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SETTLER AGGRESSIONS: INDIGENOUS DOCTORAL STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITH SETTLER COLONIALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP & POLICY STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Dedication

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Abstract

Indigenous students pursuing doctoral education often navigate environments shaped by the historical and on-going settler colonial structure of the United States. This study aimed to examine the lived experiences of Indigenous doctoral students with microaggressions at Non-Native Colleges and Universities (NNCUs), with attention to how these incidents are shaped by underlying settler colonial dynamics. Using an Indigenous methodological approach, with Settler Colonialism and TribalCrit as guiding frameworks, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 11 Indigenous doctoral students from both public and private universities. The term "settler aggression" emerged in this study as a way to describe microaggressions rooted in settler colonialism and directed at Indigenous individuals or communities.

The findings uncovered four themes of settler aggressions: Settler Ignorance, which is categorized as a structural lack of awareness that benefits the setter; Settler Tokenization (and Indigenous Labor), which illustrates how settlers utilize Indigenous people, knowledge, culture, or spirituality to appear diverse without bringing about real change; Environmental Settler Aggressions in the Academy, which are the systemic settler aggressions embedding within academic structures; and Settler as Supreme Sovereign, which reflects how settlers assert their dominance through the centering of their own authority, knowledge, and culture while marginalizing Indigenous people. This research highlights the need for higher education institutions to move beyond symbolic gestures and implement actionable policies that support, protect, and empower Indigenous students.

Keywords: Indigenous doctoral students, Native students, Microaggressions, Settler aggressions, Doctoral education

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

My Story

"They are, more importantly, transmissions of culture upon which our survival as a people depends. When our stories die, so will we (Wilson, 1996)."

From a very young age, stories, particularly those with a paranormal twist, have been a major part in my life and shaped how I saw the world. Growing up I would beg my Grandma Elise to tell me ghost stories. She would always concede saying, "But you won't be able to sleep tonight." Of course, she was right, but that never stopped her from talking to me about all things that I deemed spooky. In the western world, the stories she told me would have been written off as fake or tall tales–dismissed as a storyteller's fictional fantasy. But they never felt unreal. There was never a moment of doubt or second-guessing if what she was saying was true, because the stories *are* real.

My grandma was discussing the Spirit World (metaphysical) to me and the ways that it interacts with ours. She was teaching me a reverence for stories and the spiritual. Archibald discusses the spiritual as one part of holism, where it is interrelated along with the physical, intellectual, and emotional realms to "form a whole healthy person" (2008, p. 11). Her storytelling became a basis of how I saw the spiritual and the rest of the world. Her own life story also greatly impacted my own.

Like many of our relatives, my grandma was sent to boarding school. She ran away from Chilocco Indian School when she was 16 in the early 1940's and came back to Briggs, a small Cherokee community just outside of Tahlequah, Oklahoma. In the following years, she would raise eight sons on her family allotment. When my grandfather, Woodrow Allen, Sr., was diagnosed with severe arthritis in 1971, my grandma knew she had to get an education to help

with the household. For two nights a week, she went to night school at C.C. Victory Adult Education Center in Tahlequah (Cole, 1980).

A manpower program later hired her as a teacher's aide for the Adult Education Center. She was eventually hired full-time by the Cherokee Nation in June 1976 to be a secretary teacher's aide. During this time, she had been studying to obtain her GED and received it just six months after starting to work for the tribe (Cole, 1980). Although she came into the field of education later in life, she always encouraged her sons to pursue their own degrees. My father, her eldest son, would go on to earn his doctorate. While I come from a large family of educators, my grandma was one of my earliest teachers through her stories. Even though she has not been here to physically guide me in my journey, I know she is still with me.

Why this research?

"…this debris of historical trauma, family trauma, you know, stuff that can kill your spirit, is actually raw material to make things with and to build a bridge. You can use those materials to build a bridge over that which would destroy you" – Joy Harjo (Conan, 2012).

I am an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation and also of Kiowa and Caddo descent. I was born and raised in Cherokee County, Oklahoma–Tahlequah to be exact–which is the capital to two federally recognized Cherokee tribes, the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah Band. The lush trees that seem to encapsulate Tahlequah make my heart and soul happy and I would gladly spend all day wandering through the woods surrounding that area when I was younger. Anytime I would get bored or if I was deep in thought, I would walk through the trails the deer had made around my house. Being in nature made me feel understood in a way that few spaces did. I also felt this way when I excelled in school.

Since I was little I knew that if I did well in my classes, I would be ok. It was a way for me to fit in and belong. While I did find comfort in learning, the school environment was not

always as welcoming. When I was younger, I did not understand that certain actions from my classmates or teachers were unacceptable. I just assumed that I was too sensitive. Yet, the remarks made were related to my Indigeneity and my culture. While these incidents felt off, I dismissed them and told myself that I was thinking too hard about these interactions. As I progressed through school and entered college, I found that these uncomfortable things did not stop happening and at times were even worse.

It was not until I was in graduate school did I start to understand what these things meant. I now knew that what was occurring was a form of prejudice based on my physical features and membership in a racial/cultural group. They were called racial microaggressions–I would later learn that this term wasn't suitable to describe what was occurring to me. While I was relieved to give a name to these experiences, I was also upset to learn that it was common. I think I was so surprised, because when these incidents transpired, they weren't always overt. Sometimes I had left these situations questioning myself, because I couldn't comprehend *what* was going on. Being in community with my Indigenous peers provided good insight into just how often these instances took place. When we would meet, we would eventually end up talking about our experiences at school, with our peers, and with faculty. A lot of our stories were similar and it felt good to know that it wasn't just me–I wasn't too fragile or too sensitive. I was just existing. We all were.

But existing as an Indigenous person in a settler colonial society isn't simple. The settler project is always incomplete since Indigenous life and culture continues. In order for the project to succeed, Indigenous presence would have to be completely erased (Tuck and Yang, 2012). However, the settler structure is continuous and our existence is still a barrier to settler desires. These microaggressions manifested as a way for settlers to suppress Indigeneity, and while these

experiences did affect myself and my peers, our commonalities in this area made us closer. We finally had others to talk with when we were aggressed against. Sometimes we could laugh it off and other times we cried or even got angry. It did beg the question of how, as Indigenous students, are we supposed to be successful/happy/well-rounded when these experiences leave us feeling like we don't belong in these academic spaces?

So, I wanted to learn more about the research that had been done in this area. As I was searching academic databases to find qualitative information over the microaggressive experiences Indigenous students face, I realized that there were few studies on the subject (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2017; Jones & Galliher, 2015; Shotton, 2017). Not only was this frustrating, but I believe that this kind of discourse is needed in order to better serve future and current Indigenous doctoral students–and Indigenous students as a whole. What the settler colonial academy wants are stories of "pain and humiliation" for profit or some sort of benefit, hardly our own (Tuck & Yang, 2014). As Indigenous students, we sell the academy these stories for scholarships and other accolades, but to what point? The things that we experience in school can be more than just proclaimed trauma. I believe it can be reclaimed. Our stories can help us navigate these systems that strive to oppress.

Explanation of Terms

Indigenous, Native American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native: These terms are used interchangeably throughout this paper to describe the original inhabitants of what is now known as the continental United States.

Non-Native Colleges and Universities: The term Non-Native Colleges and Universities (NNCUs) refers to institutions that are "predominantly White institutions (PWIs) or mainstream institutions. The use of the term NNCU is a conscious effort to center our experience as Native people" (Shotton, Lowe, and Waterman, 2013, p. 4).

Racial Microaggression: This term is defined as a short, common interaction that is a "verbal, behavioral, or environmental" (intentional or unintentional) slight towards people of color, which communicates "hostile, derogatory, or negative racial" affronts (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271).

Settler Colonialism: This term is used to describe the type of colonization that takes place in North America. Settler colonialism is a structure and not an event; it is a continuous process where settlers who come to stay repeat colonizing practices (Wolfe, 2006). The settlers turn people, land, and knowledge into their property. The settler's goal is to collect more land and property and to defend what they have already collected (Patel, 2016). In order to take the land they must "destroy or assimilate the Native in order to disappear them from the land" (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 9).

Settler Aggression: The term settler aggression is used to describe the type of microaggressions that occur to Indigenous peoples, because of the liminal space that they inhabit. These are microaggressions guided by settler colonialism that are targeted at an Indigenous person or population.

Statement of Problem

To investigate these experiences, I conducted a pilot study of Indigenous doctoral student experiences with microaggressions. I wanted to get a feel for how prevalent these incidents were and what stories came from the doctoral students (storytellers) interviewed. Below is an excerpt from that trial study where the storyteller, Michelle, had just been expressing her enjoyment of a course she was taking to her classmates. It was taught by a woman of color, and it was coming from a perspective that she could relate to. Her peers felt differently and told her so. *"That's because you're not white. You wouldn't understand..." Michelle sat stunned and upset by her classmate's response (Allen, 2019). Although she did not say "...what it's like to be excluded" it hung in the air as if she did. Michelle was used to being one of the few people of color, and usually the only Native student, in her classes–exclusion was something she was very familiar with. Yet, she was being told that she could not possibly understand how her white peers feel when confronted with a worldview that conflicts with their own.*

Michelle's experience is not uncommon (Jones and Galliher, 2015) and incidents like this are just one of the many barriers that Native students face in their higher educational journeys (Huffman, 1991; Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012). It is important to note that Michelle is not an inexperienced undergraduate, she is a doctoral student already several years into her program. Although this status comes with privilege, it did not prevent this encounter. Sue et al. (2007) termed this type of conflict a racial microaggression, which they defined as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (2007, p. 271). So, this seemingly small, negative interaction, while unintentional, centered around her Indigeneity and fit the description of a racial

microaggression. While Sue et al. (2007) model interprets these as racial microaggressions, it is not best suited for those who are Indigenous, since it does not fully capture their racial and political identities.

Indigenous people occupy the unique space of being both a racial minority group and a political group, since they are citizens of Tribal Nations, what Brayboy (2005) refers to as liminal space. Labeling Indigenous experiences such as Michelle's as only a racial microaggressive event does not accurately capture this liminal space because it does not take her Tribal citizenship into account. If we look at Michelle's encounter through a settler colonial theoretical lens, developed by Indigenous Studies scholars as a method to examine how colonization has impacted Indigenous peoples, it allows for this relationship to be considered. Investigating these microaggressive encounters through a settler colonial lens is helpful, since it affirms anti-Black racism along with Indigenous erasure and the need for settlers to produce more property (Patel, 2022).

Kauanui notes that there should be "meaningful engagement with the indigenous" (2016, p. 1) when we engage with the settler colonial paradigm. In the settler colonial structure, people, land, and knowledge are the property of the settler, thus the settler becomes the authority on who and what is Indigenous. It is the settlers' aim to gather more land and resources, and to protect what they already have collected (Patel, 2016). In order to do this, those Indigenous to the land must be removed through genocide, assimilation, or erasure (Wolfe, 2006). To avoid this erasure or "elimination of the native *as native*" (Kauanui, 2016, p. 1) when using settler colonialism as a framework, it is necessary to use an Indigenous framework in collaboration.

Brayboy (2005) introduced Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) as a way to explore the lived experiences of Tribal people. The aim of TribalCrit is to "expose the inconsistencies in

structural systems and institutions—like colleges and universities—and make the situation better for Indigenous students" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 441). It would be highly beneficial to employ both settler colonialism and TribalCrit as frameworks while simultaneously expanding Sue et al.'s (2007) model of racial microaggressions, to not only encapsulate this phenomenon, but to better serve Indigenous students in higher education. Chester Peirce first coined the word, microaggression in 1970 and, although it was used in a Black and white binary, he argued that these "micro-offenses" have physical implications, such as early death (Pierce, 1970).

Research on microaggressions in higher education has largely focused on American Black, Latinx, and Asian students. Native Americans are often left out of conversations of racism in the academy due to their limited presence in higher education (Shotton, 2017). When Indigenous students are included in these conversations, they fail to address our relations to Tribal Nations. Although some studies have explored microaggressions in relation to Native Americans and Indigenous people in general (Hill, Kim, & Williams, 2010; Jones & Galliher, 2015), few look at this area within the context of higher education (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2017; Shotton, 2017). To date, only one study has been conducted to investigate Native graduate student perceptions of and experiences with settler colonialism (Masta, 2019), and none currently look at these microaggressive exchanges through a settler colonial lens in the context of higher education specifically.

Graduate education for Indigenous students is particularly significant since it aids Tribal Nation Building. Brayboy et al. defined Tribal Nation Building as the "political, legal, spiritual, educational, and economic processes through which Indigenous peoples engage in order to build local capacity to address their educational, health, legal, economic, nutritional, relational, and spatial needs" (2014, p. 578). They also contend that graduate programs at Non-Native Colleges

and Universities (NNCUs) are not only spaces for nation building, but for self-determination through self-education as well. This accentuates the significance of Native people returning to their communities to improve the lives of their own people, and in turn continuing this process (Brayboy et al., 2014)

However, this progress in Tribal Nation Building is impeded by NNCUs and the experiences Indigenous students have while trying to get their degrees. Wilder (2013) states that "the fate of the American college had been intertwined from its beginning with the social project of dispossessing Indian people" (p. 150). Academic institutions ensure and reproduce settler colonialism, since these institutions reflect society (Patel, 2022). "Every single social and political space of the United States has been deeply shaped by the history and structure of empire and colonialism and, in turn, feeds back into these structures" (Patel, 2022, p. 41). The academy needs to disappear or assimilate Indigenous students in order to continue the settler project. From the Indigenous land that it is built upon to the western curricula that is taught in the classrooms, the university upholds settler colonialism (la paperson, 2017; Patel, 2022; Wilder, 2013).

In her article addressing the microaggressions that Native women in doctoral programs experience, Shotton states that "we must seek a deeper understanding of the experiences of Native students in doctoral education," since these incidents are not uncommon (2017, p.51). Looking through a settler colonial framework as well as a Tribal Critical framework at these stories allows us to gain a deeper understanding of these incidents on a structural level, letting us know just exactly *what* is happening. With this knowledge, we can begin to investigate and critique the settler colonial system and the aggressions that take place with these Indigenous doctoral students in higher education. By considering how settler colonialism influences the

aggressions in the stories collected, we can better serve and understand Indigenous students and Indigenous people as a whole.

There is a lack of research on Indigenous students in general, and even less on Indigenous graduate students (Brayboy et al., 2015); since these individuals come back to their communities and help strengthen their Tribal Nations, it is beneficial to investigate the circumstances that make their educational journeys more difficult. When we pinpoint a problem and name it, we can begin to address the conditions that created it. It is then imperative to examine how Native American doctoral students experience these microaggressions at the highest levels of the academy and how these interactions are influenced by settler colonialism at NNCUs.

Native Graduate Education

While Indigenous people have made strides in education, information and research over Indigenous graduate students is limited. This makes it difficult to give a complete history over Native American post baccalaureate attainment, but there are a number of statistics that help shed some light on this population. Further information on this group of students will be provided in the literature review. For the 2020-2021 school year, the number of master's degrees conferred to Native Americans was around 3,500, while doctoral degrees received were 640 (NCES, 2022). Due to the way racial and ethnic data is collected, reported, and processed by the U.S. Department of Education, these numbers may actually be up to 33% higher (Burnette, Younker, & Wick, 2020). Students can now self-identify as more than one race, and when they do, they are not reported as American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN) in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), leading to erasure in the statistics (Burnette, Younker, & Wick, 2020).

Indigenous doctoral students average around 36.6 years of age, the highest among doctoral recipients (Brayboy et al., 2014). They tend to choose fields of study that are more service-oriented, supporting research that states that Natives go to school to return to their communities to give back (Brayboy et al., 2012). Typically, these students are financially supported through grants/fellowships, graduate assistantships, or personal funds. They also take around 9.9 years to complete their degrees, yet this is due to many reasons such as "access to academic, financial, and personal support" (Brayboy et al., 2012, p.75).

Native students not only have a unique and often tumultuous relationship with education, but they also come with values/beliefs/worldviews that are in stark contrast to the highly westernized university. The research on the experiences of Native American graduate students uncovers the barriers faced and the ways they have persevered through these obstacles. A number of scholars have moved this area forward, whether that be through published articles or in the form of doctoral dissertations. Research on Native American graduate students focuses on how Native graduate students experience higher education (Alejandro, Fong, and De La Rosa, 2020; Dickerson, Neary, Hyche-Johnson, 2000; Keene, Tachine, and Nelson, 2017; McCaffery, 2012; Poolaw, 2018; Shotton, 2008), how they persist in higher education (Bird, 2017; HeavyRunner-Rioux, 2017; Shade, 2019), and the ways that institutions of higher education can better support Native students while at the academy (Goforth et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2017).

When looking at doctoral education specifically, though, the research and information is even more sparse. Research on Indigenous doctoral student experiences indicates that there are some impediments that students face while in their programs (although, they persist despite these deterrents). In Fox's study over Native women who obtained their doctoral degrees, the majority of participants stated that their time pursuing the degree was "challenging, demanding, or

difficult" due to personal circumstances, finances, cultural differences, academics, racism, and discrimination (Fox, 2013, p. 31). A common challenge found while interviewing Native American STEM doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars (Chakraverty, 2022) was impostor syndrome. Whether it was the lack of understanding of their culture from others in the academy to their family upbringing, feeling like an impostor for these students was directly related to their "minority identity" (Chakraverty, 2022). While experiences in the academy were complex for these doctoral students, it was their identity that pushed them forward. Native women who earned their doctorates in Shotton's (2018) study were motivated to complete their degrees to give back to their tribes/communities. Their degrees were a way to contribute to their Native communities and help to build strong Tribal Nations.

While these studies do indicate that Indigenous doctoral students are able to endure the difficulties found in higher education, this may not be the case for all Indigenous students. Knowing more about the challenging experiences Indigenous doctoral students encounter can prove beneficial to see how they have navigated these situations and prevailed. Their stories can not only provide a roadmap for other Indigenous students to observe and follow, but they can provide insight into how to proactively support current/future Indigenous students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences Native American doctoral students have with microaggressions at Non-Native Colleges and Universities (NNCUs) and how these incidents are influenced by the settler colonial structure. Since microaggressions are not limited to any specific area (Sue et. al., 2007), this study includes Native doctoral students from both private and public higher education institutions. At this stage in the research, these microaggressions will be called settler aggressions, since it is better suited to describe the type of

microaggressions that occur to Indigenous peoples, because of the liminal space that they inhabit as members of Tribal Nations. It is important to omit the term 'micro' in this context, as it downplays the impact of these incidents, suggesting they are minor or insignificant. In truth, these aggressions can have deep and lasting effects on those who experience them.

Research Questions

This research aims to explore these experiences by asking the following questions:

1. What are Indigenous doctoral student experiences with settler aggressions at a Non-Native College or University?
    a. What types of settler aggressions do Native doctoral students experience? In what contexts? By whom?
    b. How does settler colonialism help clarify the specific microaggressions that Indigenous doctoral students experience?

Significance of the Study

This study aims to explore the experiences (stories) that Indigenous doctoral students have with settler aggressions while in their programs. This builds upon existing research over racial microaggressions while considering the impact of settler colonialism on these particular students and their ties to their Tribal Nations. With the collection of these stories, themes for interpreting these types of aggressions will be formed to better serve Indigenous students/individuals.

Summary

Prior research has indicated that graduate education aids in Tribal Nation Building by producing leaders who reinvest in their Tribal communities. However, the higher education system, built to sustain settler colonialism, is not easily navigable for Indigenous students and

they face some difficulties while working toward their degrees. Many Indigenous students experience microaggressions that cannot accurately be described as “racial” since their Indigenous identity is social, political, and racial. Currently, there is not a model to properly identify the aggressions that Indigenous people experience while living in a settler society. Through the collection of Indigenous doctoral student stories with settler aggressions, a new model for categorizing the aggressions can be produced helping identify what these students experience.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Journal articles, books, dissertations, and various other sources were examined to gain a better understanding of the history of Indigenous student engagement in higher education, the Indigenous student experience, the doctoral student experience, and microaggressions in higher education. This section explores literature over the barriers and supports specific to Indigenous students while in college. A broad synopsis of the doctoral student experience is also provided to learn about this population. Closing the section is a review of the microaggressive experiences encountered by graduate students of color, Indigenous undergraduate students, and Indigenous graduate students.

History of Indigenous Student Engagement in Higher Education

> *"We are supposed to be more civilized and educated today. But then, weren't we, before the white man came? Maybe not in his way, but in ours, very much so" (Steiner, 1967, p. 230).*

The relationship that Native Americans have with schooling is a tumultuous one. Since Europeans arrived in North America, they made it their duty to educate those Indigenous to this continent. This "education" was used as a means of assimilating Native Americans into White society. The schooling and programs provided to Native Americans were rarely, if at all, controlled and devised by Native people (Oppelt, 1990). Indigenous people were to be civilized, to seamlessly fit into the American landscape and leave their "savage" past behind (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Those who controlled and advocated for American higher education also made schooling for Indigenous people a priority. Although the settlers' goal was never to educate Indigenous people, it was to try to gain more land. Many of the trustees or officers within the first institutions of higher education (some that are considered ivy league institutions) also had

acquired lands in the backcountry–lands where Indigenous people once resided. They seized these lands through scams, treaties, and massacres (Wilder, 2013).

In the Colonial Period, several of the nine original colleges in the United States wrote in their charters that it was their mission to help educate those Native to this land (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999). Yet, for all the proclamations and school buildings erected, they did not become beacons for Native higher education. Few Native students attended these universities, and even fewer were confirmed with their baccalaureate or graduate degrees (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999). Many that did attend became ill or returned to their people unknowledgeable about their traditional ways (Thelin, 2004). Further, the monetary funds raised by these institutions to support Native education was a guise. While embezzlement did happen, it was more like a colonial catfish where the money designated to school the Indigenous population went to building up the institution instead (Carney, 1999). After all, it is the settler's aim to collect more land and resources, but to do so, they must disappear the Native from the land (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2013).

With the Federal Era, we saw a shift from assimilation to removal with President Jackson pushing this concept forward and advocating for the forced evacuation of some of the eastern Tribal Nations to the west (Carney, 2007). Education for the Native population was not seen as much of a concern during this time. As Carney notes "…the focus of Indian education was on relatively low level agricultural, industrial, and domestic training combined with religious instruction" (1999, p. 3). Prior to the removal, some tribes, such as the Cherokee and Choctaw, had vast education systems, although they did not have any post-secondary schools. The Choctaw were planning to implement a school for higher learning, but then they were forced to move to Indian Territory (Carney, 1999). Although an occasional treaty would have educational

provisions in them with some tribes negotiating funds for higher educational purposes (Carney, 1999), it would not be until much later that Tribal Nations would have their own institutions of higher learning.

The implementation of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934 ushered in an era of self-determination for tribes; this would be followed by a number of reports and other acts centered on Tribal Nations (Carney, 1999). Some changes had already started when the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) took over several responsibilities for Native higher education in 1921, but these changes were small. In the IRA, increased funding to support Indigenous students in higher education was outlined. The BIA had also created a scholarship fund in the early 1940s, and after World War II many Native veterans used the GI Bill to attend school (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 2007). In addition, several Tribal Nations created scholarship programs to support college going efforts (Carney, 2007). However, Tribal Nations would not start to exert true educational self-determination until the 1960s.

As mentioned previously, during the Colonial and Federal Eras, few Native students completed their degrees. There was a small increase in attendance and degree confirmation during the Self-Determination Era as funding to attend college became more accessible. Despite the increased funding for school, only 66 degrees were awarded to Native students in 1961. While progress was slow, Native students continued to pursue higher education and the number of degrees granted had tripled by 1968 (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 2007). The Navajo Nation developed the Navajo Community College (now Dine´ College) in 1968 (Brown, 2003; Nichols & Kayongo-Male, 2003; Oppelt, 1990; Pavel, Ingelbret, & Banks, 2001; Rainie & Stull, 2016) and a series of acts and policies would follow in the 1970s that would continue to expand Tribal sovereignty (Brayboy et al., 2012).

In July 1970, President Nixon ended the termination policies that were established in the 1950s and stressed the need for new policy that focused on self-determination (Nixon, 1970). After much debate, congress passed The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (Indian Self-Determination Act, 1975). These new policies allowed tribes to contract services from the federal government, allowing them to exercise their sovereignty. This assumption of affairs aided with Tribal Nation Building as it delegated educational control back into the hands of Tribal Nations. Brayboy et al. (2012) contend that higher educational attainment is integral to nation building efforts. In the years that followed, many Tribal Nations expanded their resources for education and created departments to specifically focus on education and higher education. Additionally, a number of Tribal Nations would create their own institutions of higher education following the Navajo Nation's example.

These institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), have been an integral part of Tribal communities and have afforded access to higher education for community members. TCUs provide their students with unique, culturally based educational experiences where they can not only be themselves, but thrive in their academic environment as well (Delong, Monette, & Ozaki, 2016). As of today, there are 35 fully accredited TCUs in the United States (AIHEC, *Who we serve*, n.d.). These institutions serve relatively 15,000 Native American and non-Native students who are either full-time or part-time (*Tribal Colleges*, 2021). All of these institutions offer 2-year associate programs, while nineteen offer 4-year baccalaureate programs, and six offer master's programs (AIHEC, *Who we serve*, n.d.). In whole, TCUs offer over 350 programs, which include diplomas, apprenticeships, certificates, and degrees (DeLong et al., 2016). As stated, education is key in Tribal Nation Building (Brayboy et al., 2012). As tribes progress in

this area, they only strengthen their communities and people ensuring the legacies of these nations.

Indigenous Student Barriers and Supports

While higher educational degree attainment can be difficult, years of genocidal and assimilationist policies have put Indigenous students at a disadvantage. The literature on Indigenous graduate students speaks to the difficulty of the process as a whole. Researchers have indicated a number of elements that contribute to how Indigenous students experience and navigate higher education. The following themes found within research over Indigenous students in higher education include invisibility/discrimination, isolation and cultural alienation, educational barriers, financial barriers, family factors, and supports.

Barriers

Invisibility/Discrimination

The systematic genocide, erasure, and stereotyping of the Indigenous peoples in the United States has led to the lack of information, misconceptions, and discrimination experienced by this population (Belcourt-Dittloff & Stewart, 2000). Consequently, Native Americans are underrepresented in all aspects of life (Fryberg & Stephens, 2010) and there is a lack of research available on this group (Musu-Gillette et. al., 2017). In fact, Fryberg and Stephens (2010) in their article over how colorblind ideologies impact Native Americans, argue that Natives suffer from a severe form of "colorblindness" (p. 115), which leads to their invisibility in many contexts, as a result of this deficiency in representation. Native Americans experience lowered feelings of "self and community worth, fewer academic possible selves and belonging" due to this invisibility (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2014; Fryberg & Stephens, 2010, p. 118).

This invisibility is even more acute at the graduate level in higher education (Brayboy et al., 2012) and can potentially hinder a student's progress through academia. Due to this, it is easy to see how entering historically non-Native spaces, such as institutions of higher education, can lead to Native American students facing incidents of prejudice. In their study on the experiences Native American young adults have with racial microaggressions, Jones and Galliher (2015) found that these incidents are frequent, happening to 98 percent of their study participants. Further, those who "reported stronger Native identity" (Jones & Galliher, 2015, p. 7) also indicated greater distressing occurrences of microaggressions happening to them.

Isolation & Cultural Alienation

While the very nature of graduate school can be isolating, Native graduate students often face isolation as well as cultural alienation while attending school (Brayboy et al., 2015). They not only come to the university with a differing worldview, but they are often the only Native student within their programs (Fox, 2013; Poolaw, 2018; Shotton, 2008). While their worldview can cause disconnections with peers (Fox, 2013; Shotton, 2008), being the only person with a differing cultural background can further seclude Native graduate students (Bird, 2017; Fox, 2013; Poolaw, 2018; Shotton, 2008).

Educational Barriers

Currently, Native Americans have the lowest high school graduation rates in the country and around 50 percent end up with their diplomas (Brayboy et al., 2012). These students are underprepared to enter high school with reading and math test scores from 2005-2015 for Indigenous students in grades 4th and 8th virtually remaining the same (Ninneman, Deaton, and Francis-Begay, 2017). Carney (1999) indicated that a lot of Native students come from high schools that are underfunded and do not have programs or support personnel to help with the

higher education process. This makes the journey into higher education even more difficult since most Native students are the first in their family to attend college (Brayboy et al., 2015) and they do not have someone to guide them through the system. This lack of preparation and guidance leads to fewer Indigenous students entering and completing their college degrees.

When Indigenous students do enter college, they are met with certain procedures and unwritten rules of the academy, which can make it difficult to navigate if one is not socialized or acquainted with the inner workings of higher education (Brayboy et al., 2015). Researchers have found that Indigenous students often feel underprepared for graduate school, both academically and professionally. Native students also felt as if their secondary education did not adequately prepare them for graduate school (Bird, 2017).

Financial Barriers

When compared to the rest of the United States population, Native Americans are the poorest in the nation, particularly those living on reservation lands (DeVoe and Darling-Churchill, 2008). Poverty has been indicated as one of the reasons provided for the underrepresentation of this group in higher education (Guyette and Heth, 1983) as well as a reason for impacting college persistence (Brayboy et al., 2012). Many Native students rely on financial aid or other funding outside of the family to afford college (Brayboy et al., 2012). These funds do not necessarily cover the whole cost, and Native students may fear the debt that can incur from loans (Tierney, Sallee, and Venegas, 2007). Also, students often lack counselors/mentors/family who are experienced with funding resources and financial aid, so they are tasked at navigating that process on their own (Tierney et al., 2007).

Family Factors

The family support system for Indigenous students can often go beyond the nuclear and include the extended family, as well as other community members (Brayboy et al., 2012). In their study over elements that affect Native American student persistence in higher education, Guillory and Wolverton (2008) found that family was named as the main factor influencing persistence. While family was a reason for these students to continue in school, it was also listed as a barrier as well (Guillory and Wolverton, 2008). The researchers noted, "On the one hand, students persisted through college to make their families proud; on the other hand, they felt the 'pull' from their families to come home, especially in situations where family members were dependent upon them for financial and emotional support" (Guillory and Wolverton, 2008, p. 77). Often students return home to help take care of their family and temporarily stop out, only to return to college at a later time (Guillory and Wolverton, 2008).

Supports

Emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical support is imperative to a student's success while in a graduate program. Indigenous students' ties to their families and communities make an important impact on their educational journey. Indigenous students progress through their degree programs with help and guidance from their families, communities, peers, mentors, and their culture.

Family, Community, and Peers

For Indigenous students, their family and community can cause strain in their persistence through college, but they are also the reason students continue through the academic process. When Indigenous graduate students face difficulties in school, it is their family and community that provide the support they need to keep going (Fox, 2013). Even when the family does not have knowledge about the higher educational process, they are supportive, nonetheless (Poolaw,

2018). These relations are the reason that the students are pursuing their degrees (Fox, 2013). Their peers also provide encouragement during their programs. This support was found in Indigenous student groups on campus (Poolaw, 2018), online social media communities (Keene, Tachine, and Nelson, 2017), and from colleagues in their programs (Shade, 2019).

Mentors

Faculty and advisors not only provide encouragement to pursue graduate degrees but also provide insider knowledge of how to navigate graduate education. These mentors are instrumental in giving Native students the opportunity to gain access to graduate education (McCaffery, 2012). It is not uncommon for Native students to build relationships with certain faculty members who go on to be influential in their lives–these mentors encourage, provide knowledge, and have even "made" them apply to their graduate programs (McCaffery, 2012; Poolaw, 2018). These relationships are key in a student's success.

Cultural Identity

Most of these support systems have cultural ties as well (Poolaw, 2018). HeavyRunner-Rioux (2017) reported that Indigenous students kept their cultural identity close while in school. These graduate students continued to participate in Tribal activities and cultural ceremonies while in their programs, indicating that they did not have to set aside their cultural identity to progress through school (HeavyRunner-Rioux, 2017). In fact, research shows that Indigenous students that are more culturally rooted in their society had better success in school. They resisted assimilation through the mediation of their culture (Deyhle, 1995).

Doctoral Education in the United States

Although the focus of this study is on Indigenous doctoral students and their experiences in higher education, it is essential to provide general information and current literature on

doctoral education in the United States. In 1860, the first doctoral degree was instituted at Yale University in New Haven, CT. The following year, in 1861, that degree was conferred (Nettles & Millett, 2006). The latest data from the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) states that 57,596 doctoral degrees were granted in 2022, the largest increase since 1970 (Nietzel, 2025). While there is a plethora of information over the doctoral student experience, the sections below include literature on funding, socialization, doctoral completion, and overall experience. It is relevant to note that one of the largest scale studies over the doctoral student experience did not include any references to Indigenous doctoral students. "Quite simply, there were too few, despite our surveying tactics, for productive analysis" (Nettles & Millett, 2006, p. xvii).

Funding

Nettles and Millett (2006) found that around 65% of doctoral students they surveyed entered their programs with no debt from their undergraduate degree. The students financed their doctoral education through fellowships, teaching assistantships, and research assistantships (Nettles and Millett, 2006). Different types of financial support can impact completion rates and time to degree. Those with research assistantships and fellowships complete their degrees faster and have a reduced time to degree than those with tuition waivers, teaching assistantships, or are self-supporting (Ehrenberg & Marvos, 1995). However, this does not take into account the financial situation of the student prior to entering their doctoral program, since 35 percent of these students are not debt-free upon admittance (Nettles and Millett, 2006).

Socialization

Although the doctoral degree is an individual pursuit, socialization from peers, faculty, and mentors into the world of academia is key in contributing to a students' overall success and completion of their degree (Nettles and Millett, 2006). Overall department climate does impact

this success as well. Weidman and Stein's (2003) study over doctoral students in two different programs, Sociology and Educational Foundations, found that socialization of doctoral students into scholars themselves is directly related to how they perceive support from their departmental faculty when they engage in their academic pursuits. This support also went beyond interactions in class; Kim (2018) found that written and oral feedback from peers and faculty on student papers facilitated socialization as well. These communications became an "essential part of what being a scholar means" (p. 977). Further, participation in academic conferences fostered growth of students into academics in a way that encounters (formal or informal) at their home institutions did not (Kuzhabekova & Temerbayeva, 2018).

Doctoral completion

While doctoral students have shown to be high achieving individuals that have obtained several degrees, 50 percent of these students do not end up graduating (Flaherty, n.d.). Gittings, Bergman, Shuck, and Rose (2018) found many elements influence degree completion, such as age, enrollment status, employment status (full-time and changes after comprehensive exams), satisfaction with dissertation chair, and overall satisfaction with academic involvement. However, the strongest indicators of degree completion were changes in employment status after comps and satisfaction with academic involvement. Students who take on full-time employment after they complete their comps tend to spend less time on academic work, which leads to lower degree completion. Those who were very satisfied with their academic involvement were engaged in other areas of academia that took away focus from finishing their degree. Zhou and Okahana's research (2019) suggests that students with research assistantships were inclined to complete their degrees faster and at higher rates than those with teaching assistantships. So, even

academic assistantships meant to fund and socialize doctoral students can impact degree completion in some academic departments.

Microaggressions in Higher Education

Microaggressive Experiences of Graduate Students of Color

Microaggressive experiences have also been documented in other graduate student populations. These include classist, sexist, gendered, and racist microaggressions. Social Class Microaggressions (SCM) were experienced by doctoral counseling students that conveyed that these messages were often received from those in power and stemmed from a classist structure (O'Hara and Cook, 2018). The aggressors, people in positions of power in the system, often did not know the impact they were having on the students (O'Hara and Cook, 2018). Graduate women in physics and astronomy reported experiencing sexist and gender-based aggressions while in their programs (Barthelemy, McCormick, and Henderson, 2016). They felt pressured to dress more masculine in order to be taken more seriously and some experienced episodes of sexist language directed towards them (Barthelemy et al., 2016). While these microaggressions are serious, it is also key to look at microaggressions based on a student's racial background in regard to this proposed research.

Racial microaggressions experienced by graduate students of color negatively impacted their path through higher education. For example, Miles, Brockman, and Nathan-Kingery (2020) found that Black STEM engineering doctoral students encountered racial microaggressions that left them feeling isolated in their programs. These microaggressions were experienced through exclusion from peer activities, dismissal from peers, and ascription of intelligence (Miles et al., 2020). Black doctoral students and recent Black doctoral graduates were found to have more life stressors when they encountered racial microaggressions (Torres, Driscoll, and Burrow, 2010).

Lilly et al. similarly found that these microaggressions have a "significant influence on minority students' mental health: the frequency and distress evoked by microaggressions are both associated with over a two-fold increased likelihood of screening positively for depression" (2018, p. 100). These findings only further stress the need to accurately examine Native students and their experiences with microaggressions. More importantly, there is a need for an accurate model to interpret these aggressions.

Microaggressive Experiences of Indigenous Students

When Native American students attend institutions of higher education, spaces that were not designed for them to succeed, they often feel isolated and experience marginalization (Jones, Castellanos, Cole, 2002; Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988; Tachine, Cabrera, & Yellow Bird, 2017). These feelings can often be increased by the discrimination that Native students regularly face (Jones, Castellanos, Cole, 2002; Jones & Galliher, 2015; Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988; Tachine, Cabrera, & Yellow Bird, 2017; Wenzlaff & Brewer, 1996). Native students report experiencing hostile campus climates (Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988; Shotton, 2017) and when surveyed in contrast to their white peers, reported a greater belief of being targets of ethnic prejudice and discrimination (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004).

Microaggressions experienced by Native American students at NNCUs range from covert, such as peers or institutional authorities assuming Native students are less competent than their white peers (Jones & Galliher, 2015), to overt, like the questioning of one's Native identity because of the way they speak (Tachine, Cabrera, & Yellow Bird, 2017). Often Native students experience discrimination in the classes they take. Literature indicates that Native students are silenced in the classroom (Brayboy, Solyom, & Castagno, 2015), are subjected to derogatory comments in class (Wenzlaff & Brewer, 1996) and can be viewed as disruptive when

challenging the western view of classmates or professors (Shotton, 2017). These discriminatory incidents are not without consequences for Native Americans, since the connection between reported prejudice and depressive symptoms are strongly correlated (Whitbeck, McMorris, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFromboise, 2002). Thus, it is imperative to further investigate how common these aggressions occur within to the individuals who experience them.

Microaggressive Experiences of Indigenous Doctoral Students

Regarding the microaggressions that Native American graduate students face, Shotton (2017) found in her study of Native women in doctoral programs that these experiences are common. The aggressions fell into the following categories: invisibility/exclusion, ascription of intelligence, pathologizing communication styles, stereotypical romanticizing of Native people, and the supposition of the homogeneity of Native people (Shotton, 2017). While some of the doctoral students did experience overt aggressions (microassaults), the majority of these incidents fell into the categories of microinsults and/or microinvalidations. The impact of these aggressions left the students feeling like outsiders and that they did not belong (Shotton, 2017).

Similarly, one of McCaffery's (2012) major findings in her research over the experiences that Indigenous doctoral students have while in their programs was that they encounter microaggressions. The main forms of these aggressions were "stereotyping, privileging of knowledge or world views of a particular group, and questioning the validity of non-white scholars" (McCaffery, 2012, p. 85). This was an unforeseen challenge that happened during the students' programs, which was stressful to them when experienced.

Tippeconnic Fox (2013) was inspired to explore American Indian and Alaska Native women's pathways to their doctorates by a story told by another Native woman and the discrimination she faced in her doctoral program. All of the Indigenous women who participated

in her study experienced aggressions while in school, and just like the women in Shotton's (2017) research, these incidents made them feel unwelcome. Research tells us that aggressions against Native Americans are common (Jones & Galliher, 2015) and that they happen frequently at the highest levels of education (McCaffery, 2012; Shotton, 2017; Tippeconnic Fox, 2013), it would prove valuable to explore this phenomenon particularly because graduate education helps sustain Tribal Nations (Brayboy et al., 2014).

Summary

The ways that settler colonialism has negatively impacted education for Indigenous students has been plentiful. Support from their peers, mentors, family, and community helps navigate the challenges of the academy and despite the unwelcoming nature of higher education and the barriers they face, Indigenous students persist. However, they are frequently met with aggressions not only in undergrad, but at the graduate level as well. These aggressions have the potential to create real harm and deter these students from completing their degrees. This is of significance since those who obtain a graduate degree go on to become leaders within their Tribal communities aiding Tribal Nation Building. Further exploration into the aggressions that Indigenous graduate students (doctoral students) encounter can help illuminate how to proactively support Indigenous students and discern what they experience through the creation of a relevant model for settler aggressions.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

In this section, I provide an overview of my two theoretical frameworks and how they guide my perspectives in this study. I discuss the Indigenous methodology that I will be using, Indigenous Storywork, in relation to my research and research methods. My responsibility as an Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous people (storytellers) and their knowledge (stories) is explained. I also touch upon the storytellers and the reasons chosen for this study. Data collection is reviewed illuminating aspects of recruitment, consent (verbal and informed), confidentiality and anonymity, and the study's inclusion criteria. I then elaborate on the data analysis and trustworthiness of the study, concluding with how the storytellers will be gifted for their time and knowledge.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical perspectives identified and discussed in relation to examining the Indigenous graduate student experience with settler aggressions are Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and Settler colonialism. This study utilizes both perspectives in order to fully understand Indigenous student experiences. While TribalCrit does address colonization, it fails to detail the kind of colonization that occurs in the United States. This is relevant to acknowledge as settler colonialism is an ongoing current process that encourages the disappearance of the land's Indigenous peoples.

TribalCrit

Tribal Critical Race Theory, which emerges from Critical Race Theory (CRT), was developed, and is divorced, from a prior legal movement labeled Critical Legal Studies (CLS). The purpose of CLS is to examine mainstream legal philosophy and its portrayal of meritocracy

in American society. However, legal scholars of color were dissatisfied with this critique since it did not address racism. It was from this discontent that CRT arose in the mid-1970s (Brayboy, 2006; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The telling of stories is central to CRT, just as it is within Native American communities. Although CRT supplies a great foundational framework, it fails to consider the liminality of Native people's political, social, and racial identities.

Considering that this study is about the experiences of Native American doctoral students, it is essential to utilize a framework that can fully examine and illustrate issues that are unique to Native Americans (Brayboy, 2006). TribalCrit emerged due to the need for theories that consider the unique relationship between Native American tribes and the United States and their intersecting identities, which places them as both a racial and political group of people (Brayboy, 2006). The framework is developed from the "multiple, nuanced, and historically–and geographically–located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427).

Brayboy acknowledges that each Native American tribe has different epistemologies and ontologies, with inherently distinct ways of being, however, commonalities can be found. The goal of TribalCrit is to break down structural and institutional systems, such as those of colleges and universities, to then make these areas better suited for Native students. In fact, those who utilized TribalCrit "take part in the process of self-determination and in making institutions of formal education more understandable to Indigenous students and Indigenous students more understandable to the institutions" (Brayboy, 2006, p. 441). Listed below are some of the principles that allow this framework to be useful for examining Indigenous students in the context of this study.

Looking at my study through a TribalCrit framework allows me to analyze Indigenous student experiences based on the theory's nine tenets. The first, or basic tenet, that TribalCrit follows is that "colonization is endemic to society" (Brayboy, 2006, p. 429). Brayboy (2006) goes on to explain that this means that European American culture dominates society through thought, knowledge, and power structures in the United States. While colonization is acknowledged in this theory, it does not specify the kind of colonization that has taken place in the United States. We know that settlers come to make a home on the land they colonize, they never leave, and continue to repeat colonizing practices (Tuck and Yang, 2012). This means that the colonial project is always incomplete (Tuck and Yang, 2012). For this reason, I will also be using settler colonialism as a framework to guide this study and further details on this frame will be presented later.

The second tenant acknowledges that policies in the US directed toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain (Brayboy, 2006). Within institutions of higher education, white supremacy is projected through the notion that western knowledge is natural; it is the baseline for what is acceptable. For example, Brayboy (2006) explains that this is illustrated in what is considered "classic" literature by the academy (i.e. Shakespeare) and states that it is "through this naturalization that White supremacy derives its hegemonic power" (2006, p. 432).

The third tenet is key in understanding how current models of microaggressions do not fully encapsulate how Indigenous people experience them in the United States, since they focus on race-based aggressions. This tenet contends that Indigenous people inhabit a liminal space by being both members of a political as well as a racial group. The political status of Indigenous peoples is largely ignored by American society and, thus, this group is typically thought of as

only a racialized group. Brayboy states that this is "directly tied to notions of colonialism, because larger society is unaware of the multiple statuses of Indigenous peoples" (2006, p. 433).

In the fourth tenet, it is made clear that Indigenous people have the right to exert Tribal autonomy, self-determination, self-identification, and Tribal sovereignty (Brayboy, 2006). This means that Tribal Nations govern themselves and their citizens as they see fit, renouncing the ward/guardian relationship historically projected by the United States government. Brayboy (2006) indicates that when researchers understand these intricate relationships, they can better analyze what Indigenous students experience in instructional structures. Next, the fifth tenet articulates that culture, knowledge, and power are interpreted differently when explored through an Indigenous lens (Brayboy, 2006).

Tenet six acknowledges that the United States' governmental and educational policies are oriented around the goal of assimilating Indigenous peoples. Brayboy (2006) indicates that while these educational and governmental policies can expand the possibilities of self-determination and self-education for Tribal Nations, the impetus for these policies and how they are enacted is always assimilation. Research has shown that Indigenous students are more successful in school when their identity as an Indigenous person is strong (Deyhle, 1995). Accordingly, TribalCrit rejects current and former assimilationist rhetoric for Indigenous students because it demands that these students "replace this cultural knowledge with academic knowledge" (Brayboy, 2006, p. 437).

The seventh tenet underscores just how imperative it is to recognize the unique, multifaceted backgrounds of Tribal Nations and their ideas for the future. Recognition of what we as Indigenous people know about ourselves, and our culture, expands the ways that we can

investigate our experiences. Our experiences provide insight into who we are and how we see our world, and this is articulated in the next tenet. Brayboy states in the eighth tenet that "stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being" (2006, p. 430). Stories, the concepts that ground Indigenous life and explain why the way things are, tell us about ourselves and who we are in the world. The inclusion of stories as real sources of data pushes back on the settler colonialist need to value only western knowledges and ways of knowing.

The final tenet illustrates the connection between theory and practice, indicating that practitioners must go on to actively create change regarding issues that arose while researching. Brayboy states that "…Tribal Crit must be praxis at its best" (2006, p. 440), meaning that this theory should also be practiced in a substantial way. What good is research and data if it does not help the community that it is derived from? For the purposes of this study, I will be using tenets 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9 as a framework to review Indigenous doctoral student experiences.

Settler Colonialism

The field of settler colonial studies emerged from Indigenous scholars as a way to understand how Native populations experience colonialism (Kauanui, 2016). Although colonization has occurred across the world, settler colonialism differs from other forms of colonial invasion, since settlers come to make a home and stay (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The aim of ialism is to continuously try and eradicate Indigenous peoples in order to gain land and resources (la paperson, 2017). Trask indicates, "By definition, conquest is an extermination not a recognition of aboriginal peoples and their familial relationship with the earth" (1999, p. 25). While there is no facet of life that is left untouched by the settler project, it is necessary to recognize a few key concepts and themes found within this framework that would be insightful

for studying Indigenous students: (1) Settler Colonialism as a Structure; (2) Settler Colonialism as Eliminatory; and (3) Settler Colonialism as Supreme Sovereign.

Settler Colonialism as a Structure

Settler colonialism is a structure and not an event; it cannot be condensed into one single occurrence, rather it is a continuous process since settlers come to make a new home on the land, they stay, and repeat colonizing practices (Wolfe, 2006). As Native Hawaiian scholar Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua (2013) explains, settler colonialism "seeks to rid the land of collective Native presence and permanence in order to make way for and legitimize settler societies. Settler colonialisms are historically rooted, land-centered projects that are never fully complete" (p. 23). This is true within higher education, where the university follows the settler aim. It is structural, meaning that these microaggressive experiences that Indigenous students have are systemic.

Settler Colonialism as Eliminatory

Wolfe (2006) contends that settler colonialism is eliminatory, with the objective of removing the Indigenous population from the territory and replacing them with the settler. He goes on to explain how settler colonialism is not just a form of genocide. Although genocide has been a mode of elimination in this structure, it is not the only approach to disappearing the Native from the land. Racialization of Indigenous people facilitates this logic of elimination, with settler's defining who was and who was not Indigenous. Wolfe (2006) presents the "logic of elimination" in relation to settler colonialism as a means to explain the multiple ways that it eradicates those Indigenous to the land. Ultimately, this involves the elimination of "the native as *native*" [emphasis in original] (Kauanui, 2016). This begs the question, how are Indigenous students being erased by/through their experiences with microaggressions?

Settler Colonialism as Supreme Sovereign

The racialization of Indigenous peoples led to the demise of Native sovereignty (Byrd, 2011) as settler sovereignty reigned supreme (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In the settler colonial structure, people, land, and knowledge are the property of the settler, thus the settler becomes the authority on who and what is Indigenous (Masta, 2019). Settler claims of authority over "indigenous discourse made from within the settler-colonial academy necessarily participate in the continuing usurpation of indigenous space (invasion is a structure not an event)" (Wolfe, 1999, p. 3). Through settler-colonialism, Indigenous invisibility is not only intentional but necessary for settler occupation.

This framework allows me to address and answer such research questions as: How do Native American doctoral students experience microaggressions at a Non-Native College or University? How does settler colonialism help clarify these microaggressions, typically thought of as racial, experienced by Native American doctoral students? How is settler colonialism alive in these microaggressions? To break it down, the settler colonial framework recognizes that (1) settler colonialism is a structure, so I come with the knowledge this type of colonization works as a system that (2) aims to eliminate the Indigenous population through assimilation/erasure in order to (3) become the authority/supreme sovereign over this land and its resources. This framework allowed me to fully investigate microaggressive experiences that Indigenous students have and to then build an adequate model for these settler aggressions.

The reason that I used settler colonialism over other frameworks is due to the very nature of our unique political identity. This liminal space (Brayboy, 2005) that we occupy needs to be considered and failing to do so would only be extending the "logic of elimination" (Wolfe, 2006). How can we expect to look at microaggressions through a model that will only further

erase our lived experiences? How can we adequately support Native students without a way to fully investigate these microaggressions?

Examining the experiences that Native American doctoral students have with microaggressions within the context of settler colonialism is important because it leads to a better understanding of how to serve our Indigenous students. It also allows us to grasp just how insidious settler aggressions are in the academy as well. While Native American students only represent one percent of the postsecondary student population, data and research over this group is scarce (Musu-Gillette et. al., 2017). From 2014-2015, out of 178,547 doctoral degrees conferred, only 884 of those doctoral degrees, less than one percent, were awarded to Native Americans (Alaska Natives were also included within this percentage as well) (NCES, 2016, Table 324.25). It is thus beneficial to investigate the experiences of those Native students that have matriculated into terminal degree programs despite potentially hostile campus climates. This study focused on Native American doctoral students, because of their achievement in the academy and due to the fact that they will most likely go on to become leaders within their communities.

Much research has been conducted on Native American imagery and stereotypes (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2014; Fryberg & Stephens, 2015; Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015), and findings show that when such representations (images, symbols, and personalities) are present, Native Americans suffer from invisibility, a lack of belonging, and are "frozen in time" (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2014; Fryberg & Stephens, 2015; Leavitt et. al., 2015, p. 43). However, the research fails to examine these experiences within a settler colonial framework. In their study over the research conducted on the racial climates of college campuses, Harper and Hurtado (2007) stress the need to address Native American students'

experiences regarding this issue. Current literature shows that microaggressions can negatively impact Indigenous students (Greenfield et al., 2021) and that they regularly encounter such episodes (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2017; McCaffery, 2012; Shotton, 2017; Tippeconnic Fox, 2013), so it is relevant to investigate how Native doctoral students navigate through these experiences. Deeper examination in this area can provide clarity on how to help support Indigenous graduate students as they navigate through the academy. Further, this study adds to the literature addressing microaggressions and settler colonialism in higher education.

Indigenous Methodology

"And we Indians are beginning to see that the only way to change it is to destroy it. And to build something else" – Clyde Warrior (Steiner, 1968, p. 70).

The research questions for this proposed study consist of: 1. How do Native American doctoral students experience microaggressions at a Non-Native College or University, 2. How does settler colonialism help clarify these microaggressions, typically thought of as racial, experienced by Native American doctoral students, and 3. How is settler colonialism alive in these aggressions? Due to the study's nature, I chose an Indigenous methodological design to delve into the experiences Indigenous doctoral students have while in higher education.

The use of Indigenous methodologies in research is an attempt to return/restore/heal what has historically been taken/used/abused through colonization. Wilson, Breen, and Dupre´ state that "research is a practice of restoring accountability: to family, to Nations, to environment, to ideas, to ancestors, to cosmos/the universe" (2019, p. 17). This is to ensure that relations are in balance and that we act in a way that is restorative. It is a way to dissect and analyze the colonizing structures that are inherent in this settler society, making them easier to understand and dismantle. When these methods are employed, they provide the perspectives of those that are colonized, letting them define who they are (Smith, 1999). Kovach argues that "To lose control

of knowledge (and knowledge production efforts as research) is akin to having another tell one's own story. For too long, Indigenous peoples have had outsider research tell their story" (2019, p. 50).

Indigenous Storywork

With this in mind, I used Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork as a guiding methodology. Storytelling is a way to understand life and the world around us. Within Indigenous Storywork, respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy are seven principles that help make meaning "with and through stories" (Archibald, 2008, p. 140). She indicates that these principles are the beginning basis for Sto:lo and Coast Salish storywork. If Indigenous stories are to be meaningful in educational settings, these seven guiding themes must be put into practice and understood (Archibald, 2008).

The "four Rs" (4Rs), respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence are a way to work with Indigenous people and the knowledge that they carry (Archibald et al., 2022). These four principles are put into action when researchers seek knowledge from storytellers. "Showing respect through cultural protocol, appreciating the significance of and reverence for spirituality, honouring teacher and learner responsibilities, and practicing a cyclical type of reciprocity are important lessons documented here for those interested in First Nations/Indigenous methodology" (Archibald, 2008, p. x).

The principle of respect must begin with the researcher and storyteller respecting each other as human beings. This also includes being culturally worthy, for both the storyteller and the listener (researcher), and trust, since the listener must believe that the storyteller is sharing this information in a culturally appropriate way. Respect is necessary for both the storytellers and

their stories. It is the researcher's duty to make sure that they are accurately representing what the storytellers say and honoring the knowledge that is being received.

The next “R”, responsibility, touches on how to honor this knowledge. It is the responsibility of the researcher to gain understanding about the “core” of a story (Archibald & Parent, 2019). This means to learn the morals, ideologies, and “the essence of a story, which transcends time and place” (Archibald & Parent, 2019, p. 6). There is also a responsibility by the researcher to know the limits of consent to the knowledge that is shared. This will prevent the exploitation of the knowledge and permission obtained (Archibald, 2008).

The third principle of reverence is illustrated in the spiritual approach to the research, those that are working together, and the stories themselves (Archibald et al., 2022). How one enacts reverence is specific to each individual and can be subjective (Archibald & Parent, 2019). This concept and how someone practices it develops over time, learning about it gradually to take on its full meaning (Archibald & Parent, 2019). An example of it being put into practice would be to give thanks to the Creator before conducting any work, whether that be through prayer, song, or speech in order to connect mind, body, and soul with the task at hand.

When respect and responsibility are practiced in the context of storywork and towards others, the concept of reciprocity naturally emerges (Archibald, 2008). All relations are reciprocal and when storytellers share their stories, the listener should give back in some way. Stories are retold with respect to the storyteller and reverence for the story, the message or knowledge from the story can be used or passed on. Knowledge is shared. Reciprocity is how stories are sustained (Archibald & Parent, 2019).

Holism, interrelatedness, and synergy are the last three principles that make up storywork. When utilized together, they serve as actions that help construct story understandings

(Archibald & Parent, 2019). Archibald explains that "holism refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (Metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical (body and behaviour/action) realms to form a whole healthy person" (2008, p. 11). Holism is developed and influenced by a person's family, community, band, and nation (Archibald, 2008). These realms work together in order to keep balance/harmony within oneself and the surrounding world (Archibald, 2008).

An example of the principle of interrelatedness is for the listener of a story to become an active participant in the story being told or read (Archibald, 2008). There is a level of engagement that must be exercised to gain the full meaning of a story. When there is an interrelatedness between storyteller, listener, and the story it creates synergy where one can better understand the knowledge being conveyed (Archibald, 2008). When one thinks about a story or knowledge shared in the context of their own lived experiences (in relation to themselves), it helps deepen and clarify the stories that are received. Using the principles above of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy helped me make meaning with the knowledge that is shared with by these storytellers (Archibald, 2008, p. 140).

Indigenous Responsibility

> *"We come from over five hundred tribal nations, different clans, bands, towns, and even within those, different families. We cannot be complicit in the erasure of our voices from the collective story, a woven field of words, songs, stories, struggles and accomplishments of humans, plants, animals, elements, and stones" (Harjo, 2017).*

Settler colonialism demands our (Indigenous) erasure (Patel, 2022); we must be forgotten about, never heard from, never seen, never real, because it is the only way for settlers to be legitimized. It gets rid of the tension of an existing Indigenous population and what that means for the settler and their stake at land – among other possessions. Telling our stories, sharing

knowledge, is an act of resistance to the settler colonial structure (Smith, 1999). Brayboy's (2005) eighth tenet in TribalCrit contends that stories are theory, and he explains why these stories are significant:

> For some Indigenous scholars (and others), theory is not simply an abstract thought or idea that explains overarching structures of societies and communities; theories, through stories and other media, are roadmaps for our communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities (2005, p. 427).

As Indigenous people, we have responsibilities to ourselves and others, to our ancestors and to our descendants to continue existing in ways we always have. So, we must share our knowledge and stories to sustain our culture and traditions, as well as push back on colonization.

As an Indigenous researcher, I have the responsibility to address the needs of Indigenous people. This means that the research that I conducted with the Indigenous storytellers should be for the benefit of Indigenous peoples. The way that I can give back is by sharing the themes, influenced by settler colonialism, within the stories told to me. However, in order to do this, I had to ensure the well-being of those who told their stories and shared their knowledge with me. The relationship that Indigenous people have had historically with research and those that conduct research is poor and full of distrust (Smith, 1999), so safeguards, like the Institutional Review Board (IRB), have been created to protect vulnerable populations from being exploited. I submitted this study through OU's IRB process as an ethical responsibility as an Indigenous scholar and doctoral student.

Storytellers (Participants)

To obtain Indigenous student stories about settler aggressions, this study included eleven currently enrolled Indigenous doctoral students, which allowed for a diverse range of responses and enhanced the study's quality. They identified as Indigenous, were currently enrolled at a Non-Native college or University, and have already completed their first year of their doctoral program. I chose current students who have already completed a year since they will have had time to experience their programs, and their memories will be more current. These students will have also experienced the current unrest within higher education. Keeping in line with Indigenous Storywork methodology (Archibald, 2008), the Indigenous students chosen are called storytellers instead of participants to show respect for the stories that they shared.

Data Collection

For the purposes of this research, the data was collected through semi-structured interviews allowing for a conversational approach to acquire in-depth evidence about experiences with settler aggressions. Interviews were held via Zoom, conducted from the privacy of my home office. Interviews lasted between 45-120 minutes. Archibald and Parent (2019) noted that within Indigenous storywork methodology, respectful relationships cannot be achieved in this timeframe and that these relationships need to develop over time. However, I believe there was a level of familiarity between myself and the storytellers to begin with since we share many commonalities. To open the interview, I established my intentions for the research, thanked the storyteller for letting me hear their stories, and thanked the Creator for bringing us together in the space we shared. I felt it was important to start the interview in a way that centers oneself and creates the space to be available to listen.

After starting the interview with a good mindset, I spent the next 20 minutes getting to know the storyteller to establish a deeper relationship. I wanted them to feel comfortable with

me, since they were sharing difficult experiences and private information. Additionally, the storytellers had the power to create pseudonyms for themselves that I used to identify them in my research. I introduced myself, my pronouns, my Tribal affiliations, and where I came from and asked the storytellers to do so as well. In the initial recruitment correspondence with the storytellers, I asked them to bring something that produces joy for them (it could be an object, text, or even a picture). Having this beginning conversation and "show and tell" helped us both learn more about each other and form a more intimate connection.

The interviews were recorded with an application on my iPhone, as well as recorded via Zoom. I also made memos while interviewing the storytellers. This way I noted intonation, body language, or other points of interest when they were sharing their stories. Some of the questions that the storyteller were asked are (see Appendix A for full list): Can you tell me about your journey as a doctoral student? Can you tell me a story of an experience on campus where others subtly or blatantly expressed stereotypical beliefs about you as an Indigenous/Native person?

Recruitment

Criterion & purposive sampling was used in the recruitment process for this research. Potential storytellers were identified through personal, professional, and social networks. I also distributed a flyer across social media with a QR code for a questionnaire to determine eligibility for the study and find more potential storytellers. A list was created from these sources to indicate potential storytellers. I then emailed the potential storytellers to introduce myself, the purpose of my study, and to see if they were interested in participating. For the Indigenous doctoral students that responded positively, I set a time to schedule face-to-face interviews via Zoom.

Criteria

In order to qualify for this study, these Indigenous students needed to meet the following criteria:

- Be enrolled in a doctoral program in either a public or private Non-Native college/university
- Be in their second year in doctoral program or above
- Be 18 years of age or older
- Identify as Indigenous
- Agree to one-on-one interview and potential follow-up interview
- Be willing to bring something that produces joy for them (this can be an object, text, or picture)

Verbal and Informed Consent

For this study, I obtained verbal and informed consent from each storyteller. To begin, potential storytellers were emailed a Qualtrics survey to establish eligibility for the study (see Appendix B). If they met the qualifications, they were sent an informed consent to sign prior to the interview to gain permission to record and video the meetings and address future interview follow-ups. The informed consent outlined the study's objectives to make sure participants were fully aware of what they were signing on to.

Before beginning the interview, I again asked them if they reviewed the informed consent and understood their role in the study. Then, I gained verbal consent to record and/or video the interview session with the storytellers. To minimize undue influence and/or coercion during recruitment and the consent process, I informed the potential storyteller that they may remove themselves from the study at any time.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

To protect this vulnerable group, I strove to ensure their anonymity. Their names were changed and the universities or colleges that they attended were not mentioned within the research. When reviewing the research data, I only viewed it in a private location (my home or a private study room on campus). Identifiable data such as names, contact information, and demographic identifiers will not be shared at any time during or after the study. The storytellers have pseudonyms that are used in the transcripts and only I have the name key.

My computer, holding the research data, was stored in a secure location at all times, with a password needed to access the laptop materials. Further, the research files are password protected. Any hard data was stored in a locked filing cabinet at my private residence. Research data will continue to be stored for six months upon the conclusion of this study. After that time, I will delete recordings, files, and shred any related documents.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I first put the recordings through the Rev.com website to be transcribed. I then went through the recordings and listened to ensure that they were transcribed properly. After I had a good transcription of the interview, I then sent it to the storyteller for clarity. Also, in the initial interview and recruitment, I let them know that a second, shorter interview might be needed to clarify or discuss what they shared further.

Data for this study was analyzed through thematic analysis utilizing methods as outlined by Charmaz (2006), LeCompte and Preissle (1993), Saldaña (2009) and Shank (2006). I also interpreted the data through my theoretical frames. This means that while I analyzed the interviews, I also considered how settler colonialism is playing out, as well as how tenets 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9 in TribalCrit come alive in the data. The transcribed interviews were uploaded into

Dedoose, which is a "cross-platform app for analyzing qualitative and mixed methods research with text, photos, audio, videos, spreadsheet data and more" (Home, n.d,).

I then went line-by-line and coded the transcriptions to look for patterns, what Charmaz calls initial coding that "entails a close reading of the data" (2006, p. 46). I also employed descriptive coding, which "summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 70). Once the coding was complete, I drew off of Sue et al.'s model of racial microaggressions to generate themes to illustrate the essence of the storyteller's experiences.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I utilized member checks and peer review. The storytellers were asked to look over the transcript and analysis of the semi-structured interview to guarantee that this interpretation made sense and was true to their experience. I also used peer review to guarantee reliability of the work.

Compensation/Gifts

I wanted to show my appreciation for each storyteller's time and knowledge, so I provided them with a $20 gift card to Amazon. Keeping in line with Indigenous Storywork principles, and how I was raised, it is understood that you always bring something to share or give to those you visit with.

Summary

In this chapter I reviewed my methodology for my research. This included looking at my guiding theoretical frames, Settler Colonialism and TribalCrit. Indigenous Storywork, the Indigenous methodology utilized, was also examined, followed by a discussion on my responsibility as an Indigenous researcher. I then addressed my storytellers and their inclusion

criteria. I ended the chapter by outlining my data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and compensation.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

"Within the colonizing university also exists a decolonizing education. Occupying the same space and time are the colonizer's territories and institutions and colonized time, but also Indigenous land and life before and beyond occupation. Colonial schools are machines running on desires for a colonizer's future and, paradoxically desires for Indigenous futures" (la paperson, 2017, p. xiii).

For chapter 4, I offer short summaries of the storytellers to give context of who they are as students, people, and how they have experienced their Ph.D. program as a whole. I then move on to examine and discuss how they experience settler aggressions while in their programs, particularly looking at the categories of settler ignorance, settler tokenization, and settler as supreme sovereign, offering my own interpretation of how settler colonialism is enacted in these aggressions.

Storytellers

I met with each storyteller via Zoom since we all lived in different regions and could not logistically make meeting in person viable. While face-to-face communication does have its benefits, I felt at ease with this mode of connecting since the pandemic made this a primary way of communicating. Before we met, I asked my storytellers to bring with them something that brought them joy and I would bring something that is joy inducing to me, too. This allowed us to have a sort of "show-and-tell" with what we brought and be more in relation to each other. Having this beginning conversation and "show and tell" helped us learn more about each other and form a more intimate connection. They shared family photos, jewelry, beadwork, and even some work they were doing on a jingle dress. While their objects were presented, I was told stories of their families, where they came from, and who they were. It provided a deeper insight into their lives that I might not have gotten otherwise.

With respect and responsibility to my storytellers, demographic identifiers have been modified to keep anonymity, with storytellers choosing their own pseudonyms. Arizona, Matho, Rain, Linden, Barbara, Bessie, Steven, T, Dee, Lea, and Daybreak Panther (DP) represent Tribal Nations from the Plains, Southwest, Northeast, and Plateau regions of the settler United States. Many of the storytellers come from multiple Tribal Nations, racial, and cultural identities. They attend both public and private universities across the country and come from different fields of study including education, environmental science, health science, political science, and social work.

Overall Experience in PhD

My storytellers shared with me their overall experience in their Ph.D. programs and the responses varied. Not every storyteller shared their overall experience concisely, but I tried to provide an overview of how they described their doctoral journey thus far. I think it was a difficult question for some of the storytellers to fully answer, because in different ways they truly enjoyed their programs – I could tell some were conflicted when answering this question. When they spoke about their experiences in their Ph.D. journeys, they seem to speak more positively when it came to some of the support they received. They found people (mentors, peers, staff) that helped make the process more navigable for them and so they had positive experiences in that regard.

Arizona spoke about his experience noting that it had been good because he had previously made relationships at his institution; “I’m fortunate to come to a doctoral program after being at the same institution for my undergraduate education. So that’s led to lots of fruitful networks and connections.” Matho’s experience has been positive as well and he gives credit to his committee for being so encouraging and understanding. Matho expressed:

> I would say overall it would be good. And part of that would be heavily weighted by how supportive my committee has been at my usage of Indigenous Research Methodology when it comes to my research methods…Where, fortunately, one of my committee members has background knowledge, so that was super helpful. But with the others, I had to build that kind of overview of this is why I'm doing this and this is why. It just makes so much more sense for me to do it this way, especially considering that I'm Native myself. So utilizing that viewpoint for me to try to collect and share and honor these stories that I've been entrusted with. I would say because of that, when I think about the experience as a whole, I would say, good.

Rain felt similarly and spoke about the advisors she's had in her program, "Basically there's three professors who I've been working with since I started the program who are super supportive, and it's just been really valuable getting to know them and work with them." Although she felt mentored, Rain did acknowledge that her program was going through some growing pains, and she believed there were a lot of areas for improvement.

Other storytellers echoed these sentiments and were even more critical about their institutions. Linden expressed her frustrations with her institution, "My specific department has been absolutely wonderful and amazing, and I have loved it so very much…My university on the other hand is just crap. I hate it…I'm just not proud of my university." She went on to discuss how her school has a large population of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff, but it was still a toxic environment for Indigenous students. "There's no advocacy. And as a student, I feel powerless. I am a freaking Ph.D. candidate, I'm at the end of my career, and I still am struggling to navigate our processes. It's just sick."

Her frustration and anger were palpable throughout the interview. She went on to explain how the university administration does not invest in the Indigenous community on campus. At one point, the highest senior Indigenous administrator position at the university was vacant for four months and the university's Indigenous students were left in the dark about it. This was detrimental, because the person who had this role was their go-to for any problems that may arise and would help Indigenous students out. Linden explained further, "So can you imagine how many emergencies and how many students starved or went homeless for four months. And we weren't told about that. No email communication went out. We just had to figure it out ourselves."

Linden's experience standing up for herself (and other Indigenous students) was not an uncommon occurrence for the storytellers. They were constantly having to advocate for themselves while in school. Barbara touched on this when asked about her experience:

> It has been surprising but not shocking…It wasn't the first time that I was going to be part of a predominately white place, but I think it was, again surprising but not shocking. Because even though I knew that these were things that I was going to encounter in terms of challenges, whether it was with getting funding or doing research that I wanted to do, it was just kind of like I cannot believe that I still have to fight for things that I know I deserve.

Even though Barbara was immersed in her Tribal community, she grew up in a predominantly white place. While she was familiar with navigating mostly white spaces, she naturally expected it to be different at such a prestigious level in academia. This is why it was surprising but not shocking to her to have the experience she did in her program.

When speaking to me about her Ph.D. journey, T used the word "exhausting" four times. She explained that she felt this way, because on top of everything she does as a doctoral student, she has to also deal with settler aggressions, address these aggressions, and then feels tension to prove herself as an Indigenous scholar. T clarified:

> Not only prove ourselves, but also convince faculty and convince people who have the power at institutions that what we want to study, how we want to do it, is worthy of support and worthy of doing it the way we see fit. Just not even being able to trust us when they don't know the knowledge. So yeah, I think it's just very exhausting and in a lot my experiences, especially in this level of courses, which is very unfortunate.

She also spoke about how solitary the experience of getting your dissertation can be. "I think being a Ph.D. student, it's just a whole nother level of isolation…You experience it with your cohort, but because you're all doing different research, it's still a lonely experience and nobody understands unless you do it."

Lea, who's program is online, spoke about how certain factors have amplified her seclusion in her program. It made her wonder, at the end of it all, how she was going to promote higher education to Indigenous youth when her experience was disappointing:

> I alluded to it, but it's been just, I think, challenging at every step in the way and very isolating. And I think there's other faculty and academics and good support at other institutions, but where I'm at it's like they have no concept. There was one professor who I'm still in contact with and that was my first semester. He was so supportive and then he left after that term. But I think for multiple reasons, maybe part of the pandemic too, but there's just been so much turnover. So it's like I'm constantly starting new with someone and trying to explain…So it hasn't been what I hoped. I feel like it's been the opposite of

> empowering. It is hard to be in education and want that for our youth and to advocate for education that way and then get the complete opposite.

This doctoral isolation also resonated with Dee. She felt like she was generally on her own in her program. “I feel like a lot of the time I’m just left out in the wind or just left to kind of navigate it myself.” Dee attended a Tribal college for her bachelor’s degree but never felt the same level of support in her master’s and doctoral programs. “It’s way different. And so I feel like I’m just out here doing my own thing, but I don’t want to complain too much. But there’s a big difference in the education I’m receiving.”

At her Tribal college, she had a great support system that helped her become a strong, independent student. However, in her doctoral program, she states that she is “just floating” and is connecting with few people. Dee had a hard time explaining *why* she was feeling this way but noted that there was a shift on her campus. New policy changes rolled out in the years she has been attending, including the closing of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, and speculated if this was a reason for why her experiences were drastically different. “I just don’t know what it is. And it’s really hard to explain.”

Bessie, a storyteller who had been teaching for about 20 years prior to going back to school, also spoke about how she felt she was unprepared for her program. Bessie described her experience:

> It was eye opening. I don’t feel like I was prepared enough. I had no idea what a Ph.D. program was, what the expectations were or anything…I have a disability, so I knew that my writing and reading, but I’ve been okay with that, but it’s not academic reading and writing. So, I had to learn strategies to help myself. I’ve also acquired accommodations, which I didn’t get until the second year, third year. Yeah, it’s been a struggle.

She additionally praised her peers in her cohort saying that they were all wonderful. She even sees some of them as her family now, calling them her nieces. Although, she did not share the same type of commendation for the program itself.

The first time her cohort met in person, the faculty running the program kept telling them how honored and privileged they should feel since so many people applied to the program– implying that they should be very thankful for getting chosen. This felt off to Bessie and she knew she had to address this and those in charge tried to justify their actions:

> Coming from a high school/secondary background, I would never say that to my students. I wouldn't even say that to my sports teams. They said, we've had advisors that made us cry. And I just told them that it's sad that they went through that. And I said, well, I apologize for them, but it's not okay and it shouldn't be okay in this environment now. So that was that.

However, it would not be the last time Bessie had to speak up for herself and others in the program. This seemed to be a common theme for most of the storytellers as they would be the only ones to address aggressions when they occurred.

Not Bringing Whole Self

Despite some support that some found in their peers or mentors, they were also left to navigate the academy virtually alone, advocating for what they needed and how they wanted to approach their research. This left them with very little to give of themselves to their peers and their program. In order to mitigate these issues, the storytellers were selective in how they presented themselves. When I asked the storytellers if they felt like they could bring their whole selves to their programs, most said they could not. Others had stories where they limited the time spent in certain spaces or were more reserved with themselves.

DP's peers like to relax by going out to a brewery after work and he would join them until he experienced aggressions at these gatherings. "I try to avoid them now…I try to have a 10-minute discussion and leave. I'm not going to stay here for two hours because there's really no constructive dialogue. It's mostly destructive, filled with microaggressions." So, instead of fostering connections with his colleagues he must remove himself early from these situations, because of these unwanted interactions that may occur. Bessie also had experiences that changed the way she interacted with those who ran her program.

There were a number of instances where Bessie was required to choose work and school over her personal/cultural life and no allowances were made to accommodate her. For example, she had to work/go to school during the summer with no exceptions for her cultural ceremonies, which take place in the summertime. Additionally, she was required to attend a conference every year where she felt Indigenous people were not represented and they were put in the "other" category. These things combined with other occurrences (personal and professional) left Bessie mentally exhausted. While she is on more stable ground now, she still does not enjoy being around her program at school. "It's very difficult for me because now I have to go two days a week. But we sat down before and planned it, and I spoke up about what I needed to finish…And it's better, but it's almost like I have to be fake when I go in now." In both of DP and Bessie's experiences, they learned that their programs were not places they could bring their whole selves to.

While Steven said that he cannot bring his whole self to his program, he spoke about how he makes the best of his situation. His program also does not make acceptances for time off in the summer, since his cohort program was in another state and they met in-person once a

month. Instead, he tried to find ways to connect with the Indigenous people and culture local to the area that he was visiting. Steven says he tries to make it fun:

> I'll just try to go to all the Tribal Nations up there and get a feel for their community…I'm just trying to get the feel of how certain communities are, and it is just like being in this community right now, it's a different dynamic compared to my tribe versus some of the [State's name] tribes that were up that way. So I just try to be positive about the whole situation…Since I'm going to be up here, I will do something good.

Even though being in school during the summer was a sacrifice Steven had to make, and he could not be with his community, he found ways to cope by learning about the Tribal Nations in the area he visited while attending his summer classes. And although he could not bring his whole self, he still found ways to be Indigenous in that space.

A few storytellers shared that they had to restrict or change how they interacted with their peers or faculty in their programs in order to be more acceptable. For instance, T is known as someone who will speak up in class to her peers and professors and so she has gotten a reputation of being vocal. Even so, she feels like she is holding back. T was explicit:

> I feel like I censor myself a lot. And I mean, they still consider me radical, and I'm like, this is me low-key censoring myself…If I brought my full self to my program, I think people would have huge issues with it more than they already do.

Dee also holds back when she addresses issues. She grew up in a non-Native community, so she gained an understanding of how to navigate these spaces at a young age in order to protect herself. "I've learned that in certain rooms it's not appropriate, just because I'm

made to always feel less than. And I try not to feel like that, but it's really hard, especially when I'm the only one advocating." She is acutely aware of when her perspective will be listened to as well. "I know when my voice is being heard and when my voice isn't. And a lot of times I am just by nature, I'm a quiet person. But depending on the topic, I can get passionate about things." Regardless of how others may perceive Dee, she still advocates for what she believes in.

This advocacy does tend to take a toll on the storytellers, though. Rain spoke about how she is particular when and where she shares parts of herself. "I feel like I am selective about when I do that because when I do, it gets tiring. There are definitely moments in classes where I can choose to be really transparent about myself and my identity and experiences." Similarly, Linden, who is multi-racial (Indigenous and other identity), expressed that it is complicated where she can be herself on campus. She constantly has to negotiate her identities in different spaces at the university. "It's sometimes just a mess in that way of just picking and choosing where I can be my full self, which is probably not really a lot of places. I would say nowhere on campus."

Despite the fact that most of the storytellers could not bring their whole selves to the academic space, they found ways to make their time in school beneficial to themselves and others. They continuously advocated for their needs as Indigenous students regardless of push back from their peers, faculty, or administration. Their journey to the Ph.D. is fraught with exhaustion and complications, but they still continue to persist. The experiences that they have to handle are not always easy to remedy since academic institutions perpetuate settler colonialism (la paperson, 2017). The storytellers are very much existing in a space that does not want them to

exist and as a result they face settler aggressions on and off campus from peers, faculty, and administration. The following addresses the aggressions that the storytellers have encountered.

Experiences with Settler Aggressions

Initially, I wanted to adapt a model to be more relevant to the aggressions that Indigenous people experience, but I found that my data would have to be more plentiful, and I felt best that I just focus on how settler colonialism is enacted in these aggressions instead. My storytellers experienced a wide range of settler aggressions, but I first wanted to share some excerpts from two storytellers, Linden and DP. They both emphasized that these settler aggressions are systemic and that their influence to change the university is limited. DP expresses how settler mindsets affect him and how, in many ways, he is powerless in this structure:

> So there's so many settler colonial mindsets that people who are not Native still use. And so for me, that triggers me, but I can't say anything because they're paying my bills. So I can't really challenge hegemony. I can't challenge those statements because when somebody's paying your bills–you can't bite the hands that feed you, you can't challenge those things. You can ask questions, but other than that, you can't do anything else.

Linden is aware that creating change at these institutions is difficult because it is a structure. As a student, Linden was not always heard by the administration or the university powers that be, but hopes that she may be able to facilitate change once she obtains her doctoral degree:

> I'm at the point where I'm like, is it more taxing emotionally for me to teach them or call them out, or for me to just ignore it and do my own thing? And where I'm at right now it is way easier, and I will say this with a full heart and clear conscience, to ignore it because I need to get done. I already wasted a whole freaking year on it trying to teach them, calling them out, and guess what? It did nothing. Because it's a system…And that's

> the thing, as a person of color, as a doc student, you know what can be better. You can see how it can be better, but you also know that in some ways you're powerless. And in some ways if you just finish, if you just get those darn three letters, you can be way more powerful. And so that's at the point that I'm at. I'm so close to the end. I need to tell myself that so that I can finish.

Both of these quotes articulate the frustration to the immutable settler structure of the university. Yet, they persist, an act of defiance in this system.

The storyteller's experiences with settler aggressions can be broken down into 4 main themes: Settler Ignorance, Settler Tokenization, Settler as Supreme Sovereign, and Environmental Settler Aggressions. The four themes will be expounded on through the storyteller's own words shared below.

Settler Ignorance

The term white settler ignorance, coined by Anna Cook (2018), was adapted from Mill's white ignorance to allow consideration of how settler colonialism is perpetuated through ignorance. She states that white settler ignorance is:

> …denial of past and ongoing violence against Indigenous peoples, through the reconstruction of the past to assert the primacy of settlers, is not explainable in terms of a lack of access to resources for knowledge and information but is rather structural ignorance. (Cook, 2018, p. 15)

Although, Tuck and Yang elucidate, "Settlers are diverse, not just of white European descent, and include people of color, even from other colonial contexts" (2012, p. 7). They go on to explain further, "Indeed, even the ability to be a minority citizen in the settler nation means an option to become a brown settler. For many people of color, becoming a subordinate settler is an

option even when becoming white is not" (2012, p. 18). So, while I agree with Cook's statements of this type of ignorance, I choose to drop the "white" from the term and call this theme *Settler Ignorance* since this allows for settler diversity.

This type of settler aggression is structural obliviousness in order to benefit the settler. It is easy to erase past and current settler violence against Indigenous peoples when you are not aware of it. This allows settlers to never be accountable for what they do or do not know, and further, how they enact their ignorance on Indigenous people. Throughout the interviews, I kept hearing the storytellers say that their peers or school faculty were "just ignorant." I found this interesting since these individuals more than likely have access and knowledge of how to research information about Indigenous people. It is not ignorance; it is on purpose. Below, the storytellers share their experiences with settler ignorance; these aggressions emerged through lack of knowledge about Indigenous people, stereotyping, settler moves to innocence, and reconstruction of the past.

Lack of Knowledge

Not all storytellers spoke about direct incidents but shared how they are impacted by those who were ignorant. Linden spoke about a professor in her department, explaining:

> We have this one white faculty member in our department, and he's been here for a long time, but he won't say racist things in a mean way. He will say racist things in an ignorant nice way. He generally doesn't know, you shouldn't say crap like that or something like that. Everybody knows that, but they call him the white savior of that department, like the students–other Black students or Hispanic students. But it's like we have to navigate around that still. Right? I still know that I can't just be my true self when I'm around him.

While the BIPOC students joke about this professor saying things that are out of pocket, they still have to deal with the results of his ignorance, as Linden indicates.

The storytellers acknowledge that these individuals, whether it be peers or faculty, are educated and are not incapable of learning about Indigenous people, but they often have to do the "educating". Rain articulated how she has had a difficult time getting her advisors to understand her research, since they lacked knowledge over settler colonialism:

> I think the biggest one for me that I have struggled with is even with some of my advisors, they sometimes just don't quite get things. I actually came in wanting to study something very different, but ended up focusing on settler colonialism and what that looks like in history classrooms. And to even get one of my advisors on board with that has been a journey. It's been helpful. It's helped me articulate my thoughts better. But just the fact that it's like you have this highly educated person doing amazing scholarship, and the fact that they can be so ignorant of even what settler colonialism is to begin with is, it's one of those things where I was like, "Oh, right, okay." Even though we're in a room with a bunch of super smart people, it doesn't mean you understand where I'm coming from at all.

And although Rain did not have any overt aggressive experiences, she still felt the strain of exclusion of Indigenous folks in conversation with course topics and constantly having to explain things to her peers and advisors:

> I think in classes it's more just the ignorance of people either not remembering to include Native folks in a conversation that they're having about education, even if they're focusing specifically on race or something, or just having to go through and explain, if I am mentioning something about a Tribal program, having to explain why it's not the

> same as a state education. Going through the whole thing with folks...I haven't had any super blatant microaggressions, but just a lot of ignorance and filling in the gaps in people's knowledge. And I think it has been interesting too. We do have a lot of international students as well, and so I think I've actually talked with some of the Black folks in my cohort about this who also feel like they have to do a lot of explaining, especially for people who don't know the US context at all, where it's like the only thing they know about it is mainstream white history. But it's not exclusive to international students, obviously, there are people who have lived here their whole lives and still know nothing.

Stereotyping

Matho's encounter speaks to what Rain indicated; just because you are from the United States, does not mean that you are knowledgeable about those Indigenous to this land. He spoke about a colleague that called him a stereotypical nickname that Indigenous men often get called. Matho attributed the individual's ignorance to where they lived–a state with few Indigenous people and where Indigenous team mascots still exist. He works as an administrator in the public school system and since he is not white, he gets approached in ways that are ignorant:

> Going through this program there were a lot of people in education, but I would say half of our group was K-12 and then half was higher ed. So when you think about the K-12 side, and I guess this could apply to higher ed as well, but just me having the context of living where I live in the area that I live, [southeast state], rural [state], where there's a school district 15 minutes away from here that they're mascot is the Indians. The university [university name], right before I came here, they used to be the [Native mascot] and now they are the [animal mascot]. There's also the Indians, which is a larger

> district about an hour and a half away. So having the context of people not quite knowing how to talk to me, I guess when it comes to just talking to me because of the way I look. And I'm obviously not white, but I'm, again…people can't quite figure out what I am. But just having someone who is a stereotypical coach, going into or administrator thinking about moving on into their doctorate. Just throwing out there, "Hey, chief," or whatever. I'm like, "Listen, just know that it's kind of weird to say to someone." Fortunately, it didn't happen after that, but I think it was more of a reflection of just where they are based on the lack of representation, having the mascots, having references here and there, but it being so far removed from reality. Thinking in terms of being stuck back in history, I guess to where, I mean, obviously they may not have ever talked to a Native person before. So fortunately, beyond that initial greeting and just conversation, yeah, it was fine after that. But I also had that preparation of living where I've lived for as long as I have. So not to say that I'm used to it, but I've had that sort of thing come up before in the community or whatever.

Even though Matho suggests that this lack of information (and resulting stereotypes) is indicative of where they live, the bigger issue is that Indigenous history is not being taught in schools or rarely discussed. This is not an accident; it is done on purpose to help settlers erase Indigenous people.

While applying to graduate schools, Arizona had a hard time finding a good fit because the research he wanted to do was focused on Indigenous people. Faculty at the programs he applied to, while they liked his research ideas, they said did not know how to support him:

> Hearing back from and meeting and networking with different professors, a lot of them basically say the same thing where it's like, "Well, we would love to have someone to

> study Indigenous politics. We just dunno how to support those kinds of students." Because no one in their faculty does that kind of work. And so more often than not, they want to bring in students that are more closely aligned to their faculty goals and what they can support, which seems outrageous.

Their lack of knowledge of Indigenous people impacted Arizona's acceptance into the graduate programs he was looking at. The faculty at those schools did not try and work with a student whose research interests were outside their own. They willfully choose to remain ignorant.

Settler Moves to Innocence

Rain had a different kind of encounter with one of her classmates, who apologized directly to Rain after reading about the atrocities committed by the United States to Indigenous people. This experience would be categorized as "settler moves to innocence" since there was an "attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10). What are we supposed to do with words? Rain discusses the incident and how uncomfortable it makes her:

> I have this one memory of, it was the first couple weeks of my program and I had connected with this other woman who's Syrian American, and we kind of aligned on a lot of stuff. Then we had a reading for class about Native boarding schools, and she sent me this long text message that was like, "Oh, I'm so sorry. This is such a terrible thing." And I'm like, I get where you're coming from, but also why are you sending me this? This is so weird and random. I don't know. Just a lot of interactions like that with people who I think mean well, but also are super ignorant, and so just do or say things that they think make sense. Then I'm just like, okay, well, this is awkward, but I'm going to move on.

Apologizing directly to an Indigenous person because of past acts of genocide does nothing but ignore the current acts of genocide that are committed against Indigenous peoples–it is akin to a land acknowledgement. The thought may be there, but it does little to make amends.

Dee also had an incident with this kind of settler ignorance. Her experience is layered, because of the context of the topic that she and her classmates were having. In anthropology the term "going Native" was coined in the 1920's by Bronislaw Malinowski about his thoughts on ethnographic work with Indigenous people. He believed that "scientists in a foreign milieu should emphasize their roles as 'participants' rather than 'observers' to enhance their study of native peoples and cultures" (Kanuha, 2000, p. 439). Essentially, he suggested these white anthropologists "go Native" in order to collect and take Indigenous knowledge for their own. The term is still used currently and that is what Dee and her peers were discussing. Dee believed the term should change, but her classmates pushed back on that:

> Going Native. Yeah. I think that's what it was. And of course, I'm in a classroom with all these educators working on the doc, and I'm one of the only people of color…And of course you know me, again by nature, I'm always quiet, but I couldn't let it go. And I said, "This is really inappropriate." And they're like, "Well, this is just a research term." I was like, "Well, it needs to be changed." And I was kind of quivering. I was scared, but after a while, I was like I don't need to be fucking scared of these people. I've done my job as an educator, but because I understand that's how non-Natives think and they have reasons for almost everything and justify it, that's what I was waiting for. And so I just explained, this is not appropriate. And especially if you go into communities and you're saying these terminologies, you're going to get pushback and I don't care where you come from. I was like, "Even myself, I would never say stuff like this, especially in front of

> research participants." And so we went back and forth. But to me, again, it just went over their heads. They're like, "Okay, we'll just be mindful not to." I'm like, "No, we need to change it. You can't say stuff like this at all." And so of course it went over their heads, and then I was just like, I don't even know why I say anything, but I'm still going to keep doing it just because I feel like the next person or even the ones coming after me, they have to be prepared. And if I'm going to teach in a higher education setting, I'm going to make sure that they understand that. And so I'll always, even though I'm shy and can be quiet at times, I think in those situations, speaking up is the best thing.

Her peers saying it is just a research term eliminates what Dee, an Indigenous person, is trying to convey. It also erases the tumultuous history between anthropologists and Indigenous people, leaving settlers guilt free.

Reconstruction of the Past

An integral part of settler ignorance is the reconstruction of the past in order to assert settler dominance. The settlers are not ignorant because they do not have the correct information, this problem is actually deeper and they are willfully ignoring or rewriting the past. Barbara noted that this kind of aggression happened at the college she attended. Barbara stated:

> In terms of more direct things, it wasn't directed at me, but last Indigenous people's day, we had some medical students send out an email to the college of medicine and just talking about Indigenous People's day and the importance of it. And we had somebody email back and say, "Well, what about Columbus? You're completely negating all of the great work that he has done to make America what it is today." And I bring this up because the administration did essentially nothing to bring any kind of education to this person because they were a surgeon who donated all of this money to the school, and

they just let it go. So not even just in graduate college, but in the college of medicine too, they just continue to perpetuate these stereotypes, which is incredibly, incredibly fun.

While she was not the target of the aggression, this incident reaffirmed that the university administration will do nothing to remedy or address these situations. One can imagine how harmful this can be for BIPOC students when those in power at this university stay silent about these issues.

Settler ignorance played out in many different ways for the storytellers. This ignorance came from not only peers and faculty, but alumni as well, indicating that this type of ignorance is structural and tolerated by the university. This type of ignorance is systemic and deliberate, often hidden through claims of naivety and that is what makes it so insidious.

Settler Tokenization (and Indigenous Labor)

Settler tokenization is the act of settlers using Indigenous people, knowledge, culture, or spirituality as a means to appear diverse without making any real change. T brought up tokenizing when she spoke about addressing settler aggressions and how other Indigenous students may not be able to speak up as she does:

> But again, I feel like that's because I know I've had the support of people who will support me...of how I approach situations like that. But just thinking about it, even in my master's, there was one other Native student in all my courses, and she was very opposite of me, would not speak up. And that's okay. And that should be fine. That should be totally okay. You shouldn't have to be a Native student who literally has to combat every single microaggression, every single assumption or thing that's said in the class, cause those shouldn't be even said or tokenizing shouldn't be happening. And I always think about that, especially when I work with students because every single person is on their

> own journey. And something like that could literally make a Native student drop out of an entire program. Then schools wonder why Native students aren't graduating? It's like, well, I wonder why. It's not their fault. It's your fault. And yeah, it's just ugly. It's just all so ugly sometimes.

The settlers tokenize, which leads to more labor (cultural tax/load) on Indigenous people to show up and respond. More importantly, as T said, not every Indigenous student will handle these aggressions the same way and it could drive some to leave school. This kind of settler aggression also plays into the ways that Indigenous people see community and support. They want better for their community/relatives, so they do the extra labor despite knowing that this work is unbalanced–they give more than they receive.

The storytellers were tokenized in two main ways by their peers and faculty. Either they were expected to represent all Natives as an "Expert Indian Expert" or they were asked to "Bring the Native," meaning Native identity was used for settler gain.

Expert Indian Expert

As an Indigenous student, you are seen as an "Expert Indian Expert". Settlers expect you to know all about Indigenous cultures and be able to educate them on the topic. There is an expectation that you will comply and happily assist them in this endeavor. DP goes on to explain how complicated it can be to be the "token Native" amongst his peers and what he can actually do about it:

> I'm the only BIPOC in my lab group, for instance, which is, I feel, really bad because I have to be the one educating every...I'm the token Native in my group. "Educate me about Indigenous now!" I'm like there's so many, there's 574 recognized tribes, plus 500 plus more that are not federally recognized in the US alone. So how can I be the token

> Native? I can suggest you books. I can suggest you Greg Cajete and Vine Deloria and Jessica Hernandez, Fresh Banana Leaves that just came out.

DP illustrates how hard it is to address the large topic of Indigenous culture when it is so diverse. All he can do is suggest Indigenous scholars so his peers can educate themselves.

Conversely, Matho enjoyed being asked for his input when it came to this subject matter. He discusses how faculty would ask for his view and how it was refreshing to be included:

> What was good was they would actually ask me for input or my perspective or things like that, which I was like, wow, this is a little different. And then, yeah, it would just add to the conversation, discussion or whatever. Especially when we would be talking about things like mascots for example, and looking at case studies when it comes to thinking about education, mascots, and those sorts of things.

And while DP and Matho had differing experiences in this case, they are both asked to give something of themselves. The delivery for those asking the questions may have also had an impact on their opposing encounters.

Barbara and Arizona each experienced situations where they felt singled out by group facilitators because of their Indigeneity. Barbara discusses how she has been frequently tokenized in school, and provides an example where she felt a group facilitator wanted her to speak up about Indigenous spiritual practices:

> I think probably what happens in most cases is we'll be talking about a topic. So I am in public health, so we do a lot of health disparity work. But it's like when you're 12 in the classroom and they're talking about the Trail of Tears and everyone goes to look at you like are you going to say something about it? I think that happens a lot to me. So whether we're talking about maternal mortality or we're talking about covid rates, that happens all

> of the time. But I feel like, so there is one example in particular, I am part of a learning circle. They call it a liberatory justice group, but we were talking, they wanted to open up the circle every single time by having some kind of grounding. And the facilitator was like, “Oh, these are practices that are based in Indigenous wisdom, and I have learned this from X, Y, Z people, but if there's anybody in the room that might have any insight on it, I would welcome them to talk about it.” And I was the only Indigenous person, and she was sitting literally right across from me, and I could see her waiting for me to say something, and I was just like, I just let the moment pass.

Instead of feeling made to speak up for all Indigenous people, Barbara chose to be silent, an act of rebellion against settler wants.

Arizona had a similar experience where he felt like the workshop facilitator wanted him to address a reading over Indigenous subject matter. Instead of complying, he told them he would not provide feedback until the other students had first. Arizona expounds on the incident:

> One time we had a workshop with just American political science students, and then the coordinator brought in two papers. One of them was clearly a paper about Indigenous American lobbying. And I think the expectation was for me to say what I think about the paper, but I knew what the field coordinator was doing, so I didn't say anything. I was just waiting for everyone else to say something first and no one else wanted to say anything. Everyone was just looking at me to say something. And afterwards, I told the fellow students, I said, "I'm not going to pay the cultural tax to tell you what the right answer is. First, I'm going to let you guys go and see what you guys have to say, and then I'll give my voice and say why the paper's good and bad from an Indigenous politics perspective." The field coordinator didn't like that so much. I guess the goal was for me

> to say, here's the good and bad of this paper and have everyone else discuss it. Whereas I took it the other way, which is I want to hear what everyone else thinks about this coming from a non-Indigenous perspective, and then I'll give the Indigenous voice to it. And since then, we never really discussed an Indigenous politics paper as American political scientists in the room. So that coordinator has since changed, and the new coordinator has been focused on professional development.

During both incidents with Barbara and Arizona, they felt like those leading the group were trying to get them to voice their opinions or suggestions. Neither were asked directly, and both felt pressure to answer, but did not. They were not going to allow others to force them to be tokens.

"Bring the Native"

To "Bring the Native" is a way of tokenizing by using Indigeneity in order to gain something or to appear diverse. It is the way settlers expect Indigenous people to give of themselves and their knowledge, but never get anything back in return. Indigenous people are just supposed to "Bring the Native" and leave. In the incidents below encountered by Lea, Barbara, Bessie, and Rain, the university aims to gain something from them. Lea's school wanted to publicize her online as a tool for recruitment since she had received some prestigious fellowships:

> I think I got all these empty promises and excitement. Like, "Oh, it's really so great to have a Native here doing this work" or dah, dah, dah. And I kept being like, "Okay, well is there any funding or...?" It got to the point because then they're like...I got some really awesome fellowships and stuff and so they wanted to promote me on their online stuff. And I was like, "Well, if you want to do that, how can you help me?" And they didn't

have any answers or anything. And so I was like, Nope! I'm not going to be used in that way then.

Lea was quick to shut down their attempt to exploit her in order to look diverse. She knew she deserved to gain something from that transaction, since the institution would look better due to her success and her Indigeneity.

Universities have a long history of using Indigenous people for their own benefit. At times it could feel like, as an Indigenous person, that you are just there to check a box. Barbara explains why she feels this way:

> I have found that I was definitely recruited to fill the Native bubble. So the person I replaced essentially was somebody who was also [Indigenous and other identity-same as Barbara]. So the year that I came in, that person graduated. So sometimes it feels like they literally were just trying to replace her so that it continued to look like they had engagement with the Native community. But they have not added any other Native people to my program since I started. And I'm curious when I graduate, if they're just going to replace me with another Indigenous person.

It is difficult to believe that the university actually wants diversity, when they fail to recruit more Indigenous students, faculty, and staff. It appears that these institutions only want the illusion of supporting Indigenous people, when in reality, they just want to use their Indigeneity.

On one occasion, Bessie's program director asked her to use her Tribal connections to get a letter of support for a grant application they were submitting. She explains how frustrating it was that they never followed up with the Tribal Nation after receiving the grant:

> I was asked if I could…I'm just going to say it because it upset me. I was asked if I could get a support letter for this new grant that they had. And I was like, okay. Because they

> talked about how it's only going to focus...It's going to focus on marginalized people, marginalized students, blah, blah, blah. So I'm like, yeah. So we did. I hadn't heard nothing. We got it. And so that was something I brought up, and I was all frustrated, upset when I met with my director not too long ago…I didn't say a few things that I wanted to. And what she said on that was, "It's a government grant, and it's not specific for Indigenous students." I knew that. But I looked at her, I didn't say anything. I was like, does she not think I read the grant? But I wanted them to send out a thank you note or call them. That's what you do.

Bessie was rightfully upset that the director did not reach out to the Tribal Nation that gave them the letter of support. There is an inherent value of reciprocity in Indigenous communities and the program director was not following protocol. It was frustrating for Bessie since what the program director did was exploitative.

Rain spoke about a time when she and another Native student inquired about getting some Native courses taught within their program. They were not exactly turned down, but instead were told they should create an Indigenous course to offer:

> I remember also in my first year, me and the other Native student who I was in the master's program at the time, we went to the program's office and we were like, "Hey, you think it would be really cool if you all offered a course on Native education, some aspect of Native education?" Literally nothing's in the course catalog. And the response was like, "Oh, yeah, that would be so cool. Why don't you guys come up with something?" And we're like, we're not professors. Hello? And so now this fall, I'm actually finally getting to teach a mini course, which I'm really excited about, but it's like

> I had to do that, right? The school has no interest or investment apparently, in bringing Native folks or including Native subject matter in the curriculum.

While the school was receptive, the onus was placed on two Indigenous graduate students to "bring the Native" into their program. As Rain said, there is no investment from the college to actually include Indigenous perspectives and knowledges.

Rain's experience with Indigenous tokenization was not targeted at her but included the Native communities surrounding the school. The university, which has deep connections to the exploitation of Indigenous and Black peoples, decided to hold discussions about their past in an attempt to reconcile:

> …I suppose maybe two years ago now though, we did a big legacy of slavery initiative and report on the university's investments in enslavement. And of course, it's New England, so they had to talk about Native folks as well and the enslavement of Native people, but also land theft and things. And so there was one conference basically where we brought [Tribe name] and [Tribe name] and a lot of the other tribes around here to campus, and they were very clear about what they wanted from the university. And then of course everyone was like, oh, yeah, patting themselves on the back. Yeah, we had this big event and it went really well. And it's like, okay, but are you actually going to now work with the tribes to do the things that they said they wanted you to do? No…But I think, again, they know how to talk the talk and give the land acknowledgement, but it's like, hey, you actually bothered to ask the tribes what they wanted, but now you're not going to do anything about it. Just actually follow up on that. Do the things they want you to do.

The university took the time to have these important discussions, and yet did nothing with the recommendations that came from the Tribal Nations. Once again, Indigenous people were used as a means to appear diverse, giving the impression that the university is genuinely engaging in advocacy work when they are not.

Settlers tokenize Indigenous people often in order to gain something. It is an attempt to use Indigeneity in order to appear diverse without having to *actually* be diverse. In this undertaking, settlers usually end up creating more work for Indigenous people. However, as the storytellers indicated, not all Indigenous people are willing to pay this cultural tax.

Environmental Settler Aggressions in the Academy

Sue et. al states that environmental microaggressions are, "Racial assaults, insults, and invalidations which are manifested on systemic and environmental levels" (2007, p. 278). For the purposes of my study, I see environmental settler aggressions as structural racism found in the university environment, whether that be access to housing, hiring practices, rules and university processes.

DP found that it was difficult for him to find housing through the university, since the spaces that they have are unavailable. He emphasizes the difficulty some students may encounter trying to obtain housing in that area due to structural racism:

> Zillow is a racist platform for housing, because they see your face, they see your name. The landowner, the whole landlord, can exclude you from getting an apartment or getting a house. They can exclude you based on your looks, and that violates federal law, but they can exclude you. And also the, let's say the renting company like RealPage, they go on algorithm. They're being sued at the moment. And so the rents are really, really high in places like [City name] because it's a university town. So it has impacted me. If I didn't

> have a high credit score, I would not be able to come here to do my graduate work. But because I have a high credit score, I'm able to get an apartment. And the university doesn't provide housing opportunities. It does not. It does, but they're always full. How can you rent an apartment if you do not provide these essentials? This human right of housing. I'm willing to pay. I don't care. I'm willing to pay, but I don't want to go outside of the university where I have to compete with outsiders for housing.

While DP can afford to pay for housing outside of the university, his point is that he should not have to and that this could deter other students who do not have the financial means like he does. This is structural and if the university was really dedicated to all students, they would have affordable and available housing for all students.

Linden addressed graduate assistantships at her university and how difficult it is to make ends meet. She notes that the assistantships are hard to obtain and not always favorable. Linden did not mince words:

> Our university treats our GA's like full-time staff, so it's gross labor and I don't want to participate…I can't even do a GAship, because you have to be enrolled in six credits. But also I have an advisor who doesn't know the processes. So even though he's promised a GA ship for me in the past, he ended up not giving it to me. I didn't know what the process was. I didn't know what the...I thought I was supposed to wait for a contract or something like that. And it ended up not working. And he is an advisor who is well known, but it feels weird calling him out. It's just weird. It feels crippling in the way that I can't hold other people accountable for letting me down, basically. And so we do have GAships, but they're not consistent. It's not like a promise for five years you're going to be a GA for this program. Every year you have to apply for it. So it adds that kind of

> stress on it. But also they're like, they literally treat those full-time staff members, and so you have to be available from 8 to 5. And if I didn't have my full-time salary as a staff person, I wouldn't be able to live. But also the work hours conflict with what I do, so I couldn't do it anyway. So it's just complicated for a GAship, I think. But most of the students that come in without scholarships aren't promised GAships, but they are always given GAships, but it's not always a pretty situation.

Traditionally, the settler university has sustained itself through exploitative work practices. If a student does not have other options, they may take a GAship and settle for less than savory work assignments.

Although, even when T did hold a job at the university, not a GAship, university processes erased her. She was brought on through a grant–which universities love to brag about when their faculty or staff receive them–but was not seen as a "real" university employee. She was doing extra labor by serving on multiple committees, but the university would not put her name on her door or list her in the new hires:

> My position, I was hired under a grant, and so I was a third party evaluator for a Tribal opioid response grant just here outside of [City name], the [Native Nation] community. So I worked with their healthcare, [Native Nation] Healthcare, and I evaluated their opioid grant. And so that was the only thing in my job description. And I did student support services, I did all the events for the office. I actually served on four different committees. That wasn't even part of my job, but diversity committee and the strategic planning committees, and then the subcommittees. And that burnt me out so bad. And it was during Covid, so it was like I was working from home, but barely even opened my computer most days. It was so ridiculous because even our evaluation, because we

couldn't go in the community and things like that, a lot of it got put on hold. But even the system stuff that I experienced in that position, because, well for one, over the years for that office, because that office has been there since the seventies, they took away all the space. They took away all the computers that our office once had. And so it was just down to my boss's, this one little tiny office. And then he advocated for me to have my own office, even though after the first week, we literally worked from home for two years, but I got my own office and then they wouldn't even put my name on my office. They said, well, technically she's not, because I was hired under a grant. And so they're like, we can't put her name on there. And I'm like, you know how degrading that is? That's so ridiculous. And then also when they had the annual welcome back and they listed all the new employees and they didn't include me. And I was like, what the? So yeah, there was all these other things. I'm like, you guys are such a mess. I swear to God, the fact that I was literally, the fact that I work here is crazy. But also I did it for the students mostly. But yeah, other than that, it was a mess. It was an absolute mess.

T worked at the school, was on university committees, did student outreach, and still was not seen as a member of the university community in that capacity. Since she was “technically” not hired by the university, the institution's processes disappeared her.

Both Steven and Bessie encountered the same issue while in the programs. Both were in programs that held classes in the summer. For Indigenous people, the summertime is when a lot of ceremonies take place. Most individuals help family prepare for ceremonies or they participate in them. Steven’s program is based on an Indigenous model, so he did not understand why they could not make allowances for time off or to connect online during the summer months for those that participate in ceremony:

> The way I think of it is, if we're in this Indigenous model and if we're putting culture, different people's culture at the forefront, it would seem that things can be adapted around ceremonies and things like that. But sometimes it's not that way. It's like you have to be here. It's like, well, we got these ceremonial things going on. We're trying to disrupt and dismantle these systems at the university level, but you're still telling us that we have to do these things? We have to be here at the doctoral program, which I mean, I get, but at the same time, if this is an Indigenous model, then why are we not adapting to different tribes in the area? So it's been interesting, and I'm not sure how the university setting is, but I'm sure there's policies and political things that go on. And I think somebody that's going to be at that leadership, I would think that you would go ahead and defend your students that are in the program. And if they have a ceremony, it would seem like you should be able to let them do those types of things…They talk to the powers that be and it's like, well, you have to be there. And it's just like, okay. It feels like you have to forget about your culture for the summer. You know what I mean, around those certain ceremonies, so it just doesn't feel right.

Bessie was also displeased by the way her program handled Indigenous ceremonial and traditional practices. As Indigenous people, we are intricately linked to our communities, and during times of ceremony or death, we have certain responsibilities to fulfill. Bessie's frustration came from their lack of understanding and failure to make allowances for these important times:

> There's things that, like I said, it has really upset me because why not just respect us and what our traditions and cultures are. Summertime, that's one of the reasons why I moved back is to help my family with our traditional ceremonies. But I didn't get to do that because of the program. We had to go to summer school too. I forgot to say that we had

> to go to summer school all summer and work. So, I didn't get that. We didn't get that from whatever our communities are, whatever our culture was outside of the building– [University name] campus. So that big part of that, I felt I was really missing that. And I think too, because my mental wellness wasn't okay. And as Native people, we say that there's different parts of this, just four directions. That in order for our wellbeing to be better, each of those needs to be balanced. And they weren't. And they didn't understand that. They didn't understand when somebody dies. I did not have time, didn't have time to mourn my dad. I had to get everything done. Even afterwards, I had to go back to school, had to work. So it just kind of went by fast. I lost an aunt too that I was dearly close to. That was earlier in the year. So this past summer, I lost one of my aunts, my aunties. So I had to go and help her this summer or help with the camp and stuff. But it's just things like that, that I feel like I should be doing more.

The settler university makes it clear that the students have to be available in person during this time regardless of ceremonial or cultural needs. Allowance for time off is usually provided for religious reasons; why would this not apply to Indigenous students?

Environmental settler aggressions in the academy may often present as neutral rules and policies, but they have implications that run much deeper. These rules/policies were most likely written by non-Indigenous people who do not have an understanding of the needs of this population. Academic institutions should know that not all rules/policies can apply across the board to all students, and considerations should be made on a case-by-case basis. These institutional procedures further erase Indigeneity/Indigenous students, and if pressed they can claim that they are just following protocol.

Settler as Supreme Sovereign

The theme settler as supreme sovereign is focused on how settler culture's ideals, values, history, knowledge, and ways of being are supported and reinforced by settlers. The settler, as the absolute authority, determines who and what is Indigenous, frequently denying Indigenous sovereignty and attempting to erase Indigeneity. These aggressions are consistently paternalistic and exert an "I know better than you" attitude from the settler aggressors. These settler aggressions took form in faculty valuing western sources over all others, paternalistic "guidance" from peers, and disappearing the Indigenous students from certain spaces.

West is the Best

T's encounter took place in the classroom, where her professor hyper-focused on her and degraded her research framework as a way to exert settler dominance. His goal was not to educate, but to demean Indigenous knowledge while simultaneously elevating settler knowledge:

> I remember my faculty, I think it was in my pedagogy class, and he said, "Well, I'm assuming you're going to use TribalCrit." Oh no, it was in my theory course. And so we had to read this old ass book about all these white theorists from day one, Socrates. So just knowledge, my brain does not need to have it. So he was talking about these major theories that social work always uses. They don't come from our degree, they come from psychology and sociology, all these places. And then he looked at me and he said, "Well, I'm guessing that you're going to use TribalCrit." And I said, "Well, probably it explains a lot of what I'm trying to look at and why things are the way they are." And then he said, 'Well, in our profession, that's what we would call a Mickey Mouse Theory, and that it's actually not seen as good enough for a lot of research." So I was like, "Okay." And so he was like, "I'm just warning you now that if you use TribalCrit that a lot of people aren't going to take your theoretical work seriously." And I was like, they actually use that term

> like a Mickey Mouse theory for theories that aren't these overarching theoretical perspectives? And I was like, well, first I was like, wait, are they really saying this to me right now? What the hell? And then what? Those processes that you go through with microaggressions. And then they just moved on. It was nothing. Here, let me use this person, this student, the only Native student in the room as an example of what not to use or what not to do. Literally looked at me and was like, oh, you're going to use this. Okay, yeah, maybe don't do that and then use it as an example for the rest of the class. And I was like, okay, cool. So then after that happened, I went to my mentor, I was like, "Wait, is this a real thing?"...And honestly I was like, wait, what? So when you go through that process, I didn't even know what to say, and then I was just like, wow. Yeah. And then to use it as an example for the whole class, it was kind of nuts. It was absolutely, it was so degrading and obviously, and I literally was sitting there like, oh my gosh. If this happened to any other student, they would be headed out or they would literally or rethink their entire research, and that is so messed up. So it was really bad.

T mentioned that if this happened to another student it could potentially stall them in school or in their research, but T doubled down. She chose to write about another Indigenous theoretical frame for this course, so the professor had to read and learn about it as well. While this probably did not change the professor's mind on Indigenous frameworks, it can be seen as an act of defiance against the settler structure.

T's experience is not unique though. Several storytellers were told by their professors to use western sources for their research even though their work focuses on Indigenous people. Lea kept getting F's for not citing western sources, which were not relevant to her research:

> I was in my last methods class and I kept on getting F's on my papers I wrote, and before that I was getting A's on everything. I was like, okay. But because this one professor who was my advisor at the time was like, "You need to have sources from Europe. You don't have enough sources from Europe." And I'm like, "Well, I'm doing Indigenous methodology." The whole point is I am finding different communities and examples of models that I want to use. In Canada and some in South America and a lot in Australia and New Zealand and in Hawaii, these are where Indigenous scholars...This is why I'm doing this.

This professor was denying Indigenous scholar's knowledge in favor of European knowledge despite Lea's research area and the models she wanted to work with. This makes a clear statement on whose knowledge is valued and who is seen as legitimate.

Bessie had a similar experience with a professor while discussing a paper she had written. She decided to later address the issue in a group setting:

> I felt so dumb. So when she was going over this, she said, "You have to cite him, Dr. Blah blah, blah." She said, "He is probably the grandfather and did all this."...Oh my gosh. So in one of our meetings, our group meetings, I had mentioned that just because your name is on top of an article or you're presenting to us, that doesn't mean that I have to give you any respect. I don't know you. I don't know what you do outside. Because we know as Native women, sometimes those leader positions don't deserve respect. But I had to say that because I don't care whose name is on what. And a lot of them were white. A lot of the older research articles, and they're older white men. Just the way it was westernized. And now coming to a place where it's all women, I was like, oh, this is going to be exciting. But to hear that they think of these other figures like that? That's just

not okay with me. And that made me feel like, well, I'm nobody–all my years of school teaching, what my statements are, or what I view is not important. That's how I felt.

Bessie found it frustrating to be told to use western scholars she was unfamiliar with and whose worldviews may not align with her own. It is a denial of Indigenous knowledge, of her own knowledge, and what she believes is best for her own research.

Paternalistic Peer Review?

This paternalistic guidance was not limited to frameworks or citations, but also how the storytellers wanted to conduct research. Lea wanted her research to be done with her former students that she taught at a residential school. Indigenous communities are close, and Indigenous researchers often conduct research with (not on) their own communities or those that they are connected to. Lea was told that this research and her relationship with the students was not acceptable:

> For a while, I really wanted to focus on my female identifying students that I had at [Indigenous residential school name] and look at the ones that have gotten different degrees, what's worked for them, and why they are able to be successful leaders in their communities. And I just kept on being told, “No, that's unacceptable. You can't do research on former students.” And there's this weird relationship dynamic with them. I'm like, you don't understand. This is why I'm fucking here. They're the ones that I started with. I was just a little freshman in undergrad and they've been my motivation and we really supported one another because at that point I wasn't that much older than them. But I'm like, “That's why I want to do this research and help legitimize what they're doing.” And just to keep on getting told, “No, you can't do it this way. No, you can't do it this way.” has been really frustrating. Really frustrating. To the point where I was just like,

> okay, I need to walk away from this for a while. I think any way where I felt I wasn't completely whitewashing it because they'd be like, you need to use for example, these three models. And none of these apply. It is not relevant. And so I think no, not very much flexibility or trying to learn from me or different scholarly work from individuals that they felt like...what are their qualifications? Or that university is not good enough? You know what I mean?

Instead of the professors helping Lea find a way to carry out her research that would appease both Lea and the academy, they told her that her research topic was inappropriate and gave her western models to review. The professors lacked understanding of Indigenous relationships and then guided her into western knowledge that was not relevant to her work.

It was not just faculty that held a paternalistic perspective over the storytellers. Dee had another peer commandeer her presentation. During the group presentation over a particular Land Grant institution, another student felt compelled to argue that Indigenous people are fine now, because he Googled some tribes and those tribes are doing well financially:

> One situation, I was doing a class assignment. I was in a group and we were talking about land grant institutions. And then the subject of, and this is when that report came out from the University of [State name] about the University of [State name's] land grant and how much they've...when the settlers came, they took all this land and how much they profited off of Native Indigenous land. And so it was pretty mind opening…It's pretty fascinating. Billions of dollars that they made just on that section of where the [location] is, where they're at. Billions of dollars have come in. And so we did an assignment on just talking about land grant institutions and the money that they bring in. But then one student got up and he's like, because I think we were talking about the Land Grant Institute in [State

name]. And he got up and he pulled up his screen and he opened up all the tribe's websites and looked up all their resources. He's like, "Well, these tribes make millions of dollars." I was just dumbfounded. I was just like, are you really going to, what we're saying here is that this one institution has profited off of Indigenous lands, and now you're saying, well, that's okay, because now they (the tribes) bring in millions of dollars? That's what he was trying to say. And I was like, "Excuse me, sir, this is not what we're talking about right now. You can't put money towards the genocide of a people." And I was like, "I feel really offended that you would actually bring that up." Oh, then he is like, "Oh, I was just pointing it out." And I'm like, "Well, we're trying to point this subject out. We're not even talking about the tribes right now. We're just talking about this one institution." So yeah, it was really, he kept going on and on, and he wouldn't let it go until finally the instructor had to shut him down. So I was...yeah, this was in front of the whole class too, mind you. And I was just like, I've never been so sidelined in my life, but it was more in a professional setting as a class, we're supposed to be respectful of each other, but I just couldn't get, I was like, holy shit, you just took over our presentation because you wanted to show, well, these tribes are doing okay now. No, I almost said, no, motherfucker, these tribes aren't doing, not every tribe is making millions. Let me show you all these other tribes that are freaking struggling, still trying to dig their way out of poverty. So anyway, I just couldn't believe he did that in front of everybody. I was the only Native in this class, but my peers were on my side. But once he started talking, everyone got quiet. I don't know if they were agreeing with him, but nobody really stood up except me.

He not only felt that he knew better than the group who did the research, but he was essentially defending the taking of Indigenous land that continues to benefit settlers and settler institutions.

Lea had a similar experience in an online group discussion board. She was providing an overview of some of the research she wanted to do that focused on Indigenous language curriculum, but her classmates did not understand the intricacies of conducting research with Tribal communities. She was trying to explain to them that as an outsider to that Tribal community, regardless of if she is Native, there are certain protocols that she has to follow to be respectful. It is not as easy as going into that community and then doing the research. Her peers then started to question her Indigeneity:

> I mean, I think it's one thing if you have to explain yourself and say who you are or your family comes from and stuff to other Natives, but to just get that pushback right away from strangers online, it's just exhausting but also frustrating. And I think you're already having imposter syndrome just being in that space, but then you're having to do all the extra work. And then trying to explain...okay, in those courses I was doing very specific tailored language curriculum development and they kept on saying, "Oh, you should just digitize everything," and I'm like, no. Especially with a lot of the Pueblos, it is a lot more complex and there's a lot of distrust in wanting to preserve certain things and do things a certain way versus your–Cherokee aids very much more–you can easily access the language and there has been different innovation. Just because you Google and you find some examples doesn't mean that works for every community or that the leadership and elders need that or want that. And so again, you're trying to impose, maybe you have a good idea of something, but your perceptions or stereotypes aren't helpful and just having to do the heavy lifting in that way is hard.

Lea goes into more detail about the situation and one of her peers requests that she “prove” she is actually enrolled in a Tribal Nation:

> One thing that really shocked me, and I was trying to figure it out was when someone initially said, "Why don't you just do things similar to Spanish? Right? You're in New Mexico." Like, it's not the same. So then people kind of got on that bandwagon and there was all these threads about looking at models of the Spanish language. I was kind of trying to explain there's a really complicated history with the conquistadors and that language and influence here. And then it's also complicated, like I'm not Pueblo. I am very sensitive to that. I think they can understand, just because you’re Native doesn't mean you have belonging in all Native communities. Or maybe there's limits to it and how you want to do things in the right way and be very intentional with it. And so I think that then reinforced, “Are you really an Indian” thing? And so I don't know. Then there was this one guy who was wanting me to put my Tribal ID on the discussion board. And so then again I went to my advisor because the professor wasn't doing anything and this was a white lady at that time and she was like, "Well, maybe they just want to learn more and understand." And I'm like, it's not, can there be some moderation?

As Lea mentioned, in Native communities we tend to inquire into each other’s backgrounds as a way to establish relationality. It is generally seen as uncouth to ask for someone to “prove” their Tribal enrollment by asking to see their CDIB or Tribal ID card. Lea was trying to share her knowledge on how she should approach her work with respect to the communities that she was working with and her peers, instead of providing helpful feedback, questioned her identity. This incident illustrates how settlers see themselves as the absolute authority over determining who is and who is not Indigenous.

Lea reached out to her professor who dismissed her and the incident:

> I was like, can we schedule a phone call? She was like maybe at the end of the semester. And this was a quarter way in and I was like, I don't have time for this. And I think at one point, I'm trying to remember exactly, this was like 2018 maybe. But she was like, I think you're being overly sensitive and taking it too personal.

Neither her advisor or her professor provided support or recourse with this situation. Her professor even went as far to suggest that she was the issue, putting the blame on Lea and not the aggressor. She was not only victimized during the incident but was further mistreated when she sought help.

Disappear the Indigenous

Settlers, as the supreme authority, not only determine who is/is not Indigenous, but also decide who is worthy of investment. When in positions of power, settlers can choose who to include or exclude. Linden spoke about a time when an administrator decided not to have representation at a conference for Indigenous and Latinos in STEM, citing the small number of Indigenous or Latino students in their college:

> I'm an [Job title] in the college of engineering, and I work with engineering to serve underrepresented marginalized students. And I work on a team that is primarily grant funded, which is fine, because the college of engineering cranks and grants like no other college. It gives me a lot of security and a lot of comfort, but it also gives me a lot of like *sighs*. So the other day, three days ago, our college dean shared an email. Not with me, it was forwarded to me. Not in a weird way, but it was like, “Oh yeah, by the way, we're not going to this thing.” It was SACNAS, the Society of Advancement for Chicanos and Native Americanss in Science. So it's Native Americans and Chicanos, right? So we're an

> HSI and we have a large Native student population, so keep that in your mind. But our college dean says something about the engineering representation is too low and not worth our investment…So that was said by a white man who's from the University of Florida. I think he's originally from Louisiana or something. So he's from the south, right? Comes here for advancement. Basically very cosmopolitan in the world of organizational theory. But he comes here to these people, he has an alleged diversity initiative, but goes and says some crap like that. Too low?! Not worth our investment. Like, what the flip?! That's how we see our partnership with our Native community is that it's an investment worth or not worth our time.

In this instance, this administrator made a decision to bypass these communities, due to the small population enrolled in the college he was dean over. Decisions like this hinder Indigenous student engagement in this field. If the goal of settler colonialism is to disappear Indigenous people from the land, the dean certainly followed this settler aim.

Matho's experience with this theme involves him being excluded from a lunch put on by a professor of color. Although he was not the only person of color in his cohort, he is the only Indigenous person. This incident left him feeling unseen:

> There was one instance where, I don't know how I feel about it even now, but I felt, I dunno, I guess invisible. Left out…One of the professors was going to host a lunch and hangout at their house for the students of color who are in our cohort. So I'm thinking, alright, I'm a student of color, there's not very many of us. I always seem to get a lot out of those classes where I have a Black professor or someone of color. So they were talking about this lunch coming up for students of color, and then when it comes around to, I remember being after class one day and some other students or some other peers had

> asked me, "Hey, are you going to that lunch?" And I was like, "What? Lunch?" And they're like, "Yeah, that lunch, it's happening." No one told me anything about it. I would've thought that, again, there being so few of us, it was kind of obvious that, “Hey, maybe we should include Matho as well being the only Native American in the group.” Whereas there were a few other Black students and Latino and then myself who were in the group at the time. But I was the one who, I dunno, I didn't get an invitation, which was weird. So I was like, okay, well I'm just going to keep doing what I'm doing because, yeah. So I don't know if it was not having a context for that. When it comes to, again, just thinking about the campus climate or just thinking about how there just aren't very many Natives around, or even visibly, I guess. But maybe just not even thinking about it. I don't know. I don't if it was done just like it was unintentional and oh we just forgot, or I don't know. But I just thought that was really weird and made me feel I'm not able to have a response for the peers that asked about that. Embarrassed, I guess.

In this incident, Matho was “disappeared” from this space. This could be attributed to the liminal space Indigenous people are situated in, never seen fully as both a member of a sovereign nation and an ethnic group. Indigenous people can be thought of as being “in-between” and this may change how people view them and their inclusion as a person of color. But more than this though, settlers need for the Native to disappear in order to gain land or resources. Whether intentional or not, the effects remained the same, leaving Matho upset and confused by the lack of inclusion.

DP shared an experience that provided the most extreme example of Settler as Supreme Sovereign. As he was conducting research out in the field, he was forced off the land where he was working:

> There's still a white supremacy going on, especially outside of university. Last year when I [was in the field conducting research], I was held up at gunpoint by a property owner because everything was snow covered…I was on public property, I wasn't on private property at all. Because I look different. I'm not, you know, I'm not white. When you look different to the community where you're doing science, there's a lot of settler aggressions going on...happening. So that's my experience. And so me being a military veteran, I just said, "No, sir. No sir. I'm not trespassing. If you feel that way, I'm very sorry. I'll step away and I'll go somewhere else." That's what I did. I went somewhere else.

This settler aggression is the perfect example of how settler colonialism is enacted on Indigenous people in contemporary times. DP was forcibly removed at gunpoint from Indigenous land, echoing the horrific past his ancestors were forced to endure.

The aggressions under this theme, Settler as Supreme Sovereign, make evident that settlers will always try to exert power over others through knowledge control, erasure, or force. They need power, or to feel powerful, for the purpose of staking their claim as the rightful authority. The intentionality of these aggressions show what the other themes do not, that this is deliberate. The settlers need Indigenous people disappeared from all spaces, including academia, in order to legitimize their position.

Summary

This chapter provided a brief overview of the storytellers and their overall experience in their programs. Stories of their experiences with settler aggressions in their doctoral programs were also shared. The storyteller's narratives show that they were aggressed upon by peers, faculty, staff, and even alumni. Four themes arose from their experiences with settler aggressions, including: 1. Settler Ignorance, 2. Settler Tokenization (and Indigenous Labor), 3.

Environmental Settler Aggressions in the Academy, and 4. Settler as Supreme Sovereign. Almost every theme had accompanying sub-themes. The themes complimented one another and illustrated how settler colonialism is enacted within settler aggressions, proving just how insidious colonial violence is in academia.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Summary

"'How?' is a question you ask if you are concerned with the mechanisms, not just the motives, of colonization. Instead of settler colonialism as an ideology, or as a history, you might consider settler colonialism as a set of technologies–a frame that could help you to forecast colonial next operations and to plot decolonial directions" (la paperson, 2017, p. 5).

Reflection

As I come to this concluding chapter, I cannot help but think of the past 7.5 years in this program. With the responsibility given to me to share the knowledges I have been entrusted with, there is a level of reciprocity that should be engaged. For this, I offer up my own story with settler aggressions. I graduated from OU in 2015 and was an adjunct instructor for OU's First Year Composition during the 2016-2017 school year. I started my doctoral program in the fall of 2017. The past election cycle and the following Trump presidency made racial tension start to bubble over across the United States. Trump emboldened people to say or do what they wanted.

The semester I graduated from OU in 2015, the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity was kicked off campus after a video was released of them singing a racist chant (Haws, 2024). President Boren went on to expel the students that were connected to the video. When I came back to get my doctorate in the fall of 2017, a member of the Pi Beta Phi sorority dressed as Pocahontas for Halloween and was met with backlash (Haws, 2024). Then in January 2019, a student was filmed in blackface using a slur. Four days later, a man would be seen walking through campus in blackface (Haws, 2024). These events continued happening with little to no recourse. You can kick people out of the institution, but it does not stop the institution from working how it was made to work.

As the President of the OU Indigenous Graduate Student Alliance (IGSA), I was invited to join the other campus leaders to help "solve racism" on campus *eye roll*. They allocated us

to certain groups and we came together to provide resolutions and suggestions to make things better on campus. I now know that listening sessions and things like that are used just to pacify and not to make real change. Some of our suggestions were taken out and not presented to the administration at all. During our meetings with administrators, I watched them further aggress upon BIPOC students, myself included. It was overwhelming. Looking back, I wish I had the knowledge then that I do now.

Even so, knowledge does not protect you from the toils of settler colonialism. One incident happened while I was at a conference in Virginia Beach in October 2019. I had gone out to dinner with two faculty who I was presenting with when an intoxicated man started to harass us and was trying to "guess" our ethnicities. He was trying to figure out "if we were American" or not. I seemed to be the target of this aggression and that irony was not lost on me. Asking if someone Indigenous to this land was American?! Words were exchanged by us, the man, and those that were with him. No one stood up for us, the bartenders and servers were nowhere in sight. We ended up leaving.

Those are just a few of the settler aggressive experiences I have had while in my doctoral program. There are many, many more that I could write about involving peers and OU administration, but I will save those for another time. My Ph.D. journey and experiences that I have had while in my program have led me to ask "How?". How is settler colonialism enacted through microaggressions? How can settler colonialism help explain what is happening? How does settler colonialism work subtly in higher education? While I do not have all the answers to these questions, I have been given stories that help illuminate how these settler aggressions are enacted. As la paperson (2017) reminds us, seeking out the mechanisms behind settler colonialism can help us predict future colonial operations and seek strategies of subversion.

Restatement of Research Questions

Despite existing research over Indigenous graduate student experiences (McCaffery, 2012; Moon, 2003; Tippeconnic Fox, 2013), few studies look at their experience with microaggressions (Shotton, 2017) and all fail to consider the impact of settler colonialism on these aggressions, leaving a gap in the literature. Moreover, there is little research on Indigenous graduate students (Brayboy et al., 2015), a group who directly contributes to their communities through Tribal Nation Building. Since these individuals become pivotal members within Tribal Nations, it is beneficial to investigate how these aggressions, experienced while in school, are influenced by settler colonialism at the highest levels of education. This study examined Indigenous doctoral student experiences with settler aggressions guided by these following questions:

1. What are Indigenous doctoral student experiences with settler aggressions at a Non-Native College or University?
    a. What types of settler aggressions do Native doctoral students experience? In what contexts? By whom?
    b. How does settler colonialism help clarify the specific microaggressions that Indigenous doctoral students experience?

Summary of Findings

With the research questions in mind, I investigated the experiences that Indigenous students have with settler aggressions. They shared with me their overall experience in their doctoral programs, if they were able to bring their whole selves to their program, and their encounters with settler aggressions. The stories they shared reveal four themes of settler

aggressions, which include: 1. Settler Ignorance, 2. Settler Tokenization (and Indigenous Labor), 3. Environmental Settler Aggressions in the Academy, and 4. Settler as Supreme Sovereign.

Settler Ignorance, the first theme, is categorized as a structural lack of awareness benefiting the settler. Current and past settler violence against Indigenous people is easily forgotten when one is not concerned about it. This makes it simple for the settlers to not be held accountable for the actions or how this ignorance impacts Indigenous people. Four sub-themes originated under this theme, including the settler's lack of knowledge about Indigenous people, the stereotyping of Indigenous people, settler's moves to innocence, and settler's reconstruction of the past.

The next theme, Settler Tokenization (and Indigenous Labor), speaks to how settlers use Indigenous people, culture, knowledge, or spirituality to provide an appearance of diversity without bringing about any significant change. Additionally, the tokenization of Indigenous people by settlers creates more labor (cultural tax/load) for this group since they are expected to show up and respond. Indigenous people strive to create better spaces for their communities/relatives, so this type of settler aggression can play on this value causing extra labor. Two sub-themes emerged from this aggression; the first is how Indigenous people are expected to represent all Natives as an "Expert Indian Expert", being the perfect Indigenous representative for settlers. The second sub-theme, to "Bring the Native", is when Indigenous identity is used for settler gain–they want you to perform as a Native.

Typically, microaggressions are thought of as aggressions from an individual to an individual, but this is not always accurate. The third theme, Environmental Settler Aggressions in the Academy, addresses settler aggressions that are "manifested on systemic and environmental levels" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278). In the context of this study, Environmental Settler Aggressions

in the Academy look at aggressions that are structural with the university system. This includes, but is not limited to, access to housing, hiring practices, rules, and university processes.

The final theme, Settler as Supreme Sovereign, addresses how settler's values, history, culture, ways of being, and knowledge are held up and strengthened by settlers. The settlers situate themselves as the ultimate authority on who and what is considered Indigenous, often denying Indigenous sovereignty, and trying to erase Indigeneity. These aggressions are often paternalistic with the settlers taking an "I know better than you" attitude. Three sub-themes arose in the research. The first sub-theme, "West is the Best," indicates aggressions that value western knowledge over others. The second, "Paternalistic Peer Review?," looks at how "guidance" from peers is often paternalistic. The last sub-theme, to "Disappear the Indigenous," is about the intentional erasure or disappearing of Indigenous students from academic spaces.

These four themes and their sub-themes of aggressions connect how settler colonialism is experienced in higher education in relation to Indigenous students. While the themes do not encompass all settler aggressions, they provide an initial foundation for looking at these kinds of aggressions while considering the influence of settler colonialism. It also helps us see how insidious settler colonialism is in higher education, even at the highest levels of study. The next section will look at how these findings connect to the broader body of research that has preceded them.

Discussion

The findings help clarify the experiences that Indigenous doctoral students have with settler aggressions while at their colleges/universities. The initial problem with conducting this research is that there was not an applicable model to investigate microaggressions that happen to Indigenous people. Sue et al.'s (2007) model of racial microaggressions does not accurately

explain how Indigenous people experience these aggressions, since it does not take into account our citizenship to our Native Nations or the impact of settler colonialism. Brayboy affirms in TribalCrit's fifth tenet that, by looking at "concepts of culture, knowledge, and power" (2005, p. 429) through an Indigenous lens, they take on new meaning. And although a model did not develop, themes emerged through the data that help expound on the aggressions that Indigenous students face.

The third tenet of Brayboy's TribalCrit (2005) lends itself well in recognizing the "liminal space" that Indigenous people exist in due to our political and racialized identities. While TribalCrit's (2005) first tenet declares that "colonization is endemic to society" (2005, p. 429), it fails to name the type of colonization that has happened in the United States. Looking at the data with a Settler Colonial frame helps to remedy this oversight. The knowledge that the storytellers shared also aligns with TribalCrit's (2005) eighth tenet that asserts that stories are theory and valid sources of data. Brayboy states that "Stories may also be informative of structural barriers or weaknesses" (2005, p. 440). The stories shared in the findings substantiate this claim and provide insight into issues experienced by Indigenous students within the higher educational system.

The findings were consistent with what previous research over the microaggressive (racist/prejudicial) experiences that Indigenous graduate students have with in academia (McCaffery, 2012; Moon, 2003; Shotton, 2017; Tippeconnic Fox, 2013), with all 11 storytellers relaying narratives of settler aggressions. Brayboy (2005) reminds us, based on tenet six, that the United States' governmental and educational policies regarding Indigenous people are deeply linked to assimilation. While the storyteller's themselves are not assimilating, they are immersed in the settler higher educational structure, which demands the eradication of their Indianness.

Historically, this is what US educational policies desired, to "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (Pratt, 1892). Although this is not explicitly said in present-day, these settler aggressions exert the same sentiment, indicating that the storyteller's Indigeneity is not welcome in the academy.

The inclusion of looking at this data from a Settler Colonial frame helped uncover how these microaggressions are linked directly with this type of colonization. One intriguing finding was the storytellers discussing their aggressor's ignorance and how this ignorance was projected. This settler ignorance, which is purposeful, was expressed in the storyteller's accounts with peers and faculty regarding their lack of knowledge about Indigenous people. This is consistent with Shotton's (2017) findings in her study on microaggressions that Native women experienced in their doctoral education. In her study, she maintains that this lack of knowledge is an issue of invisibility. Fryberg and Stephens, in their work on invisibility and social representations of Native Americans, declare that "In domains where American Indians are invisible, these spaces, in effect, communicate that American Indians are not welcome or do not belong there" (2010, p. 117). This lack of knowledge or ignorance is rendering these Indigenous students invisible and, thus, communicating that they are not welcome in higher education.

Often this deficiency in knowledge about Indigenous people led to more work for the storytellers, which Shotton (2017) also indicated her storytellers experiencing. Added labor was put on the Indigenous storytellers not only due to settler ignorance, but also as a result of settler tokenization. The storytellers were expected to be an "Expert Indian Expert"– an all-knowing Indigenous representative for settlers. This resonates with a narrative one of McCaffery's (2012) storytellers told about an aggression by a faculty member that led to the expectation of her being a representative for all Indigenous people while in class. Storytellers in Moon's (2003) study also

felt like they also had to speak and teach others about their culture. And as DP expressed, it feels like they are saying, “Educate about Indigenous now!”

Incidents like this not only affected the storytellers while in their classes, but they were also met with environmental settler aggressions due to the nature of the academy. These are the settler aggressions that are “manifested on systemic and environmental levels” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278). The cost of tuition for college is built within the system and often students are left to figure out how to fund it all on their own. One of the top ways that Indigenous students fund their academic pursuits is through graduate assistantships (Brayboy et al., 2015). Linden spoke about the difficulties of procuring an assistantship and the unfavorable work that comes with these positions. These challenges within this system can make it hard for Indigenous students to find ways to make graduate school affordable – which is purposeful in the settler structure.

Another finding under the Environmental Settler Aggression theme was the way that ceremonial responsibilities were handled. Both Bessie’s and Steven’s programs required them to take courses during the summer, which is a time when a lot of Tribal Nations hold their ceremonies. Steven noted that, “It feels like you have to forget about your culture for the summer.” This was also true for some of Tippeconnic Fox’s (2013) storytellers. One of her storytellers had to notify building staff anytime she wanted to smudge and found it hard to attend ceremonies while she was in school, while another storyteller stopped going to ceremony while she was in graduate school for fear her people would think she was collecting data (Tippeconnic Fox, 2013). This underscores how educational institutions fail to consider the cultural needs of Indigenous students, but this structure is working how it should. Masta elaborates, “Universities are designed to reflect western worldviews, and this reflection prevents universities from properly acknowledging the contribution of Indigenous perspectives” (Masta, 2019, p. 187).

The final theme in the findings, Settler as Supreme Sovereign, reflects the university's need to "erase-to-replace" (Patel, 2015, p. 38), which is the goal of settler colonialism. Patel stated, "The training of doctoral candidates is one of the sharpest junctures through which this logic of erasing to replace is expressed through higher education in the social sciences" (2015, p.38). However, this settler project is not achievable, since the replacing of this knowledge is unable to fill what is being erased (Patel, 2015). The findings unveiled this tension, and the storytellers had experiences with faculty valuing western knowledges over others, paternalistic attitudes from faculty and peers, and the "disappearing" of Indigenous students in different ways.

The storytellers were pushed to use western sources/models, even when they did not apply, and had their Indigenous source's validity questioned. T had her professor call her out in class for using TribalCrit, going as far as to call it a "Mickey Mouse" theory. Bessie and Lea also had their professors stress that they had to use western sources, with Lea's grade suffering when she did not. Similarly, McCaffery's (2012) storytellers experienced this push towards western knowledge as well. This is done intentionally. Masta notes that "In settler colonial ideology, defining what knowledge is helps justify settler colonial permanence" (2019, p. 190). These faculty were trying to define what knowledge was and was not in order to solidify the settler as supreme.

These paternalistic attitudes did not end with faculty though, and some of the storyteller's peers condescendingly aggressed upon them in their classes. When Lea tried to explain the sensitive nature of the language work she wanted to do, her peers disregarded what she said and even questioned her Indigeneity. Lea shared, "Just because you Google and you find some examples doesn't mean that works for every community or that the leadership and elders need

that or want that." Shotton discussed her storytellers experiencing these aggressions, too, and remarked that they were particularly fascinating because it was the storyteller's own knowledge about Native people that was being challenged. She goes on to explain, "This type of behavior is based in attitudes of White superiority and exemplifies long-held struggles of Native people not being acknowledged as authorities of their own realities" (2017, p. 44).

The final sub-theme in the data, Disappearing the Indigenous, is especially significant as these types of settler aggressions actively "remove" or erase Indigenous students from spaces. Matho was disappeared from being in community with other scholars of color when he was not invited to a lunch hosted by a faculty of color, while the rest of his peers were included. This left him embarrassed and unsure of what actually happened and so he moved on. Shotton (2017) revealed that her storytellers experienced this type of erasure, too. She noted that these aggressions indicated more than just "You don't belong here," but it rendered them invisible (Shotton, 2017). In DP's experience, though, he was hypervisible, so much so that he was physically removed from the space he was conducting research at by gunpoint. DP elaborated, "I'm not, you know, I'm not white. When you look different to the community where you're doing science, there's a lot of settler aggressions going on." In both experiences, the settlers actively disappeared these Indigenous students despite if they were invisible or hypervisible. This is due to the very nature of settler colonialism and its need to constantly disappear Indigenous peoples in order to stake their claim to land, knowledge, and resources (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

What is left unsaid

I wanted to discuss what is left unsaid in this work and the data. These narratives from the storytellers about the settler aggressions they experienced while in their programs may

always be unfinished. These stories can be seen as ghost stories, leaving the storytellers and listeners haunted. Yoon and Chen (2023) tell us that ghosts are those that are and have been victims of state-sanctioned violence. A haunting is a "process of return and revisitation of the past to the present; a rejection of linear-sequential time. An act of such return by ghosts. A memory of and ongoing agitation about injustice(s)" (Yoon & Chen, 2023). When the storytellers recounted their experiences, they often started to remember more settler aggressions that occurred.

Arizona had finished talking about one incident and remarked afterwards, "That's another instance that happened, which is telling me that there's a lot more experiences that have happened over the last four years than I remember." Another storyteller, DP, reached out after our interview to clarify more details that he had recalled. The ghosts of these past experiences were summoned and hung around to haunt and tell their stories. But what of the ghosts that did not get to speak? The storytellers, more than likely, had more experiences with settler aggressions than they could remember. I also could not share all the stories they told, so much is left unsaid. The ghosts of these memories may continue to haunt them in passing from time to time, as their stories will haunt me. What remains unspoken may never be revealed, but the narratives shared by the storytellers offer insight into how they experience settler colonialism in a haunted house (academia).

Implications

Brayboy's final tenet states that "Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change" (2005, pg. 430). Adhering to this principle, as educators, we should strive to create and advocate for better academic environments for all students within our higher educational institutions. The findings of this research help

illuminate how Indigenous doctoral students encounter settler colonialism in the university in everyday life. The stories shared provide insight into how the institution fails, but it also reveals what can be done to remedy some of these failures. In this final section, I address implications for policy/practice, highlighting some of the storytellers' recommendations, and discuss future research.

I invited the storytellers to share what they would like to see happen at their institutions to better support Indigenous students. The storytellers wanted actionable policies that really benefit Indigenous students as a whole. Both Steven and Arizona spoke about the performative action of land acknowledgements and stressed the need for institutions to create real changes that positively impact Indigenous people. Arizona, referencing land acknowledgements, remarked "That's not a solution. It's a symbolic gesture that doesn't really do anything. If they want to have meaningful–I wouldn't say reparations–but acknowledgement of the problems, further expanding support for students beyond that would be nice." Steven spoke to the need for an actionable element to the land acknowledgement, to ensure that the institution is not just being performative.

Practicable suggestions for these elements were discussed by many of the storytellers. The first was to recruit and retain more Indigenous students, faculty, and staff. Barbara addresses this issue, and while she believes there should be more Indigenous students, she thinks it would be even more helpful to have more Indigenous faculty and staff. She shared, "It's great to have peers who are going through it with you, but having Native mentors who have gone through the process before is incredibly helpful." There is a need for Indigenous students to see themselves in others at the university and feel supported completely. They often have different needs than

other students of color, so it is beneficial when they have peers, faculty, and staff that understand Indigenous perspectives, culture, and knowledges.

Actionable steps toward hiring more Indigenous faculty and staff include implementing inclusive hiring practices, such as forming diverse hiring committees, creating diverse candidate pools, instituting anti-bias screening measures, and standardizing interview procedures to promote objectivity. Further, some ways to recruit Indigenous students involve universities building trust with local Indigenous communities (Tribal Nations and TCUs), partnering with Indigenous organizations, providing opportunities for scholarships and students jobs, and highlighting Indigenous students, faculty, staff, and alumni to create a sense of belonging. To retain both Indigenous students and faculty/staff, it is essential to cultivate a genuinely inclusive and supportive environment. For students, this means to honor Indigenous culture, knowledges, and traditions inside and outside of the classroom, providing tailored support and academic services, and fostering relationships with Indigenous faculty/staff. Retention of Indigenous faculty and staff can be supported by providing opportunities for career development and advancement, ensuring equity in workloads, especially given their often disproportionate service work, and investing in diversity initiatives that address the barriers they face.

This brings us to the next recommendation: the need to educate non-Indigenous faculty and staff (and students) about Indigenous history, culture, and perspectives. Several storytellers indicated that if non-Indigenous students and faculty took a basic level course over Indigenous history in the US from an Indigenous perspective, it would be an improvement. Often the storytellers had to start at -10 when they spoke to peers, faculty, and staff about Indigenous issues, leaving them the burden of educating them. Requiring some level of development to remedy this problem would remove this ignorance and relieve Indigenous students of this

additional responsibility. For example, the "Kairos Blanket Exercise" is an effective practice established in Canada that has been used to teach about colonization through an Indigenous perspective. This exercise is "designed to raise awareness and deepen understanding of the denial of Indigenous peoples' sovereignty, the historic relationship between European and Indigenous nations, and the impacts of colonization" ("Kairos", 2025). Universities would benefit if they provided training like this for non-Indigenous students, faculty, and staff.

The final recommendation is for there to be institutional accountability for those who are committing settler aggressions. Settler aggressions frequently occur, and the aggressors and their victims often move on with no consequence or resolution. Both T and Arizona expressed that they would like to see something done to report aggressions that occur, so there will be some level of accountability. Even when these incidents are reported, those targeted may not get the support that they need, which only extends this violence. Institutions should implement policies and procedures for addressing aggressive incidents in a way that not only holds the aggressors accountable but also supports those harmed.

Universities should have reporting systems for these incidents with protocols to follow once a report has been filed. A tiered approach could be used to address aggressions based on different factors such as level of harm, intent, and whether this behavior is repeated. For example, first-time offenders would engage in restorative dialogue or a targeted training. If behavior is repeated, then more corrective measures could be applied like written warnings or improvement plans. Disciplinary action such as suspension or even termination would be applicable if this behavior were to continue. Also, those that have been aggressed upon should be offered support through counseling and additional check-ins through the university. As T said

after she spoke about what she would like to see happen, “There's only going to be more of us. That's the reality of it. And so it's important to do that now.”

Future Research

This current study answered Shotton’s (2017) call to investigate Indigenous doctoral student experiences with microaggressions. While the findings provided insight into settler aggressions that occurred to the storytellers, I feel like much was left unsaid. The storytellers shared important narratives that helped shed light on how settler colonialism influences the aggressions that they experience while in school. However, future research should examine a larger population in order to get a better understanding of the ways that settler colonialism works with and through microaggressions. With a larger dataset of stories, a model of settler aggressions could possibly be built with the caveat that the model is not a “one size fits all” since Indigenous people are not homogenous.

It would also be valuable to investigate the experiences that Indigenous faculty and staff have with settler aggressions. Indigenous faculty and staff are a main source of support for Indigenous students, so if they are experiencing things that may affect their ability to perform their job, this can impact the students they serve. It also is helpful to know what kinds of settler aggressions Indigenous faculty and staff encounter to examine how they mitigate these aggressions and be able to provide solutions for remedy. In the end, when we are aware of how settler colonialism is enacted in the day-to-day experiences of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff, we are better equipped to “forecast colonial next operations and to plot decolonial directions” (la paperson, 2017, p. 5). This knowledge helps us fight back against the settler colonial structure and never truly give them what they want, which is for us to disappear.

Dream Space

I have been asked numerous times over my academic career to imagine a place where nothing is bound by the current settler structure. What would I dream? What would I want to exist? How do I see this imagined future? These questions always stumped me, not because I can't think of this place, but because it is too large. I want it all for us!

I envision a place where colonialism is dismantled, and Indigenous systems of governance, education, and justice are restored/reimagined. I see our knowledges valued and revered, helping to solve societal issues brought about by colonization. We would govern ourselves, truly, and invest in our people ensuring their happiness, health, and success. We would build our own schools and universities, centering our culture, language, and traditions in these spaces.

Would this society be perfect? No, but it would be ours. And in this space, we would be free. Clyde Warrior spoke about this in the 1960s during his testimony to the President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty and said:

> Most members of the National Indian Youth Council can remember when we were children and spent many hours at the feet of our grandfathers listening to stories of the time when Indians were a great people, when we were free, when we were rich, when we lived the good life. At the same time, we heard stories of droughts, famines, and pestilence. It was only recently that we realized that there was surely great material deprivation in those days, but that our old people felt rich because they were free (Warrior, 1967).

And this meant to be free in the most literal sense – to have control over our own lives. And that is what I hope for, a future where we are completely sovereign and unbound from outside settler influence. Just imagine!

Summary

In this chapter, I offered my reflections of this research, restated my research questions, provided an overview and discussion of my findings. I also provided implications for practice that included: 1. Recruiting and retaining Indigenous students, faculty, and staff; 2. Educating those non-Indigenous on Indigenous histories, culture, and knowledge; and 3. Instituting policies that hold aggressors accountable. Recommendations for future research were also proposed where I recommended replication of the study with a larger population and with Indigenous faculty and staff.

This study helped provide insight into a population for which data is scarce, and it assisted in filling the gap of research on microaggressions and Indigenous doctoral students. It illustrates how pervasive settler aggressions are in everyday life for Indigenous doctoral students and allows us to see where we can untangle settler colonialism's snare in higher education. Addressing the needs of Indigenous people is a part of my responsibility as an Indigenous researcher. Through the sharing of these stories, I hope that I have helped amplify the voices of my storytellers and brought attention to how settler colonialism operates at this level. I am honored to have been a listener to the stories shared. It is my hope that one day these stories will not be told, not because we are silenced, but because they are not relevant. Until then, I offer my eternal gratitude to each storyteller, each story, and to those that remain unspoken.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Introduction and establish connection

Establish my intentions by sharing the purpose of the research and how I would like to understand more about their experiences with microaggressions while in their doctoral programs, thank the storyteller for letting me hear their stories, and thank the Creator for bringing us together in the space we are sharing.

(Introduce myself, my pronouns, my Tribal affiliations, and where I come from) I'm also joining you from Norman, Oklahoma on the ancestral lands of the Caddo Nation and the Wichita & Affiliated Tribes.

Share an item that brings me joy and explain why it does.

Before you share the item that brings you joy, I wanted to give you time to introduce yourself.

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

a. Where do you come from?
b. What are your Tribal affiliations?
c. Where are you joining from currently?

2. Can you show me the item you brought with you and tell me why it brings you joy?

Thank them for introducing themselves and sharing this item.

Education and Experiences

3. Please tell me about your educational journey.
    a. What made you want to pursue a Ph.D.?
    b. What doctoral program are you in?
    c. What stage (i.e. doc student, doc candidate) in your program are you (status and year)?

(Semi-Structured Interview Questions)

4. How would you describe your overall experience in your doctoral program so far?
    a. Do you feel like you bring your whole self to the program?
    b. How do you think that being Indigenous has influenced your experience?
5. How would you describe the campus racial climate at your college/university?

Now, I'm going to move to discuss particular experiences…

6. What experiences, if any, have you had on campus with others subtly or blatantly expressing stereotypical beliefs about you as an Indigenous/Native person?

7. Can recount an instance (or instances) when you felt uncomfortable, invalidated, disrespected, insulted by a comment that had anti-Indigenous overtones on campus?
    a. Potential response: That sounds awful. What did you do when you experienced this incident?
    b. How frequently did/do you have these experiences?

8. Describe an experience where people have suggested that you do not belong at your university/college because of your Indigeneity?
    a. How well do you feel like the institution supports you?
    b. How is the institution addressing these incidents?

9. How have these experiences impacted your academics, personal life, and emotional well-being?

10. How do/did you respond to those that have made you feel uncomfortable, invalidated, disrespected, or insulted?
    a. Have you had anyone intervene on our behalf when you were experiencing these microaggressions?

11. What strategies do you use to cope with your experiences with these microaggressions?

12. What would you like to see happen at your institution to better support students like yourself?

13. What are your recommendations for practice within your program/institution?

Closing

Thank you for your participation in this study. I appreciate the time you took out to be a part of my research. Do you have any questions for me about this research project? If you have any additional questions do not hesitate to email or call me. All of my contact information is on the Consent Form that I gave you. I will send you the transcript of our interview to review in case you want to clarify or amend anything. If I find something I want to clarify or follow-up with I would like to be able to circle back with you to ask, is this ok?

APPENDIX B
Qualtrics Survey

Q1: Are you enrolled in a doctoral program in either a public or private Non-Native college/university?
Yes or No
What is the name of the college or university that you attend? _____

Q2: Have you completed at least one year in your doctoral program?
Yes or No
What year are you in? _____

Q3: Are above the age of 18?
Yes or No
How old are you? _____

Q4: How do you currently describe yourself? (mark all that apply)
Female
Male
Genderqueer/genderfluid
Nonbinary
Transgender
Two-Spirit
Prefer to self-describe _____
Prefer not to say

Q5: Do you identify as Indigenous (Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native)?
Yes or No

Q6: Are you willing to participate in a one-on-one interview and potential follow-up interview over your experiences in your doctoral program?
Yes or No

Q7: Are you willing to bring an item that brings you joy to the interview? (This can be an object,
text, picture)
Yes or No