AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Racheal L. Croucher for the degree of Master of Science in Human Development and Family Studies presented on December 12, 2016.

Title: Family, Community, & Tribal Influence on Native American Student Success

Abstract approved:

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Karen A. Hooker

The history of American Indian and Alaska Natives (AIAN) in education is filled with conflict and painful memories for many. Indian boarding schools that lasted through the early 1900s were used as a tool for forced assimilation of AIAN people. With the disturbing motto of "Kill the Indian, save the man" as guidance, these schools stripped AIAN children of their language, culture, and dignity. Today, AIAN students attend and graduate from college at far lower rates than the national average. Of the AIAN students that do receive a high school diploma, only about one-third will enroll in college, compared to nearly two-thirds of their non-Native peers. Only 37% of AIAN college students complete a bachelor's degree within 6 years, compared to the 56% in the general population.

Prior research has identified supports promoting AIAN higher education success: family support, giving back to community motivations, university resources, on-campus social supports, college preparation courses, financial support, and maintaining cultural ties. Prior research has also identified barriers to higher education success: family, inadequate financial support, lack of academic preparation, and cultural barriers.

With the conflict-filled history of AIAN education, AIAN education disparities, and the dearth of AIAN college success research in mind the aims of this study are to 1. identify how family, community, and Tribe influence student success for AIAN students, and 2. begin a dialogue around student experiences and success to promote a sense community within the AIAN population at Oregon State University (OSU). Together these aims identify the needs of the AIAN population at OSU and begin the process of addressing those needs to promote student success.

AIAN students enrolled at OSU, 18 years of age or older were invited to participate in a focus group around their higher education experiences. Participants were asked to share on the topics of family, community and Tribe and its influence on their higher education experience. Through four focus groups comprised of self-identifying AIAN students (N=16), this qualitative study found family as support and barrier, Tribe as support and barrier, Native identity, culture clash, OSU resources, and OSU-Tribal connections to be predominant themes relating to student success. Financial support, Tribal unfairness, paradoxical cultural pressure, AIAN advising, and blood quantum were found to be supporting themes.

Family and Tribe were found to provide supports, but also act as barriers to AIAN student success while community was found to be neither a support nor a barrier. Students described finding family-like supports away from their family by creating a sense of family through their friends while at college. Students identified other individuals outside of their family and Tribe that were valuable supports.

Students identified conflict in the historical context of the education system and Native identity that may play a role in AIAN student success. Students rejected the roots

of the higher education system for several reasons, but especially because its original purpose was to provide White men the credentials to run the government, which is the same government that oppressed our ancestors and utilized the education system as a tool for deculturation and assimilation. Students described their primary motivation to succeed in college as being able to return to their Tribe and give back to their Tribal community, despite this devaluation of higher education.

Participants provided suggestions for OSU and the 9 Tribes of Oregon to consider in providing better supports to AIAN students. The primary suggestion was to improve communication and collaboration between OSU and the local Tribes of Oregon. Suggestions included hiring an AIAN academic advisor, promoting culturally knowledgeable services at Counseling and Psychological Services, and several suggestions for AIAN community events. The participant-identified issues of Native identity, culture clash, blood quantum, and paradoxical cultural pressures; how these issues relate to success in higher education for these students, is discussed.

The results of this study add to the sparse literature on AIAN college success, reinforcing the importance of family and Tribe and underlining the complexity of AIAN issues in higher education. Further research should look into Participatory Action Research to promote change through research. The active dissemination of these results to OSU, the Tribes of Oregon, and identified supports is absolutely essential in promoting higher education success for American Indian/Alaska Native students at Oregon State University.

Family, Community, & Tribal Influence on Native American Student Success

by
Racheal L. Croucher

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Science

Presented December 12, 2016
Commencement June 2017

Master of Science thesis of <u>Racheal L. Croucher</u> presented on <u>December 12, 2016</u>.

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University Libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Racheal L. Croucher, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

They say it takes a village to raise a child, and oh boy! I appreciate my village so much for supporting me, encouraging me, teaching me, inspiring me, pushing me and allowing me to explore my surroundings to grow.

To my family: Through all of the ups and the downs I am so grateful to have you as my foundation. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping me in every way you knew how.

To my OSU family of spectacular HDFS cohort buddies that I was 'born' into and 'adopted' into, my RED research and study team, and my blossoming indigenous community at OSU: There is no way I can express my gratitude for all that each of you has done for me, so I will leave you with some of my fondest memories. New Morning Bakery, baseball, Bombs Away, snow days, Café Yumm, conferencing, all-nighters, hikes, doughnut fundraisers, coffee breaks, step-aerobics, noodle place, halftime tailgating, proctoring, powwow, big table studying and dancing. I would not be here if not for these ways in which you supported me. I love you all and thank you for being a part of my adventure.

To my thesis committee Karen, Rob, Kay, and Michelle: Thank you for your endless feedback, support, and patience. I genuinely feel cared for and respected working with you all and can only hope for such positive interactions in my future work.

To Jamie: Thank you for your perspectives and discussions that shaped my thesis work and kept me thinking about the important things in life. Thank you for taking impeccable notes and being an excellent research colleague.

To my Tribe: Thank you so much for the opportunities you have provided to me and to my fellow Siletz youth. Please continue to invest in our Tribe's future through education.

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Dedication

I have always wondered and considered what factors in my life have come together to bring me to the place that I am in now. Most recently I have been considering why I have been able to graduate with my bachelors degree and attend graduate school. As a Native American, first generation college student I've asked myself time and again "why did I go to college? What happened differently in my life to situate me for college, compared to my peers?" American Indian and Alaska Natives (AIAN) represent less than 1% of all students enrolled in college and AIAN graduation rates are low, with AIAN students earning only .7% of all associates, bachelors, and advanced degrees (US Department of Education, 2012). How have I become part of this 1% while most of my high school peers have not? Over the years, I have considered many factors. Today, I am still considering some within myself, such as my personality, and other factors outside of myself, such as my family support. My family created an environment where college was normal even without being college graduates themselves. They would say, "*when* you go to college" rather than "*if*-" when talking about my future, and were very supportive of my choice to continue my education. I'm also considering how my situation has played a part; how did my decision to go to a small Tribal charter high school influence my success in college? These questions and my own experiences are guiding the research questions that I'm interested in.

Here at OSU, I've become more embedded within the Native American community, and through that I've had the opportunity to make many Native American friends and talk to them about their successes and struggles in college. Through the graduations and dropouts of my friends, I've witnessed both successes and struggles with

exiting college, with each person continuing life after college on a valued path. Going to college is a huge undertaking; more and more I am realizing that there are some issues that Native American students face that are outside the norm for the typical student. Because I have a background in psychology and human development, I was intrigued by the possibility of interviewing these students; to be able to provide data to the university and to the Tribes of Oregon and say "This is what you're doing right!" and "Here's where we need some work to support our Native students". Once I began to review literature for a potential project, it was obvious that there is a severe dearth of research on Native American issues in higher education. I found that the research has become more focused over time. Early articles provide descriptive statistics illustrating a discrepancy between AIAN degree attainment and other ethnic groups' degree attainment. Following this early work, more recent articles dive a little deeper and ask the question "why does this discrepancy exist?" The most recent articles attempt to find and implement solutions to this degree attainment discrepancy.

This is exactly what I would like for this thesis to attain. I know that this journey has helped me learn more about myself, my friends, family, peers, and Native students at OSU. I am hopeful that this process has also been a learning experience for the participants and will shed some light into their lives for administrators, faculty, and staff. So, this thesis is dedicated to you: the ones who will make the difference; the ones who will make the positive changes necessary for AIAN students to be successful at OSU and to find a sense of belonging here at OSU.

Family, Community, & Tribal Influence on Native American Student Success

1. Introduction

Nearly half of all undergraduate students in the U.S. fail to persist to degree completion (American College Testing, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). AIAN students persist at lower rates than any other ethnic group in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). With further investigation, Guillory (2012) and others have identified many issues related to these lower rates of persistence. Family support, faculty support and involvement, lack of resources, preparedness, institutional commitment, cultural differences, maintaining engagement at home-communities and in cultural ceremonies, and generational trauma are a few identified factors (Astin, 1982; Barnhardt, 1994; Brown, 1995; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Huffman, Sill & Brokenleg, 1986; Lin 1990; Patton & Eddington, 1973; Reyhner & Dodd, 1995; as cited by Guillory, 2012; Brown & Kurpis, 1997; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Tinto 1987). Family has been identified as a major influence on AIAN students' success in higher education; Guillory & Wolverton (2008), identified family as the number one factor supporting persistence, and the number one challenge to student persistence for AIAN college students at three northwest universities.

I have great interest in the role of the *family* in the college experience of AIAN students, especially with the literature showing such an important role in student success. In Native American cultures, family is often considered in a much broader perspective, including extended family, community, and Tribe (Bray & Stanton, 2009). I am interested to see if Native American students identify members from their family, community, and Tribe as influences on their college education.

This happenstance of my personal experiences as a Native American in college combined with having an interest in human development and family studies issues is what sparked my interest in the research topic; the lack of tangible research findings focusing on promoting AIAN student success is what lit the fire. I want to be able to promote success for my Native American peers at OSU and bring knowledge about how to promote persistence among AIAN students at other universities as well.

What themes shape the college experience for AIAN students at OSU? How have the people in their families, communities, and Tribes supported their education? These are important questions because AIAN are underrepresented at the college level (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This is true in Oregon universities, and here at OSU as well, with less than 1% of students identifying as Native American (Oregon State University, 2015). AIAN students have lower attendance rates and higher drop out rates compared to the national average (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). It is worthwhile to identify more specifically what challenges and supports students have encountered so that institutions of their support systems might better target these challenges and amplify the supports to promote success in higher education for AIAN students. As part of a research dissemination process, I hope to provide recommendations to the Oregon State University Office of Diversity Development, and Oregon Tribes to equip them with additional understanding of how to encourage and provide support to AIAN students, leading to the possibility of more effective relationships between Oregon Tribes and Universities.

I will be utilizing the Life Course framework as a theoretical perspective to understand the experiences of these students. This perspective considers the contextual to

individual-level factors that influence a person's life course. This framework is particularly ideal to explore the area posed because the perspective considers the individual within their context to address their position in their pathway; this perspective provides a framework to ask why students are where they are in their life. Historical context, linked lives, and trajectories/turning points are tenets of the Life Course perspective that will be used to frame these students' experiences.

This thesis will focus on the ways in which people from these individuals' *family*, *community*, and *Tribe* influence their educational trajectories at OSU. This thesis will extend information from previous research, and additionally I will attempt to create change for the AIAN students at OSU by identifying ways in which success can be promoted for future AIAN students at OSU.

2. Literature Review

Perspectives and Frameworks

To address issues of human development, there are many considerations for why people have "ended up" in the places and situations that they have. It is important to consider the situations that they've previously been in, the agentic decisions made to change trajectories, and the people considered when these decisions were made. Life course perspective provides a framework to understand the development of groups and individuals over time, considering their context (Elder, Shanahan, & Jennings, 2015). History, timing, trajectories, turning points, linked lives, and cumulative change among other concepts are highlighted through this perspective.

The constructs of the Life Course perspective that will be most valuable in dissecting the topic of interest for this thesis are historical context, linked lives, turning points/ trajectories, and agency.

AIAN Historical Context

The historical context in which a person is immersed will have an impact on their experience. This construct helps us to consider how the current context has been shaped by attitudes, beliefs, and events from the historical past.

The indigenous people of North America have undergone extreme cultural changes over the last several hundred years (Carney, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Wilkinson, 2010). Native American Tribes were the subject of strict policy regarding their personal and structural identities. In the mid 19th century Tribal status was removed from Native individuals and Tribal structure was disbanded. It wasn't until the 1970's that many Tribes were able to fight for federal recognition and sovereign

status. After this time many Tribes became organized as sovereign nations within the

U.S. Some Tribes established Tribal governments, defined their memberships, and

created policy to support their membership. This movement of self-determination and

self-governance was made possible by the Indian Self-Determination Act that passed in

1975. This movement provided space for AIAN people to practice their shared cultural

heritage and has contributed to the increased numbers of AIAN higher education

attendance (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Today, many Tribes have Higher

Education Departments that promote higher education for its members by providing

access to resources or even financial assistance through scholarship.

Since the 17th century these large-scale changes have shaped the ways in which

Native Americans interact with institutions of education (U.S. Department of Education,

1998; Carney, 1999; Wilkinson, 2010). As early as the 1600s, colleges were founded to

educate AIAN students. Many of these colleges were backed by religious groups with

intentions to Christianize American Indians. In the 1830s some Tribal groups organized

their own educational systems. This lasted until later in the 1800s when the U.S.

government formally intervened in AIAN education.

Beginning as early as the 1700s, American Indians were forced to leave home for

boarding schools (Carney, 1999; Wilkinson, 2010). These boarding schools were used as

a tool for colonization through the 20th century to strip the identity of American Indians

so that they would become assimilated into American culture (Jackson & Chapleski,

2000; Executive Office of the President, 2014). Children were forced to attend boarding

schools where they were given new names, made to cut their hair, replace their clothes,

and learn American-valued skills. Children were forbidden from speaking their native

languages, practicing traditional cultural activities or using their non-Christian name. These rules were enforced with corporal punishment and abuse (Jackson & Chapleski, 2000; Graham, 2012; Executive Office of the President, 2014). These schools were very effective in deterring Native children from practicing their traditional cultural practices and in turn from passing them on to their children. Through these destructive processes the language and practice of these indigenous people were all but eradicated. The lasting effects from traumatic experiences, such as the boarding school experience, passed from generation to generation has been titled "generational trauma" (Braveheart, 1998). This generational trauma is linked to the education system and has been identified on a broad level, as a potential factor for AIAN educational disparities (Braveheart, 1999).

Over time, boarding schools of the past closed or transitioned to AIAN-run boarding schools, Tribal entities began to open colleges and academies for Tribal people, some in conjunction with the federal government, and the ongoing lack of higher education opportunities for AIANs was addressed through policy (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Taken together, the historical context of the AIAN experience may have strong implications in the way that education is experienced by American Indians today.

Linked Lives

As humans, we are very social by nature. Linked Lives is the concept that the people in our lives influence our opportunities and our choices related to those opportunities (Elder, Shanahand & Jennings, 2015). Our lives are affected by the decisions of others, and we consider how our friends and family will be affected by the decisions we make. A similar construct is "social convoys" (Plath, 1980; Kahn &

Antonucci, 1980). – which refers to people who are so important to us that what happens to them has ripple effects on our own lives. Family members are agents of culture as they transmit knowledge, values, and norms to their families (Shweder et. al., 2006).

Using the Life Course perspective tenet of linked lives allows me to explore the ways in which the *people* from these individuals' family, community, and Tribe influence their educational trajectories. When I talk about family, I will be using a subjective definition, allowing students to define whom they are talking about. The term *Tribe* is used to describe the government or business institution of the Tribal organization, while *community* refers to the Tribal and non-Tribal people that make up the home community.

Collectivism is the mentality or perspective that prioritizes the group over the individual, which is a notable value within many Native American cultures (Bray & Stanton, 2009). As family and social support are becoming more important in the success of young people overall (Settersten & Ray, 2010b), with young adults 'living in' with parents longer, being more financially dependent on parents, and extending the transition into adulthood well into their 20s. The importance of these connections for a collectivistic society would be expected to reflect that of the overall population, with potentially more emphasis on familial ties. When asking students about the supports and challenges of higher education I expect them to identify people within their family, community, and Tribe that have been important in their educational trajectories. This is an important consideration because there can be conflicting feedback between the Tribal policies and familial/community value of education (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003). As a collectivistic cultural trait, AIAN students may heavily weigh the opinions and values of their family, community, and Tribe in their agentic decision-making.

Trajectories

Pathways are socially structured norms of moving through the life course that are often age-graded (Elder, Shanahan, & Jennings, 2015). Institutions often regulate entry and exit of pathways with formal procedure (i.e. Acceptance into college), and structure the paths that peoples' lives can take. Trajectories are the projected courses that an individual is on, structured by the pathways that the individual chooses. Individuals are given opportunities to transition through normative benchmarks within the trajectory. When an individual has a significant change in trajectory during a transition it is known as a turning point. Turning points often attach new meanings to an individual's environment and may change their life course.

Human agency is an individual's ability to make life choices within the constraints and opportunities available (Elder, Shanahan, & Jennings, 2015). There is a certain amount of agency involved in pathway selection. The individual may actively choose their pathway depending on the contextual allowance of options; the individual may lack agency because of other contextual factor. People who are on the same pathways may have similar experiences in their historical context, or linked lives, that lead them to their current pathway. Pathways can also be used to group people with similar trajectories. Higher education is the pathway that all college students are on, with graduation being the end goal of the trajectory, and turning point to exit that pathway.

Turning points do not necessarily have a positive or negative outcome on a person's pathway. For this generation, graduation is a turning point that is expected to result in positive changes in a person's pathway, while dropping out has negative expectations but there are many contextual factors that play a role in this (Settersten &

Ray, 2010a). Considering the context of the turning point, neither of these situations guarantees a positive or negative outcome.

AIAN Persistence

Persistence is a term used in much of the research I will be discussing. It is sometimes used as an equivalent to "retention", and often more accurately used as a counterpart to retention. Together, the terms persistence and retention describe the active efforts of both the institution and the student to be successful within the higher education institution. It is through these active efforts on the part of both the institution and the student that promote student success. When discussing the ideas of retention and persistence in this research, I will use the term "success". I will do this so that I'm not minimizing the active efforts made by the student, or the institution, and to remove any blame that may be placed by using the terms retention or persistence.

Descriptive research shows that AIAN students are not attending and graduating college at the levels of the national average (U.S. Department of Education, 2012; Hunt & Harrington, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Executive Office of the President, 2014). Pavel et. al. (1998) wrote a comprehensive report on the state of AIANs within postsecondary education in conjunction with the Department of Education. They first highlight the history of AIAN education and demographics and follow up with AIAN access to college, enrollment & retention, and completion. This report, from 1998, shows graduation rates varying by Tribe from 29% to 94% for high school graduation, and .5% to 32% for Bachelors degree or higher. On average, 54% of people ages 25 or older that live on the reservation have a high school diploma or equivalent. Only about 39% of AIAN college freshmen complete a four-year degree within six years of initial

enrollment, while 58% of students overall complete a four-year degree within this timeframe (US Department of Education, 2012). This descriptive data shows a huge variety in educational attainment between different Tribes, and it also shows a discrepancy between AIAN educational attainment and the U.S. average. About 88% of Americans have at least a high school diploma, and 29% have a bachelor's degree or higher. (US Census Bureau, 2015). In Oregon, the 40-40-20 initiative sets goals to increase degree attainment to 40% with a baccalaureate degree or higher, 40% with an associate's degree or skilled occupation certification, and 20% with a high school diploma or equivalent (Oregon Learns, 2016). Policy changes are following a steady increase in college attainment for AIAN students, and will hopefully address some of the issues experienced by AIAN to create this educational attainment gap.

Researchers began to ask why this disparity exists. Many factors have been identified, some at the institutional level and others at the individual level. Bergman, Gross, Berry, and Shuck (2014) wanted to identify factors of persistence in college students. They found that educational aspirations, institutional responsiveness, and familial encouragement to be important factors supporting persistence. Institutional responsiveness and familial factors were found in an AIAN sample as well (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Guillory, 2012). Valdez (2010) even pinpointed "the human spirit" as a factor promoting persistence for first generation students of color at community college. This was defined as the "something else" that can't be explained by individual or institutional level factors, and is similar to resilience.

Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003) used qualitative interviews to identify themes related to AIAN persistence in college. They identified family support, social support,

faculty/staff warmth, exposure to college and vocations, developing independence and assertiveness, reliance on spiritual resources, dealing with racism, nonlinear path, and paradoxical cultural pressure. All of the students in this study expressed their path through higher education as non-linear, or including breaks or multiple institutions. The paradoxical pressure mentioned refers to the conflicting values of education. Many of these students had motivations to go to college to bring their education back to serve their Tribal community, only to return to the reservation and get a negative response from community or family members devaluing their education. Jackson, Smith, and Hill suggest stable mentoring relationships and institutional supports to promote student success.

Guillory (2012) conducted a qualitative research study to compare AIAN student and faculty perceptions of persistence and college success. He found conflicting perceptions, and proposed strategies to promote persistence and completion for AIAN students. Faculty pointed to financial help and support programs as supports, and financial resources and academic preparation as barriers. Students pointed to family, giving back to their Tribe, and on-campus social networks as supports; family, single parenthood, financial support, and academic preparation were seen as barriers. Guillory concluded by suggesting that these conflicting perspectives be addressed, because perhaps the conflicting perspectives are creating the barriers. It is also suggested to maintain connections to family and Tribal community, to address single-parent students and students with family issues, and provide academic assistance through peer mentoring. Essentially, Guillory suggests that there be a dialogue between the students and the

institution so that the students' needs are being met. He suggests that similar studies should be conducted to investigate and address AIAN college student success.

Guillory & Wolverton (2008) used the same data to extend findings on AIAN supports and barriers to persistence related to family as it was noted as the leading support and barrier from the student perspective. They suggest to not only maintaining ties to family and Tribal community, but to incorporate family or create a family-like environment for AIAN students at the university. If family and Tribal community can make their mark on the education system, then values, beliefs, and indigenous knowledge can influence the way AIAN students experience education.

These research studies identify many factors related to AIAN student success, but the one consistent factor across all of these studies is family. They have consistently argued for more qualitative research to be conducted within specific AIAN populations. This master's thesis will use a qualitative approach to address the persistence gap for AIAN students and disseminating the data in such a way to promote change for these students. I aim to explore the ways in which people from students' *family, community, and Tribe* affect AIAN their higher education experience. Through this research I hope to start a dialogue within the AIAN student community at OSU around student experiences and successes and to promote community building, and a family-like atmosphere to support AIAN students. To complete this process, I will disseminate the findings to OSU and Oregon Tribes.

3. Method

In order to capture the essence of AIAN experience in higher education, leading researchers suggest a qualitative methodological approach (U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Guillory, 2012). This is preferred in order to bring in the students' perspectives and experiences. Quantitative data collection is needed to complement and enhance existing qualitative data (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Focus groups are an effective way to collect qualitative data from a group of people; semi-structured focus groups allow groups of people to discuss their opinion freely with some guidance of the topic. This method is used in exploratory studies (Morgan, 1997) to identify the factors related to the initial question, on a very broad level.

In exploratory studies, a grounded theory approach is necessary to glean the overall thoughts and ideas that come from the data (Charmaz, 2000). Through constructivist grounded theory methodology, research begins with a perspective and/or a few questions to glean the themes that come out of the data, but do not choose a theoretical framework in order to allow a less restricted view of what the data are saying. This means going into focus groups with an interview guide directing the conversation and being open to the flow of on-topic conversation leading to ideas and thoughts that come about. They use open-ended questions that guide the flow of the conversation, rather than coming in with questions that restrict the flow of conversation. This also means analyzing the data from these questions as it comes about, rather than using close-ended research questions or testing previous theories or models. The Life Course perspective provides a guiding framework from which to observe the data without restricting it to a specific theory or model.

Participants

For the present study data were obtained from four focus groups held in May of 2016. Participants were purposively sampled through a 3-pronged effort of targeted emailing, posting flyers at the Native American Longhouse, and snowball sampling as I was interested in the small population of Native American students at Oregon State. Participant requirements included being a self-identifying American Indian Alaska Native student at Oregon State University (N=167) and being 18 years old or older. There were no limitations or requirements beyond "self identification" as AIAN for a number of reasons. The first reason is that the term "American Indian and Alaska Native" has varying definitions. In this manuscript I've chosen to use the terms "Native American", "American Indian", and "AIAN" interchangeably to be inclusive of all of those meanings, and as there is no consensus in terminology to address this group (U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Guillory, 2008). For the research I used the term "AIAN" because it reflects the ethnicity terminology used by the university for its students, and will therefore be a familiar/relatable term to all of the participants. However, I also utilize this term to be inclusive of all indigenous peoples of North America, which may or may not have federal recognition of their Tribes or bands. Historically and today, AIAN individuals have to 'prove' their identity through the possession of a "Tribal ID card" or "Certificate of Indian Blood" or "Enrollment Card" (Hamill, 2003). This would be one way to assess the legitimacy of a person's blood quantum, but it does not assess a person's experiences, culture, or identity. Blood quantum is an all too familiar term to AIAN individuals; this concept that has been used to qualify individuals for Tribal membership has been defined as a crude measurement of

racial ancestry and in the past has been linked to Native identity (Hamill, 2003). In fact,

using this type of quantifier in an attempt to verify an individual's identity can be quite

off-putting. Because of this stigma, I did not have participants prove their identity, but I

did ask for them to share their affiliated Tribes or bands if known.

Table 3.1
Participant Description

Pseudonym	Focus Group #	Sex	Year in School
Judy	1	F	2nd year
Mark	1	M	Senior
Jack	1	M	Grad student
Dianne	1	F	4th year
Krista	1	F	Senior
Hank	1	M	Junior
Shelly	3	F	4th year
Lucy	3	F	Freshman
Jenny	3	F	Grad student
Mary	3	F	Senior
Rae	4	F	3rd year
Gina	4	F	Grad student
Sadie	4	F	Senior
Tom	5	M	Senior
Alice	5	F	Freshman
Amanda	5	F	Grad student

Focus group members (N=16) were 12 female students and four male students at

Oregon State University between the ages of 19 and 39 (See table 3.1; See Appendix D;

Participant names and identifying characteristics have been changed to protect their

privacy.) These students represent 18 different tribes across the United States. The tribes

represented are shown in the following table:

Table 3.2

Tribes represented in sample

Federally Recognized Tribe	Area
Alutiiq	Alaska
Apache	Southwest
Athabascan	Alaska
Arapaho	Plains
Cherokee	Plains and Southeast
Choctaw Nation	Southeast
Confederated Tribes of Siletz	Northwest
Hoopa Valley	West Coast
Klamath Tribes	West Coast
Mohawk	Northeast
Navajo	Southwest
Oglala Sioux	Northern Plains
Pueblo	Southwest
Shaktoolik	Alaska
Sioux	Plains
Tyme Maidu	West Coast
Wisconsin Oneida	Northern
Yakima Nation	Northwest

The tribes represented are all federally recognized, and represent areas all over the U.S. Half of the participants in this study are first generation while the other half of participants have parents that attended and graduated from college.

This population was chosen because of my personal interest and familiarity with AIAN issues in addition to the paucity of literature on this population concerning higher education success. Considering my interests and gaps in literature, I considered a project with AIAN students here on my own campus.

Flyers outlining the intentions, methods, and risk/benefits of the study were posted and handed out to students (Appendix C). This recruitment technique was chosen because it reaches a large number of potential participants by targeting areas that they might be utilizing on campus. I posted these flyers at the Native American Longhouse to advertise for recruitment. This flyer was also sent to the office of Diversity and Cultural

Engagement, the Native American Student Association, and the Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science, because they expressed interest in this project.

Emails are an effective recruitment technique because they target the specific students that we hope to recruit. This email was sent out to Cultural Resource Center based listserves, including a listserve targeting all OSU students that self-selected "AIAN" upon entry to OSU.

Snowballing flyers were handed out to participants after completing the focus groups. Participants were encouraged to share the flyer with their AIAN friends that may be interested in participating in the study.

Measures

A brief demographic survey that asks for participant information including age, sex, Tribe(s)/Band(s), education, and a few short questions on family structure was included in the protocol (Appendix B). There is space provided on the survey to allow participants to draw a representation of their family to supplement the family structure question. I asked about age, sex, Tribal affiliation and education to better understand the context of the participants. The family structure question reads, "When we discuss family, who are you referring to?". This is important because the definition of "family" varies from person to person, and may have some cultural implications.

I used a semi-structured focus group interview guide to serve as a guiding framework to have an open discussion with students about their experiences (Appendix A). This guiding document provided structure and consistency to the focus groups while

allowing some flexibility for students to build upon each other's thoughts and experiences.

Procedure

Five focus group interviews were conducted at the Native American Longhouse. Sessions lasted no more than 90 minutes. Three to six (Morgan, 1997) students were in each focus group. Because of the small population and snowball recruitment, many participants were friends, co-workers, and acquaintances of each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Students interested in participating emailed me to narrow down the focus group session to attend and so that I could answer any questions they had about the study. Participants were assigned to focus groups based on their availability and the number of participants already in the group.

An audio recording device and note taking were used to record verbal and nonverbal responses to the focus group interview prompts. Before the recordings started, I reviewed the informed consent individually and then as a group reminding students of their rights and responsibilities for the focus group. We then reviewed the handouts that the participants were provided, including informed consent, demographics (Appendix B), interview guide (Appendix B reverse side), and a flyer (Appendix C) for snowball sampling. After students provided their consent, the research assistant and I opened the discussion by going around the room with introductions and a brief question to get people discussing Oregon State experiences on a positive note, followed by the semi-structured interview questions. Participants filled out the demographic survey before and during the focus group interviews.

During focus group number two, both audio recording devices failed and only recorded responses for the first two minutes of discussion. After considering the responses we had from note taking, we decided to exclude this focus group from data analysis and to invite participants to share their experiences in another focus group later in the week, which one student was able to do.

Analysis

All focus group discussion were recorded and transcribed verbatim with the exception of one focus group in which both recording devices failed. These were excluded from data and students were invited to come back for future focus groups. Field notes from the focus groups have been analyzed to provide contextual and non-verbal communication descriptions. These were compiled during and after each focus group. Qualitative analysis techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2000) guided the thematic coding of the transcripts. Trends in the responses were organized by theme. During the initial coding, or open coding, emerging themes were identified to understand the complex issues related to Native American students' higher education. Themes were identified based on repetition and importance placed on the issues by the participants. Quotes and supporting thoughts were collected to accurately represent the sentiment of the participant. Through thematic analysis, patterns and themes are recorded from the data and organized within a theoretical perspective to better understand the issue (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). With the grounded theory approach in mind, I chose to utilize some Life Course perspective tenets to provide a frame from which to understand the responses, tying themes together through similar constructs and these tenets. Consistent with interview questions, I also utilized the social categories of *family*, *community*, and

Tribe in analyzing responses. These frames helped to organize the many responses and understand how they might fit together and give us a better picture into the lives of these students.

4. Results

Aim 1: Explore how Family Community, and Tribe influence AIAN students' college experience

Participants discussed how family and Tribe were important supports and sometimes barriers to their education, while community, as it was defined, was not identified as a support nor barrier. Family was described as a support by being emotionally, financially supportive. They were also helpful in physically assisting with the application process, and being socially encouraging. Family was described as a non-support in the following ways: Ambivalence toward decision, emotionally non-supportive, avoiding talking about school, absence of any decision making, and encouraging students to leave college. Tribe was described as a support by being financially supportive as well as physically assisting with organization and paperwork. Tribe was described as a non-support in the following ways: bureaucratic complexities and possibly unfairly blocking access to support.

Family

Students defined family as larger than their immediate family, and most students discussed their extended family, beyond their parents and siblings when asked about family. Some students drew representations including their extended family, deceased loved ones, ancestors, and immediate family (Appendix D) when prompted to symbolically represent their family. One student continually made jokes as I described

the family section of the demographics by saying "I've got thousands of cousins…

second cousins… adopted cousins…", which was met with laughter and agreement.

Some examples of family responses include:

> "Other than my actual family; my friends, the people I work with, my
> roommates, those people that I really consider to be my family have
> helped me get through college" -Hank, junior

> "I don't have any like family members here, and it's really interesting to
> see the dynamics of my network of friends, 'caus they like, really, became
> my family. " –Alice, freshman

Family included an array of members including parents, siblings,

grandparents, children, cousins, aunts, uncles, and fictive kin. Fictive kin is

defined as individuals considered as family even though they may not have

traditional family ties such as blood (Stack, 1974). Fictive kin included neighbors,

friends, and family of friends. Students placed importance on family, even if they

identified family as a barrier to their success, but overall, students discussed

family in a positive light.

Family as supports: Students overwhelmingly discussed family as a support

related to their higher education experience. Some stated that their family prepped them

for college starting at a young age and they were not given a choice as to whether or not

to attend college, and others expressed an ambivalence, that their family didn't mind if

they went to college or not, yet were supportive.

> "My parents always just pushed us to do better, umm kinda with their
> upbringings, they just wanted to make sure we had a better life than
> them." Tom, senior

> "I didn't have any role models in college… in high school, I was kinda
> looked at as an adult by my family, so I don't feel like they pushed me in
> any direction, almost like they were waiting for me to decide on my own.

When I told my family I was applying, they were happy and when I got the acceptance letter my mom like cried with me. My dad bought me a computer for school, but neither of them were in a place to help me financially or really in any other way." Amanda, graduate student

Others explained how their family was helpful by navigating the institutional setting and keeping up with paperwork. Participants often talked about their family members' college experience as being an important contribution to navigating the university institution. When asked if their parents were instrumental in applying for college or scholarships, participants responded:

"They did their best coming from their lack of experience with college… it was still kinda new for all of us, including my parents too." Tom, senior

"And so filling out the paperwork process was completely new, none of my family had ever went, high school was it. I don't even think my Grandmother finished middle school." –Alice, freshman.

"My dad fills out my FAFSA, I've never even looked at it" –Lucy, freshman

"My parents both went and graduated from college, 'cause they met at college. And so, they were able to be really supportive in aspects of like navigating college systems. They were really helpful with like 'have you checked in about your financial aid?' or 'have you checked in about these things…' like reminding me because they had been through the process before." Rae, junior

"My dad… contributes largely financially to my college education, so I'm very thankful in that way" Hank, junior

"As far as the hands on stuff though, my mom came to one FAFSA class with me, where we took a class and they tried to train us on how to do it, and she was just like, (threw her hands up in the air) 'I'm done, this does not make any sense'. And then that was the last of that." -Amanda, graduate student

Some students discussed how siblings played a role in their decision to attend college and their success in college. These next two excerpts come from participants that choose to go to the same school as their older sibling.

"My sister was two years older than me, and kinda searching for colleges at the time I was in high school, so I actually went on all of her tours with her, with my dad". Gina, graduate student

"My biggest support would probably be my brother… My parents were supportive of my decision to go to college, especially when it was the same college as my brother." –Tom, senior

Family was a primary support identified by a majority of participants, and the continuation of a familial connection, or the recreation of a familial connection was important in transitioning to college. Students described connecting with friends and creating a sense of family to help their success at college.

"One of the things that really helped is I connected with my roommates family, a lot. They call themselves my college family. Um so I still go hang out with her parents a lot. They cook us dinner on Sunday nights and things like that. Just, finding other people to fill in that parental role when I needed it, because I needed someone around a lot, especially in my first year." -Rae, junior

"My sister was leaving, I didn't see my uncle as much, and my grandpa had passed so it was really hard for me to get used to the idea of like making my own family here" –Gina, graduate student

"So what I did, my whole first year, well first two years, I played basketball every night at Dixon. And that became my new family… So one Korean, one Japanese kid, a bunch of Vietnamese guys, and that became like my family. Not when it came to school or anything, but it was more like just being a part of a group again, made me feel a little bit better." -Sadie, senior

"Um, favorite thing, it's the [sport] team. I really love playing with OSU and meeting new people through the team, and like you all have fun, you all do what you love, and I have a lot of fun connecting with them and it's not just on the team, but it's outside. And you guys do a bunch of stuff together, it's like a family and that's cool." -Alice, freshman

Family as barriers: Some students talked about absence of support from their families with an indifferent attitude, while others described their families as an active barrier to their access or success in college.

"My dad didn't even know that I'd applied to college, and threatened to kick me out of the house if I didn't do something with my life, basically. And I was like 'by the way, I'm moving' (laughter from peers) so uh… nope I did that all myself." -Sadie, senior

"They didn't want me to move away to go to school… When I moved out here to go to school here, me and my mom had a fight that lasted like four months. I couldn't even call her." -Mary, senior

"My parents were supportive about the undergrad. But I think they were just really confused about grad school… my mom was just like 'why?'" -Gina, graduate student

"My family has made my life really terrible in terms of college, so they weren't very helpful." -Jenny, graduate student

"I struggled the first few terms of my undergrad and felt like I had no one to reach out to. I don't know why I didn't drop out, because I was so scared of taking out loans and then barely passing my classes, it was so different than high school. I didn't think I was underprepared but once I got there, it was hard and I knew my friends and family couldn't relate. They'd just say 'you can do it, keep it up' which made me feel worse for doing so bad." –Amanda, graduate student

Community influence: There was some disagreement on the definition of the term "community" among participants. Several students saw community as being fully encompassed within the definition of family and Tribe. Questions about community influence on students' education were sometimes met with confusion.

"Are you including the Tribe in this…?" –Tom, senior

"I think because my community *is* my family, and kinda my family of friends at grad school, it's been really supportive." –Gina, graduate student

Students often responded to community questions with responses about their family or their Tribe. I tried to clarify and asked if they could identify

members of their community that weren't family or Tribe that had influenced

their education and many students said 'No'. When I asked future focus groups

the same question, there were similar results. Whether or not they were labeled as

community members, 'like family' or otherwise, there were some individuals

identified through these focus group discussions that were important in students'

decision to attend school and their success in college. Some of these individuals

included teachers, mentors, counselors, friends, and neighbors.

> "I think of my neighbors, couple in their 60s. They felt like an extra pair of grandparents because they always had extra work for us to do, you know, lemonade on the front porch and come hang out anytime, stuff like that… they were really supportive of us going to college."-Tom, senior

> "There was a teacher that helped me in high school. She was really pushing a lot of students to apply to college and get all these scholarships. That's how I got the scholarship I have… She helped a lot with that." - Shelly, 4th year

> "I wanna say that neighbors, and then like friends of family, like our family friends were supportive and were like really proud of me for wanting to go to college." –Amanda, graduate student

> "And of course my friends and stuff too, they all decided to go to college and stuff so that was a pretty big factor… We're all friends and we're all like a family basically and we've all known each other for very long, so we just kinda helped each other." Alice, freshman

> "My high school counselor pulled me out of class, like and would sit me down and put an application in front of me like 'you're filling this out. You're going to college'. You know? And like scholarships and all kinds of stuff. And I think without that, without someone pushing me, like none of my friends were going to college, none of my family were making me do it, so like, without her sitting me down and saying 'here it is, this is how to do it', I probably wouldn't have even applied." –Amanda, graduate student

> *Tribe:* Tribe was defined throughout the focus groups as the affiliations

participants held to federally recognized and non-recognized Tribes, as a member or

descendant, and as the cultural beliefs values and traditions practiced through these

affiliations. Tribe was identified as a support and occasionally as a barrier to student

success.

Tribal support: Participants identified Tribe as a support in a couple of ways,

including financially and assisting in the application process.

> "I knew I wanted to be a doctor and my parents didn't have the money for that, so I never thought it was going to be possible. Then I found out that my Tribe has a really amazing scholarship and I was able to go ahead and start pursuing that." Mary, senior

> "I think the Tribe was really supportive of higher education, and they have a higher education department where they provide scholarships and grants, like you have to apply for them and you have to like, well not everyone gets one." – Amanda, graduate student

> "[My Tribe is] a federally recognized tribe, so I think there's a lot that that says. Since it's bigger, and the way it's financed and everything, I feel like there's more opportunities Like everyone gets a general stipend, but like there's more you can apply to, but it's like very competitive you know." – Alice, freshman

> "I have to compete with other students for it. I have to write essays and all that other stuff. But without their support, I wouldn't really be able to go to school here." –Judy, sophomore

> "I've gotten small scholarships through them, but it's not to the point where I didn't need to look for outside scholarships, because I apply for a lot of outside scholarships." –Mark, senior

> "I am [Tribe] and we have really good higher education funding. So I am really lucky to be funded. Which is awesome." –Jack, graduate student

> "I actually got a lot of help from the educational director from my Tribe. And she actually sent me all of the paperwork I needed to fill out, and kept me up to date with sending things back to her and stuff. After the first year she kinda dropped off the radar."" –Mary, senior

Lacking Tribal Support: While Tribe was primarily identified as a support,

participants did note that there were sometimes issues with maintaining the supports as

seen in the previous excerpt. Other students talked about Tribal supports ending

prematurely or not having the option for financial supports through their Tribe.

> "We know some people down there and they get some tuition paid for because their Tribe is in state. So, it was, at first it was like 'I wish! That would be really nice'. I do get some scholarships because I'm a good student, AND registered in a Tribe, but… [I don't get college paid for]. – Tom, senior

> "I was fully funded, my tuition was covered for my undergrad and then as soon as you get into grad school you're cut off, and you lose those resources too. So, I'm not in the loop about, like I don't get the emails that say 'apply for the summer internship' or 'there's a housing application due at the end of the month'. So the whole support system got cut off, which is a bummer" -Amanda, graduate student

Like this previous example, students expressed difficulty interacting with their

Tribal institutions and many students saw it as a flaw within the inner workings of the

Tribal institution.

Tribal institution discrimination: Students also identified other struggles with

their Tribal institutions. Often supports were available but inaccessible due to loopholes

within the system. Students felt as if being a member of the Tribe and meeting the

'requirements' for scholarships and supports just isn't enough. They described issues

within the Tribal systems such as nepotism, blood quantum, and preferential treatment

based on qualities outside of the support requirements.

> "One of the people on the board doesn't like my grandpa. They like had this huge falling out when he still lived on the reservation, and so I've had to basically like, basically try to keep the fact that we're related, out of my paperwork and things like that, so it doesn't affect things. Because already not having lived on the reservation, and not going to a Tribal school, they take any chance they can to be like 'oh, you didn't do this thing, so you're not getting the scholarship'"-Rae, junior

> "My home address is in [City in Oregon] and they're just like 'oh, if you don't have an address in [County of Reservation] County then we can't

help you.' You know? But I'm like enrolled there! There are no rules that says I have to live there. Like how am I ever supposed to go to school if I'm supposed to live in [Reservation] County? So it really makes no sense, but I've come up with the same difficulties… they find the tiniest little nitpicky thing and they're like 'oh! You're out! Sorry!' Yeah, so, very frustrating." – Sadie, senior

"You can't really get the scholarships, you'd have to be either really poor on paper, or really high achieving, high blood quantum."-Krista, senior

"But [Her Tribal board] it's being closely held by one family in the top positions" One participant responds "That does happen. Honestly, in Alaska" and another responds "That shit happens everywhere" – Conversation between Dianne, Judy, and Jack

Aim 2: Start a dialogue within the AIAN student community at OSU around student experiences and success to promote community building and a family-like atmosphere to support AIAN students.

This aim was achieved through the focus group process and beyond, and is continuously being addressed through the dissemination of these data. Students shared their own experiences of success and their struggles at OSU, openly with friends, coworkers, and new acquaintances.

Many students contributed ideas within this dialogue on how to better the college experience for Native students and expressed interest in further developing some of these ideas through the AIAN student groups at OSU. Some of these ideas include: a Native American Longhouse-hosted event or public service announcement relating to being 'Native-enough' and rejecting blood-quantum issues, reaching out to specific faculty and staff to advocate for an AIAN advisor, outreach and recruitment efforts through the Native American Student Association or the Native American Longhouse, and holding an

annual event with a panel of Native American students sharing their experiences with new AIAN students.

Structured supports:

Students reported utilizing many resources on campus, including resources from their Tribes, and other outside sources. They contributed suggestions on what kind of resources may be useful for other AIAN students, provided ideas on how to make these resources more widely available, and offered suggestions for resources that should be made available. The resources students expressed as useful are listed in the order they were identified in the focus groups, which may also serve as the order of perceived usefulness:

- Greek Community
- Native American Longhouse (NAL)
- Cultural Centers
- Dark Matter (Event put on by Diversity and Cultural Engagement)
- National Indian Education Association Annual Conference (NIEA)
- Gates Scholarship
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
- Elders
- Director of Financial Aid
- Director of Diversity and Cultural Engagement
- Klatowa Eena Powwow
- Annual Salmon Bake
- Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP)
- Summer Bridge Program
- Native American Student Association (NASA)
- Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS)
- Indian Health Services Scholarships
- STEM leadership program
- AIAN Listserves
- Myers-Briggs program
- Tutoring
- The Valley Library
- Dixon Recreation
- Prayer/meditation spaces

- Oregon Native Education day
- Interstate compact for in-state tuition
- Sports teams
- Minority scholars Program
- Diversity and Cultural Engagement
- Academic Advisors
- FIRST Generation Student Group
- Community Engagement Core Tribal University Partnership; Superfund Group
- Upward Bound
- TRiO Student Support Services
- Educational Opportunities Program (EOP)

"My favorite part about this school is the Longhouse… That and the cultural centers in general. But particularly the longhouse." –Hank, sophomore

"Going to the SACNAS conference was really helpful." –Mary, senior

"Part of [Community Engagement Core Tribal-University Partnership] their mission is to increase cultural competency in researchers but also scientific capacity for Tribes themselves. So my vision is, you have to get to kids really early, and get them comfortable with being in a space like this… and getting them to look toward making that decision." – Sadie, senior

"LSAMP was really good like the Summer Bridge program because it is all minorities living together a week or two before school started, so you get to know people. – Lucy, freshman

Participants also identified improvements for specific resources that

weren't quite as helpful as hoped:

"I've had the problem where I go to use the resources, and they aren't as helpful as I thought they would be… I mean, CAPS is supposed to be a place where you can go for counseling, I mean why don't they provide counseling!?" –Mary, senior

"I think the scholarship and student loans department needs a major douching when it comes to people that don't know how to deal with Tribal scholarships." –Jack, graduate student

"try and make an international studies double diploma… well it's not a double diploma but I can't remember the proper term for it but not double

diploma. Anyways it's like a diploma for Native American Studies…
Approve the Native American Studies Program!" –Mary, senior

"I know the international dorms over there has like peer counselors, you
know? So I think that would be good option to have people who are, well I
guess they don't have to be affiliated with NASA or the Longhouse, but
who kindof are peer counselors that can say 'here, this is what I did'." –
Sadie, senior

"Lets talk about breaking down systems of oppression at this school. Lets
talk about mental healthcare for students online. That's what these people
need to be doing, directors of this building [NAL] need to be *that* kind of
aware... and what about disenrollment, lets talk about that." –Jack,
graduate student

Students talked about accessibility issues with some resources, from not knowing

about resources to feeling uncomfortable walking into an unknown space:

"I don't feel like there was any support. I didn't probably seek out all the
avenues for support, but I didn't know even where to begin with that
process." –Sadie, senior

"When I came into the Longhouse, I didn't feel like I was welcomed here.
Not that it was anything the staff were doing or not doing, but it was kinda
intimidating." –Amanda, graduate student

"I think really one of the things that would have helped a lot is just better
outreach to me as a first year student with how I can get involved in those
things on campus. I think now that I work in the halls I can see the
attempts that were made because I'm there, making the attempts. But it's
not reaching students, I don't think… It was like, I had this opportunity to
connect with other Native people on campus, but it was always just out of
my reach. I felt like I could never quite attain the community that I wanted
to when I first started here. Even though I was really excited that it
existed." – Rae, junior

"Centralizing a place where all the people who are [doing research] with
Tribes or on Tribal issues… I think would be important" –Sadie, senior

"I feel like an outsider when I walk into this [NAL] building. And maybe I
am here… that's what I was alluding to with the cultural differences.
Because I'm really used to dealing with Plains Tribes and maybe they
have a different cultural way that I was just really used to walking into." –
Jack, graduate student

In every focus group, when discussing ways to improve supports for AIAN

students at OSU, the idea of having a Native American dedicated academic advisor was

supported.

> "The University of [her previous university] has really increased the
> success of Native students' education, higher education, because they have
> a Native Students Resource Center where all Native students are welcome
> and there is one advisor. They provide you with scholarship applications,
> they provide you with advising, and everything so you don't have to feel
> stressed out, overwhelmed and lost in the White mans system." –Dianne,
> senior

> "Each culture center should have an advisor to represent them there… I
> know I need to get good grades but I need more of a support system and
> like other resources to do that. And I feel like the culture center advisors
> will be more helpful in providing those types of resources and places and
> let you know of groups and stuff to study and support you. Because
> education is not just about studying, it's a lot about your groups and
> support systems and people that help you." -Alice, freshman

> "One thing I always thought of, and I wanna kinda see through with
> NASA is having just individually with students, but erasing this idea this
> colonial-as-fuck idea of 'Native Enough'. And doing that explicitly. And
> outwardly. And maybe even having an event or something saying there's
> no such thing as being not Native enough. And that being a Fall event that
> we do, to kinda open that up. Because I've heard that from a lot of
> students that that's a feeling that people have. And it seems to be a pretty
> universal experience for us." –Rae, junior

> "We should have some sort of TED talk at OSU from a Native person who
> went through college and they're like, because I'm sure someone's out
> there that's got a great story that would be transparent to a lot of students,
> and they'd be like 'yeah, I've felt the same way'." –Tom, senior

OSU-Tribal connection:

Overall there was a call for stronger connections and communication between

tribes and universities relating to recruitment and success of Native students.

> "I think the universities should try to work more with Tribes in general.
> There are some programs here, like the extension program works with
> Warm Springs in central Oregon. They do some things in that area, but

they don't do a lot working *with* those communities. OSU should have a presence in the 9 tribes of Oregon." –Mark, senior

"I thought would be really cool for NAL or even NASA to take a day to go to a few high schools [for recruitment efforts]. Or just go to Warm Springs or Siletz or Grand Ronde." –Shelly, 4th year

"Native communities are pretty far from those larger schools so having a better bridge to like go directly to their high schools or some sort of invitation or something. 'these are some of the resources we have around Native Students and some of the general supports'. Just having more of an open dialogue with Tribes." –Tom, senior

"You can focus on cultural competence, but is that really getting to the question about tribe-specific issues? Or the government-to-government relationship. Or the sovereignty of Tribal nations. I don't, well I'm biased, but I feel like we deserve a little bit more focus on that relationship and I don't know but I guess the true history of that relationship. And in order to make it work from here on out." Sadie, senior

"I think like bigger colleges should have programs with each tribe within the state. So like OSU should have some type of program with all of the 9 tribes of Oregon on like having students come here." –Shelly, 4th year

Native identity

Students talked about Native identity struggles including facing stereotypes,

microagressions, and forming a stronger sense of identity through college:

"In high school my friends would call me their pretty Native…I never really said anything because it would have been worse for me socially to identify strongly as Alaskan Native, but coming here I've noticed that as I've more strongly identified with my Alaskan heritage, it does alienate you." –Judy, sophomore

Some students expressed the pressures of Native American stereotypes and the

difficulties experienced when they didn't fit the stereotype. They were pegged as

spokespeople of all Native Americans, called "not Native enough", and accused of

getting free money:

"I bring up that I'm Native American they're like 'Oh, so you get school

paid for' that was like the first thing that comes to mind because that's just like the stigma around it like 'we betrayed you, and you get stuff for free now' and I'm like 'no, that's not how it works actually'" –Tom, senior

"I kinda had to overcome that fear of not being native enough for Native spaces. Because I have never had a physical connection to a large group of people that were of my Tribe, like at all." Rae, junior

I grew up on the reservation, I have fairly dark skin, I get really dark in the summer, but I was not Native enough, because my dad's side is Korean. – Sadie, senior

 "When I'm on the Rez no one asks me if I'm Native, but like when I'm here, people say I don't even look Native" –Mark, senior.

 "We all have that feeling that we're not Native enough. We need to get rid of this whole 'Native enough' idea" -Rae, junior

"When people ask me 'how much Native are you?' I just say well how much White are you?'" –Alice, freshman

 "In high school and I'd say I was Native, people would think I was the expert and I wouldn't know what to say…" –Mark, senior
To which Jack replied, "Well that's the inadequacies of our education system in itself- expecting a native student to speak for the entire population, you are *the* spokesperson of all those nations. –Jack, graduate student

 "The most difficult thing is trying to explain to my friends why certain things are racist or offensive" Judy, sophomore

Strengthening Native identity ties: Several students discussed their identity

formation through their college experience, stating that they identified more with their

Native American heritage than they had previously. There were a couple of students that

said the opposite: they came into college with a strong sense of their Tribal identity and

they weren't looking to strengthen it through college.

"In high school I didn't really see myself as Native, I wasn't outspoken about it but if I was there would have been a lot of backlash" -Judy, sophomore

"I had no ties with my Tribal anything growing up. It was really hard because I wanted those ties, but there was really no place, or no one that I could go to because my dad was adopted, so he didn't even know himself… I've had to relearn my indigenaity." –Mark, senior

"I started reaching out to like NASA and that's helping a lot with, I think being comfortable in my identity and that was what I can do for myself, just be comfortable with who I am." – Alice, freshman

"I hear people coming here with not a real good, clear idea of their own identity. So they come here looking for that. I've heard it multiple times from multiple people here, and even today. I came here with my own identity. I would come to this building to look for resources to help me continue my path." –Jack, graduate student

Blood Quantum: Overall students rejected the idea of blood quantum as a standardization of Native identity, however it did come up several times when talking about Native identity.

"It is absolutely colonizing, it absolutely is phenotypic and absolutely is fracturing. Blood has nothing to do with culture." And later stating, "Blood does not inform culture. At all." –Jack, graduate student.

"the thing, I think it's kinda important…so I was taught that it was mainly put in place to get rid of the Natives because eventually it would lower and lower and would be not enough.."-Lucy, Freshman.

"[Blood quantum] It's an instrument for discrimination and segregation between tribes. Which I think is pretty terrible. I donno how many tribes have done this, but my Tribe, since we're at the point where we can't have full blooded children anymore, ever, we switched to a pedigree system." Mary, senior

Culture Clash: Several students expressed difficulty transitioning between their home culture and the culture of the university. Students in one focus group in particular spoke deeply on the cultural issues of not only OSU, but of the American higher education system as a whole. In the first focus group, students discussed the historical context of

universities and how it related directly to the extermination and assimilation efforts of the

US government on Native American people. Here is how the discussion panned out:

> Judy: "The University is a White institution… It started off by giving White men the credentials to run the government… That's what it was about. That's why people of color and women weren't allowed to attend. It *is* western-based thought, that's the whole point."
> At this point there was some discussion and agreement amongst the participants.
> Jack: "And I would assert that that's where our oppression comes from, right?... Their policies that destroy and fracture us…"
> After more discussion Judy went on to devalue the education system and advocate for changes needed within the education system.
> Judy: "Education at the university, we're paying for credentials pretty much. We're paying for a piece of paper so that we can go out and be good little capitalists and be productive and efficient… but what they're teaching us is very… it's based on their own findings… it's self preserving in the way it teaches you only that which sheds good light on the university system… it's based in their worldview, it's not diverse enough."

This conversation touched on the discomforting roots of the education system and

how that has shaped their historical context. Understanding this connection is emotionally

difficult for some students, and one student called for more support for culturally

competent mental health services:

> "I swear to God we needed daily therapy sessions because you're talking about your own genocide. You're talking about your own family being killed off… And that's really hard when you start thinking about it on those terms… What I'm asking for is a culturally competent counselor because we're talking about culturally relevant issues." Jack, graduate student

This conversation overall was eye opening and lead me to ask students what

motivated them to attend college. Understanding that the education system has roots in

the assimilation and genocide of your ancestors and then continuing to pursue that path is

conflicting to say the least. The responses came to be a major theme observed throughout

the focus groups.

"I have a responsibility to my people and to my land… My grandmother would try to teach me that." –Dianne, 4th year

"I want to go back and work in Indian hospitals and give back and everything. That's a big motivator for me." -Alice, freshman

"Why do we get an education? …Tribal community is right on, it's for the community." –Jack, grad student

"That was a big motivation for me to go to grad school, was to go back to my Tribe and give back" –Amanda, graduate student

"I want to go home and work for my Tribe, and I know I will have to have a degree to do that. So, that was like one of the major factors." -Shelly, 4th year

"I want to go back to the Tribal community, whether it be mine or another one, go back and make a difference there" –Mark, senior

With all focus groups identifying the conflicting values of their 'home culture' versus the culture at OSU, we continued to discuss how that experience had felt, and how students might navigate that transition. One student attributed her success in college to being 'pre-prepared' for college, and another student who grew up on a rural reservation echoes her sentiment from a different perspective:

"Western culture is very individualistic… I grew up in a White neighborhood so I have been exposed to that mindset and that ability to like, push myself… Versus when you grow up in rural Alaska, you have your family and cousins, you all go to school together, it's like a community thing. You have so much support…. I think I maybe would not have done the same if I had grown up in not-as-urban of a setting." –Judy, sophomore

"My Grandmother as a matriarch taught me from a young age, the Old Cultural ways. So I was blessed to grow up working the land and knowing how to live without running water or electricity, but then again when we get into the mainstream public college education it's a little different… Hands on, visual transparent teaching and sharing caringly with the oral tradition isn't really respected here." –Dianne, senior

Other students had a lot to say about their struggles in making the

transition from their home culture to the OSU culture. Jack reminded his peers

that it's difficult for all of us:

> "It's been very different coming here, long story short, here with new
> cultural paradigm in this building and not totally feeling like I can
> navigate easily here [has been one of my biggest challenges]…
> The fact that any of us are in higher education anyway, is a freaking
> miracle. And we all need to remember that everyday too, we're all beating
> a system that is not made for us. But we can do better and better ourselves
> and get our relatives here too." – Jack, graduate student

> "For kids coming from the Rez, it's a completely different world." –Mark,
> senior

> "I think one of the hardest things, generally, one of the hardest things to
> work through is navigating this system that is dominated by the western
> mind… If you listen to the Elders and other Natives talking about their
> 'way of knowing' and other indigenous ways of knowing, and being
> people of the heart and everything…. You come to academia and its like,
> all of this intellectual mumbo-jumbo." –Hank, junior

> "I'm a hardcore rez kid, man, and this isn't rez here at all. This is another
> lifeway, and I'm fine with them having their lifeway, but don't expect me
> to come over and feel welcomed either." –Jack, graduate student

Paradoxical Cultural Pressure: A more complex form of cultural clash that was

discussed within the focus groups is paradoxical cultural pressure. This paradoxical

cultural pressure is defined as conflict between being a successful college student and

maintaining ties to their culture, reservation, family, or home community (Jackson,

Smith, & Hill, 2003).. Many students expressed conflicting supports between institutional

Tribe and their family. One student described being grateful for the scholarships she was

able to apply for through her Tribe, but didn't appreciate the response of community

members when she'd decided to go to college:

> "My mom and other family members that haven't gone to college were

like 'oh you're tryin to leave us? You too good for us? You gotta… You can't stay here on the rez? You're leavin'?' Like… I don't wanna be here forever." –Shelly, 4th year student.

"So [higher education] wasn't common, and in fact, some of those people look at me negatively even, for going to college. They call me white-washed or tell me 'oh, you're too good for your roots?', and I know they're just joking, but even joking, you feel it." –Amanda, graduate student

"Umm, most of my community on the reservation, so I mean, a good percentage of them didn't even finish high school, so, um… I don't know that they really cared that much." Sadie, senior

"Elders see like college nowadays as more institutionalizing people and that they're not learning the full spectrum… They compare it to how they were taught like, 'that's not how our elders taught us. You've got to learn by hands-on, and actually seeing, not sitting in a classroom taking notes'. I know a lot of Elders that don't like the idea of college." -Shelly, 4th year

Even when students didn't express Tribal supports, some students expressed difficulty coming back to the reservation, including feeling like outsiders or like they're not living the traditional life like their peers that stayed home or 'on the Rez'.

"On my mothers side, all of my aunts and uncles are very traditional still. So I think that a part of them must feel like I'm missing out on that piece of it. Because I'm not home, and I'm not participating in all of the cultural events and I don't go to the longhouse every week…I think that kinda bothers them, that I'm not involved because I'm choosing to be here." -Sadie, senior

"As I further my education, there's times that I many need help and if I turn to my Tribe right now, they don't really see the need to help me… I'm just seen as heavy competition now. Somebody that could come in and take over the board." -Dianne, 4th year.

"I did my undergraduate internship with [my Tribe]. I did the Diabetes program, assistant. And I found, I really really liked working there. I enjoyed it. Had some tricky things, most people there are really nice, you know there were some things that just made it really hard to work there… it's been a challenge like I want to be more involved in a community that I grew up away from… I'm a little embarrassed that I don't know very much [about my heritage]." –Gina, graduate student

5. Discussion

Each focus group in this exploratory study provided an intriguing glimpse into the lives of these students. After warming up and getting used to the focus group structure, students brought up relatable issues and unique situations related to their experience of higher education. Many students were eager to share and thanked me for the opportunity to share their experience and form new relationships with students from a similar background.

While the semi-structured interview style was useful, the relationships between *Family*, *Community*, and *Tribe* as I viewed them were inaccurate to the experience of the participants. Students agreed to the importance of family and Tribe when the entity was present in the student's life, but there was some disagreement on my definition of community. Students agreed some community members and the culture of their community played a role in their decision to go to college and success in college, while some students expressed that *community* wasn't anything different from family or Tribe. There was agreement on this point across every focus group with some students stating that they considered family and Tribe to fully encompass anyone within their community that may have an influence on their trajectories.

Because these students discussed their embeddedness within their context and because students pointed to the importance of *individuals* within their family, communities, and Tribe to discuss each topic, it feels necessary to tie these ideas back to The Life Course Perspective. The Life Course tenet of linked lives highlights the opportunities made possible by the network of an individual's family, friends, and acquaintances (Elder, Shanahan, & Jennings, 2015). Family is a major aspect of linked

lives that was very important in this discussion. I included a space for students to share their definition of family and additional space to share a visual representation of their family because there is no consensus as to how family is defined in Native communities. Students referred to their family, extended family, and even friends as their family that was important in their college success..

5.1 Family and Tribe

Family, other individuals, and Tribe were identified as both supports and barriers to college student success. These linked lives provided social, financial, emotional, and instrumental supports along with helping navigate the university setting.

Family

Family was defined very broadly by participants, including an array of people outside the traditional "family". Parents, siblings, grandparents, children, cousins, aunts, uncles, and fictive kin were mentioned when talking about family. Fictive kin included neighbors, friends, and family of friends. This broad sense of the term family is consistent with previous research (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008), with collectivistic cultural norms (Bray & Stanton, 2009), and with previous qualitative minority research stating that supportive people in one's network are considered family in some cultures (Stack, 1974).

Family as Support

Family was primarily identified as a support in each focus group. Students shared stories of their upbringing from many diverse backgrounds with different cultural nuances related to education. Some students explained that they were raised knowing that they were college bound from a young age, while others didn't know what college was

until they applied. Students identified their families as financially and emotionally, supportive.

Family was supportive by being encouraging, helping fill out applications or paperwork, and providing financial support. These supports were noted as some of the most important supports and the first to be identified overall.

Participants discussed family support in relation to what their family was able to provide. Financially, students identified that their parents provided what they could, although often not a lot. Students expressed gratitude for this financial support even though they needed other sources of financial aid. When discussing instrumental supports, first generation students often expressed that their family was helpful, but perhaps not as helpful as a parent would be if they'd experienced college before.

Family as a barrier

Family was sometimes seen as a barrier to higher education for AIAN students. One student explained that she fought with her parents for months after she left for college because they didn't want her to move away. Another student explained that her family was a barrier to her higher education success for two reasons. The first reason was that they had a limited knowledge of higher education, because none of her family had attended college before her. The second reason was that she struggled in college and got feedback from her family that told her to just try harder and she would succeed which made her feel inadequate for coming up short. Another student didn't share examples, but assured us that her family was nothing but a barrier when it came to her furthering her education.

Family was also identified as ambivalent rather than a support or barrier to higher

education. These students felt that their family would not mind if they graduated or dropped out; they just wanted their child to be happy.

Other Individuals

There were other non-family members identified as supports for these students as well. Some of these linked-lives identified were neighbors, teachers, counselors, and mentors. These people were important in instrumental supports such as application process, financial aid, scholarship process, and navigating the university system. This was especially true for students who were first generation college students. These students would need supports in areas that other students would get support from their parents, or grandparents.

Despite identifying several barriers to their college success, students are still finding ways to be successful. One major way students were doing this was by creating a sense of family. Students brought close friends and community into their family realm. Consistent with prior research (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008), the participants of this study expressed the need to create a 'family' at school by creating strong bonds, friendships, and solidarity for social and emotional support.

Tribe

Tribe was defined as the affiliations participants held to federally recognized and non-recognized Tribes as a member or descendant, and as the cultural beliefs, values, and traditions practiced through these affiliations. Several students identified Tribe as an extension of their family and as a contributing piece of their identity. Tribe was described as a support and sometimes as a barrier to student success.

Tribe as support

Tribe was primarily identified as a financial support with many students sharing their gratefulness for the Tribal support. Financial support was a prominent theme with some students expressing that they receive a stipend or grant from their Tribe, while others have competitive scholarships. Rarely was this funding guaranteed. Many students said they would not be able to afford college if it was not for some form of financial support provided by their Tribe. Other students received instrumental supports from educational specialists within their Tribe as well such as help organizing documents, meeting deadlines, and filling out paperwork. There were very few times that cultural supports were mentioned. This may be because they are not in place currently at OSU or it may be because students did not feel the need to mention their cultural supports that they do utilize.

Tribe as a barrier

While Tribe was primarily identified as a support, participants also discussed issues with maintaining the supports, supports ending prematurely, or lacking the access or opportunity for financial supports through their Tribe. Many students described their experience of receiving Tribal financial aid, but still being in the position of needing more aid to survive in college; often times, the financial support just wasn't enough. Another student shared her experience of Tribal support being cut off once she entered into graduate school. She explained that the financial support ending was expected, but she also lost the network that she relied on in her undergraduate studies.

Students also talked about Tribal barriers including unfair discrimination in financial aid application processes, nepotism, and preferential treatment based on qualities outside of the application requirements. Students shared experiences of applying

for Tribal financial aid or other supports and being rejected even though they were highly qualified. Students presumed that this was due to unfair judgments based on blood quantum or preferential treatment for the close family members of the education panel. Another student described being denied financial aid because she did not live on the reservation, which she could not do if she was to attend college, and was not a part of the application requirements. These are just some of the examples shared by students in which they questioned the impartial leadership of Tribal supports. Some students shared experiences of unfair treatment, even when they identified Tribe as a major support for their higher education success. This is an area in which I would suggest more attention from Tribal authorities.

5.2 Native Identity

It was a requirement of participants to identify as AIAN to be a part of this study. This identity took many forms including membership in a federally recognized Tribe, membership in a non-federally recognized Tribe, and non-membership in a Tribe. Regardless of their membership status in a recognized, or non-recognized Tribe, all of these students had their identity tied to a certain 'Nativeness'. Students discussed their Nativeness being questioned, Native identity changes, and blood quantum.

Participants had several experiences to share relating to their Native identity being questioned. These experiences included strangers asking them "how much Native are you?" or saying "Well you don't look Native". These are experiences shared by all of the participants in this study. One participant explained this phenomenon by expressing that it is "an inadequacy of the education system". Many people aren't knowledgeable about the experience of Native American people and have no background beyond what is

taught in history classes. Many times history classes fail to describe the thriving AIAN population that exists today, let alone explain the stigma that comes with quantifying identity with blood percentages. According to Phinney's Model of Ethnic Identity Development (1993), having your identity questioned is an event that brings an opportunity for an individual to search or question their identity. These students would assess this harsh event, assess how it relates to their identity, and respond to this event by adjusting their identity to more strongly identifying or further separating from the identity. The final stage is identity achievement in which the students can successfully navigate their identities.

A few participants expressed feeling a stronger connection to their Native identity through their college experience (Phinney,1993), which can be expected at this adolescent stage (Erikson, 1968). Judy even expressed that in high school she felt that her peers would alienate her if she closely identified with her Nativeness, showing her stage of questioning or searching for identity. Many people that hold a minority status experience this alienation, or fear of alienation (Astin, 1982; Executive Office of the President, 2014; Jackson, Smith & Hill, 2003). Being an ethnic out-group member can be alienating, and some researchers suggest that minority students can benefit from cross-group friendships, and finding a place of belonging in their higher education institution (Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008). Other researchers propose that AIAN students can benefit from having a strong sense of personal self-identity and confidence in that identity (Huffman, T., Sill, M.L, & Brokenleg, M. 1986), suggesting that students with a strong traditional Native identity have a better chance for success in higher education. Judy then went on to describe how her Native identity has blossomed through her higher

education experience, as she was in the stage of ethnic identity achievement (Phinney,1993). Several students shared their similar experience in developing their sense of Nativeness at OSU with their AIAN peers.

Blood quantum was one of the most discussed subjects throughout the focus groups despite the fact that it was never intentionally a part of the original study. I was surprised for this topic to be mentioned in every focus group, even though as a Tribal member navigating an institution, blood quantum is an ever-present piece of your AIAN identity (Hamill, 2003). Most students talked about their blood being questioned by individuals rather than the university itself. For the same reasons that I refused to use blood quantum as a marker of the participants' culture or ethnic identity, OSU administration, faculty, staff, and associates should not condone using this type of identity marker. I will reiterate, as the students in this study have discussed, it a colonizing, fracturing, and divisive concept that is best left in our past, and has no utility in defining culture.

5.3 Culture Clash

Students did not pinpoint exactly what the cultural differences were between home and university but previous research has shown this college transition to be difficult for students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012; Settersten & Ray, 2010b), and specifically minority students (Astin, 1982) and first generation students (Jewett, 2008). This was more pronounced if students are coming from a strongly traditional background or 'the rez', presumably because students would have a stronger culture that is different than the culture of the university. Students discussed difficulty in navigating the University system and described it as "a whole new world" compared to the reservation.

Students expressed difficulty in learning things that seemed unimportant to their goal orientation, and others wished there was a more rounded curriculum. One student explained that they were reprimanded when they reached out for the resources that she would be able to use back home. These issues were met with confusion and students were unable to take the opportunity to discuss these cultural differences with their professors.

This difficult transition may be related to the difference in overall cultural values on individualism versus collectivism, or other cultural differences. Jaspal & Breakwell (2014), look at this transition process on a micro-scale with individuals assessing their identity and responding more or less all the time with identity processing. This is highly related to this culture clash idea because individuals have the opportunity to emphasize or minimize aspects of their identity depending on their context. These students may emphasize certain aspects of their Nativeness and minimize others to promote success in their context.

Cultural clash is highly influenced by the individual's family. Since family plays a huge role in transmitting culture (Shweder et. Al., 2006), perhaps students with higher education values within their culture would have less of a "clash" so to speak. Half of the participants in this study were first generation college students, and first generation students expressed more difficulty navigating the University system, which is consistent with the work by Jewett, (2008). First generation students brought up the fact that their parents had little experience to help them with this transition. First generation students' families are less likely to incorporate higher education experience values within their culture compared to families that practice higher education attainment. Another student pointed out that she felt prepared for college because she was raised in a white

neighborhood and her culture valued higher education.

5.4 Paradoxical Cultural Pressure

Despite having Tribal support or familial support, some students expressed that members of their family or community devalued their education. This has been coined as Paradoxical Cultural Pressure (Jackson, Smith, and Hill, 2010). Students didn't pinpoint exactly why but expressed that it is difficult to go back to 'the rez' when people judge them negatively for their chosen life path. This concept has been expressed in a novel by popular Native American Author, Sherman Alexie, titled *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* (2007). In this book, the main character leaves the rez for a better education in a neighboring town. As a result, his best friend hates him and his identity is torn between the reservation and his new White community. He feels alienated by his White peers who do not accept him as their own, and alienated by his reservation peers because they feel like he's abandoned them. These mixed signals between partial support and partial devaluing education is conflicting and creates a barrier for many AIAN students.

A few students identified some of the mixed historical context of the education system and its effect on Native people. They did not explicitly discuss this connection, but did refer to the Westernized education system educating future White-male politicians on the policies that oppressed Tribal people. They are referring to the treaties that forcibly removed Native people from their homelands onto reservations, laws that took away AIAN rights as a sovereign people, and the policies that supported assimilation efforts like the cultural genocide of boarding schools (Braveheart & DeBruyn, 1998; Jackson & Chapleski, 2000; Executive Office of the President, 2014).

Several students referred to their elders' devaluation of higher education. The historical context of these elders, having lived through the aforementioned assimilation efforts, would be more highly affected by early treaties, laws, and policies directed at their parents, grandparents, and ancestors. It is clear that these elders have reason to devalue the education system. While it was discussed that elders devalue education, the students that are enrolled in college must value education on some level. One reason students may value education more than their elders is that they are further removed from the direct oppression that resulted from the education system. Another reason may be that over time, AIAN communities have placed value on education in order to gain the resources needed to maintain sovereignty.

5.5 Promoting AIAN Success at OSU

Students utilized many resources provided by OSU. Students identified needs for more resources that are currently unavailable, and suggestions on improving access and quality of available resources. AIAN students want to be involved in a community. They want to take an active role in making OSU a better place for their selves, their peers, and someday for their families.

One way to promote AIAN success would be to expand opportunities based on students' motivations to attend college. Consistent with previous research, (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008), students across every focus group discussed a primary motivation for going to college as being able to give back to their Tribal community. Many students hold this motivation and would like to someday do research in their specialty areas with their own Tribes. Some students came up with a way to strengthen this motivation by creating a centralized space for AIAN researchers to network. Students expressed

frustrations in doing research with Tribes because of the difficulty creating connections and networking with Tribes that tend to be closed off. One student suggested that student-researchers that work with AIAN Tribes should form a networking group to share experiences, contacts, and create research partnerships.

Students identified the need for an AIAN academic advisor that could promote student success from a holistic view. This was suggested in every focus group. Some students expressed their experience with an AIAN-specific academic counselor in the past at a previous school, and suggested it would be a great addition to the AIAN services at OSU. These students actually identified that the student services for AIAN students is lacking in comparison to their previous schools. An academic advisor would be a step in the right direction. The person/people in the AIAN academic advisor position should take a holistic approach to student success; students would like to be able to go to this person for everything from scheduling classes and scholarship information, to when and where the next sweat will be held. OSU has the NAL as a resource center, but students want more interaction from a culturally competent, knowledgeable advisor.

Students expressed difficulty in navigating their financial aid issues, and many expressed frustration related to financial aid. Some students felt that the Financial Aid office could use some improvements and possibly some education on how to handle Tribal scholarships and grants. Navigating the financial aid system is already quite complex, but when you add in Tribal scholarships that financial aid officers don't know how to process, the result can be quite demotivating.

Students identified the need for culturally competent counselors and mental health services specific to AIAN needs. This was brought up, the first time, in relation to taking

classes in which you must relive the near-genocide of your own people. For non-AIAN people, Native American Studies is just another history class, but for AIAN students it is a look into your own history in which you have to relive the sometimes-horrible experiences of your ancestors. This can be traumatic and there are not currently any resources in place to assist students' in dealing with their feelings around these issues. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) does not have this type of counseling and/or the support systems in place to be a resource for handling this type of trauma. Again, this issue was brought up when several students had tried to utilize Counseling and Psychological Services but were put on a waiting list because their issues were not emergent. And, it was brought up a final time when a participant expressed concern that there aren't culturally trained counselors at CAPS even though AIANs have some of the highest suicide rates and alcoholism rates out of any ethnicity (Executive Office of the President, 2014).

Students posed some ideas for the NAL or NASA to hold as events. One was strongly related to promoting the use of AIAN resources on campus by all Native students. The suggestion was to host a recurring fall term event around being "Native Enough". This event would reject utilizing blood quantum as a tool for defining culture, while emboldening Nativeness and family-like community bonds. This student explained that feeling like she was not "Native enough" held her back from exploring Native spaces and creating friendships with other AIAN students. This event would be progressive in nature, which was a suggestion of another participant who is bored with the redundant mascot events, and will promote accessibility for many resources already available. Another suggestion was to host AIAN graduate TED talk, or similar, to address AIAN

identity issues in higher education. It could double as a community-building event for AIAN students at OSU, and a recruitment event, if Tribal high schools and student groups were invited to participate as well.

5.6 OSU – Tribal Connection

There was a repeated and insistent need for OSU to become more engaged in Tribal communities, specifically in relation to recruitment efforts. Students expressed that this connection is needed to show AIAN students that other Native students can be successful at OSU and to help them navigate the unknown university culture. Many students expressed wanting to be a part of recruitment efforts themselves. A few students shared their experience trying to bring young AIAN students to OSU campus to tour and get familiar with higher education and resources. Students identified that the generic campus tours were not as applicable to AIAN students as they would like them to be, and they suggest touring the NAL, and meeting with members of a few of the Native student groups on campus.

Shelly explained that bureaucratic red tape prevented her from bringing in a bus-full of AIAN students from a local high school since she was affiliated with the NAL. From what she remembers, students need to go through the touring process with the administration building rather than being the responsibility of one person who is an employee of the office of Diversity and Cultural Engagement. Sadie shared her experience of bringing a bus-full of students from a nearby reservation. She was able to take these students on a tour of the campus that was more culturally relevant, and on a weekend that was full of AIAN activities such as the Klatowa Eena Powwow, Annual Salmon Bake, and a Native American motivational speaker and artist, Supaman. She

wants to make this an annual, if not quarterly, event to reach out to AIAN youth in Oregon and show them that college is attainable.

Students are making the attempts to create stronger ties between OSU and the 9 Oregon Tribes, but suspect there may be a more formal way for OSU to connect with the 9 Tribes.

5.7 Limitations

There are several limitations of this study to consider relating to recruitment, sample size, and unused data. The sample of students is limited by the recruitment techniques; posters only reached students who frequent the NAL; emails only reached students who signed up to receive emails from the NAL; snowball sampling only reaches students who are in contact with students who have participated in the study. This creates a potentially biased sample with all students having similar experiences because they could potentially all be acquaintances of each other.

The small sample size could provide a limited perspective of the overall population. Another consideration of a small sample size from a small population is that participants will know each other. Indeed, many participants were friends, coworkers, and acquaintances, but that is to be expected with a small population. While this can be seen as a limitation, I also saw this as a strength in that participants were comfortable to share their experiences in detail with a room full of their friends. One main aim of this study was to start dialogues and promote strong family-like community ties. The fact that most participants were acquaintances was helpful because participants were networking and creating stronger bonds within their community, effectively promoting the second aim of this study. This could influence what they are comfortable sharing, since their

anonymity is compromised, but I believe that they are more comfortable sharing with their known friends, coworkers, and acquaintances. The majority of participants were known acquaintances of mine, with very few participants being students that I met for the first time. This may have influenced the way participants responded. I addressed this by assuring participants that they should speak from their experience and not to tell me what they think I want to hear. I also assured potential focus-group participants that their participation or non-participation would not affect their standing with the NAL, Native American Student Association, or any other groups.

There was also a notable technology failure in the second focus group that compromised the data gathered. This further limited the sample size, but was a great learning experience for further research endeavors. One participant from the excluded focus group was able to participate in a later focus group. This allowed us to use her perspective in the data, however her responses may have been affected by the fact that she had already participated in a prior focus group.

5.8 Implications

The results of this study support the need for OSU and Oregon Tribes to work together to support AIAN student success. AIAN enrollment at Oregon State University has been dropping since 2009 (Oregon State University Enrollment Summary, 2015). Jack referred to this trend and students had suggestions for what OSU could do to support this population. If OSU and Oregon Tribes work together to support these areas that AIAN students identified in this study, everyone can potentially benefit. The current students will be supported and will be able to assist in recruiting more AIAN students, which will fulfill the desire of students to have a stronger sense of community or family

at OSU. Starting this dialogue is the first step in the partnership between these AIAN

students, OSU, and the Tribal groups that can make these suggestions a reality. Here are

the suggestions I have for OSU and the Tribes of Oregon to address the needs of the

participants in this study:

1. Family and Tribe are important to AIAN students and are important supports for

    their success. Tribes should support their students in more ways than just

    financially. Students are appreciative of any financial support they do receive, but

    are asking for a more rounded approach to student supports. Students sometimes

    identified Tribal barriers to success such as unfair discrimination in financial aid

    application processes. Tribal administrators and education specialists should be

    aware of this concern and work to eliminate any unfair loopholes relating to

    nepotism, blood quantum, and preferential treatment based on qualities outside of

    the support requirements.

2. AIAN Identity issues need some attention at OSU to provide a strong sense of

    family or community for AIAN students. Participants expressed the need to create

    a 'family' at school by creating strong bonds, friendships, and solidarity.

    Participants expressed a struggle in creating bonds with other students with

    similar cultural backgrounds unless they participated in groups such as the Native

    American Student Association or the Native American Longhouse. Knowledge

    of, and access to these groups was limited for some of the participants. These

    participants provided feedback on how different groups at OSU can be more open

    and accessible to new students. The Native American Longhouse and related

    groups will be instrumental in addressing these needs so that students have the

opportunity to create their 'family' at school. These students have all kinds of

ideas on how they can help their selves and each other with these issues, and

would like some help from OSU organizations.

    a. Support efforts to hire an AIAN academic advisor.

    b. Host AIAN graduate TED talk to address AIAN identity issues in higher

       education.

    c. Promote culturally relevant counseling at CAPS.

    d. Host recurring fall term event around being "Native Enough", rejecting

       blood quantum as a tool for defining culture, while emboldening

       Nativeness and family-like community bonds.

    e. Create a centralized space for AIAN researchers to network.

Another related issue that OSU administrators may need to address is the fact

that AIAN students defined success in many ways. Sometimes this was

completely unrelated to academic success, grades, or even degree attainment. If

OSU is measuring success by GPA or graduation rates, there may be a

discrepancy and therefore a gap in the ways that OSU can promote success for

these students.

3. AIAN students at OSU experience paradoxical Cultural pressure. Students are

    feeling backlash in their home communities for choosing to go to college, despite

    their Tribal support. Tribes can address this in the long-term by creating a culture

    around supporting higher education in more ways than financially. Once again,

    students repeatedly expressed gratitude for the financial support that they do

receive, but they are craving a more holistic support system from their Tribes in relation to their higher education success.

4. OSU and local Tribes should work together to create outreach and recruitment targeting AIAN high school students. Many students in these focus groups identified how recruitment efforts would have supported them better, and others expressed the desire to give back to their communities by getting involved in recruitment efforts. These stronger ties may also be able to facilitate in creating opportunities for AIAN students to gain service-learning experience in Tribal communities. Many students expressed giving back to Tribal communities as a primary motivation and this would be one way to help students fulfill their goals of higher education by acting on their motivations.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This research study shows some of the complexities of AIAN college student success at OSU. This study is a great starting point in understanding the lives of AIAN students at OSU, and has provided insights for further promoting AIAN success at OSU. Here's what I learned:

- Family and Tribe are important supports in AIAN college student success. While this was no revelation, the intricacies of family ties and Tribal relationships may be an important consideration for OSU when creating supports for AIAN students.

- AIAN Identity issues are prevalent in the lives of students at OSU. These students face stereotypes and pressures relating to their identities that add complexities to their college experience. Being "Native enough" and

blood quantum issues, are disruptive concepts that interfere with students' access to resources and supports, and in turn affect their ability to be successful at OSU.

- Cultural clash occurs for AIAN students transitioning into college for many reasons, several of which are embedded in the historical context of the education system and Tribal people. This creates a difficult environment to navigate, especially when left without resources, or experience in attaining resources. Paradoxical Cultural Pressure is an extension of this cultural clash that occurs when family or friends from students' homes negatively value their choice to attain a higher education.

- Students utilized many resources, had needs for resources that are unavailable, and suggestions for how to improve available resources. Students identified the need for an AIAN academic advisor that could promote student success from a holistic view. Students identified the need for culturally competent counselors and mental health services specific to AIAN needs.

Participants discussed the importance of support from these different areas of their lives including their family, Tribe, and OSU. These supports can only be made stronger if they work together to support our small but thriving Native American population. I am hopeful for these connections to be made stronger, and I am hopeful for the future Native American students at Oregon State University.

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Appendix A

Upon entry: Students will meet one-on-one with Racheal or Jamie to provide informed consent.
Introduction:
Thank you all for coming today. My name is Racheal, and I'm conducting this project as a part of my Masters thesis. Jamie will be helping me today with data collection. I want to talk with you about your experience as a Native American in the higher education system. Everything we talk about today will be compiled into a report and provided to the university, and to the Tribes of Oregon. It is provided in hopes that they may use it to improve the educational experiences of Native American students.

- PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY- I want to remind you that in a focus group, we rely on each others' ability to maintain privacy and confidentiality. We ask that what is said in this room stays in this room today. You do not have to share anything that you wouldn't like to. We cannot guarantee that your input will not be repeated. This is why I am now asking each of you to do your part in keeping this confidential.
- DEMOGRAPHICS- Please fill out the demographics form while we get started- If you have any questions, about the demographics, we can discuss after our focus group.
- EXPLAIN FOCUS GROUP- Who has been in a focus group before? This is a data collection technique that allows us to get personal-experience data from several people at one time- this facilitates discussion and may prompt you to a memory, experience, or issue you'd like to discuss that might not come out during an individual interview. For this focus group we will be moderately organized, but flexible in that we don't have to stay in order- we can discuss related topics, but I have a list of questions that I'd really like to get everyone's feedback on. Any questions about how a focus group works?
- ICEBREAKER- Name & Favorite thing about OSU.

Focus Group:
Ok, to get started,
1. Story Telling: Sharing our experiences within our community for the benefit of all. Our stories can affect the people that have similar experiences. It is my hope that sharing our experiences today can benefit future AIAN students at OSU.
   Family, Community, Tribe: Who is our family? How do you define it? Community: Tribal and non-tribal individuals. Tribe: Tribal organization or institution.

   We are going to be moving on to some questions that reflect on your personal experiences

2. Invite students to share their personal stories and experiences at OSU:
   - Prompt: Expand on favorite thing. What has been your best experience? What has been challenging? Why did you choose OSU? Remember when you first got accepted?
3. How has *family* influenced your education in the college setting?
   - Prompt: Were your (grandparents, aunties/uncles, siblings, parents) supportive?
4. How has *Tribe, community, and culture* influenced your education in the college setting?
   - Does your Tribe provide guidance on how to apply to college? Did/do other members of your community help you with college? How have you integrated your "Tribal culture" with college culture?
5. What is your goal for after OSU? What could OSU do differently to better support you in reaching this goal? What could Tribal groups do to better support you?
   - Resources?
6. What can we do as students to better support each other and ourselves?
7. Is there anything else we haven't discussed that you think is important for the university and Oregon Tribes to know about as they consider programs and supports for Native American students?

Wrap-up & debrief:
Ok guys, that seems like a pretty good ending point unless anyone has a comment or topic that they'd like to bring up before we break? Thank you for taking part in this! I'm hopeful that your feedback

Appendix A (cont.)

will provide some insight for the university and local Tribes on what they can do to better support Native students at OSU. I'd like to remind you that the small flyer I gave you when you got here has the contact information for the PI of this study, the OSU IRB, and myself if you have any questions or comments that come up later.
CAPS -- 500 Snell Hall -- 541-737-2131

Appendix B
Demographics   ID#_____
Age:_____
Sex: _____
Tribal Affiliations/bands if known: _____
Years of Education: _____

Family Structure
How many siblings do you have? Brothers?_____ Sisters?_____
When I ask about "family", whom are you referring to?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
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_____

Please draw/doodle/sketch/symbolically represent your family in the space below:

Appendix B (cont.)
Demographics   ID#_____

How has your family influenced your experience at OSU?

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How has your Tribe, community, or culture influenced your experience at OSU?

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What can OSU and Tribal organizations do (or what are they doing) to better support AIAN students?

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What can we do as students to better support each other and ourselves?

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Appendix C

Family, Community, & Tribal Influence on Native American College Experience

Principal Investigator: Karen Hooker

Student Researcher: Racheal Croucher

The purpose of this research study is to 1. Provide a setting to discuss our experiences as Native American students at OSU. 2. Identify supports and barriers to success at OSU. 3. Brainstorm ideas for minimizing barriers and promoting supports at OSU. To participate in this research, you must be: 18 years & older; Identify as an American Indian Alaskan Native student at OSU; speak English. Study involves: Participating in a focus group interview on campus. Please email Racheal with your top 3 availabilities from the following selection:

Session A	Session B	Session C	Session D	Session E
MONTH, 00	MONTH,00	MONTH, 00	MONTH, 00	MONTH,00
Time	Time	Time	Time	Time
NAL	NAL	NAL	NAL	NAL

To find out more about the study, please contact Racheal by email: croucher@oregonstate.edu.

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Judy
Focus Group: 1

Demographics
Age: 18-22
Sex: F

Background
Hometown Setting: Urban
First Generation: No
Year in school: 2nd year

Family Structure

Siblings: 1 brother, 1 sister
Family is… My whole family, both sides, grandparents, aunts uncles, cousins etc.
Friends- very close friends as well.
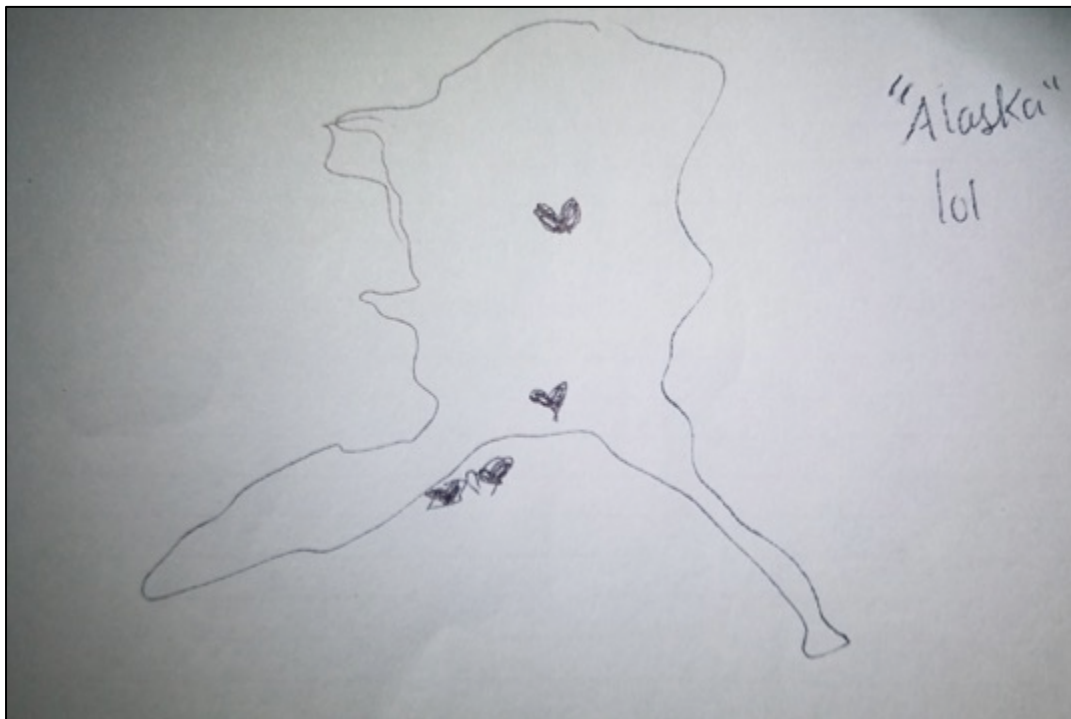
Appendix D: Participant Bios

Mark
Focus Group: 1

Demographics
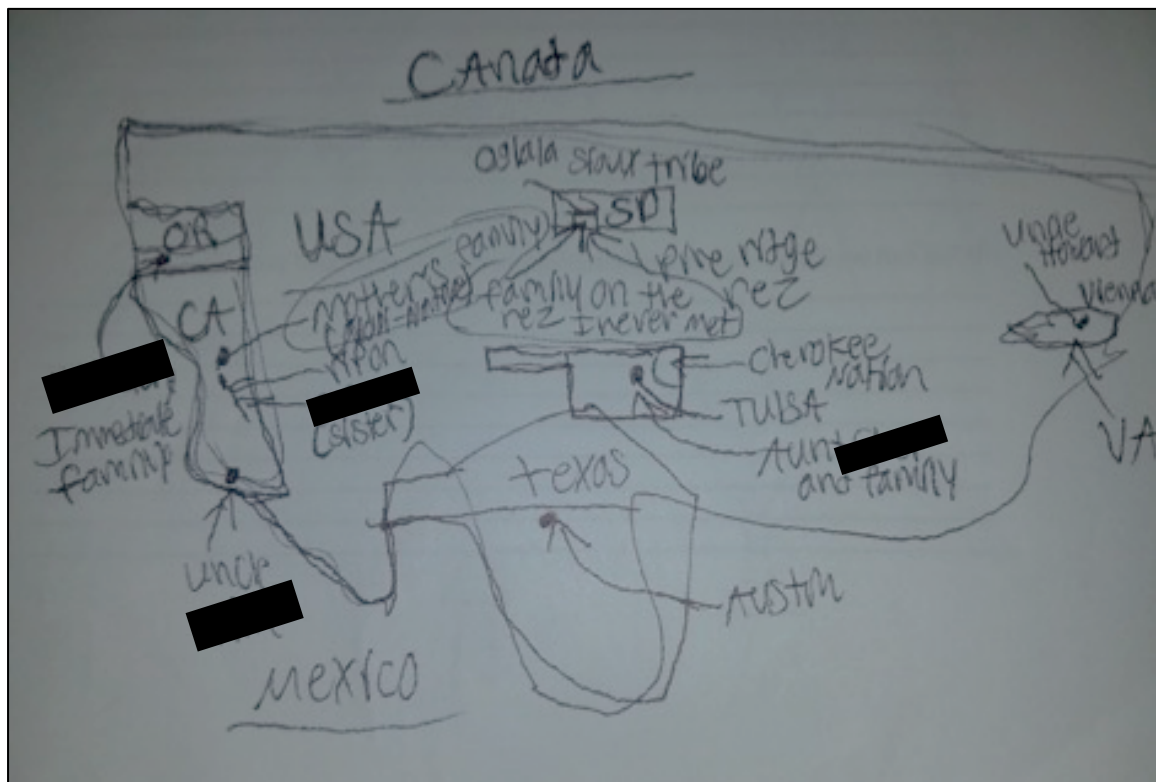Age: 23-30
Sex: M

Background
Hometown Setting: Rural
First Generation: Yes
Year in school: Senior

Family Structure
Siblings: 2 brothers, 1 sister
Family is... My father's family on my Native American side both on reservation and off reservation. My map shows where my family is from. Mother's family is non-Native and is from California.

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Jack

Focus Group: 1

Demographics

Age: 30-40
Sex: M

Background

Hometown Setting: Urban
First Generation: No
Year in school: 1st year Masters

Family Structure

Siblings: 3 brothers
Family is... My nuclear family – all my relations. Aunties, grandmas, grandpas uncles, cousins.

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Dianne
Focus Group: 1

Background
Hometown Setting: Rural
First Generation: No
Year in school: 4th

Demographics
Age: 30-40
Sex: F

Family Structure
Siblings: 1 brother, 2 sisters
Family is... Mother, Father, siblings, maternal aunts uncles, paternal aunts uncles.
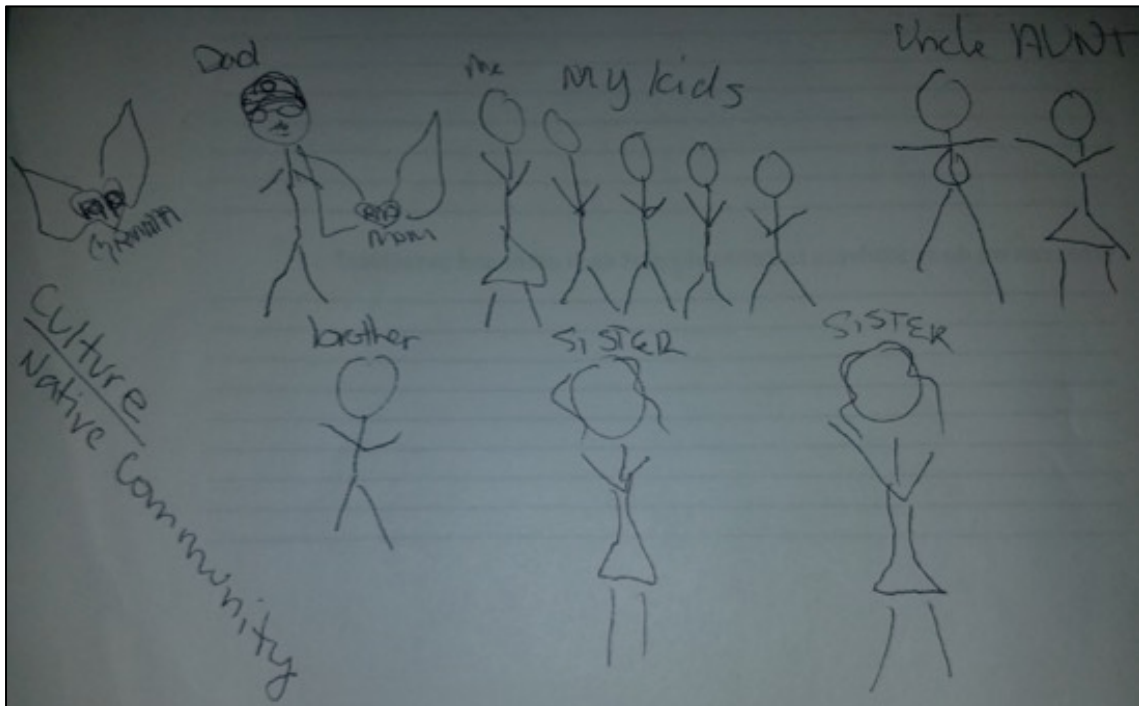
Appendix D: Participant Bios

Krista
Focus Group: 1

Demographics
Age: 18-22
Sex: F

Background
Hometown Setting: Urban
First Generation: Yes
Year in school: Senior

Family Structure
Siblings: 1 brother, 4 sisters
Family is… Grandma, Papa, aunts, uncles, siblings, mom, dad.

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Hank
Focus Group: 1

Background
Hometown Setting: Suburban
First Generation: No
Year in school: Junior

Demographics
Age: 18-22
Sex: M

Family Structure
Siblings: 2 brothers, 1 sister
Family is... Both shared blood and stepfamily. I personally have a loose definition of family. I consider everyone in my circle of influence to be a part of my extended family. Similar to layers of an onion with the most intimate relationships toward the center.
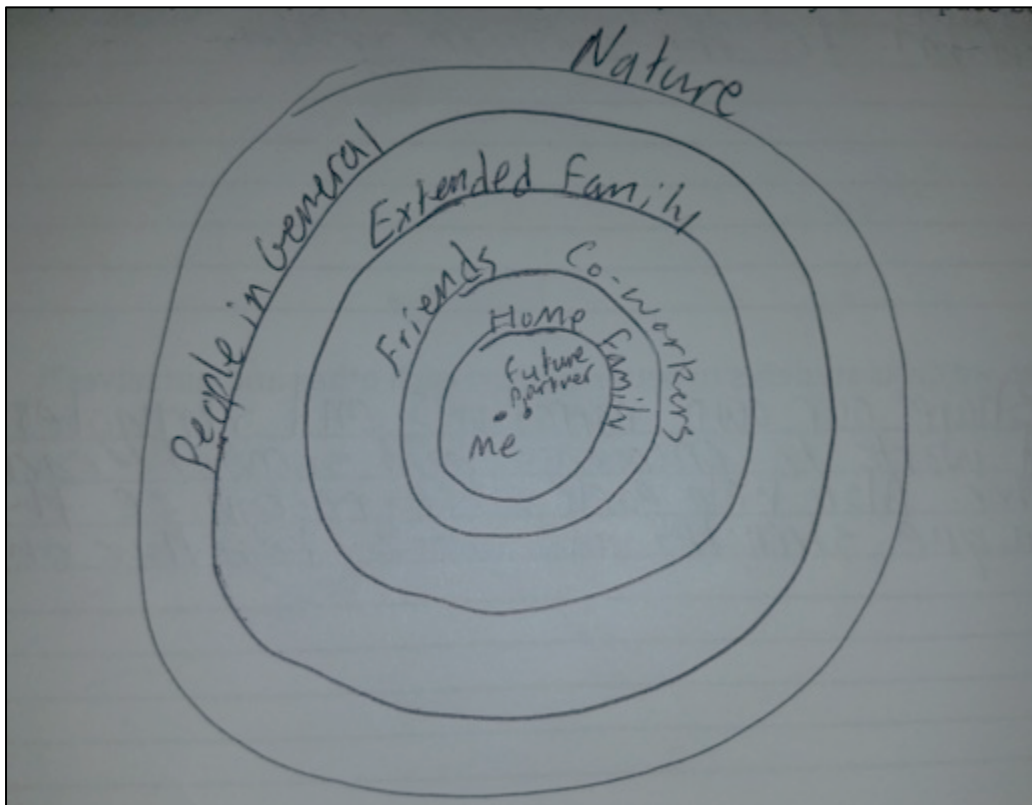
Appendix D: Participant Bios

Shelly
Focus Group: 3

Demographics
Age: 18-22
Sex: F

Background
Hometown Setting: Rural Reservation
First Generation: Yes
Year in school: 4th

Family Structure
Siblings: 3 brothers, 1 sister
Family is… My immediate family, as well as my boyfriend's family, close friends, distant relatives, family friends, and anyone who I'm related to.

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Lucy
Focus Group:3

Demographics
Age: 18-22
Sex: F

Background
Hometown Setting: Rural
First Generation: No
Year in school: Freshman

Family Structure
Siblings: 1 brother
Family is... Parents, brother, grandma, mostly. Close relatives such as cousins.
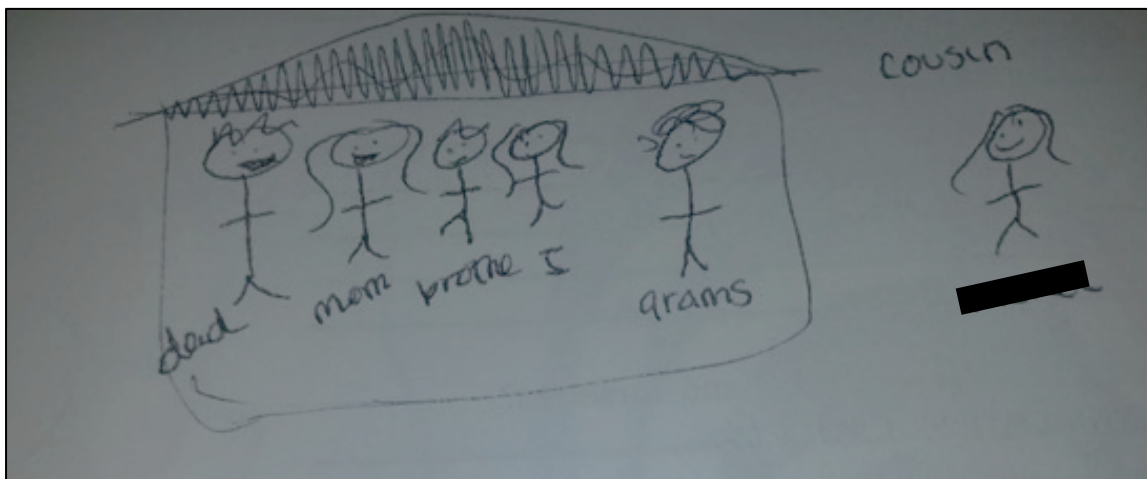
Appendix D: Participant Bios

Jenny
Focus Group: 3

Demographics

Age: 23-30
Sex: F

Background

Hometown Setting: Urban
First Generation: Yes
Year in school: Graduate school

Family Structure

Siblings: 2 sisters
Family is… Biological relatives going back to the beginning of the human race. I would say 'Tribe" included, but my more immediate relatives were somehow disconnected from the tribe. My family is broken.

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Mary
Focus Group: 3

Background
Hometown Setting: Urban
First Generation: No
Year in school: Senior

Demographics
Age: 23-30
Sex: F

Family Structure
Siblings: 2 brothers
Family is... Grandparents, parents, siblings

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Rae
Focus Group: 4

Demographics
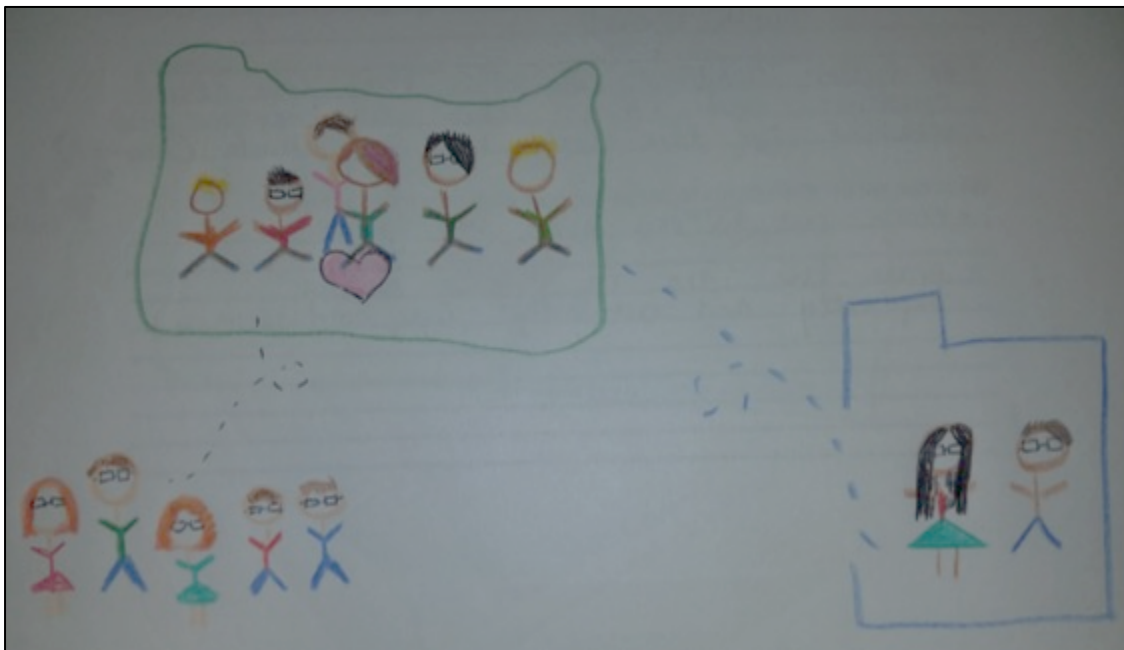
Age: 18-22
Sex: F

Background

Hometown Setting: Rural
First Generation: No
Year in school: 3rd

Family Structure

Siblings: 2 brothers
Family is… Mostly my parents and brothers, and my grandparents on my mom's side. My boyfriend/partner. Often when I talk about family, I also include my best friend and her family. "College fam".

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Gina
Focus Group: 4

Demographics

Age: 23-30
Sex: F
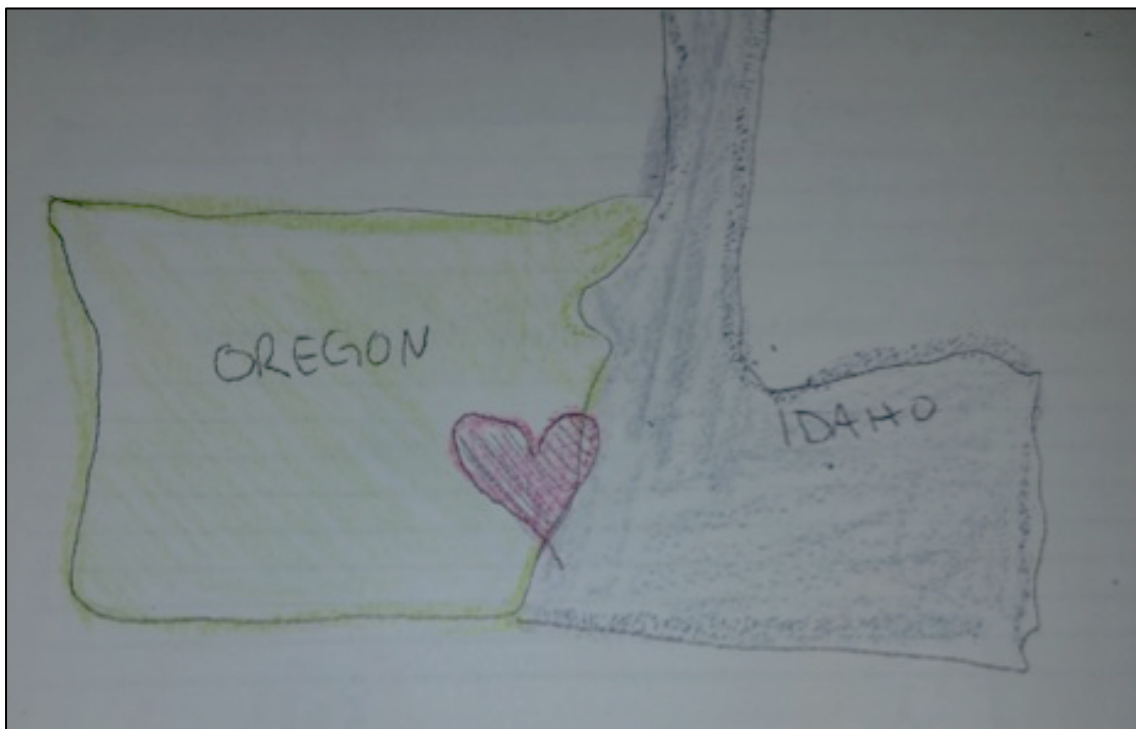
Background

Hometown Setting: Other
First Generation: No
Year in school: Graduate school

Family Structure

Siblings: 1 brother, 3 sisters
Family is... My family (Mom, Dad, brother, 2 sisters). Family of friends (From Idaho & Oregon).

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Sadie
Focus Group: 4

Demographics

Age: 30-40
Sex: F

Background

Hometown Setting: Reservation
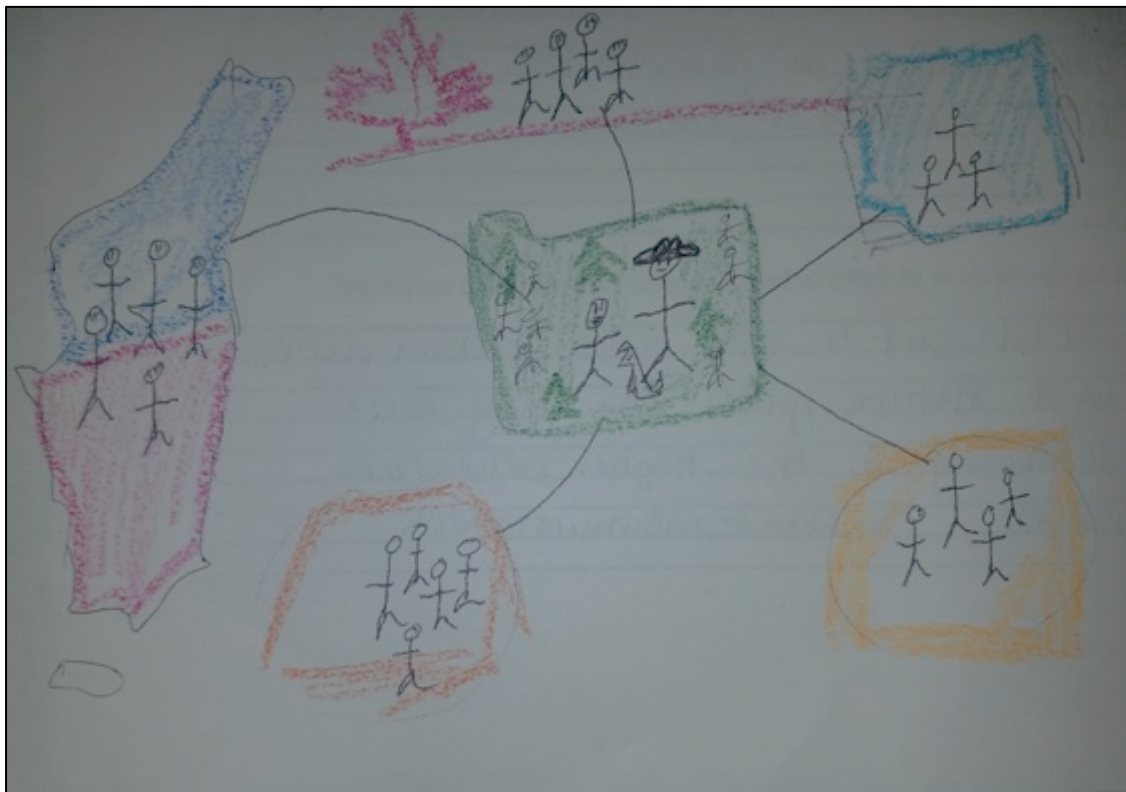First Generation: Yes
Year in school: Senior

Family Structure

Siblings: 1 brother
Family is... Dad, extended family, non-blood families

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Tom
Focus Group: 5

Demographics
Age: 18-22
Sex: M

Background
Hometown Setting: Rural
First Generation: Yes
Year in school: Senior

Family Structure
Siblings: 2 brothers, 1 sister
Family is... Immediate family, including partial siblings.

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Alice
Focus Group: 5

Demographics
Age: 18-22
Sex: F
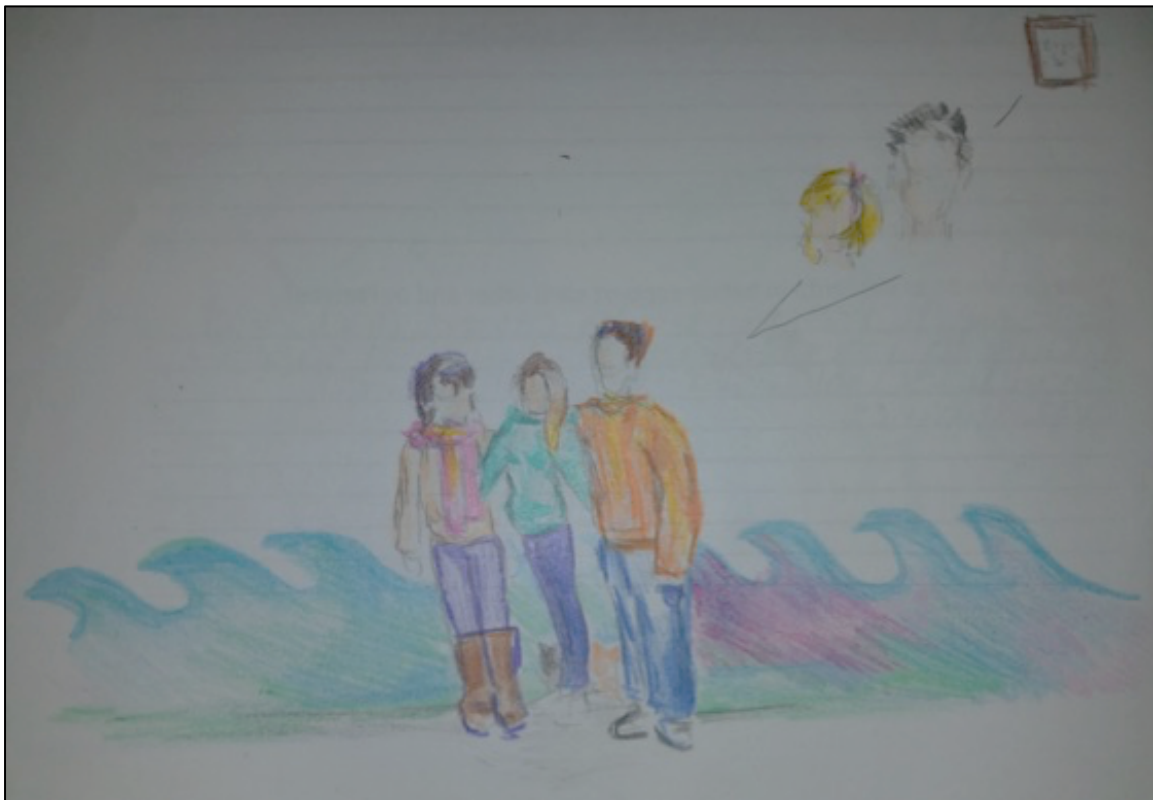
Background
Hometown Setting:
Urban/rural/reservation
First Generation: Yes
Year in school: Freshman

Family Structure
Siblings: Only child
Family is... Mother, Father and father's side of family (Native side; grandparents & maybe great-grandparents)

Appendix D: Participant Bios

Amanda
Focus Group: 5

Demographics
Age: 23-30
Sex: F

Background
Hometown Setting:
Rural/Reservation
First Generation: Yes
Year in school: Graduate school

Family Structure
Siblings: 3 brothers, 4 sisters
Family is... My massive family, 8 siblings, step families, aunts and uncles, cousins, grandparents, great grandparents, and my close friends.