think about what we have done to mitigate that, you know, to combat it' (Professor Rice).

Throughout both the Sharing Circles and individual interviews, a pervasive theme emerged: the enduring challenges faced by the Storytellers, which stem from historical inequities and

contemporary policies and procedures. These barriers underscore the persistent and evolving nature of the obstacles encountered. For example, there is a current trend in several states to enact bans on initiatives related to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belongingness (DEIB). The ambiguity of the legislation in some states has confused the permissible scope and limitations of discussions on specific topics. In other cases, these bans effectively hinder the ability to effectively serve Indigenous students and communities, reflecting a continued agenda of assimilation within such policies. For example, Dr. Fox shared:

We've run into some really unique issues that have become political in the state. I don't know if you know, but we're in an ultra conservative state. The legislatures and the governors don't take too kindly to cultural responsiveness models in education. They want to emphasize all the other things except for some things that we think should be included. So we're still fighting that battle on that part, trying to help make some of those changes. I think those are some of the key things that— it's policy. And sometimes, for example, we organized and developed a Native American cultural center right in the middle of the campus. And we're trying to get it to a point where it will have a real standing as a program within the college curriculum. We want to offer classes, bring in elders, and some other folks to help lay out a program that students can take for credit as opposed to being required to take other credits that are not specific to teaching about Indian education related issues that I call reality based. But we're unable to do that because they [state's legislators] say that it's not academic oriented, it has a more service orientation to it. It's not an academic unit. And so that's just a sample of some of the things that we've dealt with (Dr. Fox).

Dr. Fox's encounter with bans vividly illustrates a significant barrier impeding Indigenous faculty members' capacity to champion and empower Indigenous students. Extensive research underscores the dissonance between the values universities embrace and those intrinsic to Indigenous students' cultural and communal identities (Shotton et al., 2013; Waterman, 2019). These bans obstruct support structures and institutionalize the hurdles Indigenous students face through formal legal frameworks and policies. When challenges are enshrined in written statutes and bolstered by legal backing, they acquire "legitimacy," intensifying their resilience against future efforts to challenge or dismantle them. As TribalCrit (2005) observes, this phenomenon finds its roots deeply entrenched in assimilationist agendas.

The dialogue further delved into the university's resource allocation and institutional priorities, shedding light on the scarcity of Indigenous faculty and overall representation as yet another systemic hurdle. A recurring theme among the Storytellers was the glaring absence of reflections of themselves within the curriculum, academic disciplines, and faculty ranks – a clear indication of the enduring lack of Native men and Indigenous presence in these domains. William White Bear offered insights from the early stages of his career, highlighting that while progress has been made, these issues persist today. He emphasized the lack of representation not only in scholarly literature but also within the field of Native American Studies itself, underscoring the ongoing struggle for inclusive representation and recognition.

When I came into teaching, uh, Native American Studies was a new discipline. You know, the African American Studies had been around in the early sixties and so our program actually began in about 1974. And so we didn't really have the advantage of thinking about methodologies, theories and, you know, we just– not that we made it up as we went. But we didn't have that luxury I guess. Our strength, though, was that we could

adapt and adopt our cultural teachings into our actual teaching. Which was what we did.

But even then, we got *a lot* of pushback from the administrators (William White Bear).

William's focus on the importance of the emerging field lies in his ability to incorporate cultural teachings into teaching practices, highlighting its resilience in the face of adversity. However, his experience sheds light on the challenges faced by Indigenous scholars in pioneering unexplored academic territory and developing real-time methodologies. While the landscape may have changed since William's time, the struggle to establish and validate Indigenous contributions within academic circles continues. TribalCrit (2005) emphasizes how educational institutions often require Indigenous peoples to abandon cultural wisdom in favor of conforming to traditional academic paradigms – a dynamic evident in the resistance William faced from administrators.

This legitimizing of knowledge was evident in Levi's Sharing Circle. He spoke about the cultural dissonance he often feels the academy incites. He shared:

I remember I was preparing for my comps and I, it was, I was kind of burned out. I said, 'I don't need this. Like, I've done well as an administrator.' I was just burned out and stressed from preparing for comps and then I kinda told myself, 'If I don't pass, I'm done.' You know? And then I passed my comps, so okay. I'm going to keep going. And then, I said to my committee afterward, 'Do you wanna know my real purpose statement? My real problem statement?' My chair started laughing, he said, 'Yeah.' I said, 'The real problem is for me to jump through these hoops, so that I can kneel down before the white academy and you can take that imaginary sword and touch me on the head and say to the society, 'Go ahead and listen to him. He can speak, think, and write.' And in that way,

I'll be able to help my own community. And my problem statement is that this situation exists. That this scenario even exists' (Levi).

Levi echoes William's observation that Indigenous scholars often face pressure to conform to the norms of predominantly white academic institutions to attain "recognition" and "legitimacy" within these spaces to be "effective." However, as TribalCrit (2005) suggests, while education can serve as a valuable tool, it frequently leads to assimilation, a reality experienced by Indigenous scholars like Levi. This ongoing tension underscores the complex relationship between education, assimilation, and Indigeneity within academia.

All Storytellers shared their struggles navigating cultural expectations and institutional dynamics within academia. For example, AB expressed discomfort with the need to "package" himself and boast about his accomplishments, a sentiment against cultural humility teachings. Similarly, Henderson highlighted the challenge of balancing cultural values of listening and humility with colleagues' expectations of constant authority and assertiveness, often leading to misunderstandings. MJ23, like Dr. Fox, addressed the impact of shifting educational landscapes, particularly the elimination of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belongingness (DEIB) initiatives, hindering efforts to increase Indigenous representation in healthcare professions. The pandemic exacerbated challenges for several Storytellers, such as Two Guns Arizona, Dr. Kyle, and James Wayne, with higher education administrators failing to recognize the value of their initiatives, resulting in furloughs. This perception reinforced to Z that sometimes universities prioritize "lip service" over meaningful support, fostering feelings of exclusion. Seysay R. struggled to balance academic demands with his desire to support his tribe's language immersion program. At the same time, Reed recounted barriers faced by Indigenous students, such as restrictions on wearing regalia to graduation, prompting him to advocate for policy change.

Buzzy highlighted the frustration of educating legal counsel on sovereignty and self-determination, feeling unsupported by administrative leaders in navigating legal challenges and bans imposed on Indigenous practices. These experiences underscore the ongoing struggle for cultural recognition and institutional support within academia.

The systemic barriers and cultural dissonance are palpable realities among the Storytellers. TribalCrit (2005) underscores the enduring nature of this challenge, driven by the assimilative tendencies of higher education institutions entrenched in legal frameworks. Consequently, each Storyteller recounted instances where their cultural values clashed with those of the academy, often resulting in feelings of being unsupported or excluded.

Navigating Unwritten Rules and Tokenism

Navigating the unwritten rules of higher education encompasses understanding the tacit norms surrounding academic jargon, publishing, teaching, and service. The Storytellers shared their journey from pre-graduate experiences to entry into faculty roles, revealing how these unspoken expectations also led to issues of tokenism. This tokenism, both incited and perpetuated by the academy, often pigeonholed them into being perceived as spokespersons for *all* Indigenous peoples or compelled them into Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) roles. This experience highlights the complexities of the academic environment, where Indigenous faculty members are frequently tasked with representing an entire culture or are steered towards specific roles based on their identity rather than their expertise or interests.

Henderson, TGA, and Dr. Kyle each recounted their experiences before entering graduate school, highlighting a common issue of unawareness about the application process, the structure and expectations of graduate programs, the responsibilities and benefits (such as tuition waivers) associated with graduate assistantships, and the importance of establishing relationships with

professors within their prospective programs to advocate on their behalf. Henderson specifically shared:

I was completely out of my depth because I did not understand what anybody did in this department. They were going on about their research. I thought I knew everything about water and these people were raising terms I'd never heard of before, but I applied anyway. I got in. I'm not gonna say I never looked back because as I finished my masters and got ready to pivot to a PhD in the same department, I briefly contemplated bailing out and going and doing something else. I had a really tough time with my masters (Henderson).

Henderson highlights a significant challenge many Indigenous peoples face, especially first-generation students: the assumption that newcomers inherently understand how to navigate academic spaces. This challenge extends to first-generation assistant professors as well. Levi and Buzzy discuss their initial encounters with academic jargon, insider knowledge, unwritten rules, and the complex systems within higher education. They recount how, at the start of their careers, they were compelled to learn through experience, navigating their paths without guidance, as no one was available to "show them the ropes" often. This reflection underscores the steep learning curve and sense of isolation that can accompany individuals from underrepresented backgrounds' early stages of academic careers. Levi said, "I think for just anybody coming into an institution, you know, I think there's a lot of insider knowledge that universities assume you're going to pick up through osmosis." TribalCrit (2005) reaffirms how Indigenous peoples are expected to conform, knowing the language/rules and how to navigate it.

In some instances, once Native faculty “successfully” navigated the unwritten rules of academia, they frequently found themselves positioned as the presumed experts on *all* Indigenous matters. William shared:

We’re also recognized as the custodian of everything, you know, everything Indian.

We’re called upon to speak on behalf of Native culture and peoples [shakes his head disapprovingly]. When I’m asked to pray, I never say no because I was always told that’s a good thing to pray. Besides, I enjoy getting to the front of the dinner line [laughs]. So, I don’t turn it down but, you know, it’s like you have to be kind of the representative of your community whether you like it or not. Yeah, so that’s a white man’s burden. And it’s a burden that can ironically hold a person kind of hostage. So every time I meet with the Dean, he looks at my accomplishments for the year. He just kind of nods his head and says, ‘Well, that’s a lot of service,’ And I agree, you know, it *is* a lot of service, but it’s the kind of thing that we get sort of thrust on us. We need to be doing this committee work or we need to have a voice in this policy or we need to be a member of that committee and that just really will kill a career because we’re not measured on service, we’re measured on research and teaching and integration. And even bad teaching can be fixed, you know, it can be tolerated (William White Bear).

William’s experiences not only illuminate the university’s tolerance for subpar teaching but also highlight the disproportionate burden placed on professors of color, particularly when they are compelled to offer services to Indigenous students. This excessive service load compromises their ability to serve students effectively and pursue their scholarly work. Raymond echoes this sentiment:

Tokenism remains a problem and it's kind of like this 'benign' tokenism. People are aware of tokenism more than they would have been in the past, but also I think people and institutions can find themselves sliding back into it without even realizing. And for some of us too, where, particularly if we're— literally, I mean, we're really an extreme or small minority in the faculty population, so, you want to help, you know? You want to sort of elevate that presence and make yourself available and useful and to be that resource to field honest questions about Native America and Native peoples. But then that also becomes, I think, a bit of a slippery slope (Raymond White Horse).

Raymond and William shed light on the burden placed on Indigenous professors, who are often expected to represent their communities and cultures within academic settings. However, this expectation can hinder their ability to focus on research and teaching, the primary criteria for evaluating professors, as noted by William. Raymond further illustrates how Indigenous scholars may feel pressured to go above and beyond to promote Indigenous perspectives within their institutions, but this can lead to their exploitation or tokenization. TribalCrit (2005) emphasizes that such expectations often prioritize Anglo values, exploiting Indigenous perspectives and services for institutional gain rather than genuinely honoring them.

During our Sharing Circles, Seysay R and James Wayne shared experiences of being cautioned to be strategic with their commitments to avoid exploitation. They were advised to "Stay off the copy machine committee," meaning they should avoid unnecessary or trivial tasks that do not contribute meaningfully to their work, goals, or passions. Instead, they were encouraged to focus on what is important to them and the impact they aimed to accomplish for their communities. Z Carter expressed frustration at mainstream society's lack of understanding of Indian Country, often leading him and his colleagues to be cast as experts solely based on

their cultural background rather than their expertise. AB echoed this sentiment, expressing a desire to engage in meaningful discussions on supporting Indigenous students without being reduced to his identity as *the* “American Indian faculty member.” MJ23 and Dr. Fox also emphasized their willingness to support Indigenous students but voiced concerns about being pigeonholed into DEI roles, which often left them feeling overwhelmed. Professor Rice and Reed discussed how tokenism can lead to Indigenous professors becoming isolated, impacting their relationships with colleagues. These accounts highlight Indigenous professors’ challenges in navigating academia while balancing their cultural identity and professional roles.

Navigating unwritten rules and facing tokenism are unfortunate realities for the Storytellers and many other professionals of color. The assimilative nature of higher education institutions, coupled with the emphasis on metrics like publishing, teaching, and service, can easily strain their journeys. As a result, Storytellers often express feelings of burnout, being spread thin, or frustration with the intersection of educational expectations and the lived realities of their identities, cultural ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Bridging Academic Work With Community Engagement and Personal Challenges

Many Storytellers grappled with the challenge of conveying their roles in higher education to their families and communities, a task particularly daunting for first-generation scholars. Often, their families could not fully grasp the significance of their commitments to teaching, service, and publishing. This reality underscores a deeper divide, as some Indigenous cultures may not inherently prioritize these academic pursuits, creating a stark contrast with Tribal Nations’ values. However, higher education was not outright dismissed as a potential tool for community service. The central issue lies in the disconnect between academic work and community engagement. Storytellers recounted their struggles to bridge this gap, using creative

methods to help their communities understand and appreciate the value and relevance of their academic contributions to communal ways of knowing and being. For instance, Two Guns Arizona recounted an experience where he sought IRB approval from the community members on his reservation for his project. The council listened as he presented his project ideas, detailing his intentions and how he envisioned them aligning with his community's needs. Yet, as he shared, it became apparent that their concerns lay elsewhere. He shared:

And I was going through it with Council and Council was like, 'Hey, you know, we know you, we love you, and we think you're doing great, but we gotta tell you...' And, like, this is their quote, it was like, 'Who the hell cares about what you're doing?' They continued, you know, 'Do you think the community's *really* gonna read any of this? Or understand peer reviewed papers? Any of these things?' You know, it was everything that I was suggesting. And they approved my IRB, but they gave me, like, they challenged me a little bit and basically were like, 'But how would you make this more accessible? How can you make it so our community knows about what you're doing?' (TGA).

TGA raises an insightful observation. His proposal might have faced less resistance in an "academic environment," given that academia often values complexity and specialized jargon as indicators of sophisticated thought. However, TGA encountered skepticism from the council, who saw his approach as less impactful due to its misalignment with Indigenous community practices. Fortunately, TGA acknowledged this disconnect and successfully adjusted his strategy. He took a step back, revamped the academic jargon, and collaborated with members of his community to ensure his work was accessible. He actively sought their feedback, and once they endorsed his approach, he moved forward with confidence.

James Wayne echoed a similar sentiment. In our Sharing Circle, we delved into the challenge of conveying the essence of our academic endeavors to our communities and families. We discussed the obstacles we faced in effectively communicating our research and its relevance to community service. James then recounted his struggles with this issue, highlighting its difficulties. However, a turning point came when he collaborated with Indigenous colleagues to address these challenges head-on. He shared his experience:

Well, and sometimes our families don't know what we do, right? I *could* explain it to my mom, right? So my report cards that I send my mom are my end of the year evaluations [laughs] I still send her my report cards. But she doesn't understand when we speak to the other stuff. I think one of the things that's helped us though is we're intentional. Like, we sat down one time and asked the question, 'How do we communicate to our own families and communities what we do?' Like, you know, the ideas that we're playing with. I think, like, my community values orality-based stories more than they value reading a journal or how many citations you got in that journal or whatever. And so we wrote a review of a paper on just that. And did a poster at an academic conference. And our poster didn't have a word on it. It was a deer hide and we painted on it like a winter count. And each one of the pictures on that winter count has a full-on academic lit review behind it, right? And so we can tell that story in an academic context and to researchers who need to know about words with the term theoretic sensitivity and cultural intuition, right? Those words don't mean anything at home. But if you can tell a story that embodies those ideas with a visual that's reflective of, uh, traditional community morality, man, that was some of the funnest work that I've ever done. We could see, you know, the— 'Yeah, this works for the academy, but not necessarily our communities.' We

wanted to address that. And, uh, I mean, they could be interactive, and so in a sense we're privileging *all* storytelling, um, Indigenous storywork (James Wayne).

James exemplifies the clash between traditional values and academic metrics like journal publications and citations. Yet, his narrative emphasizes the intentional effort in communication as he and his colleagues strategize to make their work accessible and relevant to their communities. His story illuminates the nuanced negotiation Indigenous scholars undergo, balancing the expectations of the academy with the values of their communities. TribalCrit (2005) echoes this dynamic, highlighting the fluidity of culture. Despite the pressure to conform, James leveraged the power of culture to prioritize serving his community, showcasing the adaptability and resilience of Indigenous scholars.

Storytellers shared personal challenges encountered while navigating their careers during the Sharing Circles. TGA, Reed, and Henderson discussed the juggling act of academic life alongside parenting responsibilities, all while meeting institutional metrics such as publishing, teaching, and service commitments. AB and Raymond highlighted the uncertainty surrounding mentorship amidst competing obligations. Similarly, AB, MJ23, Levi, and Z Carter struggled to articulate their roles to their families. Dr. Kyle and Dr. Fox raised financial concerns inherent in early career stages, relying on limited grant funding. William White Bear, Buzzy, Professor Rice, and Seysay R. reflected on the struggle to balance academic roles with cultural commitments, emphasizing the continual quest for personal growth amidst professional demands.

The Storytellers encountered personal challenges along their educational paths. Yet, one prominent obstacle was relaying what they do in the academy to their communities. However, their culture served as a vital answer to navigating this challenge.

Racism, Microaggressions, and Stereotypes

In the interviews, another common thread among the men was their encounters with racism, microaggressions, and stereotypes throughout their journey. TribalCrit (2005) underscores the pervasive nature of colonization in society and its intimate connection with racism. It also points out how westernized paradigms of thought, knowledge, and power prevail in the current societal landscape of the United States. For the Storytellers, experiences of racism, stereotypes, and microaggressions were not confined to external interactions but were also prevalent within the academy. Within these academic settings, they faced such issues from colleagues, administrators, the curriculum itself, government officials, and, at times, from the students they were teaching. William White Bear, for example, shared his experiences:

I had a colleague in our department, a non-Native person, who taught some of the same courses as I did, and vice versa. Interestingly, when we taught the same classes, I consistently received higher evaluations from students on cultural topics but lower than him on subjects like History and Federal Indian policy. I eventually understood why. The students perceived me differently. When I spoke about Native sovereignty or Tribal sovereignty, they saw it as expected, thinking, ‘Of course, he’d say that.’ However, when my non-Native colleague made the same point, they took it as a novel insight, crediting him with authority and impartiality (William White Bear).

Levi touched upon this point in his Sharing Circle. He shared:

Racism is a challenge. In my experience, it was always a challenge. Knowing how to navigate those situations and be strategic, like, ‘Okay, I’m not gonna win this little battle here, but this one here I can be strategic and try to take on.’ And knowing that as a brown person, you will maybe have to work twice as hard as others and you will have to cross all your T’s and dot all your I’s. You’re gonna have to do all of your work at a high level.

It's not always fair. It is difficult seeing what can be perceived as a free pass that non-Natives get (Levi).

William and Levi both highlight the challenging reality faced by Indigenous peoples within westernized paradigms, which often do not recognize them as equals. William noticed how his non-Native colleague could teach with significantly less resistance. Simultaneously, Levi discusses the need to work harder due to the racism he encounters, which consistently undermines his efforts and perceives him as inferior, regardless of the strategies he employs or the advantages non-Natives seem to receive automatically. Together, their experiences underscore the deep-rooted nature of colonization and racism, illustrating its pervasive impact on their professional lives.

Seysay R. shared his experience. He said:

I guess the challenge though that I had was even though I was in a discipline, other faculty members in like History or English or whatever, the nearby departments, um, never did really think of [Native American Studies] as a real discipline. Some of the comments that we got were, 'Well, you guys don't even have doctorates.' Which wasn't true. They just weren't in— I mean, one of my colleagues had a degree in law, which is a terminal degree. It's not like you're not educated. Another one had a doctorate, an anthropologist, well, actually two of them. And, so, then I earned my doctorate, you know, but there is still that sense that, 'Well, that's not *really* a discipline.' And so, you know, it's like that 'credibility' that goes along with having a '*real* doctorate.' But I remember trying to explain that to someone in a different department, and they were just like, 'Man, I didn't know Indians were so smart' (Seysay R).

Reed talked about the racism he experienced early in his career:

[The state] is very racist when it comes to, not just today, but it was the worst in my day in the seventies because it was at the tail end of the Vietnam War. There were so many stigmas that had transpired here. I didn't have the right look, you might say. I was Indigenous. I was a male. I had long hair down to my waist. I had long earrings and that's how I graduated. All the public schools that I applied to in the northeastern part of the state didn't give me the time of day. I didn't even get an interview because once they saw my phenotype, that was that, you know? I tried all over the state. I would not get an interview for a teaching job, even though I had teaching credentials, a degree, good grades, good recommendations. I was a student leader at my institution. But I thought all of those things would be appealing to any school administrator, but it was not. I just didn't understand. I didn't understand the social political climate at that time. Now I know it's structural racism that I was confronting at that period of my life (Reed).

Seysay R. highlights the lack of recognition and respect for Native American Studies within academia, particularly from neighboring departments. Despite having qualified faculty, Seysay R. recounts experiencing microaggressions. In contrast, Reed discusses the systemic racism prevalent in the education system. Despite his qualifications, he faced discrimination and exclusion from job opportunities, and his achievements were overshadowed by racial prejudice. TribalCrit (2005) underscores the endemic nature of racism in society and education, emphasizing its connection to colonization.

Professor Rice echoed similar experiences. He shared:

You know, there was still a lot of resistance, questions like 'Why is that important?' or comments suggesting 'Maybe the boarding schools were a good thing.' It seemed like there was still that perception, or perhaps people just didn't know; they lacked the basics,

an ‘Indian 101,’ so to speak. And that was a challenge, even in graduate school, because it felt like people didn’t take us seriously. For instance, there was this belief that Indian history wasn’t a relevant topic for discussion, or the stereotype that ‘all Indians live in teepees,’ or the only valid representation of Indians was what’s seen in movies. And that has been a persistent challenge (Professor Rice).

Professor Rice encountered stereotypes stemming from a lack of knowledge or interest in Indigenous history among individuals. This issue is mirrored in the curricula of public schools and institutions, where there is often no expectation to educate on these topics, reflecting a broader trend of Indigenous erasure and disregard. This situation highlights how the academy perpetuates such issues, underlining the systemic nature of this neglect.

However, the reality of racism and Indigenous erasure extends beyond the academic sphere, as it is not confined solely to institutional settings. For instance, Raymond recounted his experience with the state governor’s participation in Indigenous erasure, sharing:

I’m still somewhat surprised to be at an institution in a state with a large Native population, yet sometimes encounter people here who know very little about Native people, aside from the fact that there are more here than in other places. You know, like, when I lived in a northeastern state and taught at a small liberal arts university an hour away from a prominent Tribal Nation, I often met people unaware of the Native presence so close by. So much so, that at one point, the governor of the state even declared there were no Native people there. He just essentially erased us (Raymond White Horse).

TribalCrit (2005) discusses the pervasive nature of colonization within society, including the power dynamics at play within state governments. This dynamic is evident in the experiences of Raymond and the Indigenous community around him, where eurocentric viewpoints and power

structures, epitomized by the governor's authority, rationalize and legitimize such statements. Furthermore, Patel (2020) highlights that settler colonialism aims to erase and replace Indigeneity, underscoring the systemic intention behind such words and sentiments.

Not all Storytellers encountered overt racism. For individuals like Buzzy, AB, and Dr. Fox, it manifested as covert racism, where Indigenous perspectives were marginalized or dismissed. Similarly, Z Carter, Dr. Kyle, and Henderson faced challenges in advocating for their voices to be acknowledged. James Wayne, TGA, and MJ23 also grappled with lateral oppression within their communities.

These stories of the second lesson shed light on the complex layers of racism, microaggressions, and stereotypes that Indigenous male scholars navigate within academia and beyond. Their experiences illuminate not only the personal impacts of such encounters but also underscore the systemic nature of these challenges, deeply rooted in the historical and ongoing process of colonization and settler colonialism. Yet, these stories also speak to their resiliency and the success they cultivate for themselves and their communities.

Tsoine Adeloquasdi | Third Lesson: Defining Success

In academia, success is often narrowly defined by traditional metrics such as tenure attainment, promotions, salary increases, and advancement in administrative roles. Institutions highly value these benchmarks as indicators of professional achievement. Throughout our discussions, the Storytellers emphasized the significance of these conventional measures in shaping leadership trajectories and career advancements within the professional landscape. However, beneath these surface-level markers lies a deeper understanding of success rooted in Indigenous perspectives. Drawing from TribalCrit (2005), which explores the intersection of culture, knowledge, and power from an Indigenous lens, the Storytellers offer alternative interpretations of success that diverge from mainstream Western paradigms. Their narratives reveal a broader conceptualization of success that encompasses community engagement, advocacy, long-term visioning, and the cultivation of a meaningful presence. This section delves into the multifaceted dimensions of success articulated by the Storytellers, highlighting their profound significance beyond the confines of traditional accolades.

Community Impact and Advocacy

Community impact and advocacy are central to how the Storytellers perceive their effectiveness and contribution to higher education. For them, success encompasses personal achievements and active participation in promoting Indigenous issues, solutions, and visibility. This involvement might manifest in various forms, including the development of curricula, policy advocacy for Indigenous students, or assuming facilitative roles that drive meaningful impact. ‘Being a Good Relative’ is deeply ingrained in our communities. It underscores the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships with each other and water, plants, animals, and the cosmos (Wilson, 2008). Embodying this principle involves aligning our actions with our

ancestors' teachings, prayers, and intentions, fostering a legacy of respect and interconnectedness across all elements of existence. This broader definition of success, which integrates community impact and advocacy, reflects the values and aspirations of the Storytellers in the academic sphere. For example, Seysay R shared:

I define success real simply. And it's taken me a while to reach this point. Success is all about, Can I be a good relative? Can I be a good relative not only to my human relatives but to plants, animals, the Earth itself, the water, the air? Can I be a good relative? What does that even mean? Am I responsible? Am I respectful? And I think being a success will probably be determined when I'm no longer here in this form. But success to me would be if my granddaughter's children, that'd be three generations away. My son, my granddaughter, and my great-grandchildren. If my great-grandchildren and their children can look back and say, "You know what, great grandpa was a good ancestor. He was a good relative." That to me at this point is what success is. It's not the next big grant. It's not this award. It's not getting material recognition. It helps. I mean, we all got to eat, it feels good when you write a book and people buy it, that feels good. But really in terms of success, I really think of success now in that deep relational way. And at the end of the day, will people say, 'You know what, he was a good relative?' And then when I'm gone, will people think of me as a good ancestor? That's success. That is my definition of success (Seysay R).

Seysay R. underscores the significance of relationality and responsibility in defining success. Rather than measuring success by material wealth or accolades, he emphasizes the importance of fulfilling his role as a good relative to all living beings and Mother Earth. TribalCrit (2005) reinforces this notion by highlighting the interconnectedness of culture with the lands and

ancestors. Moreover, TribalCrit (2005) underscores the power of knowledge in facilitating community advancement through change and adaptation. For Seysay R., success is intrinsically tied to positively impacting his community as they move forward.

Henderson shared an opportunity about how he engaged with policy to impact his community. He said:

Ten years ago, our State's Commission on Indian Affairs out of the blue invited me to join a new committee that they created called Environmental Justice. I said yes. The first rule of improv, right? [laughs] I said, yes, and? The second thing I did was I said, 'What is environmental justice?' [laughter] I actually had no idea because I'm a natural scientist, no background in policy whatsoever. But because I took a leap of faith and said, 'Hey, you have opportunities to do something directly for either your tribe or other tribal communities. They don't confront you head on like that very often.' So I said yes and just taking that leap of faith, opened the door to a strong pivot in my work towards environmental justice policy and Indigenous rights issues. And so I have a look back, that was 10 years ago. That was just a watershed moment in my career and it opened my eyes to looking at my work and community in a completely different way (Henderson).

This story effectively highlights Henderson's experience as a testament to the reciprocal benefits of advocacy. By actively representing Indigenous interests, he made a significant contribution to his community and gained valuable experience. The narrative underscores the transformative power of community engagement and advocacy, emphasizing the essential role of Indigenous presence in such spaces. By merging community impact with an Indigenous perspective on success, Henderson's story demonstrates how advocacy efforts can be strengthened, emphasizing the pivotal role of Indigenous voices in shaping policies and discussions. Overall, it effectively

communicates the importance of Indigenous representation and engagement in advocacy endeavors.

Two Guns Arizona (TGA) found a meaningful way to support his community by introducing a college-level curriculum to Indigenous high school students on his reservation. He recounts a particular instance where collaboration turned into an unexpected solo opportunity. Initially, TGA and a colleague planned to co-lead a project, but circumstances led to his colleague's absence, requesting TGA to represent them both. Coincidentally, TGA was slated to participate in a panel, which, due to unforeseen changes, featured him as the sole speaker. This opportunity transformed the panel into an impromptu Q&A session, allowing TGA to directly address the audience's queries. Following the event, an attendee (an assistant professor from a university) approached him, seeking advice on improving access, enrollment, and persistence for Native students in their institution. He shared:

I was like, 'You know, I think one tangible thing you could do is start credit programs.' Or, you know, I was like, 'Even more so, why don't you just go teach the courses on the reservation? Like, what's stopping you all from teaching it in the community?' And I left it at that. But by the fall, she had already been teaching English 101 and college math on our rez. She had organized it, got everybody, got all the permission, and I was like, 'Dang, we're having accredited courses on our rez for our school.' And I thought, 'She did that in, like, six months or whatever it was. Even less than that.' You know, like, that was amazing. And now they offer English 101 and 102. They have college math, and I think some other advanced math courses. Then they have an art class and, like, uh, a regular art class and then an art history kinda course. But I just thought it was amazing to see how that kinda blossomed into what it is today. And, you know, for me, I'm just

thinking, ‘Man, no one ever listens to recommendations,’ and to me, I thought, ‘Ah, I’m just talking’ (TGA).

TGA’s narrative exemplifies the profound impact of advocacy on his community. By championing tangible improvements in education and resource accessibility, TGA actively enhanced the opportunities available to community members. His story underscores the importance of Indigenous presence and expertise in effecting meaningful change, mirroring Henderson’s transformative efforts. Together, their experiences highlight the vital role of Indigenous voices in advocating for and shaping initiatives that benefit their communities. The stories reiterate how they perceive and define success.

Raymond White Horse exemplifies a paradigm of success that defies conventional metrics. Beyond personal accolades, he perceives success as a catalyst for empowering Indigenous communities through his pivotal role within a university museum. Despite the intricate historical dynamics within anthropology and archaeology, Raymond harnesses the museum’s resources to enact positive change. His approach reflects a profound understanding of his position as a potential conduit between academia and Indigenous peoples, underscored by a steadfast commitment to reconciliation and advocacy. He shared:

I think, just sort of a silver lining, it’s a lot about bringing collections to communities, but also bringing communities to collections. Getting, you know, communities to come in and take advantage of and see the collections, work *with* the collections. I think that has been the most rewarding for me because I see the interest and I see other people who, you know, well– I study baskets and textiles specifically, and so to see a weaver come in and get really excited by something they learned simply by looking at an ancient or historic basket, is pretty enthralling to me (Raymond White Horse).

Raymond embodies a profound grasp of cultural preservation and engagement by emphasizing the imperative of integrating communities into museum spaces. His advocacy for accessibility and inclusivity underscores the pivotal role of engagement in cultural revitalization. Moreover, Raymond's narrative exemplifies how Indigenous male faculty foster these interactions, aligning with the holistic vision of success that prioritizes cultural preservation, engagement, and empowerment. This approach resonates with the principles outlined in TribalCrit (2005), emphasizing the interconnectedness of past, present, and future in Indigenous frameworks of thought.

For other Storytellers, they spoke about defining success as advocacy and impact in various ways too. For example, MJ23 and AB articulate success as achieving the rank of full professor, underscored by a commitment to mentorship, advocacy, and community impact. MJ23 views explicitly giving back as integral to his academic success, emphasizing community enhancement as a critical measure. Newer to academia, Dr. Kyle identifies success through impactful community engagement, modeling his approach on mentorship experiences with his mentor. Henderson navigates dual measures of success: traditional academic achievements, like securing grants and advancing through faculty ranks, and more personally meaningful metrics, such as community impact and sovereignty efforts. He views success as inherently collective, emphasizing community betterment. Z Carter and Buzzy echo this sentiment, defining success as service to their communities, with Buzzy particularly highlighting the role of cultural values in shaping his understanding. James Wayne and Levi stress accountability to their communities and adherence to cultural protocols, prioritizing these over conventional academic expectations. William White Bear measures success through the positive impact of his teaching, finding profound value in the gratitude expressed by generations of students. Dr. Fox focuses on policy

creation and developing opportunities that support Indigenous students' growth across various domains. Reed views success as applying cultural knowledge within educational settings to influence students' academic and personal lives positively.

Success in academia for these Indigenous scholars surpasses individual achievements and is firmly grounded in community impact, collective advancement, and advocacy. TribalCrit (2005) underscores the communal nature of knowledge, power, and culture, which resonates with the reality guiding these scholars. Regardless of their titles or positions within higher education, their conception of success remains aligned with community empowerment and cultural preservation principles.

Visioning the Future & Solidifying Presence

The Storytellers shared how they perceived the future and solidifying presence as a form of success. For them, success is equated with seeing Indigenous presence in all disciplines, careers, and levels. Success was equated to thinking generations ahead, where cultural customs, revitalization, and resurgence were at the forefront. TribalCrit (2005) talks about how understanding these cultural ways of knowing and being is critical as we think about the future. This definition of success is no different.

In one of the Sharing Circles, Professor Rice shared:

We're educating these students to be success stories in so many different ways. And I feel like, you know, someone has mentioned what it's gonna look like 30 years from now. I mean, I really think we're gonna have so many of our highly educated Indians running programs, departments, and universities, you know? They're gonna be administrators, shaping the history programs, anthropology, archaeology programs, things like that, you know? Here at our institution, I even think about stuff like, how are they leveraging

Native ways of thinking or Native culture in a business sense that is responsive to the capitalist environment in which we are stuck? But doing so in a way that is thoughtful and tells Native stories and presents cultures, you know, whether it would be something like cultural tourism or small businesses that are Native inflected. Not necessarily what they offer to sell but maybe in terms of the measure of ‘what is profit,’ ‘what is success?’ I think that’s an amazing opportunity to bear witness as a faculty member (Professor Rice).

Z Carter shared:

I mean, that’s the dream. I see our next generation of students in all layers of the system. I feel like we’re coming up, as a younger faculty member, at a time of critical mass. There’s a critical mass that I can recognize that some faculty didn’t necessarily have but what they did was make room for the next generation. I mean, you look back at the Native scholars and it was a time when they had to fight through so much, to decolonize and to do these different things. Whereas, I find myself not having to fight as hard for those things; they’re a little more accepted. When I look at success or I think about the future, that’s how I want it to be for the next group of Indigenous scholars that follow (Z Carter).

Professor Rice highlights the transformative role of education in equipping Indigenous students for leadership roles within their communities and broader sectors like academia and business. He envisions these future leaders integrating Indigenous perspectives across diverse fields, advocating for a redefinition of success that aligns with Indigenous values and community needs. Z Carter observes an evolving academic landscape marked by increasing acceptance of Indigenous scholars and decreasing resistance against them. He points to a growing critical mass

of Indigenous scholars advancing academically and emphasizing the importance of community, mentorship, and spaces that validate Indigenous identities. TribalCrit (2005) emphasizes the integration of tribal philosophies and ways of being as essential to crafting a future where Indigenous knowledge and leadership are central. Together, these perspectives underscore the critical role of education in decolonizing spaces and reimagining success through an Indigenous lens, especially in terms of presence and futurity.

Building upon the discussion of education's transformative potential and the evolving landscape for Indigenous scholars, Reed offers further insights into the significance of Indigenous role models in defining success, particularly involving presence and future aspirations. When asked about the influence of culture on his views of success, Reed provided profound reflections.

We start class with a drum or an honor song or some kind of ceremony and then they go into it. The students are mostly settler students and they tell me, 'We have never had a professor like you. You bring in things, you wear your Pendleton vests, your jackets, and your earrings that you have on.' You know, or, they're like, 'Your hair, how you wear it. We don't see a lot of people like you, especially professors.' I usually say, 'Well, that's where I'm coming from. I've never seen one by myself. I've never had a Native teacher until I was in a doctoral program at my previous institution. If I can make that impact on you and you're not even Native, just think about how many other Native students would be proud to see me in front of them, you know, that their teacher is Native.' Culture has a lot to do with that because you're practicing it every day and then you don't have to tell them what you're doing. Just, um, they will see it by seeing your presence and performance (Reed).

Reed's story underscores the significance of cultural representation and visibility in education, aligning with Professor Rice and Z Carter's points. It exemplifies the integration of Indigenous perspectives across diverse fields, reflecting a vision of futurity. Reed's experience supports Z Carter's observation of a shifting academic landscape where Indigenous scholars like Reed are increasingly acknowledged and valued. This recognition of Indigenous presence resonates with the Storytellers' definition of success.

In discussions about success, it is crucial to acknowledge that futurity extends beyond academia; it encompasses cultural elements that serve as pillars of our heritage. Raymond and TGA emphasized the dynamic nature of Indigenous cultures, highlighting their ability to evolve and progress over time. This evolution is evident in various cultural artifacts such as baskets, textiles, beadwork, and language. TribalCrit (2005), which examines the intersection of culture, power, and knowledge, underscores how survivance necessitates adaptation and strategic accommodation for community growth. Thus, the definition of success encompasses survival and the flourishing of culture, as manifest in our rich cultural materials. This reality not only underscores the resilience and adaptability of Indigenous peoples but also serves as a testament to the enduring vitality of our traditions – a perspective of success echoed by TribalCrit (2005) and the insights shared by the Storytellers. For example, TGA shared:

What do those new baskets look like? You know, and what do they symbolize? It's fascinating to see emerging trends among contemporary Native artists, especially in beadwork. I appreciate when they incorporate traditional Native art into modern themes, like depicting Baby Yoda. It's a unique fusion of cultures. Nowadays, we witness a diverse array of art forms evolving, from Native fashion to basketry. Even in cradleboards, we see a blend of traditional and contemporary materials. It makes me

reflect on our cultural heritage and my responsibility to preserve it while also innovating for the future. I want to create new traditions that future generations can embrace fearlessly. And the fact we still have these traditions *is* success, too (TGA).

Raymond stated:

You know, that's a great point. I feel like we're now at the cusp of – with our generation and the generations coming up – where it's a lot of reclamation, rejuvenation, and reawakening. You know, in the grand sweep of things, we're peering back over this last couple hundred years of the effects of settler colonialism. So, we're entering a new era. And the next couple hundred years, you're gonna see this resurgence at the likes of which we probably couldn't have predicted. This is what helps give me purpose. It's my family history, it's community history. It's all of ours. I think that becomes a really important source for motivation when thinking about the future. Creating something' that isn't, you know, a depiction of Native people that's forged on stereotypes. That there can be something about Baby Yoda rendered in bead work that is not incommensurable with the way non-Native people view us. Or even what are those new techniques or designs for basketry? And I think that's probably one of the most rewarding parts, to even be having these conversations, and to dream up a future like that. It's awesome (Raymond White Horse).

TGA and Raymond both emphasize cultural preservation, innovation, and adaptation of Indigenous communities. They are all integral aspects of success in terms of culture. For them, it is a dual commitment to honoring the past and envisioning the future where success is cultural continuity.

In this lesson, the Storytellers diverge from conventional Western paradigms of success. Their definition of success transcends individual achievements, emphasizing the importance of community impact, advocacy, cultural presence, and envisioning a future where Indigenous cultures flourish. TribalCrit (2005) reinforces that success is inherently communal, intertwined with notions of power and survivance within Indigenous communities. The stories shared by the Storytellers vividly exemplify this communal perspective on success, showcasing the collective aspirations and values that guide their personal and professional endeavors.

Nvgine Adeloquasdi | Fourth Lesson: Conversations About Masculinity

The fourth lesson uncovered in these stories centers around discussions of masculinity. Every Sharing Circle and individual interview offered profound insights into the concepts and perceptions surrounding masculinities. The Storytellers shared their experiences growing up and how their views on masculinity were shaped by cultural practices and influenced by the effects of colonialism on Indigenous men and women. These conversations are critical for Native men as they navigate their paths forward. TribalCrit (2005) underscores that colonization permeates society, shedding light on the myriad issues faced by Indigenous communities. Specifically, colonization has dramatically transformed the roles and responsibilities of Native men, leading to a significant erasure of gender diversity.

Furthermore, the Storytellers contemplated the future for Native men, drawing inspiration from their rich heritage of traditional and ceremonial customs. Brayboy (2005) stresses that such contemplations are crucial for comprehending and envisioning the future, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of individuals and communities. These narratives encapsulate insights on masculinity, the navigation of colonialism, and “Vgalutsa,” the Cherokee term for Return.

Insights on Masculinity

Before discussing the impact of colonialism on Native men, I initiated the conversation with the Storytellers by inquiring about their thoughts on the term “masculinity.” Research has begun to explore how colonialism affects Native men in higher education settings (Still, 2019; Poolaw, 2018). Furthermore, I was intrigued to learn about their perspectives on the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous views of masculinity. In response, they shared insights on ceremonies, cultural responsibilities, processes, and the importance of relationships. They talked about the complementary and balanced roles shared with Indigenous communities,

highlighting that masculinity is perceived as both fluid and complex, shaped by the specific context and environment. For example, James Wayne shared:

So, to me, the concept of masculinity is connected to relationality. What is your role?

Right? It's not as cut and dry and black and white as contemporary [white] society would say, 'Well, you're supposed to be the warrior,' right? Or, 'You're supposed to be the provider.' Well, no. It's a lot more nuanced than that. Yes, in some cases, but what about old men or young boys? Those kinds of things could be dangerous. It's knowing your place in the community and your contribution but then also being impacted by it, having people that keep you in check, specific people for a reason. And knowing that if someone in your life is missing (James Wayne).

James emphasizes that masculinity transcends the simplistic fulfillment of predefined roles, framing it as a nuanced tapestry of responsibilities and relational dynamics deeply influenced by context. He highlights how this context is intricately shaped by cultural knowledge, underscoring the importance of understanding one's role and contributions within the community and the role of others in maintaining this balance.

William emphasized this point as well. He spoke about how his perspective is culturally informed and completely depends on space and context, especially cultural processes like ceremonies. He shared:

The other part of [masculinity] is in some Indigenous cultures, they can be very male centric. You have to navigate those kinds of really strong opinions from a cultural sense that, you know, 'Oh, women shouldn't be doing this.' Or, 'Only men should do this or only men should do that.' And, intellectually, I respect that and I can understand that. Maybe even, um, you know, recognize that it is important. For some ceremonies, you

know, there's strong roles for men and strong roles for women. And those roles are, you know, they are ancient. And sometimes they clash with this idea of what I think, well, it's not even feminism or anything like that, but what I think is a healthy male-female relationship. What I mean is, we're partners. There's a sense of equality that I think intellectually *I* need to be practicing. So my masculinity is only defined by, I suppose, how I can help the people in my life. But I want to reiterate, you go to certain [ceremonies] and you have to sort of, I think, it's almost code switching where there's an expected role for a man within that ceremonial context that you have to kind of recognize is there and maybe even go along with it. My wife has, you know, three academic degrees and is very strong in terms of her sense of self. And so, we're at ceremony and all the women are like, 'You know, we gotta make sure we get supper ready.' And, 'Oh yeah. You're right.' Well, at home, that's *my* job [laughs] you know, *I'm* the one that's cooking supper. However, there at ceremony, you know, what do the men do? They go and smoke. Right? Okay, well, there's a reason for that as well. And that's what happens. You know, it's not male versus female, even in those settings. These are complementary roles, they're not competitive roles, they're complimentary. And as long as we're doing it jointly, those things that we need for success, both culturally and sociologically, then we do it consciously and openly and then I can deal with that. I mean, I can navigate that because I recognize that maybe it's bigger than me (William White Bear).

Williams' perspective showcases an awareness of these roles' deep cultural roots and historical significance, transcending his individual beliefs or actions. He recognizes that masculinity and gender roles are only a part of a broader socio-cultural context that includes traditions and

practices that Tribal Nations have been enacting since time immemorial. In other words, these beliefs are both a personal perspective and a collective one.

During Professor Rice's Sharing Circle, he introduced an intriguing topic to the group. Beyond discussions on ceremonies, responsibilities, and relational dynamics, he delved into the roles and responsibilities of relatives identifying as Two-Spirit or Non-binary. He shared:

And you know, this is something that was coming up in my early days of graduate school. There were some cutting edge people who were talking about that particularly in Native traditions. You know, you have special people in our communities. People who are recognized for their strength, their wisdom, for their ability to facilitate, and to knit communities together by occupying a role that weaves gender together or not conforming to one or the other.

He emphasized the perspective many Indigenous communities historically held, and some still maintain, regarding Two-Spirit or non-binary individuals as sacred. During the Sharing Circle, the group was notably engaged, agreeing with his remarks. This discussion highlighted the significant impact of colonization on these relational and perceptual understandings, especially in the current socio-political climate.

An additional intriguing aspect of our discussions centered on the contrast between viewing violence as a form of protection through a cultural lens and seeing violence as a means to a solution. I was reminded of hooks' (2004a) observation that many boys and men are conditioned to demonstrate their masculinity through the capability for violence, whether psychological or physical. However, hooks (2004a) did not delve into situations where Tribal Nations resorted to violence, whether for the protection of their tribe's safety and well-being or

warfare. TGA and Raymond offered insightful perspectives on the conversation surrounding violence. TGA said:

I think there's also a perspective on that where it's like, we're not asking you how violent you are, but more asking about your ability or your desire or your willingness, um, to be able to protect your own, your own people, and your own families. And so I think there's some subtle differences there in the viewpoints of, you know, between what I see from like western masculinity and, you know, what it might be to be Indigenous, you know, embodying Indigenous masculinity. It's like, we're not trying to be violent. We're trying to protect our way of life and our people and the way that it is (Two Guns Arizona).

Raymond followed up saying:

You know, I've been fortunate enough to maintain a friendship with Denis Bowen, a Seneca leader. He was one of the original members of the American Indian Movement. He was speaking to one of my classes and was talking about how he had come to have a very different perspective and take on violence inasmuch as those early times when he was younger. He was protesting the construction of the Kinzua Dam that had a lot of other youths who were motivated towards violence. They had grown up in a very different time. Their childhood was very different. Those experiences shaped them and motivated and promoted a lot more violence. And it's understandable. Um, you know, the man saw his house burn down to make way for the construction of the Kinzua Dam. But as he got older, it was just one of those things where he came to appreciate and recognize that violence wasn't a viable solution or answer. And I kind of feel like that's something that a lot of people, as they get older, come to that recognition. Um, but I, again, appreciate it too because that's a separate issue. That type of violence in response,

violence as protection, is different from, um, violence as part of duty or obligation
(Raymond White Horse).

Raymond and TGA touched upon a crucial and intriguing aspect, particularly concerning the role of violence viewed through the lens of responsibilities, processes, and significance. These stories and discussions reveal the multifaceted ways in which Indigeneity diverges from and transcends Western interpretations of similar concepts. Whether the topic is violence, gender identity, ceremonial duties, or relational dynamics, these initial conversations serve as a reminder of the distinct meanings and perspectives these elements acquire when examined through an Indigenous lens.

Navigating Colonialism

In discussing masculinity, the Storytellers delved into the profound impact of colonialism. They explored its historical contexts and how it has shaped their lifeways, particularly within ceremonial practices, and discussed the interplay of gender identities, roles, and responsibilities. They shared personal stories highlighting the psychological impacts of colonialism and its representation in the media. TribalCrit (2005) underscores that colonialism, with a particular emphasis on education, aimed to “civilize” Indigenous peoples. This conversation extends to how colonization has enforced rigid binary gender structures and introduced the effects of colonial patriarchy, demonstrating the far-reaching influences of colonialism on Indigenous conceptions of masculinity and societal roles.

William White Bear and Levi spoke about how colonialism altered initial roles, responsibilities, and rites of passage. For example, William stated:

You can look at the decline of the male role as being, you know, warriors without weapons. That was an expression that was used early on that Native men’s roles had

changed so dramatically during the reservation period that they were left, you know, sort of jobless if you will. And so we've always had this, uh, kind of stereotype that today's men, Indian men, long for the buffalo days because they lost their job (William White Bear).

Meanwhile, Levi brought up a great point in regard to rites of passage. He shared:

Previously a young person had to prove themselves before they were considered an adult. In my tribe, one had to have war deeds or count coup before you were considered an adult and that was a rite of passage as some might call it now. They had to count coup, and young men weren't considered of age, or capable of adult responsibilities until they accomplished these deeds. They weren't allowed to marry and have other responsibilities until they proved they were able to fulfill the responsibilities that came with this role in the community. And if one didn't count coup they had to wait until about age 24 to be able to marry and such. And now many of those pathways don't fit our current reality. And so having your rite of passage criminalized and with the changing time, you know, it is time to create new rites of passage for young people, and that's an obstacle too (Levi).

William illustrates a significant shift in the societal roles occupied by Indigenous men due to colonialism. The transition from being warriors to a state of enforced passivity and "unemployment," signifies a profound loss of purpose and agency because he is talking about the stripping away of roles with the imposition of dependency and inactivity. Meanwhile, Levi illustrates the deep-seated impact of colonialism on identity and social structure. He emphasizes the traditional value of war deeds or counting coups with courage, skill, and contribution and how it has been uprooted with the cultural fabric. As a result, both share insights into the

challenges colonialism presents and how they are left thinking about their cultural practices moving forward.

Within contemporary ceremonial contexts, the Storytellers even shared how they experienced colonialism's pervasive reality and intersections of masculinity. For example, Dr. Kyle shared:

My dad is someone who can be tough and everything but he can also feel free to weep in front of me and my mom, especially in spiritual gatherings, like going to [Native American Church/religious use of peyote] meetings and things like that. You know, he can weep there. That's around like folks. But also by the same token, you can be around your own family sometimes and if certain cousins see you crying, they'll say, 'Hey, buck up.' It's hard to see what the difference is even among our own people sometimes (Dr. Kyle).

Buzzy also shared:

My brother and some of my mentors, you know, we were having these conversations. I was like, 'You know, I get how during ceremonies there are certain jobs that we have to do. But why do all these young men always want to do it? They really want to do this one particular thing.' And we were talking, and they said, 'Well, that shows him and others how big of a boss he is, how tough he is' (Buzzy).

Dr. Kyle and Buzzy delve into the nuanced and intricate ways colonialism influences Indigenous experiences. Dr. Kyle discusses his father's capacity for emotional expression, contrasting the freedom to weep in spiritual gatherings with the pressure to remain stoic in front of certain family members. This reality highlights the complex interplay between colonialism and traditional Indigenous practices, in this context, how it regards emotional expression. Similarly,

Buzzy reflects on the significance of ceremonial duties and the eagerness of young men to undertake specific roles. He suggests that this enthusiasm is about fulfilling traditional responsibilities and adhering to broader, possibly colonial-influenced, social norms regarding masculinity and leadership. They shed light on how colonial values subtly permeate and shape Indigenous cultural practices.

The Storytellers also discussed the complex interaction between gender dynamics and cultural responsibilities, particularly how colonial perspectives on gender roles and expectations impact Indigenous men who view their identities through a different lens. These conversations highlighted the tension between traditional Indigenous understandings of gender and the mainstream, colonial definitions imposed upon them. For example, Z Carter was taught Native men only sang and played the drums. He shared:

Or, like, I'll go to certain places where the women are playing drums and everything. And I just kinda stand there like, 'Well, this is different but I'm a guest here so I'm just going along with whatever's happening here.' But, you know, moving between all those regional differences you understand it's a layered kind of thing. There's a lot of dissonance and not always clear, not always easy to pick out (Z Carter).

James Wayne shared:

A few years ago, I was giving a presentation. And the person who had extended the invitation to come speak, you know, well, I was always told, 'Don't show up empty-handed. Bring something for them.' And I tan hides. And so I brought her one. I said, 'Hey, don't be telling anybody where you got that.' She's from back home. I said, 'I can hear the jokes already. 'Oh, geez, that guy tans a good hide,' Or, 'He's gonna make somebody a beautiful wife someday.' Right? 'Cause my assumption was that it was

women's work. And she asked me right there, she said, 'Where did you learn that?' And I said, 'I don't know. A movie or maybe I read it someplace. Probably was taught by one of my teachers.' She said, 'Who do you think made that movie or wrote that book where you learned that? You think they were from home?' I said, 'No.' She said, 'To the best of my knowledge, we did these things together.' And so I haven't done the work. I'm not a historian, but things like who tans hides, who sets up teepees, who does all these traditional things, where did we learn it? It made me realize how complex all of this can be (James Wayne).

And, similarly, Raymond shared:

Yeah. I mean, I got it early on when I became interested in baskets and textiles. That results in a lot of bemused looks and questions because, you know, for a lot of societies, not just Native folks, but cross-culturally generally it's women that are the basket-weavers and the textile producers. So, you know, the man that I learned textiles and baskets and archeology from, initially was very, well, one might characterize him as hyper-masculine. I mean, when he's not involved in the academics of archeology and writing about baskets and textiles, he's weightlifting and really into motorcycles and cars and other things that are sort of stereotypically associated with men (Raymond White Horse).

Together, these stories emphasize the impact of colonial and external influences on Indigenous cultural practices and gender roles. Z Carter touched upon the complexities of cultural diversity and gender roles within different Indigenous communities, demonstrating how these roles vary significantly across tribes and regions, but his openness to differences, even when they challenge his expectations, reflects an essential aspect of cultural exchange and understanding that they are

not monolithic but richly varied and nuanced. Meanwhile, James' story offers insight into the deep-seated assumptions and stereotypes that occur even with the gender roles of Indigenous communities. His initial belief that tanning hides were exclusively women's work reflects broader societal constructs while also being challenged and demonstrates the need to reclaim Indigenous knowledge. Raymond's juxtaposition reiterates this need to reevaluate gender roles within Indigenous and cross-cultural contexts. Additionally, by mentioning his mentor as challenging gender roles, he positions himself as challenging the complex intersection of identity and stating that engagement with activities like textile production or basket weaving does not diminish one's masculinity. All of these showcase the fluidity and complexities of colonialism and emphasize the impact of colonialism.

During our conversations, James and Raymond shared other stories that further complicated and demonstrated the intricacies of redefining gender roles when aligning it with contemporary realities and the challenges they present. James shared:

I had a Native student and she was a part of a tribal buffalo hunt. She self-identified as lesbian, right? And she was at a tribal buffalo hunt but didn't know where she fit in. And it's not like a new phenomenon, right? There were gender-fluid folks back in the day. And I still think about that because it was important, especially to help us think about gender roles in traditional and contemporary contexts (James Wayne).

Raymond shared:

I actually recently had this conversation with a friend, another archaeologist who's Apache, and she was talking about how the things that she's been involved in the field are not things that typically women are allowed to do. But, you know, given the lack of interest by other younger folks, she has been allowed sort of the cultural space by

members of her community to do this. And she has also been provided access to information that she might not otherwise have had available to her. And I think that got me thinking more about this way in which there's a little bit of a contradiction here, paradox, where we think about how oftentimes these traditional gender roles and ideals are presented as well. 'This is the traditional way, we need to return to all these traditional ways and traditional teachings.' But I also think it sometimes butts up against that idea. The reality is that all human societies, Native peoples, everybody, societies change. And that includes perception of gender roles. So, it might be that as much as there's value and importance to adhering to aspects of traditional teachings, that there's room and space for change in response to society's wants and needs, and community wants and needs today (Raymond White Horse).

James shared a story that underscores the ongoing conversations and reflections on masculinity, gender fluidity, and the roles in traditional and modern settings. These discussions reveal a collective endeavor to reconcile historical practices with present-day realities, suggesting that Indigenous perspectives on genders are not static. Raymond's story further emphasizes this point, illustrating how shifts in community interest and participation can open opportunities for individuals to engage in roles traditionally not assigned to their gender – which in turn presents a paradox where commitment to traditional gender roles encounters the pragmatic need to adapt and evolve based on current societal and community needs. The openness of her community to allow her participation in fields typically reserved for men underscores a broader, albeit subtle, shift towards a more inclusive understanding of gender roles. A point that TribalCrit (2005) emphasizes – saying that culture remains simultaneously fluid and dynamic.

During one of the Sharing Circles, we talked about the internalization of stoicism, the inability to express emotion, and how numerous Indigenous men often suffer. AB shared:

I think sometimes Native men are made to portray themselves one way. For example, like suicide. MJ23 and I did a study on suicide. In the past year, there's two guys that— I have their pictures on my phone — two guys from the community who committed suicide and both of them were probably in their forties. I've known them for a long time. Someone came up to me and said, 'Did you know this person committed suicide last night?' I'm sitting here like, 'Are you serious?' They presented themselves in one way, but sometimes you wonder if what they were presenting and what they were really dealing with were two different things. And they really weren't comfortable dealing with getting help or asking for help because they felt like they were forced to be too masculine and presenting these issues was a form of weakness. I don't know. Sometimes I think about that. I was talking to a friend of mine in San Antonio who does research on suicide and he had this little focus group panel. I asked, 'How do you figure out what the characteristics are so you prevent it?' But, then, I remember thinking we probably still wouldn't get answers, you know? Because, for some men, they're so caught up in, 'I have to show this and I have to keep all my feelings on the inside.' You know, sometimes for Native men, that's just how we're brought up. You don't talk about it. You don't cry. You don't express your feelings. You deal with things and you move on. Even if you get emotional, sometimes I get emotional, and you start to cry but then you have to gather yourself and pull yourself back in. I ask, 'Why can't I just let myself release?' But I think that's how we're taught to do that and that's not healthy *at all* (AB).

AB touches deeply on the intersection of colonialism, masculinity, and mental health within Indigenous communities. The struggle of suicide and the pressure to conform to a specific type of masculinity highlight broader systemic issues stemming from the historical impacts of colonialism. Unfortunately, these issues are exacerbated, especially as stoicism and suppression of the expression of emotion were the impositions valued by Eurocentrism's masculinity and sustained in various spaces.

The Storytellers also highlighted the significant influence of media in shaping and enforcing specific norms and expectations for male-identifying individuals. They pointed out how the media constructs and promotes a particular image or standard of masculinity, pressuring individuals to conform to these ideals. Seysay R. shared:

I think I'm a product of all the cultural traps. I think in many ways it is damaging notions of masculinity and what it means to be a man and to be strong and to be a leader and to be successful. I mean, I grew up at the height of the James Bond movies. So I wanted to be James Bond! (Seysay R.).

Dr. Fox also shared:

You know, these are things I've noticed with words and in the media. Like, when people say like, this person is strong – no matter if it's a woman leader it carries with it a sense of masculinity or people assume that if you're describing somebody as strong then they think, 'Yeah, it's probably a guy.' And I think it starts there. Then you'll see how everything is geared toward male dominance: Super Bowls, you know, sports in general, movies, music, and other modes of entertainment. Everything reiterates 'the man' (Dr. Fox).

Henderson stated:

You know, I'll be honest with you. When I start thinking critically about manhood or what I think when I hear the word 'masculinity,' it's hard for me to unwrap my head from the Western colonial ideas and those archetypes that we're presented with in the media. And we're really entangled with it all. I mean, social media drives a lot of these fundamental ideas about success, about beauty, about competence, about being a man, you know, all of these things that we think are important (Henderson).

Seysay R., Dr. Fox, and Henderson delve into the profound influence of cultural representations and media on masculinity. These insights underscore how these influences are deeply intertwined with colonial legacies and the construction of male identity.

“Vgalutsa” | A Return

The Cherokee term “Vgalutsa” signifies “return.” In discussions about masculinity, the Storytellers highlighted the significance of revisiting original teachings to counteract colonial impacts. TribalCrit (2005) underscores the importance of Indigenous cultural practices for envisioning the future and understanding diverse realities while acknowledging individual and group differences. The concept of “returning” guided our conversations. So, “Vgalutsa” symbolizes a journey back to the foundational knowledge and practices of each person's specific tribal teachings, approached without centering masculinity, *per sé*.

When talking about the future, Professor Rice brought up an interesting point regarding terminology. He said:

I started having this conversation with a friend about the kind of the nomenclature that we're using, that's more or less an umbrella term. That is, I mean, we've moved away from some of the older scholarship and I mean, older by like in the eighties and nineties, the terminology that was being used to describe people, visionaries, social mediators,

people with certain abilities, and gifts. The terminology that was being used then, I think some of those scholars, many of whom were coming from outside, were using terms that actually were demeaning, because they had been co-opted through different colonizing words. And that's not to impugn those scholars. I think they thought they were using something more authentic than what was being bandied around in the eighties or nineties to maybe describe or label people in the dominant culture. But as time has gone on, we have come to see that difference because it's just in the nature of scholarship. But, you know, Two-spirit, and I'm not making any judgment on that, but that's an umbrella term. I think we will probably move away from that eventually to something else that we feel is more appropriate or more culturally centered. But I do understand kind of the need to talk about it just in the same way we talk about Indigenous peoples, you know, writ large. But yeah, that I think is an exciting burgeoning scholarship as well that brings out that complementarity, you know, it brings out those different points, but certainly just as valid viewpoints as Western ones. And it can be part of that decolonizing process as well (Professor Rice).

Professor Rice examines the evolution of terminology related to Indigenous identities, highlighting the move away from derogatory, colonial-imposed terms. This exploration of reclaiming Indigenous identity through culturally appropriate language emphasizes the continuous process of adaptability and envisioning future alternatives. As individuals and groups delve deeper into their tribal and cultural identities, there is a renewed 'return' to ancestral reverence for these identities, coupled with a forward-looking embrace of possibilities.

Seysay R. and Dr. Fox emphasized the criticality of looking at our cultures for solutions to problems created by colonialism. For example, Seysay R. shared:

And I do think, well, I would echo what Vine Deloria Jr. was always writing about, ‘The solutions are going to be found if we look back and take seriously our own cultures, our own Indigenous traditions.’ So, we need to make a full scale effort to really look at that, and try to cut through some of the colonial limbs that we’re told to even look at our own selves through but to not succumb to that and take those lenses off and try to see a different way, about the nature of the relationships between Indigenous men and women (Seysay R).

Dr. Fox added:

Well, I think it’s preserving a way of life. If we stay in touch with those values, if we stay in touch with those beliefs that our ancestors brought forth, there’s a way of life, there’s a way of living that gives respect to a lot of different things. That’s why I think it’s important to stay as close to these teachings or return to them and really center and be with all of them. Otherwise, we lose that (Dr. Fox).

Seysay R. and Dr. Fox advocate revisiting Indigenous traditions and cultures to solve contemporary issues. Seysay R. acknowledges the transformative power of cultural resilience and wisdom, emphasizing the significance of Indigenous perspectives in tackling modern challenges. Dr. Fox underscores the importance of preserving Indigenous values and beliefs to sustain their way of life. TribalCrit (2005) highlights cultural continuity as crucial for resisting assimilation. Beyond recognizing problems, especially regarding masculinities, they stress the importance of staying connected to ancestral teachings and practices. This connection is vital for maintaining sovereignty, resisting erasure, and thriving, living, expanding, and growing.

In our subsequent interview, I inquired with Buzzy about the significance of discussing masculinity. He recounted personal anecdotes from his upbringing, highlighting the impact of

internalizing his anger. This reality had repercussions on his relationships and overall well-being. Fortunately, he found solace in various resources and cultural traditions, such as ceremonies, and emphasized the transformative power of vulnerability. He shared:

There's this great talk given by Moana Jackson. He's a Māori lawyer. He passed away just recently. He specifically talks about, you know, the implications of that movie 'Once Were Warriors' on Māori society and Māori men. You know, he specifically talked about this idea of hyper masculinity. And he goes on to say that like, 'Truth be told, it wouldn't be necessarily if we're looking at modern society values and belief systems. And it wouldn't be once we are warriors. It would be once we're farmers, once we're gardeners, once we're poets.' And it reminds me of the things that I've learned in community, a lot of that comes from things that I've learned in ceremonies, being more involved in ceremonies and learning. You know, I remember a time when I was really angry. And I mean *really* angry, just wasn't a good relative, you know? But, through all that, I'd say – and it's taken me some time to get here – but vulnerability is probably the key. This whole thing about transparency is like, I just want to put everything out there. I'm okay with being vulnerable to be honest and I've learned and I'm learning how to navigate all that. So I think that's a big skill for me, for sure. All the things like delegating leadership really, just all those things. My point is, I've learned more about 'being a man' from vulnerability, going back to ceremonies, and thinking about how others are navigating masculinity. We don't have to be set with this, you know, and who knows what it'll all look like in the future. It's interesting *and* exciting (Buzzy).

Buzzy reflects on Moana Jackson's speech. Jackson brings an insightful discourse, particularly challenging conventional notions of masculinity, which intertwine with Buzzy's growth through

cultural knowledge and practices. Further, he emphasizes the significance that embracing vulnerability has taught him. As a result, Buzzy has learned from others' experiences of navigating masculinity, and in doing so, it has helped him reimagine what traditional gender roles could look like as the future will bring change, evolution, and opportunity. Yet, what remains consistent is cultural reconnection and centering ancestral knowledge for envisioning the future.

In the fourth lesson, the Storytellers offered insights into masculinity, discussing its cultural lessons alongside the challenges of mainstream societal norms. They also addressed the impact of colonialism, observed both in ceremonial contexts and within the sphere of higher education. Despite these challenges, culture's resilience and power remain constant. It offers a space for vulnerability and critical thinking, encouraging visions of a future anchored in traditional knowledge and ways of being. This commitment to cultural roots ensures an Indigenous future.

Hisgine Adeloquasdi | Fifth Lesson: Sustaining Indigenous Male Faculty

In the fifth and final lesson, the Storytellers opened up about what propelled them through higher education, guided by a wide-ranging inquiry into the support, resources, strengths, skills, and wisdom they had accumulated, applied, and utilized on their journeys. TribalCrit (2005) emphasizes the centrality of tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, and traditions in comprehending Indigenous peoples' lived realities, highlighting the adaptability of communities and the uniqueness of individuals and intergroup dynamics. This tenet underscores the importance of cultural foundations – including meaning, culture, knowledge, power, beliefs, and thoughts – as pivotal in analyzing experiences. The conversation primarily focused on how the Storytellers nurtured relationships and support networks, seized career opportunities while prioritizing community servingness, and championed Indigenous leadership, heartwork, and utiyvhi (balance), all through this culturally-informed lens.

Cultivating Relationality and Support Systems

Cultivating relationality and support systems was one, if not *the* main way the Indigenous men talked about sustaining themselves. They highlighted the significance of support and connections, not just within their communities but also within the academic realm. This support network – encompassing mentors, departmental assistance, and relationships with fellow students, friends, colleagues, and the broader community – enabled them to persevere and remain committed to their educational pursuits.

For example, AB, Seysay R., Professor Rice, and Raymond emphasized the importance and role of a great mentor. AB shared a story about how his then mentor had a grant and was able to ride around to schools and work on different projects that impacted both school and kids. He shared:

As I was riding with him, he said, ‘What are your career goals?’ I said, ‘I’ll probably be a high school principal one day. He said, ‘Why would you do that?’ I replied, ‘Well, that’s what people do back home. That’s a high ambition.’ He said, ‘Why don’t you become a professor?’ I thought, I don’t know any professors. He just kept reiterating, you know, ‘Well, you need to think about it. You can be a professor anywhere if you get your PhD.’ That stuck in the back of my mind when I started working as a school counselor. After my first year, it kept going over in my mind. Finally, I remember just thinking, ‘Alright. That’s it. I’m gonna apply’ (AB).

AB underscores the significance of mentorship in presenting alternative perspectives or ways to reevaluate situations, highlighting its transformative potential. This guidance was pivotal in his journey to becoming a full professor. Now, he pays this invaluable gift forward by mentoring students in need, exemplifying the lasting impact of mentorship. Similarly, Seysay R. shared the impact his mentors made on his journey. He said:

I had no plans of ever going after a PhD. I met a guy who was good friends with [Samuel] from [a Midwestern University], his name is Jackson. The way he recruited me is we became friends and he called me up one day and said, ‘Hey, man, I want you to come to Midwestern University. We’ll pay for all of your stuff.’ I was teaching now, so I’d been at my current institution now, not quite a decade. I was already starting to write my first book when he called me. I remember sitting in my office. I was looking at some drafts of a book that I had in mind, and I started writing it and he called me up and he said, ‘Look, you’ve got to get a PhD.’ And I said, ‘No, I don’t need a PhD. I love what I’m doing now. I’m teaching, I’m writing, I’m working on a book. I can’t do what I want to do and get a PhD.’ And he goes, ‘Oh, yes, you can. Where are you?’ And I said ‘I’m in

my office at my university.’ He literally got in his car and drove to my office in an hour. He’s at my door and said, ‘Alright, I’m gonna tell you something. You’ve got to get a PhD because that’s gonna open doors for you. If you don’t, I hate to tell you, but the PhD is your union card in higher education. If you don’t have the PhD, there will be doors that won’t open to you. It doesn’t matter how great you are. Show me your book.’ So, I was like, you know, okay. He said, ‘Okay, let’s make *that* your PhD.’ I said, ‘I can do that?’ And he said, ‘We’ll make it happen.’ I remember I was still holding out. I said, ‘Hell, no.’ So, here’s what happened. Jackson asked me what it would take for me to get my PhD. I knew I needed support. So, I told him I wanted Samuel on my dissertation committee. I remember saying, ‘If you get Sam on my dissertation committee, I’ll do it.’ He says okay, leaves my office, drives back to Midwestern University. It took him an hour. I get a call in about an hour and fifteen minutes. I’m still sitting at my desk, and I answer the phone. I pick it up, and it’s Sam. He goes, ‘Hey, so, I hear you’re gonna get a PhD?’ I go, ‘Oh, my God, I’m trapped.’ [laughs] I said, ‘Well, I will. Only if you’re gonna be on my committee.’ He replies, ‘Done’ (Seysay R).

Raymond and Professor Rice reflected on their mentors’ transformative roles in their lives. Raymond highlighted how his mentor, deeply knowledgeable about Indigenous cultures and an advocate for his progress, helped him navigate the challenges of a predominantly white academic environment, ultimately aiding him in pursuing his PhD. Meanwhile, Professor Rice attributed his ability to challenge and transcend perceived limits in his personal and educational endeavors to the guidance of a trailblazer mentor, teaching him the value of pushing boundaries.

Aside from mentors as support, Storytellers like James Wayne also spoke about the relationality he finds with Indigenous students. He shared:

It's the Native students. Man, it's so cool when you get Native students that come in and you get to develop a relationship with them in ways that they have the same wants that you do. Like, this is about my community, that way. Like you said: This is what I do, but it's not who I am, right? They're coming from a super similar place. Like, this person's got the will, the skill, and they can pay the bill. Like it's just awesome to see really strong Native students come through. That helps sustain me, for sure. Having those students that are in the right mind, right? They are conscious of not being extractors of their own communities' knowledge and information. They're conscious and aware of not misappropriating their own stuff. They're really good at the technical parts. Like for some that get an A- in stats for crying out loud. Right? Um, I just love to see that kinda success, knowing that they're gonna go forward with a skill set, with authority to be able to make those kinds of changes. Yeah, so, that's pretty sustaining (James Wayne).

Other Storytellers spoke about the importance of having relationality with their departments because it provided support in other ways. Two Guns shared:

I had great support from my department as a whole. You know, I have a really great boss. I've had two great bosses and have a third one coming in, and I think she's gonna be equally as wonderful in supporting all the work that I want to do.^[P] And the nice part with that is, like, I would say one of the greatest supports they did was just kind of get out of my way and let me do my thing. They never try to regulate me and say, 'Hey, you need to do this. You need to do this.' It was more like, 'We're gonna let TGA off his leash, and he's gonna go do his thing, and we're not gonna get in his way, and that's gonna be that. Let us know if you need anything.' And you know, I appreciated that about my department. I have felt a lot of freedom and creativity in everything that I did. You know,

no one really got in my way or they didn't make it too hard for me to do the things that I wanted to do (Two Guns Arizona)

Henderson and Levi discussed the value of the friendships they've developed as professors. They emphasized how communal support not only underscored the significance of striving for excellence in their work but also opened avenues for networking. These relationships, in turn, facilitated strategic collaborations, enabling them to serve their communities in diverse and innovative ways. Overall, it speaks to the criticality of cultivating relationships and support systems.

Strategic Wisdom: Seize Opportunities with Cultural Insight

Amidst the competitive nature of academia, each Storyteller highlighted the critical role of seizing opportunities that resonated with their cultural duties and aspirations to influence their communities positively. This strategy enhanced their teaching, service, and publishing effectiveness, broadening their networks and fostering a strategic mindset. Furthermore, it prompted them to deliberate carefully on the sustainability of their careers and the legacy they aim to establish for future generations, ensuring their actions align with long-term visions for cultural and community advancement.

TGA, Z Carter, and Dr. Fox spoke about some of the benefits they have experienced from expanding one's networking systems and stepping up to the opportunities presented. TGA shared:

You know, having that network of people you could rely on to be like, 'Hey, we're having a special issue. We want you to submit something. We're doing this book. Can you do a book chapter? Oh, we need a speaker for this. Can you come and do it?' You

know, those are all things that I felt like help build up your CV and help get you to another level and show there's people looking out for you (Two Guns Arizona).

TGA highlights an important aspect: higher education values academics who can teach, serve, and publish. The presence of a supportive network and available opportunities not only showcases TGA's 'technical' success but also reflects the effectiveness of TGA's relationships. Z Carter emphasized this point during another Sharing Circle. He shared:

What's interesting about the network is its perceived smallness, yet as it expands, you find yourself being a bridge to a world oblivious to its existence. It's like revealing an invisible community to some people, you know? Saying, 'Hey, there are Indians over there. Have you spoken to the chairman? Let me give them a call or send a text.' This type of networking lends authenticity and legitimacy to your expertise. Sometimes, the simple act of knowing you can reach out and connect speaks volumes (Z Carter).

Z Carter emphasizes the importance of being able to serve in this role, to make those connections, and reaffirms the depth and quality of creating opportunities as well.

Dr. Fox recounted his journey of recognizing the importance of networking and seizing opportunities. After years as a superintendent, Dr. Fox returned to academia for his doctoral studies. Like many in higher education, he understood the emphasis on service, publishing, and teaching. Although his role as a superintendent did not involve teaching, Dr. Fox had amassed considerable experience in service and publishing. Balancing these responsibilities, he was concerned about finding teaching opportunities. However, he recalled connections with colleagues at the same institution, reflecting on the potential avenues these relationships could provide.

I remember how nervous I felt. But, then, I remembered some of my former colleagues from my previous institution had moved to the one I was currently attending. And so when I got back into school, we met up, and I explained what was going on. Of course they welcomed me and visited with me and then the first thing they said was, ‘Are you interested in teaching some classes?’ Problem solved (Dr. Fox).

For MJ23 and AB, stepping into opportunities also meant creating opportunities and making it work for them. For example, MJ23 shared:

I got to know a lot of people there at the medical school. And then someone reached out to me and said, ‘I’m getting ready to do a study funded by NIH.’ It was a qualitative study, a nutrition study looking at Native elders on our reservation. They said, ‘We know you’re interested in this area. Would you be interested in working with us on it?’ I said, ‘Yes, but I want a faculty position.’ They said, ‘We will create a faculty position for you. You’ll need to bring in all of your funding.’ So, I connected with some folks at the State Health Department and they were able to pay for part of my salary and then this grant paid for the other part of my salary. So for the first part of my faculty position, I was 100% grant funded, which was nerve-racking because, you know, I remember thinking if this grant money runs out, then I’m in trouble. But it was a great experience. I had great people along the way to help make sure that I was successful. And taking on that opportunity really helped me get my academic career started (MJ23).

AB shared his story about the importance of creating and leaning into opportunities as well. He said:

I applied for a research position and got that, but at the same time, I found out about a minority supplement grant. They said, if you find somebody with [R1], you can apply for

a minority supplement. I started googling to see. I googled it and it said, there's one at the university 20 minutes away from me in the psychology department. I called the guy and I set up an appointment. I went over and I started talking. He said, 'Yeah, you can apply. It's a one pager.' Basically, you know, if he really liked you, he'd submit it. It's so much like I'm telling them, I want you to work with me. So I applied for that and they paid 65%. The other research position paid for 35%. Now I had two opportunities and I said, 'Okay, what if I asked them if I could do both of them at the same time?' And then I asked, and got told, 'There's no reason you can't.' So I got both of them, both of them fell under the NIH. I ended up doing that. It was a two-year program. I was doing the minority supplement with the Psychology department at the university and the research position in a western state. I did it simultaneously for two years. And, even before I finished that, the leadership changed at the university I wanted to apply to in the first place. So, I reached out to the new leadership and I sent it to the new Chancellor. The Chancellor immediately sent my email to the Provost. He said, 'I need you to invite that guy in.' So they invited me in and then I got a job offer as an assistant professor (AB).

MJ23 and AB underscored the innovation and strategic thinking required to tailor opportunities to their advantage. They also shared their enthusiasm for advancing their careers and positioning themselves to assist better and serve their Indigenous communities. Moreover, these experiences highlighted to them the crucial role of building relationships and the value of networking. They saw firsthand how these connections provided insights into navigating the higher education landscape – understanding it as 'playing the game' by leveraging tools and resources effectively for their benefit and their communities.

Indigenous Leadership

Indigenous leadership is deeply rooted in cultural responsibilities and aims to impact communities while preserving cultural traditions positively (Minthorn, 2018). It draws from philosophies, beliefs, customs, and traditions, as TribalCrit (2005) highlights. The Storytellers illustrate this through values like humility, recognizing experience as a profound teacher, using humor as a guiding tool, and the importance of storytelling. This approach involves effectively communicating and presenting one's journey and insights through engaging narratives, embodying the essence of leadership in Indigenous contexts. For example, Buzzy shared:

In my clan, our responsibility is not focused on taking the center stage. We're the ones that lay the groundwork for folks behind the scenes a lot of times, and we do 'the dirty work,' so to speak. We do those things so people can really step into that leadership role or whatever. For me, I really try to lead with that. That humility, you know? I'm not interested in getting awards and stuff like that. Someone wanted to nominate me recently for an award. They said, 'I want to nominate you for this award, Buzzy.' I was like, 'I don't want no award. Let's work on an application for someone else. We'll give them an award because they're doing the work.' And so I try to lead in that way. My uncle sat me down when I was young and he told me all those things like, 'Here's your responsibility. This is what you're supposed to be doing.' And so that's how I really try to live, It's not always easy but I try. I just keep on trying my best (Buzzy).

Buzzy highlights a core lesson taught within Indigenous communities: the power of humility. He notes that staying humble bolsters relationships, improves work, and signifies personal growth. This humility is vital to acknowledging and learning from mistakes for Indigenous leaders like him. Buzzy also mentions how humility aids in giving and receiving feedback, embracing new

ideas, and fostering stronger connections. This approach cultivates a supportive environment at his institution, enhancing his sense of belonging and support.

Dr. Fox believes in the profound role of experience as a teacher, particularly in navigating and learning within one's space. Drawing from TribalCrit's principles, he underscores the tradition of Indigenous ancestors as original scientists who gained knowledge through hands-on interaction with their environment. This perspective has been pivotal in Dr. Fox's academic journey, allowing him to integrate this experiential approach into his scholarly work. He shared insights on how this philosophy has enriched his educational endeavors. He stated:

I think in the world of Indian education, there's a big difference when someone relies on book knowledge in everything they do as opposed to speaking from experience. One of the things that my parents and my grandparents taught me was that experience is a mother of all knowledges. Well, that experience is *the* mother of all knowledges. And relying on book stuff, relying on that side of the equation, I think, is insufficient. So therefore, I think I would advise others to pay attention to your experiences and take note of some of the things that you're doing well. You know, and take note of what these experiences represent and how they are tying back in with some of the very important things like when you're in a teaching role. Or, for example, like when you're in a leadership role. How are you referencing those lessons that you are learning, keeping note of it, and then utilizing your own personal cultural lens to navigate how you move forward? And if you don't learn your lesson, well, there will be another one coming somewhere down the line [laughs] but I think we just have to embrace it (Dr. Fox).

Dr. Fox views experience as a significant teacher, offering a fresh perspective where challenges become opportunities for personal and professional growth. This mindset enriches his leadership

and teaching, guiding those he serves. His experiences have crucially informed his ability to navigate various spaces effectively, emphasizing the transformative power of embracing life's lessons through a cultural lens – ultimately aiding his approach and sustainability in the roles he has served.

When I asked Henderson what has sustained him throughout his journey, he discussed the reality of stories and communication. Within stories, he talked about how much of what he learned has been about communication, how to convey a thought, experience, and more through communication or telling stories. TribalCrit (2005) not only values and prioritizes storytelling for transmitting the stories for the lessons and importance they carry but also because this form of communication allows for the transmission of knowledge across generations and more. In the context of higher education, having excellent communication skills within his writing allows Henderson to be more effective as a leader with requests, plans, grants, and more. He shared:

I have learned that it does *not* matter how quantitatively gifted you are. If you cannot clearly articulate what the heck it is you are trying to do, what it means, and why anybody should care about it, you are *not* going to get very far. And so, one thing that I really value, and this is something that I feel like I have refined and worked on through the years, is my ability to express myself in writing or storying (Henderson).

Henderson continued to talk about how this approach has helped him become a better grant writer and how it has helped him to get papers accepted for conferences and manuscripts for publications. This approach has even helped him with talking with the graduate students he advises and, overall, has helped his communication. He finished by emphasizing how anyone in higher education should take advantage of opportunities with writing retreats and practice as it helps refine his skills and makes him more effective as a leader.

William White Bear emphasized the importance of humor. Humor plays a crucial role in our communities. It has served as help with resiliency and communication. TribalCrit (2005) speaks about the philosophies, beliefs, customs, and traditions we honor and humor blends all of them as it is deeply woven into the cultural fabric and can be a tool for teaching, healing, and connecting while also parting wisdom, teaching, and more. William said:

I think having a sense of humor is very important. I think, Native peoples view that as a positive attribute that somebody can, not just make people laugh, but can enjoy the experience. You know, whether that's teasing or having those self-deprecating kinds of conversations with others. It's very consistent in terms of tradition that we can just sit around with each other and do that. And it has been a strength. Now, whether or not something is funny is of course cultural. I like to think so. So when somebody doesn't laugh, I say, 'Oh yeah, they just don't understand.' [laughs] But with humor, we can engage at those kinds of levels where we can laugh with each other, whether it's a real bad joke or just kind of a witty observation. That's been one of the things that I've enjoyed doing and honestly how I lead, too, you know, you gotta make people laugh. I'm not saying be a comedian but rather just tell a story and connect with communities in that way. It's a way of building a different kind of relationship which is also based on, you know, affection. Like we always say that if people tease you, it means they like you. And, you know, if somebody doesn't tease you then you know you're in trouble [laughs] But I think that it breaks down defenses and helps all of us to be more lighthearted. But, you know, it *can* be disciplinary. I mean, if you see somebody doing something that you're not particularly fond of, you can tease them about it in a light way and hopefully they understand. So, I hope I bring that to these spaces because I don't think we ever want

people to take things too seriously. I mean, when we're talking about changing grade policies or whatever, you know, it's not earth-shattering kinds of work that we're doing – in those contexts. But, yeah, we can't ever take ourselves too seriously (William White Bear).

William, Buzzy, Henderson, and Dr. Fox emphasize the various components of Indigenous leadership. This lens has not only helped them be better leaders but also served as reminders for community impact. As a result, it has helped them sustain themselves within these spaces.

Heartwork

Winder (n.d., para. 2) describes heartwork as a fusion of purpose and passion, dedicating oneself to fulfilling one's inner call. This concept resonates deeply with Indigenous definitions of success, which are inherently community-focused. Heartwork embodies this collective orientation, with individuals' resilience, passion, and actions aimed at serving and enhancing their communities. Additionally, this lens aligns with TribalCrit's (2005) focus on knowledge, culture, and power, underscoring heartwork's role in addressing and advocating for Indigenous experiences within broader societal and cultural contexts. In Indigenous leadership, heartwork fosters empathy, connection, and resilience, which are crucial for navigating and overcoming obstacles.

For example, Levi shared:

As an Indigenous person from an Indigenous community, we have a spirit of excellence. To me, being hardworking is synonymous with being Native. Right? A spirit of excellence. That is reflected in our beadwork, the songs, the dances. Like, that is a lot of work and commitment to create that. We need to reconnect the idea of excellence with

the idea of being Indigenous. So for me, it's about taking the values that I have within my culture and being able to live them out in the academy. Things like intentionality, respect, and trying to make a difference and trying to serve your community and your family. But within this role. You have to work hard. Like between reading, writing, and trying to understand. It can be *very* difficult, right? But, like, you can't skip that stuff. So, I always try to make that learning purposeful and that scholarship purposeful (Levi).

Levi's narrative emphasizes the profound role of heartwork in his journey. While some might view his dedication as merely striving for tenure, it is deeply rooted in cultural values that nourish and empower him far beyond academic accolades. This cultural perspective enriches his work, offering a sense of fulfillment and impact transcending conventional academic achievements or standards.

When I asked Professor Rice what personal strengths he discovered or refined throughout his journey, he explained it similarly to Levi. He said:

I would say resiliency as a strength to keep going sometimes in the face of great adversity. And I don't necessarily mean like with personal adversity, but sometimes I feel that way when I'm trying to navigate bureaucracy. There's really a bunch of bullshit we have to navigate as faculty. And I think that the cumulative effect of that can be challenging to say the least, especially on *us*. You know? So, yeah, resiliency. But that's just one example. I mean, there's lots of different ways that you learn to be resilient. And I think one of the positive things that we take away from these histories, encounters, and our culture even throughout the whole 'colonization story' is strength through resiliency. That's how we have survived, you know, it's how Native people have survived and

continue to thrive. How we revitalize. I keep that in mind as I move throughout
(Professor Rice).

Navigating the complexities of academic bureaucracy can be daunting, but Professor Rice finds strength in his cultural heritage and the resilience of his ancestors. This deep connection to his roots and the enduring spirit of Indigenous peoples helps him overcome challenges. He leans into the power of heartwork, drawing upon cultural wisdom and ancestral journeys as sources of motivation and resilience, reminding him to persist and thrive within the academic world. Which has, in turn, helped him sustain himself.

Buzzy explains how he has enacted heartwork since the beginning of his academic journey since it has been a great motivator. He shared:

When I got more serious about my education, I remember I called my brother. He's the executive director for the tribe. I remember, I asked, 'What does the tribe need?' You know, as I journeyed throughout my academic career, it has always been me asking those kinds of questions. And so he'd tell me, you know, 'Oh, we're having a hard time with our youth.' For me, I remember thinking how I could help them. Or when we'd speak again, I'd ask the same question and he'd say, 'Oh, we need social workers. We need people that understand the kind of the social dynamics of rural communities, especially reservation communities and how youth are experiencing those dynamics.' So, I went and got my degree in Rural Sociology. And, of course, later I did not know what graduate school was, but I called my brother again. I asked, you know, 'What does the tribe need?' He responded, 'We need legal people here because we're paying a lot of fees for our lawyers that don't know anything about the tribe. So, it'd be nice to have somebody come in that knows about the background information of the tribe, you know, that could work

for us.’ So, I turned around and got my master’s in law and policy that specifically focused on Indian law. And then I wanted to keep going and help in other ways. I never thought of being a faculty member or a teacher or anything like that. But, really, when I think back, I had this major infusion growing up. It’s just a different feeling when you’re in community, and you’re going to ceremonies, and having all of these experiences. So, I just really wanted to be useful, like what could I do to be useful? And, you know, it seemed like being a faculty member was a good way to kind of do a number of things all at the same time: being in a classroom with students, teaching, and learning. You know, while also working with tribes on the research and really just addressing the needs of the tribe the best way that I can (Buzzy).

Buzzy showed a deep commitment to serving the community’s needs through education and professional development. By continuously having conversations with his brother and figuring out what the tribe needed, he exemplified heartwork in action. He was able to utilize his passion for serving his community to align with his Indigenous principles of reciprocity, community well-being, and enhancement.

Two Guns Arizona shared his perspective in relation to publishing. He stated:

You know, my first publication that I submitted years ago. When I first started it, it was a literature review [chuckles] and it didn’t get accepted until like the fall of 2018. You know, it took me five years. But I think if I would have abandoned it— man. And it ended up being in a top-tier journal, an academic journal for my field. And so, I was like, ‘Man, that paper took five years to put out, you know, and if I would have given up on it at any point, then it would have never come through.’ But it was like a solo authored piece and I

just felt so good about it. And, so I think it's just like having that mindset of, 'Hey, you know what, I'm gonna fail, but I'm gonna try anyway (TGA).

TGA enacted heartwork as he remained dedicated, passionate, and resilient. His perseverance and willingness to face failure for this achievement showcase the engagement and fulfillment that heartwork embodies, especially when aligned with personal and professional goals. For TGA, the publication ended up helping numerous Indigenous scholars with their scholarship. TGA's story serves as an example of the impact of heartwork within the academy. Overall, heartwork helped each Storyteller find sustainability.

Utiyvhi

Utiyvhi is the Cherokee word for balance. Brayboy (2005) emphasizes the importance of tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future; he states that such concepts must be recognized as viable and essential for the lives of the individuals and members of the group. For the Storytellers, balance was significant in maintaining their sustainability within the academy. Balance, within tribal beliefs, encapsulates the physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, environmental, and occupational dimensions.

TGA emphasized the importance of balance. For example, he shared:

It's kind of about balance in all aspects of your life. You need to be able to balance your workload and recognize that you shouldn't be doing too much, you know. Make sure you're spending time with family and your community but also making sure you're doing things that you enjoy. Not losing track of whatever hobbies or things that give you life. Because, honestly, I feel like those things make you more productive. Like, for example, I do enjoy fishing. I think those times are usually quiet and peaceful times for me. They help fuel my writing. But I think it forces you to take a moment, you know, away from

technology, away from other things in life, and allows you to focus on something that you're kind of trying to overcome in your mind. If it's writing or getting through a writer's block or whatever it may be. And then, of course, you have to try and maintain your health as best as you can, you know. I'm not against eating cookies and chips and whatever, but you know, making sure you're getting some broccoli in there (laughs) and drinking some water (TGA).

TGA's reflection highlights the holistic nature of balance, emphasizing the importance of maintaining equilibrium across different domains of life. For him, prioritizing his family, community engagement, and personal interests is a necessity, and he's able to fuel more as he utilizes something like fishing as a source of tranquility and inspiration because it underscores the connection to nature and land as a culturally rooted activity.

In another Sharing Circle, when I asked about the strengths and skills others enacted during their time as a professor, MJ23 emphasized maintaining a balance as well. He shared:

And I think the ability to try as much as possible to sort of juggle things, because it's like, you know, I look at my schedule and I'm like, 'Man, how did I commit to so many different things?' You know, so, you have to sort of learn that art of managing your schedule, keep juggling a lot at one time. So, I think that's, well, it's a strength or skill set. It's something that I've kind of learned over the years how to do it in a way where I don't get too overwhelmed. But I also think that the other balance is wanting to give back to the community. So we're out there doing presentations in the community or doing screenings or doing surveys. And so, trying to balance that part of it as well. You know, a lot of that is going to the community group or speaking at a powwow or setting up a booth at a powwow or something like that. I mean, reality sets in that it's on you. You

know, like, you're doing that in your free time. So, trying to balance that part of your life with your professional life and your family life. There were times, particularly when my kids were little, I just didn't manage that well. I was missing sporting events or things at school. But I also think those are the types of things that higher education institutions need to be sensitive to, culturally, professionally, all of it (MJ23).

MJ23 further elaborates on the challenges and importance of balancing professional commitments, community involvement, and family obligations. His experience underscores the responsibilities that some Indigenous scholars and practitioners face. Further, his call for higher education institutions to prioritize resources for Indigenous scholars reiterates the necessity of equity within these academic spaces because non-Indigenous scholars probably do not have cultural obligations simultaneously like Native professionals.

Levi shared:

So, that's one thing that sustains me is the view of education. I was taught that we had educational systems before what's here now. You know, all of our ceremonies. They taught you how to be on this Earth, they taught you how to live, how to respect. And through some relationships, you were given skills on how to provide for yourself, how to find health and healing, and what to avoid. So, we already had "educational institutions" in our history. So, looking through this lens, higher ed is just an addition that has helped me in that, you know, so that I can help other students and Native students. But I think one thing that sustains me is prayer. You know, I'll tell my dad or my uncles, you know, 'Hey, this is what I wanna do,' or, 'This is what's going on,' and we'll do our own practices, you know? And it's a normal part of life. That's what we do for other things, too. But if I need the energy to do that, I say, 'Hey, I really need help here.' That

spirituality helps. And maintaining my health really helps me. I've learned how to maintain my health a while back and that just switched everything 'cause I worked for over a decade, nonstop. But focusing on my health helped me to be a better person, you know, a better husband, dad, and relative because I now had more energy for them (Levi).

Levi's perspective adds a spiritual dimension to the balanced discourse, highlighting the roles of cultural practices and holistic well-being in maintaining his steadiness. His emphasis on seeking support from family and drawing energy from spiritual traditions underscores the reality of tribal philosophies and traditions. As a result, Levi can sustain himself and serve his community further while continuing his academic and personal endeavors.

During our interview, I asked William about his thoughts on balancing his personal and professional life. He shared:

Do not ignore your family, you know, take care of your home life. Don't let that interfere because what we can do is get into that competitive spirit, that competitive environment, and that becomes the goal. So when I started teaching, I told my wife, 'I'm not gonna bring home my work. I'm not gonna do that.' And I try to do that intentionally except when grades are due on Monday and I haven't graded all those papers [laughs] I'll bring that home. But as a rule, I try not to bring work home. And it's because my home life is more important than my academic life. And, of course, I don't want to tell the dean that. But, you know, I'll tell the president that or I'll tell the provost it's more important. My home, my family is more important than my job. And I know that that's kind of challenging for young scholars, graduate students, or whoever because academia is built on being the best. When you're going for that job that you really want, your goal is to get

an interview. Your goal is to be offered the job. And the only way you can do that is to be the best. And so I don't know, that seems, you know, in the academic sense, those things are valued. How many papers you publish, how many articles you've written, how many books you've authored, and all of those are measures. But ultimately, they're not measures of your worth as a person. They're not measures of you as a good dad or a great grandpa or whatever– that kind of thing. And so that's where I hope people go and not necessarily looking at an academic career as, like, you know, because it just doesn't define you. I mean, it does but not where it's important (William White Bear).

William offers critical reflections on the competitive dynamics within academia and the importance of preserving work-life balance. His prioritization of family over professional accolades challenges Eurocentric norms within academia. As TribalCrit (2005) speaks about pulling onto our cultural traditions and knowledge, William offers insight into thinking about futurity for Indigenous scholars and what the higher education institution prioritizes.

In the fifth lesson, the Storytellers discussed what sustains them in this space. They spoke about balancing their professional and personal lives, pulling on their cultures to enact heartwork and Indigenous leadership, the importance of stepping up to opportunities that are presented and cultivating relationality and support systems to solidify their orbit. Pulling on these factors has not only helped them expand their careers and servitude to their communities but has also helped them to extend and think critically about their longevity.

Balancing Through the Seasons: A Model for Sustaining Indigenous Faculty

In my second research question, I asked, “Based on the experiences of Indigenous male faculty, what model can be developed to enhance and foster perceived personal and professional success, supporting future generations of Indigenous men in academia?” To answer this question,

I present “Balancing Through the Seasons: A Model for Sustaining Indigenous Faculty.” This model, which emerged from the insights of the Indigenous men in this study, serves as a guide for future Indigenous male faculty and a reminder for seasoned Indigenous male faculty to find and sustain themselves throughout their professional careers.

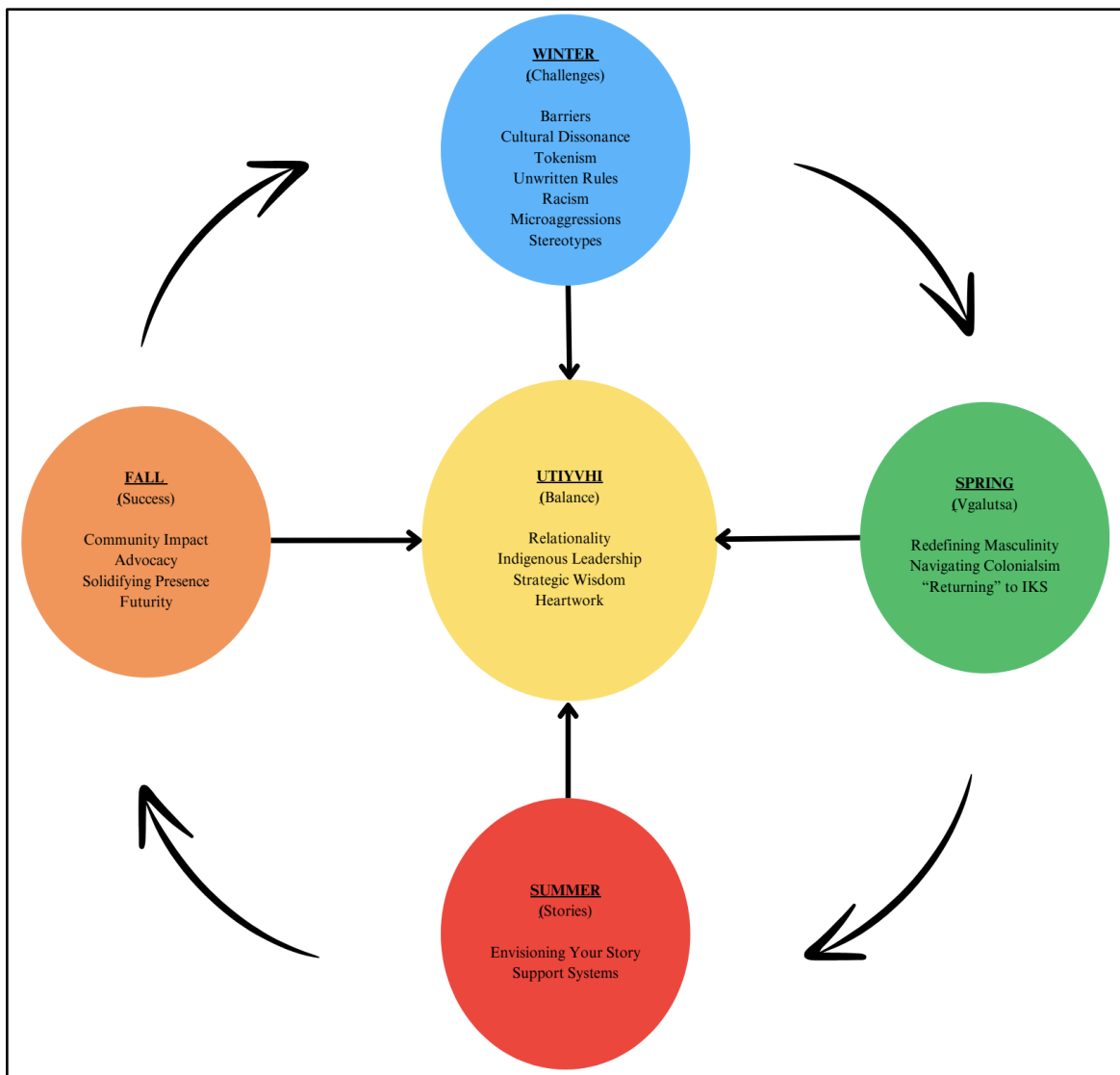


Figure 6: Balancing Through the Seasons: A Model for Sustaining Indigenous Faculty.

While existing guides and faculty models often focus on “strategies” and “optimizing” achievements, they rarely cater explicitly to Indigenous peoples, particularly Native men. I do not discount the importance of such approaches, especially for Native faculty members who

continually serve their communities. However, models like the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (Pewewardy et al., 2022) and The Modern Warrior Model (Poolaw, 2018) are among the few that exist in this regard. Therefore, this model seeks to enhance and foster the personal and professional success of Native men, serving as a valuable resource for future generations and those seeking guidance at any stage of their careers.

This model is a culmination of the experiences shared by the Native men I interviewed. It encapsulates five pivotal lessons that redefine success and challenge conventional definitions. These men have emphasized the impact and empowerment derived from their relationships cultivated throughout their higher education journey. Rooted in their experiences and insights, this model can serve as an initial guide until further refinement and expansion occur, inviting readers to contribute and shape its future.

Conceptualizing this guide within the framework of a garden, it mirrors the four seasons. Just as different crops are planted and grow according to the season and location, individuals navigate various “seasons” throughout their higher education journey. These seasons encompass the ebbs and flows, the challenges and successes, and the moments of abundance and scarcity inherent in academia. These complexities are intrinsic to the educational system and life itself. Moreover, these seasons are interwoven with the uncovered themes, each reflecting and informing the other. Allow me to elaborate further.

Utiyvi | Yellow | The Sun

In the “Sustaining Indigenous Male Faculty” theme, relationships and support systems emerge as a steadfast anchor for the Storytellers. Whether it is the encouragement from department heads, the unwavering support of family, the solidarity of the community, or the camaraderie of colleagues, these connections are paramount throughout their careers. Amidst

discussions of the Indigenous leadership they embody, the heartfelt dedication they carry, and the myriad opportunities they encounter, maintaining balance remains a constant challenge. Much like the Sun in a garden, providing essential light, warmth, and guidance for flourishing crops, these relationships can determine whether the Storytellers thrive within the landscape of higher education. For them, the ability to sustain themselves within this environment, or not, is an undeniable reality. Hence, I liken the concept of Utiyvhi, or balance, to the Sun, positioned at the model's center.

Stories | Red | Summer

In exploring the theme of “Stories from their Journeys,” I uncovered the diverse paths and support networks embraced by each Storyteller. Beyond mere trajectories, those seasoned in their fields for decades expressed a profound sense of fulfillment and agency in shaping their story's trajectory. They considered how they wished their stories to unfold, contemplating what additions or sentiments they might weave. In essence, it was a reflection on personal agency: How do you envision your story? What contributions do you aspire to make? In the garden metaphor, this phase parallels the summer – a season of growth, fruition, and introspection upon the roads traveled.

Furthermore, summer signifies a time for communal storytelling and fostering connections; it may even involve ceremonies to celebrate the richness of one's journey. For emerging faculty members, stories serve as guiding lights, prompting them to deliberate on their intended impact and influence within this new landscape. How do you wish to shape your story? What impact do you aim to leave? Reconnecting with the central concept of Utiyvhi underscores the importance of drawing upon relationships and cultivating support systems as they weave their stories. For seasoned faculty, summer becomes a moment of reflection, a pause to

contemplate the journey thus far. It is a gentle reminder that their stories are still unfolding, leaving plenty of room for further impact and contribution within these spaces. Therefore, the symbolic summer invites all to embrace their stories with intentionality and purpose, knowing that they are not finite but evolving chapters within academia's and their community's broader impact.

Success | Orange | Fall

The notion of “success” took on multifaceted dimensions as articulated by the Storytellers. Amidst the diversity of definitions, a common thread emerged: a commitment to serving their communities and leveraging their positions to effect change in their spheres of influence. While conventional markers of success within academia, such as publications, service, and teaching, undoubtedly hold weight, these Storytellers perceive success through a broader lens. They view their roles within higher education as platforms for community enrichment and cultural preservation, recognizing that success manifests in multitude forms.

Success encompasses technical aspects like securing grants or advancing through the tenure process, as well as the more personal endeavors such as community impact and cultural sustainability. These Storytellers were unwavering in their dedication to their “why” – crafting curricula rooted in community needs, advocating for policy changes, or safeguarding traditional knowledge for future generations. For them, success is intertwined with their commitment to collective well-being and cultural resilience. Thus, in the symbolic garden of academia, the season of “Success” mirrors the harvest, symbolizing the culmination of efforts and the realization of impacts. As the metaphorical Fall approaches, it signifies the end of one cycle and the preparation for the next. By embracing the concept of Utiyvhí, this season underscores the

importance of balance in defining success – a balance that encompasses both individual achievements and contributions to community vitality.

Challenges | Blue | Winter

The theme “The Challenges Endured” encapsulates the formidable obstacles the Storytellers confront throughout their academic journeys. Within higher education institutions, they encountered various barriers and adversities, reflecting the broader challenges inherent in navigating life’s complexities. This theme finds resonance in the metaphorical season of Winter, symbolizing a period characterized by hardship, resilience, and the anticipation of renewal. Much like the unpredictability of Winter’s severity, the challenges faced by Indigenous male faculty members vary in their intensity and nature. Climate change serves as a metaphor for the evolving landscape of challenges, where some may encounter harsher conditions while others navigate more manageable climates.

Nevertheless, the collective experiences shared by the Storytellers shed light on systemic barriers, cultural dissonance, and the pervasive nature of tokenism within academia. Moreover, as new challenges emerge, they contribute to a deeper understanding of the nuanced dynamics. While not all Indigenous faculty may confront identical obstacles, acknowledging and addressing these challenges remains imperative. Support systems and mentorship play a pivotal role in navigating these trials. Drawing from the wisdom of mentors who have traveled similar paths facilitates the development of strategies to effectively overcome barriers and navigate the complexities of academia.

Vgalutsa “Return” | Green | Spring

Vgalutsa, the Cherokee word for “return,” encapsulates the conversations held with the Storytellers, revealing their perceptions of “manhood” and “Indigenous masculinity.” Cultural

contexts shaped their understanding of the enduring impact of colonialism and their visions for the future of Native men. In Poolaw's (2018) model, he advocates for reclaiming Indigenous masculinity. While there is merit in reclaiming aspects of identity, I remain hesitant, especially since numerous scholars challenge the notion of a singular, universal, or even masculinity as a concept in general (Barker, 2017; Fa'avae et al., 2021; Hokowhitu, 2012).

Acknowledging the diversity among the 574 federally recognized tribes with distinct belief systems and cultures, it becomes apparent that a one-size-fits-all approach to reclaiming Indigenous masculinity does not fit. The complexity of these conversations is exemplified in contemporary spaces, as illustrated by Raymond White Horse's narrative of cultural gender roles restricting access to knowledge. While I advocate for reclaiming Indigenous philosophies, customs, and visions predating colonialism, I grapple with the complexities inherent in such a return. The realities of violence against Two-Spirit individuals and Indigenous women underscore the disconnect between ideals and lived experiences. This uncertainty challenges the notion of a straightforward return to pre-colonial norms.

By "return," I emphasize a reconnection with tribal philosophies, customs, and beliefs, recognizing their importance in shaping Indigenous cultures' relationality with land, ceremonies, people, and language (Holm, 2003). TribalCrit (2005) underscores the necessity of these components in understanding Indigenous lived experiences and envisioning futures that acknowledge individual and group differences. This theme, though not centered on masculinity per se, transcends gender to focus on the potential of returning to Indigenous values and ideologies. Spring symbolizes renewal, growth, and reawakening, mirroring the journey of reconnecting with ancestral wisdom and fostering personal and communal growth. As we plant new seeds and envision new possibilities, Utivvhi serves as a guiding principle, reminding us of

the journey taken and the importance of relationality in navigating these conversations and spaces.

Mechanisms and Theoretical Underpinnings

The model is designed to be dynamic and adaptable, reflecting the diverse experiences and challenges faced by resilient Indigenous male faculty members in higher education. As the Storytellers shared their journeys, it became evident that they journeyed through different “seasons” at various times, sometimes experiencing overlapping phases of transition. Consequently, the model remains fluid, accommodating these shifting realities.

Utiyvhi emerges as a central guiding principle within the model, offering navigation through the complexities of different seasons. Drawing from the findings of this study and existing research by Indigenous scholars, it is evident that Native individuals often encounter racism, microaggressions, and stereotypes in academic settings. While these challenges are not easily overcome, the crucial role of cultivating relationships and establishing support systems cannot be overstated. These networks provide emotional support and facilitate resource sharing and strategic planning to address systemic barriers present on college campuses.

Aligned with the principles of TribalCrit (2005), this model acknowledges the pervasive influence of racism and colonialism within higher education. It recognizes the assimilative intentions behind educational policies and institutions, understanding their implications for Indigenous faculty members. By integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and storytelling practices, the model honors and values the narratives of Native men and future educators. These knowledge systems are profoundly personal and contextual, providing a robust framework for understanding and navigating the complexities of academic life. This model is underpinned by theoretical insights and empirical evidence, offering a holistic approach to addressing the

challenges faced by Indigenous male faculty members in higher education. It validates their experiences and empowers them to navigate these spaces with resilience and cultural integrity.

Implementation of Model

For incoming Indigenous professors in higher education, this model offers a comprehensive framework for navigating the complexities of academia. By understanding the different “seasons” represented in the model, new professors can anticipate and prepare for the challenges they may encounter throughout their careers. For instance, during the initial phase of “Challenges” or “Winter,” they can reflect on their cultural identity and aspirations, grounding themselves in their Indigenous values and knowledge systems. As they progress through their careers, they can utilize the model’s emphasis on building relationships and support networks, recognizing the importance of community and mentorship in overcoming obstacles.

Moreover, for experienced professors who have been in the field for years, this model serves as a valuable reminder of the cyclical nature of academic life. By revisiting the different “seasons” depicted in the model, seasoned professors can reflect on their journeys and the challenges they have overcome. For example, during the phase of “Success,” professors can celebrate their achievements and contributions to their communities while acknowledging areas for growth and continued learning. Additionally, the model can prompt experienced professors to mentor and support younger colleagues, passing on their wisdom and insights to the next generation of Indigenous scholars.

Overall, this model has the potential to serve as a vital tool for navigating the realities of higher education, particularly for Indigenous faculty members. For instance, imagine a new professor encountering microaggressions or institutional barriers in their department. By referring to the model’s emphasis on relationships and support systems, they can seek mentors

and allies who can provide guidance and advocacy. Similarly, if a seasoned professor grapples with burnout or cultural discontinuity, they can draw upon the model's principles of balance and resilience to recenter themselves and prioritize self-care and cultural ways of knowing. In this way, the model offers practical strategies and solutions for addressing the unique challenges faced by Indigenous faculty members in academia.

Summary

In Part I and Part II of the Findings Chapters, I have delved into the narratives of the Storytellers, unveiling five pivotal themes that encapsulate their journeys. These themes illuminate their diverse paths and the myriad influences that have shaped their trajectories. Amidst challenges and sometimes unsupportive environments, they exhibit remarkable resilience, navigating obstacles with relentless perseverance. Moreover, their stories reveal their definitions of success and their aspirations for improving their communities. These narratives also offer profound insights into their perceptions of masculinity in the present and future. Even amidst evolving traditions, the essence of community remains unchangeable, underscoring enduring values and relationships. Central to their narratives is the crucial concept of balance, symbolizing their ability to harmonize various aspects of their lives while fostering meaningful relationships and support networks in the academy.

Like Squashi, the stories collected and shared embody the cyclical nature of growth – tipping, turning, expanding, and condensing – with each phase contributing to the following continuous shift. These stories serve as influential teachers, offering invaluable lessons and perspectives. Archibald (2008) reminds us that we can always return, relisten, and relearn a new lesson from the same story. The same can be said the next time we plant Squashi or any of her

sisters. The opportunity to plant the seed of a new story and to begin the cycle again is always there.

Discussion, Implications, and Future Research



Figure 7: Ahani Tlogesi Igiwisvny! (“Welcome to the Harvest!”)

Ahani Tlogesi Igiwisvny! Welcome to the Harvest! The Harvest is a time for community, celebration, and reflection. It is a moment to honor the heartwork in our intentionalities and relationalities. As I embark on this reflective journey, I am reminded of the tradition I follow after each planting cycle. I pause, sit quietly, and contemplate: What have I learned? What

lessons will guide me in the next planting season? How can I be a better relative to gadohi (soil)? These moments of meditation are essential, but for now, let us revel in the fruits of our labor, celebrating together through the trials, moments of clarity, and triumphs.

In this chapter, I see the Discussion, Implications, and Future Research as the culmination of Tso-i Anadalv. As each chapter builds upon the last, this section invites us to reflect critically on our journey. We must consider what has worked well, what insights we hope others will glean and build upon, and how we envision a brighter future for our communities. It is an opportunity to contextualize the contribution within the broader knowledge landscape and anticipate the next steps in the garden's growth. For example, exploring potential collaboration with other Indigenous communities or discussing practical strategies for implementing the research findings. Who will join in tending to the garden, enriching it with their unique perspectives and experiences? This chapter is an invitation to explore these questions and provide a potential map for the future.

Overview of the Journey

This research aimed to illuminate the significant roles of Indigenous male faculty in higher education institutions. Often, the discourse around Native men in academia frames their underrepresentation as a failure of individual ambition rather than a systemic failing, leading to the marginalization or outright disregard of those who do navigate these spaces. By focusing on these men's diverse and impactful contributions, this study sought to bridge a gap in the literature and shift the narrative from a deficit to one of strength and resilience. In this final chapter, I will restate the research questions, methodology, and summarize the findings. A discussion of previous research findings and the theoretical framework will be presented. Finally, the implications for practice and recommendations for further research will be discussed.

Restatement of Research Questions

In the evolving landscape of scholarly research, there is an understanding of the experiences of Indigenous faculty, with a particular focus on Indigenous women (Shotton, 2008; Shotton et al., 2024; Walters et al., 2019). However, the narratives and experiences of Indigenous male faculty remain underexplored, revealing a critical gap in our collective knowledge. Often, when the academic journey of Indigenous men *is* documented, it is framed through a lens of adversity, subtly suggesting that success for Native men within the educational sphere is an anomaly (Poolaw, 2018; Still, 2019). While acknowledging the systemic barriers that indeed exist, such a narrative inadvertently sidelines the significant contributions of Indigenous men who navigate and enrich higher education.

This oversight not only diminishes the diverse realities of Indigenous male faculty but also risks overshadowing their substantial contributions across various academic disciplines. Recognizing this, the study attempts to bring the stories of Indigenous male faculty to the forefront, aiming to celebrate their achievements and the unique insights they bring to higher education. In doing so, this research was guided by the following questions:

1. What can the stories of Indigenous male faculty reveal about their experiences in U.S. higher education institutions?
 - a. How do Indigenous male faculty members personally perceive and define success?
2. Based on the experiences of Indigenous male faculty, what model can be developed to enhance and foster perceived personal and professional success, thereby supporting future generations of Indigenous men who pursue careers as faculty members in higher education institutions in the U.S.?

Review of Methodology

This study embraced an Indigenous methodology, a deliberate choice underpinned by a commitment to fostering relationships, honoring the narratives shared, and acknowledging the rich tapestry of epistemologies, ontologies, axiologies, and paradigms inherent with the Storytellers, each bringing unique experiences and stories.

Such an approach is informed by seminal works in Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2020; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008) that advocate for research practices grounded in respect, reciprocity, relationships, and relationality. These practices recognize the sovereignty of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the importance of approaching research with humility and an openness to learning from the wisdom shared by Storytellers (Archibald, 2008). This study is enriched by the stories of fifteen Storytellers whose voices and experiences form the heart of this research. I organized Sharing Circles in four states to facilitate sharing their narratives, strategically grouping the Storytellers based on the study's criteria and their geographical convenience. These circles, inspired by the work of Tachine et al. (2017), served as an initial platform for my co-collaborators to share their experiences and reflections, highlighting diverse topics from overcoming barriers to defining success through community impact and sustaining themselves through navigating higher education.

Following these collective gatherings, I conducted individual follow-up interviews via Zoom. This second engagement phase was designed to delve deeper into the stories initially shared in the Sharing Circles. It also provided an opportunity to expand upon insights, seek clarifications, and further explore themes that emerged during our initial meetings and subsequent reflections on the transcriptions. This approach allowed me to weave together the Storytellers' narratives with the study's theoretical framework, fostering a deeper understanding

of their experiences. The crafting of these follow-up questions was guided by a dual aim: to engage with the theoretical underpinnings of TribalCrit (2005) and to navigate the Storytellers' narratives critically. For example, how TribalCrit (2005) illuminates the systemic challenges faced by Indigenous male faculty in higher education.

All interviews – whether audio or video – were recorded and transcribed. The initial analysis began only after obtaining the explicit approval of each Storyteller, ensuring respect, relevance, and reciprocity, and the relationship was honored. The selection of Storytellers in this study was guided by criterion sampling, ensuring that each co-collaborator met a specific set of requirements. These criteria included self-identification as Indigenous and male, current employment in a faculty position, a doctorate from a U.S. higher education institution, willingness to engage in a Sharing Circle, and agreement to participate in a one-on-one interview. The structured Sharing Circles were designed to last 90 to 120 minutes, providing a rich, communal space for storytelling and sharing. Follow-up interviews were conducted to explore further and clarify the narratives shared in the circles, lasting between 45 to 75 minutes and allowing each Storyteller to expand upon their journey and insights.

I adopted Kovach's (2020) comprehensive six-step model to analyze the stories collected. The process begins with familiarizing oneself with critical Indigenous theoretical perspectives. The following steps involve identifying the narratives and experiences shared during the initial engagement (first-level analysis), establishing connections between these narratives (relational analysis), and grounding the analysis in Indigenous theory. This approach weaves Indigenous theoretical frameworks throughout the analytical process, ensuring that the findings reflect and are relevant to Indigenous epistemologies. The final stages include deriving themes from the data

and acknowledging ‘coyote codes’ – outlier findings that, while not fitting neatly into the main themes, provide unique and insightful perspectives.

To uphold the study’s trustworthiness, several rigorous methods were employed: member checking allowed Storytellers to verify the accuracy and resonance of the findings with their experiences; memoing enabled me to critically examine my own biases and assumptions throughout the research process; and triangulation ensured that the findings were well-supported by multiple data sources, enhancing the validity and depth of the research.

Review of the Findings

This study unveiled five critical themes, presented as lessons to underscore the rich educational insights garnered from the stories shared. Following Archibald’s (2008) notion, each retelling or rereading of a story offers new lessons and deepens understanding, aligning with this research’s intention to illuminate more than data – it honors Native men’s experiences.

The initial theme explored the influences that shaped the Storytellers’ educational journeys, highlighting their diverse backgrounds before academia. Mentors, family, and community figures played crucial roles, as seen in Seysay R.’s reflection on his mother’s dedication to teaching, which profoundly shaped his academic values. Similarly, TGA’s narrative revealed how his mom’s transformative actions influenced his family’s trajectory and instilled a deep sense of duty. These stories reflect non-linear paths filled with personal and community commitments, emphasizing the need to consider broader contributions outside traditional academic settings.

Storytellers discussed systemic barriers, cultural dissonance, and tokenism, revealing a profound mismatch between academic priorities and community values. Dr. Fox and MJ23, for example, discussed the detrimental impact of state ban initiatives on their ability to support

Native students, illustrating how policies can impede effective community engagement. This theme highlights the complexities of navigating academia while maintaining cultural integrity, with stories like Levi's showing the challenges of academic culture expected others to navigate unwritten rules through "osmosis" and the alienation it can cause.

Success for the Storytellers extends beyond traditional academic metrics, embracing community impact, visionary leadership, and significant presence. Henderson's story of utilizing his role for environmental justice highlights a broader definition of success, including meaningful community engagement. Similarly, Seysay R. emphasizes success as maintaining relationality and fulfilling communal responsibilities, showing how these Storytellers' definitions of success are deeply intertwined with community well-being and cultural continuity.

Discussions around masculinity revealed how cultural responsibilities and relationality shape male identity in contemporary Indigenous contexts. The impact of colonialism on these roles and the importance of returning to traditional teachings were significant topics. Storytellers like William and Levi discussed how colonialism reshaped traditional roles while emphasizing the need to learn from ancestral practices to mitigate these impacts, supporting a redefinition of masculinity that honors historical and cultural complexities.

The final theme focuses on the practices that sustain Indigenous men in academia, such as relationality, support systems, and the practice of utiyvhi (balance). AB highlighted the importance of mentorship and community connections, discussing the transformative impact of having a mentor. Furthermore, the role of Indigenous leadership and heartwork in maintaining cultural integrity and well-being within the academic environment was emphasized, showing how these elements are essential for navigating and thriving in higher education. All lessons were then intertwined into the Navigating the Seasons: Sustaining Indigenous Faculty Model.

These themes provide a foundation for others to gain new understanding. They highlight the paths taken, the challenges endured, the redefining of success, views on masculinity, and how Native men are sustaining themselves within these spaces. Overall, these themes shed light on the experiences and perspectives of Native men, offering valuable insights into their lives and the communities they belong to.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the roles, experiences, and realities of Indigenous male faculty in higher education. For example, the themes “Stories From Their Journeys” and “The Challenges Endured” echo the realities reported in the literature. In Burnam’s (2023) study, he reports about the “Pathways to University/College.” Here, he highlights the diverse routes taken by his co-collaborators, including non-traditional students, athletes, academically driven individuals, and military personnel. Similarly, in this study, the pathways and trajectories varied widely. For instance, TGA, guided by his parents’ advice, initially pursued elementary education, then joined the military, and later returned to higher education to pursue a doctorate. Likewise, James Wayne and Levi shared that they did not have clear career trajectories in mind, instead navigating their educational journeys with a focus on serving their communities.

Another prominent aspect of the first lesson was the support received by the Storytellers in this study. All fifteen Native men spoke about the mentorship, communal support, and familial support they received while pursuing their degrees. These findings align with Poolaw’s (2018) study, which discusses the reliance on support networks, including family, tribal community, peers, and mentors, providing a sense of belonging, reassurance, encouragement, and guidance. For instance, SeySay R. mentioned that having a prominent mentor was pivotal in his decision to

pursue a PhD. Similarly, Reed was motivated to pursue a PhD after seeing representation in an Indigenous male academic mentor. These examples underscore the importance of establishing mentorship ahead of a PhD program, a topic that will be further discussed in the implications section.

The Storytellers encountered various obstacles ranging from unwritten rules, racism, microaggressions, challenges in conveying their educational pursuits to their communities, and tokenism. These personal accounts align with and expand upon existing research by scholars such as Shotton (2008), Poolaw (2018), and Still (2019). Shotton's (2008) work on microaggressions, stereotypes, and racism faced by Indigenous women scholars echoes the stories shared in this study. Levi explicitly noted, "Racism remains a challenge." These narratives resonate with Shotton's (2008) findings and underscore the necessity for institutional policies to evolve beyond mere diversity statements and implement substantive support mechanisms to foster an inclusive academic environment. Poolaw (2018) shares stories of his Storytellers encountering racism, microaggressions, tokenism, and stereotyping from professors and peers. Similarly, the Storytellers in this study experienced racism in comparable settings. For example, William White Bear shared how his students perceived him differently and disregarded his contributions compared to a non-Indigenous colleague. SeySay R. recounted how his intelligence was questioned during a departmental discussion, with a peer stating they "didn't know Indians were so smart." Still (2019) highlights how such generalizations lead to stereotyping, tokenism, and microaggressions by non-Native individuals.

These first two themes are supported by TribalCrit's (2005) tenets, primarily tenet six and tenet eight. Brayboy (2005) writes that stories are not separate from theory but are real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being. Given the novelty of this research and its lens, the

introduction of the Storytellers provided a way to “orient oneself and others toward the world and life” (p. 439), or, in this case, to become acquainted with the Storytellers. Brayboy (2005) further discusses how stories are valued by TribalCrit because they are the foundations on which Indigenous communities are built. Since these Storytellers were sharing some of these stories for the first time, it was important to honor their contributions and to use their narratives to transmit the culture, knowledge, and power they spoke of. Thus, the first lesson was reported in this way.

Secondly, through tenet six, Brayboy (2005) specifically addresses how governmental and educational policies are intricately linked to the problematic goal of assimilation. The second lesson highlights the cultural dissonance and clash experienced by the Storytellers (or any Indigenous person) upon entering a Historically White Institution or non-Native College or University. This issue is not new and, unfortunately, is likely to persist. Brayboy (2005) emphasizes that although policies and procedures can be updated to reflect more equitable changes, the reality remains that these institutions are built on stolen land and stem from a history rooted in Boarding Schools with the initial intent to assimilate, colonize, and “civilize” Indigenous peoples. Tenet six also speaks about the necessity of maintaining cultural integrity through identity, beliefs, and actions. Patel (2021) expands on this by explaining how institutions perpetuate their legitimacy through settler colonialism, which inherently involves an ‘erase to replace’ dynamic. In this context, Indigeneity is perpetually at odds with these institutions, and vice versa, as institutions strive to exist while diminishing Indigeneity. The second lesson underscores this unfortunate reality as reported by the Storytellers in this study. William spoke about microaggressions from peers, while Levi experienced cultural dissonance when the academy judged his worth based on productivity. Henderson shared his confusion and frustration with not knowing the “rules to the game” when he first tried to navigate graduate school. These

narratives illustrate the ongoing challenges Indigenous individuals face in navigating these environments.

The Storytellers spoke about the numerous ways they defined success. Their narratives revealed that success for Indigenous male faculty is deeply interwoven with community impact, advocacy, visioning for the future, and establishing a significant presence. This multifaceted definition of success reflects a profound departure from traditional academic metrics, emphasizing relationality and community well-being as primary indicators of achievement. These findings build upon and extend Pidgeon's (2008) inquiry into what it means to be successful in higher education from an Indigenous perspective. Pidgeon (2008) advocated for a vision where educational success is not seen as an individualistic achievement but as a community-oriented endeavor. All fifteen Storytellers in this study acknowledged the importance of traditional metrics such as publications, service, and teaching. However, these were not their primary focus. What truly felt like success to them was utilizing their positions, resources, and knowledge to advocate on behalf of the communities they served.

For example, Raymond used his expertise as a museum curator to bring collections to communities and bring communities to collections. It was vital for him that community members and elders could see baskets, textiles, and other cultural artifacts. Similarly, TGA leveraged his knowledge to provide college-accredited courses to community members on his reservation. These findings resonate with Waterman (2019) and Brayboy et al. (2012), who critique traditional success metrics like recruitment, retention, and graduation rates for not fully capturing the aspirations and needs of Indigenous peoples. Additionally, this study highlights how the Storytellers engage in community and nation-building efforts as fundamental aspects of their professional successes.

Another critical aspect of success defined by the Storytellers is the reality of presence. Presence is equated with the visibility and influence of Indigenous individuals across *all* academic and professional fields. Despite a reported decline in attendance, the number of Indigenous graduates has increased over the past 40 years, enhancing Indigenous presence in various sectors (Shotton et al., 2024). Professor Rice optimistically noted, “What is it going to look like 30 years from now? I mean, I really think we’re going to have so many of our highly educated Indians running programs, departments, and universities.” These findings underscore the ongoing need for educational policies that better support access, resources, and the unique pathways of Indigenous scholars to further increase presence in the next 40 years.

In tenet seven of TribalCrit (2005), Brayboy emphasizes the importance of tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, and traditions for the future. He reaffirms that communities serve as the foundation for everything. Specifically, he discusses how institutions often view cooperation as an inability to work alone or be self-sufficient. In contrast, for Indigenous communities, groups are a source of strength and power. During the boarding school era, individualism was prioritized and held in high regard because it demonstrated self-efficacy (Lomawaima et al., 2000). As a direct result, there is often a dichotomy between what equates to success, what is prioritized as success, and what attributes to success. TribalCrit (2005) emphasizes that communal conceptions of power and survivance, like success, are not independent but instead rely on and are tied back to communal values. The Indigenous men in this study affirm TribalCrit’s perspective on success. They highlight that western education can be utilized as a tool of empowerment and liberation for the community, as Brayboy (2005) suggests. This is reflected in the findings through Storytellers like James Wayne, who used hide to tell stories at conferences, making the point that the hide contains a literature review. This

innovative approach to scholarship underscores the communal and cultural integration of academic work. To reiterate Waterman's (2019) point, higher education institutions should expand definitions of success to incorporate community well-being. More on this is discussed in the implications section.

One surprising finding in this study was the lesson on "Conversations About Masculinity." Although my original research questions did not explicitly seek to explore masculinity, I did not want to assume all the Storytellers would engage with these concepts. Initially, I was primarily curious to hear about their broader experiences only. However, within those conversations, the Storytellers shared profound insights into how they navigate the impacts of colonialism on their identities as Indigenous men. They discussed how they construct their male identity from cultural foundations and expressed their hopes for reimagining these identities in the future, especially as more people engage with these critical topics.

Poolaw (2018), Still (2019), and Burnam (2023) affirm these findings. Each scholar emphasizes the importance of engaging with Indigenous masculinity. The Storytellers in this study echoed similar sentiments. All fifteen Storytellers highlighted the need to redefine masculinity within the broader conversation, advocating for a return to original teachings and the fulfillment of responsibilities within their tribal communities. Burnam (2023) underscores how perceptions, reminders, and responsibilities to the community helped his co-collaborators overcome challenges in higher education. Similarly, Levi, James Wayne, William, and Dr. Kyle shared that ceremonies helped them reaffirm their commitment to communal responsibilities. Still (2019) emphasizes that engaging with these conversations enables Native men to critically reflect on what it means to be an Indigenous man. The Storytellers in this research spoke about returning to traditional knowledge, acknowledging that this return will not provide all the

answers due to the pervasive impact of colonialism. However, they believe that if Native men continue to unpack and address these issues, conversations and realities can change – especially in light of the current statistics Native men face in higher education (Field, 2021).

TribalCrit (2005) does not explicitly engage with gender or Indigenous masculinities. Given that Brayboy published this framework in 2005, it does not acknowledge the diversity among Indigenous peoples regarding sexuality, gender, and more. On one hand, there could be an assumption of this diversity, especially through tenet one, where Brayboy (2005) discusses colonization as endemic, similar to Critical Race Theory’s recognition of how these issues intersect with race, class, and gender. On the other hand, prominent works on Indigenous masculinities did not emerge until authors such as Inness and Anderson (2005) and McKegney (2014) began publishing volumes unpacking these topics.

Therefore, this finding is not directly explained by the theoretical framework. However, Brayboy (2005) reiterates that stories and theory are not separate. If I were to theorize this finding within a tenet, I would imagine tenet seven could help with understanding it. This is because Two-Spirit individuals, Indigenous women, and Indigenous men are not separate from tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and more. Colonization is endemic and has affected the treatment of all our relatives. When discussing a “return” with the Storytellers, people like William and Seysay R. emphasized embodying relationality and being good relatives. This involves understanding what it has always meant for our ancestors. While Brayboy (2005) does not explicitly make this connection, he touches upon how this tenet is intertwined with the experiences of Indigenous peoples. McKegney (2021) discusses the need to redefine masculinity, and I agree. However, a larger part of this discussion is acknowledging and unpacking the

damage that has occurred first. Tenet seven involves community, working together, learning together, re-membering, and remembering together. Perhaps that could be a start.

In the final lesson, the overarching model synthesizes all lessons to underscore their collective significance. Poolaw (2018) echoes this integrative approach in his research, particularly highlighting the essential role of support networks and the discourse on Indigenous masculinities. The Storytellers in this study consistently emphasized how pivotal these conversations are for navigating their identities and challenges. They credited their resilience and persistence to the robust support systems that underpinned their journeys. Additionally, the concept of balance emerged as a critical theme among the Storytellers. Poolaw (2018) characterizes this balance as a “Warrior Mentality” (p. 198), signifying the strength and perseverance required to maintain equilibrium amidst various pressures.

The model is primarily affirmed by tenet seven. While tenets one and six highlight the realities of higher education institutions and the experiences of most Indigenous peoples, tenet seven underscores the power of culture, teachings, knowledge, and our beginnings. At the center, Indigenous leadership, heartwork, relationality, and balance guide us. These elements of our peoplehood affirm where we have been, where we are, and where we aspire to go.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

In this section, I explore the implications of this study. While this overview is not exhaustive, it provides valuable insights into actions that higher education institutions and professionals can undertake to foster a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive environment. Such efforts benefit the broader academic community and significantly serve the interests and well-being of the Indigenous community.

Cultural Competence and Inclusivity in Policies and Practices

The persistent challenges faced by Indigenous male faculty, including systemic barriers and cultural dissonance, necessitate a critical reassessment of current institutional policies and practices. Higher education institutions must commit to fostering culturally competent environments that recognize and deeply respect Indigenous values and traditions. This commitment could manifest in several transformative actions, such as revising hiring practices, redefining evaluation criteria, and creating more accessible pathways to promotion, all of which should embrace Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies.

A profound understanding of the historical context – especially how it intersects with contemporary issues like racism, stereotyping, microaggressions, and tokenism – could significantly inform institutional policy. Indigenous scholars often bear an undue burden, feeling isolated or tokenized within academic spaces. Proactively hiring more Indigenous faculty could alleviate the pressure on existing Native faculty members by distributing responsibilities more evenly and creating a supportive, collegial environment.

For example, non-Native Colleges and Universities (NNCUs) would greatly benefit from collaborating with Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) to understand their commitment to supporting Indigenous Knowledge Systems, faculty presence, and Indigenous academic staff. Such initiatives would not only address the immediate needs of Native faculty but also enrich the institutional culture, making it a more inclusive space for learning and scholarship. This strategic shift towards inclusivity and respect for Indigenous perspectives can lead to a more vibrant academic community where Indigenous faculty and their contributions are valued and celebrated.

Redefinition of Success

The findings of this study suggest a transformative approach to success metrics within higher education, urging institutions to broaden their definitions to include community impact,

cultural continuity, and collective achievements. This shift would foster a more inclusive and equitable environment. Storytellers like TGA and Raymond White Horse exemplify this broader definition of success through their efforts to employ academic positions and resources in service of Indigenous communities, such as developing curricula tailored to Indigenous Knowledge Systems on reservations. Expanding success metrics in this way would validate and celebrate the unique contributions of Indigenous male faculty, enriching the academic community.

To achieve a holistic evaluation of faculty performance, institutions should integrate metrics that value community engagement and contributions to Indigenous Knowledge Systems alongside conventional academic standards, such as publishing achievements and grant acquisitions. Current institutional metrics often focus narrowly on teaching, publishing, and service. While these aspects are important, they do not fully capture the contributions of faculty who prioritize community well-being and cultural preservation. By adopting a more inclusive approach, higher education can better align with Indigenous perspectives on success, recognizing and valuing contributions that extend beyond the academy's walls to uplift Indigenous communities and knowledge.

This recalibration towards a more inclusive definition of success aligns with the aspirations and values of Indigenous faculty. It promises to create a more vibrant, diverse, and socially responsive academic landscape. Implementing such changes requires thoughtful consideration and action from institutional leadership, including policy adjustments and professional development opportunities that underscore the importance of community-oriented achievements. By embracing these broader definitions of success, higher education institutions can take meaningful steps toward honoring the diverse contributions of all faculty members,

thereby enhancing the richness and depth of the academic experience for students and educators alike.

Enhanced Support Systems

The study's findings highlight the crucial role of support systems, including community, family, and mentors, in promoting the success and well-being of Indigenous male faculty members in higher education institutions. Therefore, these institutions must establish comprehensive and robust support structures tailored to the unique challenges and needs of Indigenous faculty members. These enhanced support systems include but are not limited to mentorship programs, community, engagement, and support networks.

One effective way to provide support is through mentorship programs that foster meaningful relationships between Indigenous faculty members and mentors within and outside their institutions. These mentorship initiatives should offer guidance, encouragement, and advocacy, enabling professional growth and empowerment. By promoting mentorship relationships, institutions can cultivate a collaborative culture that encourages knowledge sharing and resilience, leading to higher retention and success rates of Indigenous male faculty. For example, Raymond, Z Carter, and Dr. Kyle stressed the importance of mentorship and networking opportunities in their careers inside and outside the academy.

Moreover, institutions must prioritize community engagement opportunities that strengthen the connections between Indigenous faculty members and their respective communities. By actively involving Indigenous faculty in community-oriented initiatives, institutions can honor Indigenous Knowledge Systems and cultural traditions while fostering mutual relationships that enrich both parties. These community engagement initiatives validate the cultural identities of Indigenous faculty members and contribute to the broader social impact

and relevance of higher education within Indigenous communities. For instance, Seysay R. and Professor Anderson spoke about the community they built at their institution and how having administrative support made all the difference in their academic pursuits.

Furthermore, institutions must establish robust support networks that facilitate meaningful connections, collaboration, and solidarity among Indigenous faculty members across different institutions. These networks should provide peer support, resource sharing, and advocacy efforts, mitigating feelings of isolation and promoting professional development. A national group connecting Indigenous male faculty could help engage in these realities, share advice, and build relationships.

Weaving It Together

Although the implications offer great insights, it remains that it asks for the minimum. For example, William White Bear has been consistently asking about the transformative nature of higher education since the early 1970s. Given that younger scholars like TGA and Dr. Kyle are asking similar things in today's contexts, this shows the slow-changing nature of higher education. These asks are the bare minimum for Indigenous scholars. Often, it feels as though we are asking higher education professionals and policymakers not to be racist and neglectful, to consider Indigeneity as legitimate in spaces that otherwise would never believe us (or don't), and more. For example, SeySay R. reiterated that success for him is defined by "being a good relative." Yet, this approach carries no weight within higher education institutions because it isn't a metric, measurable, or framed in any way that is useful for institutions. So, though the implications of this study suggest places for higher education institutions to start, such as revising hiring policies, and providing resources and opportunities for community building, it is still asking for the floor and not the ceiling. Change is needed.

On a broader scale, the study proposes a comprehensive reevaluation of institutional policies and practices within higher education to recognize better and honor Indigenous perspectives and contributions. This reevaluation addresses historical and contemporary challenges, particularly at the intersection of gender, race, place, and space. By dismantling colonial structures and fostering meaningful reforms, the study seeks to drive systemic change and influence a more equitable future for Native individuals within these spaces. Back to the implications, this would look like revising hiring policies to actively seek Native candidates dedicated to serving their communities, such as Buzzy or Levi's stories. It may involve institutions to broaden their definitions of success and generate metrics that value community engagement and contribution to Indigenous Knowledge Systems alongside conventional academic standards, for example, James Wayne's story and how he shared that they utilized deer hides to showcase a literature review without any word or English and utilized Indigenous storytelling. Perhaps this could serve as an example. Lastly, to the point of support systems, every single Storyteller spoke about the benefits of support systems. Though the quality of these support systems is the responsibility of Native individuals, I believe that ensuring spaces and opportunities for them to connect is not – especially if institutions do not recognize the value it can bring when we collaborate.

The study provides a powerful vision for an inclusive and supportive academic environment that honors Indigenous perspectives and contributions. Challenging the prevailing Western success metrics and advocating for systemic change pushes higher education institutions to strive for meaningful reforms that extend beyond the bare minimum. On a specific level, this study serves as a vital conversation starter. Given that no study has been conducted with Native men and their experiences, this research offers valuable insights into the experiences,

livelihoods, and realities of Indigenous male faculty. These stories not only provide technical advice but also highlight new possibilities. The hope is that this conversation starter will inspire others to build upon what has been shared and continue to advance the dialogue on creating more inclusive and equitable academic spaces.

Future Research

The study's findings suggest the need for further research and policy development. Though this research focuses on Indigenous male faculty, more research is necessary to explore the impacts, efficacy, and support of Native faculty generally. Future research could explore longitudinal impacts of supportive interventions, the impact of culturally tailor mentorship programs, or look into Native faculty across different institution types. Additionally, policymakers and educational leaders can utilize these insights to develop frameworks that support the recruitments, retention, and success of Indigenous faculty, thereby enriching the academic landscape for all members of the higher education community.

Lenses from Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians

For instance, including perspectives from overlooked groups like Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian communities could provide valuable insights into the unique experiences and cultural contexts shaping Indigenous faculty experiences in higher education. Expanding research on Indigenous masculinities, cultural dynamics, and gender dynamics would significantly enhance our understanding of how identity and cultural contexts uniquely influence the higher education experiences of individuals from specific tribal backgrounds. This broader engagement with Indigenous voices has the potential to uncover varied challenges, practical strategies for success, and essential modes of support. It opens avenues for a deeper exploration of how regional, cultural, and tribal affiliations shape the academic narratives and perceptions of

success among Indigenous male faculty. By broadening the scope of research, valuable insights could be gathered that guide the creation and implementation of curricula or programs. These initiatives could fully celebrate and integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems into the academic fabric, fostering institutional policies that acknowledge and champion community-engaged scholarship.

Explore Indigenous Definitions of Success

Though this research expands on various definitions of success, it is crucial for researchers to continue exploring how diverse Indigenous communities define success. This ongoing exploration not only deepens our understanding of the dynamic and multifaceted nature of Indigenous cultural practices and educational philosophies but also provides unique perspectives and values that shape definitions of success across different regions. Such research can significantly inform and transform educational policies and practices, making them more aware and inclusive of the needs and aspirations of Indigenous peoples. Additionally, delving into Indigenous definitions of success expands the literature, informing the creation of models, surveys, and tools that accurately reflect our perspectives. Ultimately, this work acts as an essential effort in cultural preservation and revitalization by acknowledging and honoring Indigenous Knowledge Systems. It also promotes the empowerment and validation of Indigenous communities, fostering a sense of pride and identity while attuning to the empowerment and validation of, by, and for our communities.

Create a New Theoretical Framework

Though TribalCrit (2005) has been invaluable in providing a lens for this research, it is crucial to consider developing or implementing a new theoretical framework. Specifically, exploring the ongoing conversations around Indigenous masculinities could offer fresh

perspectives and insights. Indigenous masculinities encompass diverse and evolving understandings of gender roles, identity, and cultural practices within Indigenous communities. By focusing on these conversations, researchers can uncover rich, nuanced perspectives that have previously been underexplored.

As this area of research expands, it will naturally contribute to the emergence of new theoretical frameworks. These frameworks will not only deepen our understanding of Indigenous masculinities but also enhance our comprehension of broader Indigenous experiences and identities. The insights gained from this research could challenge existing paradigms and introduce innovative concepts that better reflect the lived realities of Indigenous peoples.

Additionally, a strength of TribalCrit is its relatability across Tribal Nations while acknowledging the variations among our distinct peoplehoods. As Tom Holm (2003) reminds us, while we may share similarities, each nation has its own unique histories, ceremonies, languages, and sacred places. Brayboy's (2005) framework is effective because it captures this broadness, addressing both our commonalities and differences. Similarly, researching a new theoretical framework focused on Indigenous masculinities could achieve the same balance, providing a nuanced understanding that honors both shared experiences and unique cultural identities.

Tribal Colleges and Universities

When examining topics such as the challenges endured, the definitions of success, and conversations about masculinity, conducting more research specifically with Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) would be highly beneficial. TCUs, being rooted in Indigenous communities, offer unique perspectives and insights that are often distinct from those of faculty at non-TCU institutions. The close relationship between TCUs and their communities enables a more authentic and nuanced understanding of the cultural, social, and economic factors that influence

these topics. Research within TCUs can provide deeper context and more relevant stories, highlighting the specific experiences and voices of Indigenous students, communities, and in this case, Indigenous male faculty. Additionally, by engaging with TCUs, new insights, lenses, and experiences could be uncovered from hearing Native men's stories from these campuses.

Implement New Model

Researchers could utilize my new model, which is dynamic and adaptable. Designed to evolve with ongoing research and contributions from diverse scholars and practitioners, this model's flexibility allows it to incorporate new insights and findings, ensuring it remains relevant and responsive to the needs of Indigenous communities. I encourage other educators and researchers to implement, refine, and enhance this model within their own contexts. By doing so, they contribute to its continuous development, ensuring it better serves Native men who engage with these educational and cultural spaces. Collaborative efforts to improve this model will not only enrich academic discourse but also provide more effective support and validation for the unique experiences and identities of Native men.

Summary

The Harvest serves as a reminder of the culmination of efforts, the gathering of insights, and the celebration of the rich stories of Indigenous male faculty's academic experiences. Through this research journey, we have unveiled stories that, like seeds, hold the potential to grow into something vast and impactful. These stories highlight the indispensable contributions of Native men, who are far more than footnotes in the reported statistics and limited literature of higher education. They are the uncles, fathers, and grandfathers whose influence extends beyond the academic realm into the heart of their communities. This study acknowledges the contributions of Indigenous male faculty and calls upon future educators and researchers to sow

new seeds – by actively engaging with, learning from, and honoring the truths and wisdom of Indigenous communities. The stories shared demonstrate that the richness of our communities illuminates a path filled with possibilities, strength, and empowerment.

In closing, I sincerely thank those who have shared their journeys with me. Ahani Tlogesi Igiwisvuv (Welcome to the Harvest)! It is a time to gather, celebrate, and envision a future built on the recognition and reverence of Indigenous contributions. Wado (Thank you) for your wisdom, patience, and strength.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Exemption Letter



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: November 09, 2023

IRB#: 16622

Principal Investigator: James David Wagnon

Approval Date: 11/09/2023

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: Exploring Indigenous Male Faculty Experiences

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Lara Mayeux, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix B: Recruitment – Email Script

Osiyo (Hello),

My name is James Wagnon, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Oklahoma. I am working on my dissertation study (insert IRB number) that looks at the experiences of Indigenous male faculty members. My primary aim with this project is to emphasize the strengths and successes of Native male academics, and you have been identified as a potential participant in this study.

I want to invite you to participate and share your story. Attached is a Qualtrics survey (hyperlinked) that further explains the study and has you verify that you meet the study's requirements should you be interested in participating. I will contact you as soon as possible to begin scheduling interviews.

This project will have two parts: the first is participating in a Sharing Circle in person, and the second part is an individual interview with me via Zoom. Food and refreshments will be provided at the Sharing Circles. The date and time of the Sharing Circles will be decided upon the availability of the group. Additionally, you will be compensated \$75 for your time.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please email me at james.david@ou.edu or text or call me at 918-348-9803.

Criteria for participation are:

1. Self-identify as Indigenous.
2. Self-identify as male.
3. Currently hold a faculty position.
4. Possess a doctorate from a U.S. higher education institution.
5. Be willing to participate in a Sharing Circle.
6. Agree to engage in a one-on-one interview via Zoom.

Wado (Thank you),

-- James D. Wagnon, M.S. (Cherokee)

Doctoral Candidate, Adult & Higher Education

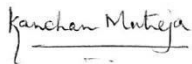
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, University of Oklahoma

Appendix C: Transcriber Agreement

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Exploring Indigenous Male Faculty Experiences [IRB# 16622]

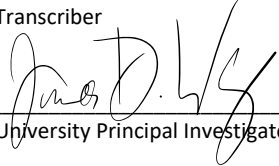
- A. I, the principal investigator named below, represent that:
1. I have received IRB approval for the study named above.
 2. I will not provide any Protected Health Information to be transcribed.
- B. I, the transcriber named below, agree to transcribe data for this study for the principal investigator signing below. In this capacity, I agree that I will:
1. Keep all research information shared with me confidential and will not discuss or share the information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) ("Research Information") with anyone other than , the principal investigator;
 2. Keep all Research Information secure while it is in my possession. This includes but is not limited to:
 - using closed headphones when transcribing audio-taped interviews;
 - keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews in computer password-protected files;
 - closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
 - not taking the Research Information outside of the approved site;
 - keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet;
 - permanently deleting any digital or e-mail communication containing the Research Information and shredding any paper copies; and
 - immediately notifying the principal investigator named below in the event the Research Information has been lost, stolen, or compromised (such as by hacked or ransomed files).
 3. Return all Research Information to the principal investigator when I have completed the transcription tasks;
 4. Erase or destroy all Research Information that is not returnable to the principal investigator (e.g., information stored on a computer hard drive) upon completion of the transcription tasks.



Signature of Transcriber

11/10/2023

Date


Signature of University Principal Investigator

11/09/23
Date

Copy to be Maintained for 6 Years

Appendix D: Signed Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research University of Oklahoma

You are invited to share your story as an Indigenous male faculty member. This study looks into your experiences, successes, potential barriers, and more.

If you agree to participate, you will partake in a Sharing Circle. It will take approximately 60 minutes to 90 minutes. Please note that this interview will be audio recorded. Once transcribed, I will share your contributions with you for your review and approval.

You may experience these risks by participating in this research:

Participation in a group discussion includes the risk that other Sharing Circle participants may share your statements with people who were not involved in the discussion. To minimize the risk of identifying you and your comments, we will remind everyone that what is said here is confidential and should not be shared with anyone else.

There is a risk of accidental data release if I collect your data using audio recordings. If this occurred, your identity and the statements you made could become known to people who are not on the research team. To minimize this risk, I will transfer data to, and store your data on, a secure platform approved by the University's Information Technology Office. Additionally, after this interview is transcribed, all audio recordings will be destroyed. Pseudonyms will be utilized too.

You will be asked to provide demographic information that describes you. I may also gather information about your geographic location in this research. Different combinations of personal and geographic information may make it possible for your identity to be guessed by someone who was given or gained access to our research records. To minimize the risk of deductive re-identification, I will not combine identifying variables nor analyze and report results for small groups of people with specific demographic characteristics.

There are no benefits for participating in this research.

Upon completing this Sharing Circle, you will receive a \$50 Visa Gift Card.

Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be confidential.

I might share your de-identified data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional permission from you.

Lastly, because your story forms a segment of my dissertation, your de-identified data will be made available on platforms like ShareOK.org, an institutional repository that serves as a home for digital theses, dissertations, faculty publications, and more. Thus, your contribution will be made publicly available for anyone interested in reading about your experience or using

the insights and data we uncover (e.g., de-identified transcripts, your pseudonym, quotes, and themes uncovered from the research).

I will be asking some questions to find out how you want me to report your ideas. You can refuse any that you do not like without any penalty.

Do you agree to be quoted directly, without the use of your name? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you agree to have your pseudonym reported with quoted material? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you agree for your data to be archived for scholarly and public access? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you consent to audio recording? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Even if you choose to participate now, you may stop participating at any time and for any reason.

If you have questions about this research, you can contact me, James David Wagnon Jr., at james.david@ou.edu or 918-348-9803. Additionally, you may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Natalie Youngbull, at nyoungbull@ou.edu

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu with questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or if you don't want to talk to the researcher.

You will be given a copy of this document for your records.

I agree to participate in this research.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix E: Verbal Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research University of Oklahoma

You are invited to share your experiences as an Indigenous male faculty member in this study. This study investigates your experiences, successes, potential barriers, and more.

We will complete this individual interview via Zoom. This interview can take anywhere from 45 minutes to 60 minutes. Please note that this interview will be both audio and video recorded. Once transcribed, I will share your interview with you for your review and approval.

There is a risk of accidental data release if I collect your data using audio and video recordings. If this occurred, your identity and the statements you made could become known to people who are not on the research team. To minimize this risk, I will transfer data to, and store your data on, a secure platform approved by the University's Information Technology Office. Additionally, after this interview is transcribed, all audio and video recordings will be destroyed. Pseudonyms will be utilized too.

Data are collected via an online platform (e.g., Zoom) not hosted by OU that has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. Please note no assurance can be made as to the use of the data you provide for purposes other than this research.

Upon completing this interview, you will receive a \$25 Visa Gift Card.

Please remember, your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be confidential.

I might share your de-identified data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional permission from you.

Lastly, because your story forms a segment of my dissertation, your de-identified data will be made available on platforms like ShareOK.org, an institutional repository that serves as a home for digital theses, dissertations, faculty publications, and more. Thus, your contribution will be made publicly available for anyone interested in reading about your experience or using the insights and data we uncover (e.g., de-identified transcripts, your pseudonym, quotes, and themes uncovered from the research).

I will be asking some questions to find out how you want me to report your ideas. You can refuse any that you do not like without any penalty.

Do you agree to being quoted directly, without the use of your name? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you agree to have your pseudonym reported with quoted material? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you agree for your data to be archived for scholarly and public access? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you consent to audio recording? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you consent to video recording? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Even if you choose to participate now, you may stop participating at any time and for any reason.

If you have questions about this research, you can contact me, James David Wagnon Jr, at james.david@ou.edu or 918-348-9803. Additionally, you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Natalie Youngbull, at nyoungbull@ou.edu

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu with questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant, or if you don't want to talk to the researcher.

Do you agree to participate in this research? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Finally, would you like a printed or electronic copy of the information we have just reviewed?
_____ (note response)

Date of interview: _____

Name of Interviewee: _____

Mailing or Email address for electronic consent copy: _____

Name of Researcher and Date of the Consent Process: _____

Signature of the Researcher: _____

Appendix F: Sharing Circle Interview Guide

An Opening

1. Please introduce yourself (i.e., tribal affiliation, department, where you are from, etc.).

Faculty Experiences

2. Can you describe your journey of becoming a faculty member?
3. What have been some significant opportunities or challenges that you have encountered along your professional path? How have these shaped your experience?

Defining Success

4. Can you share some examples of times when you felt particularly successful in your professional and personal life? How do you define this success?
5. How has your cultural background shaped your views on this success?
6. What are the key attributes or strategies that have aided your persistence and success in the professoriate?

Developing a Model

7. What types of support or resources have been most beneficial to you throughout your career?
 - a. Based on these supports and resources, how might they be incorporated into a holistic model for the success of Indigenous male faculty?
 - b. Reflecting upon your experience, what personal strengths or skills have you discovered or refined?

A Closing

8. Is there anything else about your experience as an Indigenous male faculty member that we haven't covered but that you think is essential to share?

Appendix G: Individual Interview Guide

Faculty Experience

1. Tell me more about what inspired or motivated you to pursue a career in academia.
2. How have the dynamics at your institution, such as policies, curriculum, and demographics, either aided or posed challenges for you as an Indigenous man?
3. How has your cultural identity influenced your experience in academia? Could you describe how it has shaped your interactions with colleagues or students?
4. Of the challenges discussed in the Sharing Circle, which resonated most with you? Could you share more about your personal experience related to those?

Success

5. How has your culture empowered you throughout your academic journey? How have you utilized it when navigating spaces in higher ed?
6. How do your Indigenous values and beliefs align with, or differ from, traditional measures of academic success, like promotion, tenure, or salary?

Model

7. Based on your experience, what best practices can you recommend for Indigenous male faculty to succeed in academia?
8. Can you provide suggestions for how higher education institutions could better support the personal and professional growth of Indigenous male faculty?

Closing

9. What message or advice would you like to pass on to the next generation of Indigenous men considering a career as a faculty member in higher education?
10. Is there anything else about your experience that we haven't covered but that you think is essential to share?