

Highly Educated Navajo Women Who Pursue Their Careers  
Off the Navajo Reservation

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lives of highly educated Navajo women who, with their children, left the comfort of their homeland to pursue their careers. Using qualitative research methods, five Navajo women were asked to reflect on their lives while on the reservation and in their new location off the Navajo reservation. Among the topics explored were the principal factors as to their leaving the reservation, barriers and supports they faced in their careers, what cultural transitions they experienced, and the effects on their careers, their families and to their personal sense of self.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

As I hustle and bustle my way between cars and 18-wheelers, who think they are the “kings” of Interstate 10, I can’t help but appreciate the sight of the sun peeking from behind the San Tan mountains and indulge the calmness of the desert up ahead. I look in the rearview mirror and see the chaos and softly say, “See you later, city of Phoenix.”

My mind ponders on why I moved from a small Navajo reservation community of 3,624 people to the metropolitan city of Phoenix with over 4.3 million people. The Navajo reservation is approximately 300 miles away from Phoenix, Arizona. An average drive back to the reservation would take about five hours. I had a successful career as a reading specialist as a sixth through eighth grade teacher in a very unique Navajo Immersion school where we guided our students to revitalize our heritage language (Navajo) and culture. Why, then, did I relocate to pursue my career off the Navajo reservation? Were there more Navajo women, like me, with a degree pursuing their careers off the Navajo reservation?

Then, I thought of my grandfather, Hastiin Slim, who set my mother’s educational journey at the age of 8, as she sat on his lap. He told her “*Shiyazhi, Olta’adiiliil doo olta’ altsoh adiiliil*” (My child, you will go to school and finish school). Aronilth (1991) emphasized, “Seeking for the foundation and roots of education are important, because when you do this, your direction of life is clear to you” (p. 171). This western foundation, coupled with our Navajo traditional foundation set by my grandfather has taken my mother, Lena Slim-Post, a long way.



Soon after this memorable moment with her father, my mother lost her father. Her mother, my grandmother, *Aheedibaa*' Fannie Slim, was left to raise and teach five of their ten children by herself. Although the other five were married, they still needed guidance and support. It was customary for the older female siblings to continue living with their mothers along with their husbands and their children in a little one bedroom Hogan until their husbands built a Hogan near her mother's home.

My grandmother, *Shimasani* (the Navajo term for my maternal grandmother), only had her weaving and her sheep to depend on to raise her children. She was now charged with the duties of being a mother as well as a father. She taught her children many traditional and spiritual values. Like most Navajo families of that time, all the teachings were taught in the home including basic livelihood, respect, and welfare of the family, clanship/relationship, physical, and spiritual values. They did not have to leave home to learn all this.

My mother and many other young Navajo children were taken away from their familiar homeland to boarding schools off the Navajo reservation to learn the western education for months at a time, while their parents tended to the flock and domestic duties. Despite the harsh treatment, these young native children endured, many high school and college degrees were earned. Of her nine siblings, my mother and her younger sister, my aunt, Mary Ann Leonard, were the only two to complete high school and receive their Bachelor's and Master's degree in Education. Johnston (1966) compared the educational attainment of adult Navajos to the total adult population of the United States for the years 1950 and 1960. In 1950 the percentage of all female persons completing 16+ years was 5%. For the male Navajos in the same age group, the percentage was .1%. For

the Navajo females in the same age group, the percentage was .1%. In 1960 the percentage of all female persons completing 16+ years was, again, 5%. For the male Navajos in the same age group, the percentage was increased slightly to .5%. For the female Navajos the percentage increased to .4% (Johnson, 1966, pp. 54-55). This gap indicates how unusual it was for Navajo women, like my mom and aunt, to accomplish a degree in the early 1960s.

During the mid-1900s, reservation communities lacked local high schools, so teenage youths were forced to attend boarding schools hundreds of miles away, were shipped off to out-of-state Indian student placement programs (ISPP), or would stay with extended family members who resided closer to the high schools. Garrett (2010) reported three Navajo students were enrolled in the program in 1947 and the numbers increased to 68 by 1954 (p. 130), and then to 365 in 1960 (p. 171). A projected student enrollment showed a decrease from 700 in 1989 to 1 in 2000 (p. 485).

My mother recalls boarding and feeding about 11 of her nieces and nephews and their significant others in her two-bedroom teacher housing apartment, for she was the only one to have a stable job. This family residence pattern was a normal act for Navajos. Despite these struggles, my mother faced, she chose to stay on the Navajo reservation to fulfill her duties as a successful educated Navajo woman leader, as did many other educated Navajo women. My mother said she was determined to overcome this hardship—it was a way of life.

There were other native women who relocated off the reservation to pursue their careers. Metcalf (1975) conducted a study regarding Navajo women relocating off the reservation to enter the workforce. She reported that the women described “life . . . as

hard back on the reservation. The families were poor, and there was much work to be done, with few of the mechanical conveniences common in white society” (p. 536).

So, why was I, and many other Navajo women escaping the way of life on the Navajo reservation? Was it fair that I take the beauty of the reservation from my children? How do I continue to instill the culture, language, traditions and life styles of our unique Navajo culture in my children here in the city?

### **Growing Up as a Young Navajo Girl on the Navajo Reservation**

As a child my life was full of richness. I had an abundance of relatives and a very strong religion. I was fortunate to be among many native women role models who taught me the value of being a Navajo woman living in two worlds; the world of our sacred Navajo culture as well as the western world. I was nine years old when my grandmother passed away, but her beliefs in being a young Navajo woman were illuminated through my mother’s everyday teachings. In addition, because my mother was a teacher and a principal, I was among many other Navajo women educators who exemplified the importance of education.

The sacredness of a Navajo child’s life is established at birth. Gilmore (2012) shared her father’s teachings that at the time of birth the father takes the placenta to a specific place according to gender. For a female, it is either returned to earth beneath a juniper tree or hung from its branch. For the male, it is placed beneath a pine tree or hung from its branches (p. 2). At the birth of each of my children, my mother maintained this practice. “Your children will be reconnected to mother earth. This reconnection will strengthen how they face life’s impediments,” my mother taught. My placenta, as well as each of my children’s placentas, was placed beneath the appropriate tree in Pinon,

Arizona. This is where my mother taught me to call home. It is the responsibility of a Navajo women to carry on the teachings of our tradition; my children are aware of their home; the place where their placenta has been placed.

### **Changing Woman**

In order to better understand the status and strength carried by the women and girls in the Navajo culture it is imperative to understand how they are related to the image and power embodied in the original female deity known as Changing Woman (Monroe, 1995, p. 1).

We, the Navajo, are created from Changing Women. We “are the children of Changing Woman” (Iverson & Roessel, 2002, p. 1). “She rubbed the skin from her breast, her back, and from under her arms to create the first four clans . . . eventually there would be sixty clans” (Iverson & Roessel, 2002, p. 11).

A Navajo child is born into a clan-oriented matrilineal society where the child belongs to its mother’s clan. There are four clans. My first clan belongs to my mother’s clan and they are the *Tl’izi lani* (Manygoat) clan. My second clan belongs to my father’s clan and they are the Bit’ahnii clan. My third clan belongs to my maternal grandfather’s clan, also known as my *cheis*, and they are the *Todik’ozhi* clan. Finally, my fourth clan belongs to my paternal grandfather’s clan, also known as my *nalis*, and they are the *Tachii’nii* clan. This is how my mother, my grandmother, and my aunts have taught me to identify myself. This is how I inculcated my children to respect our clanship.

As a young girl, my mother stressed the importance of introducing one’s clan to another Navajo for the first time. This allows clan relations like brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles to recognize one another, even if they’ve never met. It is customary that we do

not marry someone who is in the same clan family or they say your children will have ailments. Aronilth (1991) explained “how lots of problems are created” (p. 132) when you marry your own clan relatives. He goes on to explain, “Our ancestors said that only a person who knows evil or bad medicine would marry his or her own blood relatives or clan. This person does not have love in their heart or any respect for the clan system” (p. 132). As a Navajo mother of four, I stressed this teaching to my children.

Many more teachings are taught when a young girl reaches puberty. That was the first time I heard of Changing Woman. Changing Woman, also known as White Shell Women. Turquoise Women is said to be a very powerful Navajo female deity whose birth is controversial. Some say she was found by First Man and First Women while others say she just appeared. “There is the underlying assumption in the older stories as well as the contemporary format that women are powerful beings . . . sacred beings and transformative beings!” (Monroe, 1995, p. 8). Our culture is deeply rooted in Changing Women or the *Asdzaa Nadleehe* Woman epitomizes motherhood and serves as a role model that most Navajo women strive to emulate. The first puberty ceremony is said to have been conducted for Changing Woman.

As a young girl, I had the privilege of having my puberty ceremony. My grandmothers, aunts, and older sisters enlightened me with promises of becoming a strong disciplined young lady. This was my celebration of maturity. I remember running to the east the first morning of my ceremony and my relatives running after me. This symbolically attests that I will be a kind mother, whom my children will always follow. I was instructed not to stop and that no one should pass me or they would grow old fast.

The all night singing and chanting was tough but all I thought of was the teachings by my female role models. Although I did not understand the meaning of the beautiful songs sung those nights, I grew to understand that the 12 songs were sung to Changing Women during her first puberty ceremony by Talking God (one of the male Navajo deities), called the Hogan Songs.

### **Urban Navajo**

How, then, does a Navajo family continue these teaching in the city? Do Navajo parents instill these in their children and do the children understand it, respect it, and practice it in the city?

As a strong advocate for revitalizing a heritage language through culture, I still ask myself why I chose to withdraw my children from a distinctive school that promotes revitalizing the heritage language and culture and relocate off the reservation into the city to pursue my career. I was sure to follow the footsteps of my mother and many other educated Navajo women, who remained on the Navajo reservation to continue their profession.

How did I get here? Why here in the city? Why did I escape the reservation? Is it fair that I take the beauty of the reservation from my children? How do I continue to instill the culture, language, traditions and life styles of our unique Navajo culture in my children here in the city? These thoughts and my mother's unique experience, coupled with my experiences, led me to my dissertation' concept question, "What initiates an educated Native American woman, with children, to relocate off the reservation to the city to pursue her career?" My inquiry into the participant's individual stories of their decisions to relocate is guided by my belief that these stories are important. They will

have an influence on the Navajo Nation's plans for women leadership and will assist educational leaders and administrators in creating environments that support success for children, women, and their relationships.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

Although much research has been conducted on Native American women, there is a lack of research that specifically addresses educated Navajo women who leave the comfort of their homelands to pursue their careers. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding the lives of five highly educated Navajo women who, with their children, left the comfort of their homeland to pursue their careers.

In order to gain further insight into the reasons these women leave, qualitative research methods were used to gain in-depth answers, in the women's voices, to the following research questions:

1. What are the principal factors that highly educated Native American women leave the reservation to pursue their careers?
2. What barriers and supports do they face in their careers?
3. What cultural transitions do they experience?
4. How did these transitions affect their careers, their families, and their personal sense of self.

### **Significance of the Study**

Denise K. Lajimodiere wrote, "The best information on what it was like to be a Native American woman in early American would have been from Native American women themselves, but few were asked." Mihesuah (2003) advised, "If writers want to find out what Indian women think, they should ask Indian women" (p. 4). As a Navajo

woman, I am challenged by these implications to scrutinize the motives of Navajo women relocating off the reservation to pursue their careers. The findings of this study will provide a knowledge base for Navajo leaders to better understand the decisions of educated Navajo women who, with their children, relocate off the reservation to pursue their career. By better understanding these decisions and the impetus behind these decisions, Navajo leaders can begin to focus on strategies that will inspire these educated Native women to return to their reservation and contribute.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was that only five educated Navajo women in the state of Arizona were studied, who had school-aged children, who worked on the Navajo reservation and then relocated off the reservation to pursue their careers. These individuals were selected from a pool limited to Navajo women who obtained a BA/BS degree or higher.

### **Assumptions**

An assumption is that the participants in this study answered all of the interview questions openly and honestly.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to tell the stories of five Navajo women, with school-aged children, who worked on the Navajo reservation and for various reasons relocated off the reservation to pursue their career. I am primarily interested in the principal factors for their leaving the reservation, the barriers and supports they faced in their careers, the cultural transitions they experienced, and the impact their leaving had on their careers, their families, and the perceptions of self.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **The Dine Education Philosophy**

We are the Holy People of the Earth. We are created and placed between our Mother Earth and Father Sky. Our home, the Four Sacred Mountains, with the entrance to the East, embodies our Way of Life. It provides strength and peace within us.

Spirituality, intellect, planning, and life have been instilled within us; through these attributes we attain knowledge and wisdom. We shall combine the best learning and knowledge of other societies with that of our own for the benefits of our future.

With that, our children will talk with beauty before them, beauty behind them, beauty beneath them, beauty above them, beauty before them, and they will always be respectful and live in harmony with natural law. Our children will go forth in life endowed with what is required to achieve their ultimate aspirations. (Office of Dine Culture, Language & Community Service, Division of Dine Education *T'aa Sha Bik'ehgo Dine B Na nitin doo ihoo'aah*)

The focus of this study was to gain an understanding of the lives of highly educated Navajo women who, with their children, left the comfort of their homeland to pursue their careers. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 is separated into four categories: Navajo history, changing woman, Navajo women, and the changing roles of Navajo women,

#### **Navajo History**

##### **Anthropologically**

There are two folds on the Navajo history, anthropologically and traditionally. Anthropologists say during the 14th century the Navajo migrated from Asia and across the Bering Strait and settled in what is now southwest United States. It is at this location the Navajos call home. The Navajo reservation, also known as *Dine Be Keyah*,

encompasses 27,673 square miles and spreads throughout northeastern Arizona into northwestern New Mexico and on to the southern border of Utah.

The 2010 Census identified 5,220,579 as Native Americans and Alaska Natives in the United States. Out of this total 332,129 are of the Navajo tribe. While 164,601 (48%) Navajos reside throughout the United States and in other countries, a total of 173,667 (52%) Navajos live within the boundaries of the Navajo reservation; 50.1% of whom are females and 49.1% males.

Prior to European contact, according to Niethammer (1977),

The woman ruled the home. She not only did all the cooking, cared for the house and children, managed the herds of sheep, butchered the domestic animals, made all the clothing, entertained all the guests, and wove rugs in her spare time, but she also had a voice in all the family affairs. (p.127)

Their way of life included the cultivation of corn and the herding of sheep and goats. From the fleece of the sheep the women wove beautiful rugs and blankets. These were adored by the Whites and other Native American alike. Individuals were ascribed gender specific roles and responsibilities, which in many cases were based on egalitarian norms that included shared decision-making. Denetdale (2001) shared,

In traditional societies, gender roles were often egalitarian, meaning that both males and females were crucial to the survival and perpetuation of culture and society. Women were consulted about important decisions that affected all of their people on matters that extended to the economic and the political. (p. 10)

As doors opened to the Colonists, treaties between Colonists and Native Americans were signed to acquire land. Christianity and Western culture, which excluded recognizing the heritage language and culture and history of the Native American, were the paths they were forced to observe.

Roessel (n.d.) commented about the 1789 to 1871 Treaty Period:

Relations between the federal government and the Indian tribes were covered by formal treaties. One treaty after another was made with Indians providing for them to give up large tracts of lands while other territories would be set aside for their exclusive and perpetual use. (p. 13)

According to the [navajopeople.org](http://navajopeople.org) (Navajo People—The Diné, 1994-2003) in 1863, a Scorched Earth Campaign conducted by Kit Carson against the Navajo occurred where captives were forced to march on the Long Walk to Fort Sumner, 350 miles east into New Mexico, and many died. Acrey (1979) shared, “The Navajos, whose traditional way of life had for centuries provided a comfortable and secure existence, were now at the mercy of their enemies. Their “Long Walk » would forever remain in the hearts and minds of the People” (p. 45).

In 1933, the U.S. government, once again, put the Navajos through a gruesome period with the Indian Reorganization Act and the Livestock reduction. Both events had effects on Navajo women in various ways. Hamansy (1957) explained that since the Indian Reorganization Act allowed Native American married men to own land granted they followed certain guidelines and made proper use of it; women and children, who were traditionally owners of land, were affected because they could own land only through inheritance or through transfers from male assignees. In addition, Hamansy shared that because few families managed to make a living with farming and livestock operations many men and women were forced to find additional income. This meant native women had to seek jobs outside the home. Because government institutions, such as schools and hospitals offered few jobs to women, women were forced to work in seasonal agricultural positions, restaurants, and domestic services while the men found better paying positions such as on the railroads, agriculture, lumbering, construction, military, and mining operations.

Shepardson (1982) explained how drastic changes economically affected livestock rearing and small-scale agriculture, which affected the status of Navajo woman. She explained David Aberle's startling figures regarding per capita ownership, women, women were forced to work in seasonal agricultural from 20 in 1930 to 14 in 1935 . . . to 8 in 1940 . . . to 4 in 1951" (p. 151). She added that women especially were affected because they lost their only source of income. Shepardson (1982) explained how the stock reduction resulted in few job opportunities for woman, "The blow fell heaviest on Navajo women who were offered few alternatives—federal jobs were in forestry, irrigation, road building, and the construction of schools—federal jobs were in forestry, irrigation, road building, and the construction of schools—man's work" (p. 151).

In 1956 the Relocation Act allowed and encouraged Native Americans to move to the city. Metcalf (1982) shared,

The Bureau's objective was to move Indians and their families into metropolitan areas where economic opportunities were presumed to be more plentiful than the reservation. Ultimately, the policy was based on the assumption that urbanization would lead to assimilation and, thus, to the final solution of the so-called 'Indian Problem. (p. 71)

In *Navajo Women in the City: Lessons From a Quarter-Century of Relocations*, Metcalf (1982) outlined the impact of the relocation on a sample of Navajo women in San Francisco in the early 1970s. She shared a comparison of urbanization among White, Black, and American Indian populations between 1910 and 1970. A gradual increase in the urban Indian population indicated 4.5% in 1910 to 9.9% in 1930 to 16% in 1950 to a dramatic 44.9% in 1970. (p. 72). According to the 2010 US Census, 48% of the Navajo population had relocated off the reservation.

According to Metcalf,

The steady increase in urban residence among all groups could lead to the conclusion that, with or without the BIA Relocation Program, Indians would eventually become urbanized. Of course, not all Indians come into the city as part of the official BIA programs; many come on their own. “On their own” in this context means without BIA subsidy, not necessarily “alone,”—usually, they come to join relatives and friends who have participated in the program. (pp. 72-73)

So, what did this mean for Navajo women?

Metcalf shared the 1970 Census by comparing the median income between urban and rural male and female Indians. The figures show \$4,568 for male urban Indians compared to \$2,741 for rural male Indians. Although these numbers showed an advantage for the urban dwellers, the numbers compared to all males in the U.S. was 1.4 times larger than the sum for urban male Indians at \$6,614. These numbers are much more startling for the women. Whereas, the numbers for the urban female Indians are less than half of their male counterparts, their \$2,023 median income was slightly lower than all U.S. women, at \$2,404. Metcalf concluded that this meant as a woman, any woman, in the labor market, you were at the bottom of the pay scale. However, this affected Native women far more than the overall women in the U.S. Metcalf went on to share the female-headed household data. The number of female-headed households for the Indians was 9% higher than that of the overall U.S. women of 11%. Because an urban-female Indian’s income was three-fourths of all U.S. female-headed families, the Navajo woman fared about the same as women in general. However, when some of them had to support their families on their own, they were left with fewer resources than any other group. Metcalf (1982) concluded, “So 25 years of Relocation has done little to accomplish the BIA’s goals of increasing economic opportunities for Indian individuals” (p. 74).

Joyce Griffen (1982) did a study sample on 22 Navajo women who were working or worked on a Navajo reservation border-town in Flagstaff, Arizona. Griffen's hypothesis were as follows:

That Navajo women employed in Flagstaff were at the cutting edge of an increasing movement of Navajos from the reservation into wage work; that they were leaving the secure social and economic position of traditional Navajo women; that significant female others would not have been role models for work in the Anglo world; and, that stress could only be the result. (p. 90)

In "Changing Roles in Indian Country," women are emerging from positions of authority in traditional tribal culture to more public roles. Mary Pember (2008) explained how Native women like Cheryl Crazy Bull of the Sicangu Lakota Nation, "We are creating new roles for ourselves, evolving and changing. We are in new territory" (p. 11). Pember shared that 14 out of 37 tribal college presidents are women in the United States.

Lamphere (1989, p. 432) summarized all periods and suggests that when it comes to interpreting women's positions feminist anthropologists have moved from constructing universalist framework to conducting more historically embedded analyses of gender relations.

There is general agreement that Navajo women are active participants in domestic life; however, their participation in political and ritual activities has been the subject of some controversy. Lamphere (1989) attempted to assess both the regional variation and historical changes by analyzing five different Navajo community studies during different periods since 1938. As she analyzed the Navajo women's roles, she kept her focus on the sexual division of labor in the household/residence group and the structure and function of female exchange networks.

In her analysis of the 1930 study, Lamphere concluded that because Navajo families have been incorporated into a capitalistic wage economy, Navajo women's roles have changed enormously. This is evident in the domestic division of labor that may be related to the patterns of wage labor prevalent in the late 1930s and the Navajo women's resource network that includes the post-marital residence choice and the number of females or males in one's sibling set.

The 1950's study showed a combination of female economic dependency and an over-burdening and under-burdening of women in regards to productive and reproductive labor. Because of the allotments to male heads of households and the extensive male labor away from home, some women became dependent on male wages and isolated themselves in nuclear families. Many replaced their husbands' labor with their own on farms while others worked for wages. The patriarchal and nonlocal residence for women resulted in a small network that consisted of relatives by marriage rather than sisters and mothers.

The 1960's study showed a flexibility in division of labor for those who stayed in rural areas. The older women committed to preserving the pastoral economy while the younger women either did wage work or received some sort of government help. Some migrated to the city and in 1980, even though wage work was available in rural areas, some of these young women moved to the cities in Arizona for wage work. Depending on residence choices and the number of the women's female siblings, the set women's resource network ranged from strong female-dominated networks to isolated ones.

The 1980's study indicated an important emphasis that men dominated wage labor and earned more than women. Although well-educated Navajo women were able to

obtain professional jobs such as teaching and social work, others were relegated to low-paying female service work or craft production. This has created a wide range of patterns in women's domestic labor, control over income, and the ability to build a resource network for exchange of goods and services.

While men and women still shared the domestic responsibilities on the farm and in the home, more and more men were leaving the home to work, which put economic pressure on the male. This economic responsibility used to be a family responsibility. This affected the Navajo woman's economic position, too. Where extended families used to live together, during this period, more and more nuclear families chose to live independently. While the Indian Reorganization Act strengthened Native American tribes, it also weakened them.

A disturbing comment regarding the end of the Navajos was made by Ethelou Yazzie in *Navajo History* (1971),

When the population increases so much that the People spread out beyond the boundary the boundary represented by the God's body, that will be the end of the Navajos. Because Navajo people live beyond that boundary now, it could be that they will run into difficulties with nature and will be out of harmony with the plan of the gods. (p. 83)

### **Traditionally**

Traditionally, according to Iverson and Roessel (2002),

The Navajos emerged into this world after a long and difficult journey that took them from the First World (the Black World) to the Second World (the Blue World) to the Third World (the Yellow World) to the Fourth World (the Glittering World). (p. 8)

The Fourth World, also known as the Glittering World, is the site of the four sacred mountains. Mitchell (2001) shared that Navajos are embraced within the wraps of the Four Sacred Mountains, which were created in the Glittering World by First Man and



First Woman with soils gathered in the third world. Each of the mountains is represented by a color, protected by a sacred animal, housed to a sacred deity, and adorned with gems (p. 18-19). In the book, *Ama Sani doo Achei Baahane* (2004), by Jackson and colleagues related that it was in the Glittering World that the roles and responsibilities of the male and female were established and explains,

It became clear that the role of the male is to provide protection, direction and guidance for his home and family. The role of a female is to take care of the home and nurture the young ones. The Beings understood that they must work as a team, father and mother to provide for the family. (p. 25)

It was, also, in the Glittering World that Changing Woman was born.

### **Changing Woman**

In order to better understand the Dine women, it is imperative to understand that the “status and strength carried by the women and girls in the Dine culture is related to the image and power embodied in the original female deity” (Monroe, 1995, p. 3), known as Changing Woman. Changing Woman, also known as *Asdzaa Nadleehi*, *Yoolgai Asdzaa*, and White Shell Woman were born as a base for understanding the Blessing Way, *Hozho k’eiina*. Anderson (1996) stated, Changing Woman “is the heart of *Hozhooji*, the oldest and most sacred of Navajo ceremonies.” Some say she was not born at all, but rather just appeared. She was a female deity complete with spiritual status and powers” (pp. 3-4).

Yazzie (1971) shared,

One morning at dawn, First Man and First Woman saw a dark cloud over *Ch’ool’i’I* (Gonernador Knob). Later they heard a baby cry. When they looked to see where the crying was coming from, they realized that it came from within the cloud that covered the top of *Ch’ool’i’i*. First Man searched and found the baby girl. She was born of darkness and the dawn was her father. (p. 31)

Mitchell (2001) noted,

In twelve days Changing Woman quickly became a beautiful young woman and started her menstrual cycle. A ceremony was assembled for her called *Kinaalda* (Puberty Ceremony). This same ceremony is given today for Navajo girls when they first start their menstrual cycle. (p. 28)

According to Begay (1983) there is oral historical evidence that the ceremony called *Kinaalda* is to be performed on the occasion of a girl's first and second menstruation. In Changing Woman's ceremony, First Woman was the *Ideal Woman*. She assisted her daughter by adorning her with the finest mixed precious gems and the finest jewelry made from turquoise, white beads, jet, coral, and obsidian. The girl wore a beautiful traditional woven dress and a pair of moccasins with leggings. She was arrayed with white beads and white shells. For this reason she is also called *White Shell Woman*. Much of the ceremonial activity in the first *Kinaalda* centered on tying Changing Woman's hair. This act signified the tying together, or combining, of thought, life, and positive values. For this reason Navajo girls today are urged to have long hair. She was blessed with a most important attribute: the ability to bear children. On the first day of the ceremony, she began her first race. Her final race occurred on the fourth morning of her Walking Into Beauty ceremony (p. 6).

In addition, Mitchell (2001) added that 12 Hogan Songs were sung at the ceremony. Then on the final morning Changing Woman was massaged, which symbolizes molding a young girl's body into a woman's body and to make the body strong (p. 29).

Scholars give beauty to this most celebrated ceremony in a Navajo girl's life. Anderson (1996) says Changing Woman's "greatest symbolic significance for the cyclical aspects of women's being and she provides the spiritual and traditional basis for the *kinaalda*." Reid (2008) shared, "Navajo deities treat this moment in the young girl's

life as pure, powerful, and sacred” (para. 5). Denetdale (2001) concluded, “*Kinaalda*, or puberty rite, a ceremony celebrating women’s reproductive and regenerative powers, offered further evidence of Navajo women’s authority and status. Women were absent from the public domain, but this did not necessarily mean that they lacked influence or power” (p. 4).

Roessel (1981) highlighted Changing Woman as being the most recognized deities because of her regenerative and reproductive powers. Roessel continued and shared Marion E. Grindley’s thoughts about the Changing Woman:

The Navajo believed that there were many Holy People, or spirit beings, and that Changing Woman was the most sacred of all. She helped to create the people of the earth, who were the ancestors of the Navajos . . . Changing Woman taught the people how to live in harmony with all things—the elements, the mountains, the plants, the animals. (p. 17)

We, the Dine, are created from Changing Women. We “are the children of Changing Woman” (Iverson & Roessel, 2002, p. 1). Iverson and Roessel added,

She rubbed the skin from her breast, her back, and from under her arms to create the first four clans . . . eventually there would be sixty clans. Changing Woman’s gift of mother’s instincts and affection are the basis for the matrilineal clan system. (pp. 11-12)

## **Navajo Women**

The Navajo adhere to a kinship system where their ancestral descent is traced through maternal lines that determine individual’s roles in marriage, life and culture.

As a matriarchal society, married daughters continue to live with their unmarried siblings and their parents. Hamansy (1957) shared,

The Navaho traditionally live in widely scattered matriarchal family groups. Each nuclear family lives in a separated Hogan . . . composed of an older woman, her husband, her unmarried children, her married daughters, and the daughters’ husbands and children. (p. 102)

## **Changing Roles in Native American Women**

There are several aspects to look at before we can begin to assess the changing roles of Navajo women. First, we must look at how Western culture perceives Navajo women as well as how the Navajos view themselves. Next, we must answer the question of why Navajo women are perceived that way. Finally, we can begin to evaluate the changing roles of Navajo women and discuss what can be done to change that view of Navajo women.

### **How Western Society Perceive Native Women**

*In Representing Changing Woman: A Review Essay on Navajo Woman*, Denetdale (2001) discussed the past and current studies of Navajo women with the intent of illuminating how their lives have been represented. She stated, “Prior to 1970, few studies of Navajo women were published. Beginning in the 1970s, research on Native women was guided by assumptions about the universal subordination of women” (p. 2).

Scholars, such as Iverson and Roessel (2002) emphasized, “To be Navajo meant to respect the old ways and to find the means to continue in a new day. The Navajos have always brought in new people, new ideas, and new elements and, over time, made them Navajo” (p. 3). The Spaniards brought livestock and according to Iverson and Roessel (2002), “The Navajos took the animals, wrapped them in the strands of their own stories, and made them theirs” (p. 3). The authors added, “Pueblo women may well have been the ones who primarily introduced Navajos to sheep and influenced their raising of sheep. Sheep, goats . . . were all central to the evolution of Dine society and economy” (p. 23).

In “The Status of Navajo Women” Shepardson (1982) shared how the Navajo, who were once a non-literate, clan-based pastoral tribe whose early economy was based

on livestock and small-scale agriculture, has made a leap into an economy based on wage-work in service, industrial organizations, and large scale irrigated farming when the 1933 Navajo livestock reduction was implemented. She suggested that this stock reduction has resulted in the lost of high status for the Navajo woman.

From a Euro-American point of view, Navajo women have been deemed as “princess . . . squaw drudge. They are noted in historic records as autonomous, self-assured, authoritative, and central forces in their families and community (Denetdale, 2001, p. 1).

### **How Natives Perceive Themselves**

Iverson and Roessel (2002) shared, “The Navajos believed that for their society and culture to prosper they had to expand in a number of different ways” (p. 3). The Navajos needed more land for their sheep so they expanded their land. Iverson and Roessel (2002) added, “The original Navajo reservation established through the 1868 treaty grew to four times its original size through various executive order additions” (p. 3).

According to Iverson and Roessel (2002), “There is an understanding that the people, the animals, and the land must be defended in order for the Dine to survive” (p. 2-3). Navajo women and children were enslaved by Spaniards and other native tribes such as the Utes and Comanche. “The Navajo oral tradition brims over with accounts of Comanche and Ute attempts, sometimes successful, to steal their horses, their children, or their sisters or mothers” (Iverson & Roessel, 2002, p. 22). Iverson and Roessel (2002) stated, “Although the Dine have faced racism, oppression, and hostility through the centuries they have found ways to adapt, adjust, and continue” (p. 2).

According to Marie Salt (2013, cited by Estes, 2013, para. 9),

The white people came and took a lot. We barely have anything . . . this loss included how women and the home have been re-structured according to non-Navajo values with dire consequences. One such consequence is the devaluing of traditional and historic women leadership roles.

Shepardson (1982) stated, “There can be little disagreement between observers and the Indians themselves as to the high status enjoyed by women in traditional Navajo society” (p. 151). Women and men played different yet complementary roles, exercising power over aspects of tribal life for which they were uniquely responsible. Denetdale (2007, p. 11) explained the fundamental Navajo political entity, called a natural community, which consisted of 10 to 40 members in a local band. The larger group, known as *naachid*, consisted of a group of 24 headmen, 12 of whom were peace leaders and 12 of whom were war leaders. This group of men met to address matters regarding the tribe.

On the other hand, Denetdale (2007) went on to say, “Although written reports do not mention women as leaders or chiefs, Navajo oral tradition and other accounts make note that it was not unheard of for woman to serve as headmen or chiefs” (p. 11).

Denetdale (2007, p. 11) shared Ruth Roessel’s comment that Navajo women were not appointed as leaders of natural communities, but they influenced the decisions that male leaders made on behalf of their people. According to Denetdale (2007, p.11), Juanita also known as *Asdzaa Tl’ogi*, the wife of Chief Manuelito, was relied upon for her counsel by her husband.

Lee (2012) reminded us that in 1998 Lenora Fulton ran for president but was heavily scrutinized and never made it to the general election. Then in 2006 and again in 2010 Lynda Lovejoy ran for Navajo Nation president but lost both times. Even though

some Navajos have said these leadership attempts by Navajo women have been discouraged by many Navajos based on tradition and culture, Lee believed this resistance had to do with acculturation to American ways. Lee pointed out that Dr. Anthony Lee, president of the Dine Haatlii Association, said women have always been a part of Dine oral traditions and he did not understand why gender would be an issue in the election. Lee also mentioned that Philmer Bluehouse, who is an advisor to the association, commented that women have always been a vital part of cultural teachings and a woman president fit within the scope of the oral teachings. Bluehouse went on to acknowledge that while men and women do have specific Dine roles, no story or song explicitly states a woman cannot be the primary leader. On the contrary, Lynette Willie, who ran and finished last for a seat on the Navajo Nation council as a delegate added that it was not that they hate women or do not value them. It is coming back to the mindset that women are sacred. Putting a woman in a position of harm could hurt a family in ways that go beyond the physical realm of life. Traditional Navajo people never want a woman to be criticized.

Hamamsy (1957) explained the division of labor between men and women in regards to pastoralism and management of the Hogan. She shared,

Men are responsible for the horses and cattle, women for the sheep and goats. Women carry the burden in the running of the Hogan, including the making of clothing, but men are responsible for the leather and silver work. Blanket weaving is a common pursuit of the women. (p. 102)

Even though many Navajo women were discouraged from leadership roles, they made decisions that affected the survival and well-being of their communities. Hamamsy (1957) stated, “Economically, the women fare equally with or better than the men, since

they are the usual owners of sheep, a major property, and since they can earn cash through their weaving” (p. 102).

Benally (2008) shared her father and grandfather’s perceptions of a Navajo women’s role. She was responsible for the passing down of cultural knowledge from mother to daughter, and for setting a good example that provided an important balance to the words and actions of men, resulting in Navajo harmony between traditional and contemporary life. To be a Navajo woman meant connecting the spiritual, intellectual, social, and the physical.

### **Why Are Native Women Perceived This Way?**

Denetdale (2007) reminded us, “Foreign ideas about proper gender roles have affected Native women’s roles and Western perceptions of them have been detrimental. Native women have suffered under colonialism, but they have continued to challenge and counter gender oppression” (p. 10). This causes problems for Navajo women because the world promotes a patrilineal society.

In “Representing Changing Woman: A Review Essay on Navajo Women”

Denetdale (2001) explained these perceptions about Dine women:

Beginning in the 1970s, research on Native women was guided by assumptions about the universal subordination of women. By the 1980s and 1990s critics pointed out the flaws in some of the 1970 studies and the critics came from Native women, too. Some of the analyses noted that women as a category of analysis was assumed and that examinations were often limited to social organizations associated with women, methods that failed to address how gender shapes economic and political realms. In the 1990s, scholars utilized a number of approaches to illuminate Native women lives. (p. 2)

Based on this assumption, Denetdale (2007) proved in her essay that a reevaluation of the past and current studies demonstrated that Navajo women had and continue to have voices in economic, political, and social realms. She acknowledged



Laura Tohe who noted, Navajo women's stories are not about "those poor Indian women who were assimilated, colonized, Christianized, or victimized." These tales are about "how these women cling to the roots of their female lineage despite the many institutional forces imposed on Indian communities and how they continue to survive despite five hundreds years of colonialism" (pp. 19-20). Referring to Reichard's study Denetdale added, "While Reichard's work served as the basis for future studies that recognized Navajo women's autonomy and authority in their own societies, it also became the basis from which decades of scholars would declare that Navajo women's high status had been severely diminished by a colonialism that emphasized patriarchal values" (p. 4). She began by saying, "Contemporary studies acknowledge Navajo women's high status and recognize that their experiences under colonialism have varied, but they still grapple with scholarship that has painted Navajo women's status as severely eroded" (p. 4). While Navajo women were moving into male-dominated arenas, such as political and professional fields, scholars are forced to reexamine anthropologists who have painted Navajo women's status as severely eroded.

Reid (2008) stated, "The influence of missionaries spurred an exodus of children to off-reservation schools and introduced the concept of a male-dominated society, in which men were 'head of household' and make all the important decisions"

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lives of highly educated Navajo women who, with their children, leave the comfort of their homeland to pursue their careers. Using qualitative research methods, five Navajo women were asked to reflect on their lives while on the reservation and in their new location off the Navajo reservation.

#### **Research Design**

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter . . . qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experiences, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual text—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2)

Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005) stated, “Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations” (p. 1). The researcher chose to capture the stories through qualitative in-depth interviews because it was most appropriate. Seidman (2006) shared,

At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth. (p. 9)

#### **Sample**

The sample for this study consisted of five college-educated Navajo women. To begin, an initial database of 27 Navajo women was compiled through a list of ASU

graduates. The list was comprised of individuals the researcher knew either through graduate school or were related to the researcher in some way. To determine eligibility, the following criteria were used:

- They were Navajo women.
- They were all married.
- They had children.
- They had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher.
- They had gained professional experience on the Navajo reservation after receiving a degree.
- They had relocated off the Navajo reservation to pursue their career.

Because this study focused on these criterions, the initial database was reduced to seven females. Unsure if all seven would be willing to participate in the study, an additional open invitation that described the criteria list was sent through social media, as well as a mass email, to acquaintances of friends to recruit additional Navajo women who fit the criteria. Twelve women who felt they fit the criteria responded to this invitation.

Using the same criteria list, this list was, again, shortened. Of the 12 women who responded three met the criteria. The two database lists (seven from the first and three from the second) were combined which left a total of 10 potential participants. Next, the prospective participants were notified through electronic mail or phone conversations and a final list of five interested participants was generated.

### **Instrumentation**

The initial questionnaire to determine eligibility included 10 closed-ended questions about participants' demographic characteristics including their age, clan,

marital status, number of children and their ages, cultural orientation, and the languages they spoke. The initial questionnaire also asked the participants to elaborate on their K through college school experience, which included the schools they attended, programs of study, and their year of graduation.

After the sample was selected, the women were interviewed asking six open-ended questions. Among the topics explored were the principal factors related to their leaving the reservation; barriers and supports they faced in their careers; what cultural transitions they experienced; and the effects on their careers, their families, and to their personal sense of self.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection for this study began in late March 2015. Four participants were interviewed at Hayden Library in Tempe, Arizona, on two consecutive days, March 24 and 25, 2015. One participant was interviewed through an audio recorded phone interview on March 25, 2015. The women were asked six questions (see Appendix A). Each interview lasted one to two hours. The transcription of the audio recordings took over 300 hours and produced over 80 pages.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were carefully scripted from the audio memory device, saved on a thumb drive, and labeled as Participant 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5. The researcher then organized the collected data into categories: demographic characteristics; K-12 and college experiences; cultural and language orientation; type of career experience; challenges and successes on and off the reservation; motives for moving to the city and its effects on career, family, culture and sense of self. These were securely stored.

Keeping track of participants . . . making sure the written consent forms are copied and filed in a safe place, labeling audiotapes of interviews accurately, managing the extensive files that develop ... with transcripts of interviews, and keeping track of decision points . . . a concern for security, and a system for keeping material accessible, can save hours of frustration later. (Seidman, 2006, p. 112)

An expression of thanks was a \$10 gift card to The Cheesecake Factory for each of the participants. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Within this chapter are findings of the interviews that were held with five educated Navajo women. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the lives of these highly educated Navajo women who, with their children, left the comfort of their homeland to pursue their careers. Using qualitative research methods, they reflected on their lives while on the reservation and in their new location off the Navajo reservation.

Among the topics explored were the principal factors that contributed to their leaving the reservation; barriers and supports they faced in their careers; what cultural transitions they experienced; and the effects on their careers, their families, and to their personal sense of self.

#### **Participant Profiles**

I will begin by introducing the participants through participant profiles. Profiles were crafted by an analysis of the transcribed interviews. To protect the identity of the Navajo women, pseudonyms were used. As Navajo people we identify ourselves through our four clans. Therefore, each of the participants were identified based on her first clan. For instance, the first participant's four clans were *Kinyaa'aanii*, *Bit'ahnii*, *Biih bitoodnii*, and *Tl'izi lani*. She was identified as Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii, meaning Woman *Kinyaa'aanii*.

Each profile begins with the participant's demographic characteristics including her age, clan, marital status, number of children and their ages, cultural orientation, and the languages she spoke, followed by a recounting of her kindergarten through college

school experience including the schools she attended, programs of study and the year of college graduation. Interviews ranged from one hour to one-and-half hours in length.

Participants were asked to respond to the following three open-ended questions:

1. Would you please tell about your career experience on the Navajo reservation?  
Type of position you held, number of years, successes you endured, and challenges you faced.
2. Would you please tell about your career experience off the Navajo reservation.  
Type of position, number of years, supports you received, and barriers you faced.
3. What were your motives for moving off the Navajo reservation? Cultural transitions you experienced, effects on your career, family, and personal sense of self.

### **Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii**

*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii* is a 44-year-old mother of a 15-year-old girl. She and her husband are originally from Black Mesa, Arizona. She is an educator and her husband is a construction worker who travels throughout the United States. *Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii* and her daughter spend a minimum of two weekends a month with him. Because of her demanding work load, she rarely visited her extended family on the Dine Reservation.

However, she credits her success to the strong cultural upbringing from her parents.

*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii* smiles as she recalls this memory,

I saw both of my parents go out every morning to offer corn pollen to the Holy Gods. I heard them pray. They would put cedar down for us before we went back to the dorm and at any hardships or accomplishments, I can still smell the aroma of the cedar.

While her parents emphasized the importance of family roots, *Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii* spent her entire childhood, since five years old to her high school years, in a

boarding school dormitory on the Navajo reservation, all of which were more than 100 miles away from home. She clearly remembers her mother as

a hard working lady. My mom left for work at 4:30 in the morning to assure the children living in the dormitory, including me, had a hot breakfast. Her work at the school cafeteria allowed me to see her every day. But I couldn't go home with her because she had a second job taking care of an elderly lady after work and would not get home until after ten at night. I wonder if she ever slept.

*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii* rarely saw her father and understood that his job on the railroad paid for the vehicles her mother and father drove and for the grain and hay needed for the livestock on the farm. During those years, *Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii* continued to speak her mother tongue (Navajo) and, eventually learned to read the Dine writing at church. Her parents spoke fluent Navajo but they could not read or write the language.

On weekends, if she was lucky to go home, she attended ceremonial events such as *yeibichei* dances, blessingway ceremonies, peyote ceremonies, and various cultural milestone gatherings such as a baby's first laugh ceremony, puberty ceremonies, and other cultural events. She recalls her mother's adamancy that *Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii* have her puberty ceremony known as *Kinaalda*. When that day came, her mother drove over 600 miles, round trip, to assure *Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii* participated in the ceremony. She shared,

I am fortunate to have had my *kinaalda* twice. That's how important the ceremony is to the Navajo and to my mother, in particular. I am, continuously, reminded by my mother of my irresponsibility because I did not do everything in my power to make sure my only daughter had her *kinaalda*. She was 13 years old at the time and was attending a summer program at Stanford University in California when she had her first menses so we did not have her puberty ceremony. At her second menses, we had a death in the family so we never had a ceremony for her. She is now 15 and I have not even had a beauty way ceremony for her. I am very sad about this.



## **Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhinii meaning Woman Ma'ii deeshgiizhinii**

*Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhinii* is a flamboyant 54-year-old mother of four. She and her husband are originally from St. Michaels, Arizona. Because they lived exactly 7.6 miles apart, they have been friends since childhood and attended and graduated from the same local schools from kindergarten through high school. They continued their college education together and graduated from the University of Arizona in 1984. She giggled, “I didn’t go far to find my soul mate” (*Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhinii*, 3/24/2015).

*Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhinii* grew up working on a farm. Because her only sibling, a brother, is 27 years older than her and had a job an hour away, her parents depended on her to help with the farm. She did not have time for any school events. She shared,

School for me was nothing exciting to talk about. I got up at the crack of dawn, which was around 4:00 A.M., did my daily chores of feeding the horses, the chicken, geese, dogs, and turkey, went to school, came home, did my homework, ate dinner, did my agricultural chores, watched a bit of television and went to bed. I did this for 12 years. Nothing exciting. No activities, no sports, and no hanging out with my friends. Just a simple life is what I lived as I was growing up. (*Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhinii*, 3/24/2015)

*Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhinii's* mother always held some sort of home business. As a well-known weaver, her mother sold her beautiful tightly woven rugs at local rug auctions, which were held monthly. While this income paid for the basic necessities, arthritis in her hands soon robbed her of this job. Determined to continue her share of income, she woke every morning at 3:00 a.m. to prepare breakfast burritos for the local businesses. The small community called her The Burrito Lady. If her hands could handle the pain, she sometimes would sell tamales at the same local businesses in the afternoons. *Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhinii* softly shared, “I attribute my strong determination to my

mother. She was a woman who would not give up. She was a strong native woman” (3/24/2015).

*Asdzaa Ma’ii deeshgiizhini* is a financial planner and her husband is a counselor at a community college. All four of her children have bachelor’s degrees and have been instilled with the teaching that “as Dine we have been given a special gift to live in two worlds and that we should value and appreciate it” (*Asdzaa Ma’ii deeshgiizhini*, 3/24/2015). She proudly shared her skill of speaking, fluently in the Dine language and continued to highlight her husband’s ability to fluently speak, read, and write Dine.

### **Asdzaa Bit’ahnii meaning Woman Bit’ahnii**

Asdzaa Bit’ahnii is a 44-year-old mother of two. She was originally from Lukachukai, Arizona, and her husband was from Shiprock, New Mexico. They both are educators on the Tohono O’odham Reservation. She teaches 3rd grade and he teaches high school history. Their oldest son is a senior at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona, while their daughter is a fifth grader within the Mesa School District. *Asdzaa Bit’ahnii* spent her childhood years moving from one community school to another, for her mother was an educator working in the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) on the Dine reservation. *Asdzaa Bit’ahnii* recalled monthly visits to the medicine man. These visits taught her that having faith was important. She lived in a community that held cultural ceremonies such as *yeibichei* dances, beautyway ceremonies, fire dances, puberty ceremonies, met her husband while in high school at Shiprock, New Mexico. They both continued their education at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, but her husband had to put off school and work for they were expecting their first child. *Asdzaa Bit’ahnii*

successfully completed her studies in Elementary Education and received her degree in 1992.

### **Asdzaa To'aheedliinii meaning Woman To'aheedliinii**

*Asdzaa To'aheedliinii* is a 37-year-old mother of five children. She and her husband are originally from Tuba City, Arizona. Their children all attend school in a Phoenix suburb. John is 10, Jerri is 8, Becky is 6 and her twins Trisha and Trent are 3. (To protect the identity pseudonyms were used for all children in the profiles). While *Asdzaa To'aheedliinii* and her husband were raised in the heart of the Navajo reservation, both were deprived of learning their language and culture. Both their parents rarely spoke or practiced their heritage language and culture. *Asdzaa To'aheedliinii* said that this was why her children do not speak or understand their Navajo language.

### **Asdzaa Honaghaahnii means Honaghaahnii Woman**

*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii* is a 38-year-old mother of two children: Matthew, 17 and Kim, 15. She and her husband have been married 14 years and are from Crownpoint, New Mexico. They both received a master's degree in Elementary Education from the University of New Mexico in 2000.

“We ingrain in our children, everyday, that our culture and our tradition is our life” (*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii*, March 25, 2015). *Asdzaa Honaghaahnii's* preparation for her daughter's puberty ceremony began years before her daughter actually had her ceremony. “I encourage my children to rise before the sun to offer corn pollen to the holy Gods and to run.”

## **Career Experience on the Dine Reservation**

The five educated Navajo women gained experience in their career on the Navajo reservation. What follows is an analysis of their voices. Prior to leaving the Navajo Reservation, of the five participants, two of them were elementary school teachers, one in a Bureau of Indian Affairs school for 16 years, and the other in a state public school for 10 years; one was a middle school principal for five years in a state public school; one was a bank receptionist for 12 years; and one was a microwave technician for two years with the Navajo Technology Utility Authority.

### **Successes on the Navajo Reservation**

When asked to reflect on the successes they experienced while on the Navajo reservation, three themes emerged: Self-growth, being treated fairly, and applying skills.

**Self-growth.** The following are reflections of three participants who experienced self-growth:

My superintendent trusted and supported the entire leadership team's leadership; and each one of us had different leadership styles. He was a great superintendent. Because he trusted and supported my leadership I was able to grow so much as a woman leader. I had the support I needed by my superintendent and the board members. My team at the middle school trusted and supported me. We learned as a team. My final year there was the year No Child Left Behind was being introduced. I don't know how they (Tuba City district) got the necessary training. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa 'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

The successes while working with BIE was that I got the experience and training I needed to work with children who were struggling with both languages. BIE is pretty good about sending teachers out to the necessary training. There were two of us who were ESL teachers. I worked with grades kindergarten to 2nd grade and my colleague worked with 3-6 grade. I was able to take the experience to my next job. After working 10 years at the community school, I accepted a job next door at Leupp Elementary School with the Flagstaff School District as a reading specialist. I don't think I would have been able to get a position as a reading specialist if I didn't get the training I got through BIE. This professional growth landed me a good job as a reading specialist in a great school district. (*Asdzaa Bit'ahnii*, 3/24/ 2015)

We had a lot of training with the NCLB and the 5 reading components – phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. I felt like I was an expert in that area. The school even paid for my schooling to get my reading endorsement. (*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii*, 3/24/2015)

**Being treated fairly.** The following is an example of how one Navajo woman said she was treated fairly while working on the Navajo reservation:

In comparison with other leaders in the district I think I was treated fairly by everyone. As I recall, four native women and eight Anglo men were on the leadership team. Our superintendent was an Anglo male. He treated us all equally. No one got more and no one got less. We all were treated fairly. That's a big success for a Native woman leader on the reservation. I know of many native women leaders who were treated unfairly. I was a lucky one. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii*, 2/24/2015)

**Applying skills.** One Navajo woman felt successful on the Navajo reservation when it came to applying her mother tongue to interpret for customers at the bank:

I think my biggest success was that I would be called on as the interpreter to help the elders who could not speak English. I was good at that because I spoke to my parents, grandparents and relatives in Navajo, everyday, while living on the reservation. I always had someone to talk to in Navajo back on the rez. It was the best feeling. (*Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhunii*, 3/24/2015)

### **Challenges on the Dine Reservation**

When asked to elaborate on the challenges they faced, while on the Navajo reservation, two themes emerged. The women shared the lack of opportunities and facilities for their children and themselves and the constant changes in the school and work system.

**Lack of opportunities for their children.** Two participants shared their concerns regarding the lack of opportunities for their children:

All I kept thinking was whether my child would be ready for kindergarten or not. She wasn't getting the opportunity to play with others. She was getting too bossy and didn't know how to play with others. She would grab toys from other kids or wouldn't share her toys with others. Poor thing, she didn't have anybody to play with. By the time I got back from work, I was exhausted. I rarely did educational

stuff with her. I couldn't even sign her up for any extracurricular events, because there was none available. No dance classes, no gymnastics, no soccer, no t-ball, no karate. Nothing was available. This made me sad. Even though I didn't have these growing up at least in the dorm I was always playing with other kids. We had sewing and other events like movie nights, culture nights where we made baskets, weaved, beaded, danced, sang. My daughter was not getting any of this stuff. There were no opportunities for her and this frustrated me. So, yeah, working on the reservation with children was challenging. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa 'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

My children were elementary age when we lived on the reservation. Besides the basic functions offered by the school, my son and daughter did not have any structured after-school activities. They went to school, came home, and played outside with friends. You know, basketball on the dirt ground with an old goal mounted on the side of the house and they also ran around from one cousin's house to another cousin's house, which were about five hundred yards apart. That's it. Then when the sun went down they were back inside to do homework and to eat dinner. Then it was off to bed. The next day, the cycle continued. We were on the Navajo reservation and they didn't even offer any structured cultural events for the children. When I say cultural events, I am talking horseback riding, weaving, basketmaking, beadwork, cultural dances, and other such events. (*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii*, 3/25/2015)

**Lack of self-growth opportunities.** The children were not the only ones who lacked opportunities. The participants expressed their own lack of self-growth opportunities on the Navajo reservation. One participant shares her frustration:

I don't think I grew, professionally, as a banker. The only time I felt I grew was when we got new computers or registers. We would get trainings by our boss or on the job training. That was like once or twice in the ten years I worked there. Otherwise I didn't find anything tough about working at Wells Fargo. Everything was the same for the ten years I worked there. I did not move up the ladder. (*Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhinii*, 3/24/ 2015)

Another participant felt, as a principal, the biggest challenge she faced was when she did not provide the appropriate opportunities for her teachers to grow, even though it was out of her control:

The challenging part was when it came to professional development because it was done by bringing in outside consultants from across the United States. My teachers hated that. They wanted to go out to these trainings. I wonder, today, if it was because they wanted an opportunity to get off the reservation. I don't know. I

don't think I was giving them the professional development they needed to help them grow. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

**Lack of appropriate daycare facilities.** In addition to the lack of opportunities on the Navajo reservation, a few of the women expressed the challenge of finding appropriate day care facilities:

Those years were tough because I didn't have a reliable babysitter. I hired locally but the trust just wasn't there. I feared and worried for my baby's safety, everyday, because I didn't know the person very well that I had hired to care for my little girl. I even brought my own relatives to live with me to care for my daughter. This was a little more comforting but each relative was not reliable. They would call me last minute and tell me they had something to do and I would run around looking for a sitter. Many times I would take leave from work. It was so frustrating. When my daughter turned 3 it was even more frustrating because there was no daycare. I wasn't eligible for head start. I guess I made too much money. My husband tried to help when he could. When he wasn't working that is. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

**Constant change in the school system.** Change in the school system or the work force on the Navajo reservation was another big challenge these women faced. Two participants expressed their frustration with the constant change in the school system. As a principal, *Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii* shared her experience:

The challenge I faced was getting their "buy in" to change. My teachers were wonderful, hardworking educators who were used to doing what they did year after year. I wouldn't be surprised if they had the same lesson plan each year. These teachers were comfortable with what they were doing and trying to motivate them to try something new was a challenge. It was around this time, 2002, or some time close to that year. The years of No Child Left Behind. Well, it was during that time that looking at data was important. There was also a large push toward standard based education. These changes were just too much for my teachers, I think. Those were tough years for educators. It was a big shift in education. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

The following is remembered by an experienced teacher regarding the challenge of change in the school system:

There was always something new each year. It was frustrating. I got into teaching when No Child Left Behind was at its conception stage, so there were a lot of

trainings we had to attend. It was my first year teaching and all the ideas I had learned in college, I never applied. Then, when I got started as a 4th grade teacher, we had to apply the new stuff we crazy. I was frustrated. (*Asdzaa Hanaghaani, 3/25/2015*)

The challenge of change was also expressed in the form of going through a high administrative turnover in the school system. One participant recalls the following:

As a teacher in a government school system, our school was always faced with the high turn-over in administration. Our principals changed like we changed clothes. The politics was terrible there. A new board would come on board and would get rid of someone they didn't like. Then, a new administrative team would come on board and we would start all over. It was certainly, frustrating. (*Asdzaa Bit'aahni, 3/24/2015*)

This high administrative turnover led to other challenges for a few of these women. The following illustrates the challenge of staying out of people's business just to secure a job:

I did everything I could to stay out of people's business. I think that helped because, I successfully completed 10 years at this community school as an ESL teacher. I learned to stay on people's good side, especially those who had relatives on the board. It was terrible, but that's what I had to do for job security. That was the challenge I faced working with the Bureau of Indian Education. (*Asdzaa Bit'aahni, 3/24/2015*)

I was, always, worrying about whether I would have a job for the following year or not. Someone was always getting the pink slip. I had my eye on a teaching position at our sister school next door. After six year of teaching there, I finally got a job at the other school. (*Asdzaa Honaghaanii, 3/25/2015*)

Another teacher shared how the change in the high administrative turnover caused challenges in the leadership approach:

Everything was top-down. Our administrators told us what to do. It's like they didn't trust us. It was like do this, do that, no, do this instead, no do that. I felt like their puppet. It saddens me know because they disregarded our degree we had earned in college. We never knew what the next administrator was going to be like. (*Asdzaa Hanaghaani, 3/25/2015*)



## **Career Experience Off the Navajo Reservation**

Currently, the five participants are living in Metropolitan Phoenix. Of the five, three own their own business, one of whom has been a school improvement consultant for the past nine years. One has been a financial planner consultant for the past six years. One has been running an after-school Navajo culture class from her home for the past seven years. The fourth participant works as a teacher at a Bureau of Indian Education school for the past 11 years; and the fifth participant has been a systems engineer for the past five years.

## **Supports Received off the Reservation**

The five Navajo women were eager to share their successes of being supported and accomplishing personal growth, while working in the city. Two of the women shared their experiences of their cultural decisions being supported by their immediate supervisor:

Boy, was I lucky. I had an awesome Agency Director who was very supportive of Native Americans, women in particular. He was understanding of the cultures of the Native Americans he worked with. There were several Navajos, a couple of Tohono O'odham, an Apache and a Hopi. He was always participating in various Native American cultural events such as the Apache puberty ceremony, the Tohono O'odham wake, the Navajo *yeibichei* dances, which I took him to. He supported and encouraged the children of his employees to continue in school. A couple of times he took our children on weekend trips to the local universities: ASU, U of A, NAU, and Stanford University in California. Not only did he support our family, he also made sure we were properly trained as School Improvement Specialists and when necessary he sent us to appropriate trainings in the U.S. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa 'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

My supervisor thought it was great that I spoke two languages. She was more excited that one of my languages was Navajo. She teased me and called me her personal code talker. She was so intrigued by my language. She and my other colleagues wanted to learn a new Navajo word every day. Of course, I never taught them the bad words, even though, some of them, the rowdy ones, wanted to know. I always told them my language was sacred and I wanted to keep it that way. I also told them that my parents never said a curse word in my presence.

They understood and respected me for that. I am fortunate that my co-workers supported me and my language. (*Asdzaa Maiideeshgiizhnii*, 3/24/2015)

In addition to being supported with their culture, all five of the Dine women were supported by their supervisor as to their personal growth:

We have principals that come and go. I have been here for the last 5 years and I have had three different principals. All have been supportive. I guess they trust my teaching because I have not had a bad evaluation or have not had any professional problems with any of them. I try to stay on the good side of people. I learned that while teaching at Leupp. (*Asdzaa Bit'aahnii*, 3/24/2015)

I feel respected for my professional knowledge. It's very pleasing to me. I really, really like my career here. Notice how I referred to my job as a career and on the rez, I called it a job. We are constantly told that it is our responsibility to make our career the best we can make it. That type of support has really allowed me to grow. (*Asdzaa To'aheedliinii*, 3/25/2015)

I had the proper training I needed. My office was housed on the same floor as the agency office. The directors were right next door and if I had a question or concerns I went straight to them. This made my job successful. If I wasn't getting the training I needed, I was just 20 minutes away from boarding the plane to get to my destination. I recall one day, my boss could not attend a meeting in Albuquerque due to a personal emergency, so he sent me to the meeting. It was funny because when I got up that morning I had no idea I was going to be at a meeting in Albuquerque at 10 am that morning. I returned home at my normal time that evening. My daughter didn't even know I went to Albuquerque that day. This would not have been possible if I was still working on the reservation, because the nearest airport was an hour and a half away. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

Now that's when I grew the most. I started out as a banker and within a year, I was offered a position as a financial planner. My boss was always pushing me. I took advantage of this opportunity because my supervisor said he had a lot of faith and confidence in me. It is not very often I get this type of encouragement. If my supervisor had not encouraged me, I believe I would still be at the bank as a teller. (*Ma'ii deeshgiizhnii*, 3/24/ 2015)

I get plenty of support. Once a week we meet as a team at the central office and get trainings on the newest things. We are expected to apply these new learnings during the week. It's challenging, but that's where my world-wide colleagues step in. They are good critics. I learn a lot from their input. My immediate supervisor is always available. The biggest support I get is from my weekly trainings from my colleagues here in the Phoenix area. They are open to my ideas and that helps me to grow. (*Asdzaa To'aheedliinii*, 3/25/2015)

## **Barriers Faced Off the Reservation**

While moving to the city brought successful change and opportunities, the five Navajo women also experienced great challenges in their new work settings. They were challenged with adapting to new work environments and struggling with finding individuals who spoke their mother tongue, the Navajo language. Adapting to new work environments. Below are reflections of two Navajo women who struggled with learning new work procedures:

My career experience has always been with state public schools. So, when I relocated to the city and landed a job with the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), as a school improvement specialist, I was forced to learn the procedures and policies of the BIE. It was tough and time consuming but I eventually caught on. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

Like I mentioned earlier, I have my own home tutoring business. To have a business means you have to take care of all the finances on your own. One of which includes taxes. I didn't really know how to keep track of my financial paperwork for auditing and taxing. In the beginning it was hard to find clients but Phoenix Indian Center really helped me. I am still trying to learn the taxes part. (*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii*, 3/25/2015)

Adapting to a new administration was another struggle one of the women experienced. Below is her experience:

One is the politics of the school board. It is just as bad as the reservation. School board members are relatives of employees in our school. I have finally concluded that this happens everywhere. I'm getting use to this type of system. But, I just come to work and do my job. If you do that, you'll be fine. (*Asdzaa Bit'ahnii*, 3/24/2015)

Below is an example of how one woman struggled to adapt to working alone in the workforce:

It's not a barrier, but I do miss being around people, professional adults, that is. I miss conversing with them. My work station is my kitchen table. I work from home and most of my conversations with my colleagues is on the computer. I develop what needs to be developed and then send it out to my colleagues, some in China, Australia, London, Brazil, all over the world and they respond back in a

matter of seconds. It's pretty neat. But, yeah, I miss talking to people. That's the downfall with this job. (*Asdzaa To'aheedliinii*, 3/25/2015)

**Struggling with finding individuals who spoke the Dine language.** The biggest struggle three of the Navajo women faced when they relocated off the Navajo reservation was the challenge of finding others who spoke the Navajo language. Here are their responses:

Having a heritage language is the most beautiful thing to have. Speaking Navajo is the best gift my parents have ever given me. So, it saddens me that I can't find other Navajos in the city who can speak the Navajo language with me. I miss the deep conversations. Conversations about ceremonies, conversations about celebrations, conversations about our culture, and conversations about our people. I have to drive almost six hours just to have these conversations. Our language is our medicine. It is our weapon. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

Back on the rez, I spoke our Navajo language every single day, at work and at home. I spoke it to other Navajos who did not speak it very well all the way to elders who spoke it fluently. Here in the city, I speak it to my colleagues who want to learn, but I don't know of any other Navajos who speak it. I do miss speaking and hearing the language. I think that would be the toughest thing about moving to the city. (*Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhini*, 3/24/2015)

The second barrier I faced was that I had no one to talk Navajo to. I am learning the *Tohono othom* language though. I miss joking around in Navajo. *Ayeee*, that's the one word I miss. *Yaadilah*, that's another. Oh, I miss our language. I miss conversing with other Navajo people. I really took our language for granted while living on the reservation. I spoke a lot of English when I could have been talking Navajo. (*Asdzaa Bit'aahni*, 3/24/2015)

**Motives for moving off the Navajo Reservation.** The five women lived on the Navajo reservation for an average of 34 years. For various reasons, these women moved to the city. Two themes emerged from their responses: opportunities and change.

***Opportunities.*** Opportunity for their children, spouse, and/or self were among the reasons these Navajo women relocated to the city. Having opportunities for their children was expressed by three of the Navajo women. Examples of their decision included the following:

Opportunities for my daughter and I is the reason I moved to the city. The Navajo reservation lacked opportunities for my daughter to be successful in the western world. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

The Navajo reservation lacked opportunities for myself as well as my children. My son loves to play the piano but there are no piano teachers on the reservation. He had to get some of his training on the internet, if the internet was working. The internet service is terrible on the reservation. I really wish we had found someone to help him as he was growing up on the reservation. He also loves to play baseball but they only play during baseball season and that's about 2 months out of the year. If he's lucky he'll play in the summer but we have to drive 40 miles a day to get him to practice. The lack of opportunities my son faced scared me for my daughter who was of age to join different activities. It was at the point, my husband and I decided the move to the city was necessary. (*Asdzaa Bit'ahnii*, 3/24/2015)

There were no opportunities for my children nor myself. My son was 2 years old at the time we left. Since there was not a daycare provider available, it was hard. My mother-in-law, bless her heart, was there to watch my son from birth to age 2. But, he needed other kids to associate with, he needed to start learning how to play with kids his own age, he needed to be in a school setting. And the reservation just didn't have that. I tried to sign him up for the Navajo Nation Head Start but they told me my son was not eligible because he did not have an educational need. He would have to have a speech impairment or some sort of learning disability. My son was talking the second he came out of my womb she laughs. He is a talkative young fella. I needed to challenge him and the reservation just wasn't the place. (*Asdzaa To'aheedliinii*, 3/25/2015)

In addition to the opportunities they were seeking for their children, one Navajo woman wanted an opportunity for her husband to pursue his education.

The biggest motive was when my husband told me that he would get his bachelor's degree if we moved to the Valley. I jumped to the opportunity. He now has his Bachelor's degree in secondary education. (*Asdzaa Bit'ahnii*, 3/24/2015)

Then, there were two participants who expressed this move to the city as an opportunity to better themselves. Below are their reflections:

There were no opportunities for . . . myself. I felt I was not respected as a woman with a career that most men on the reservation held. So, when I was offered a job at a worldwide technology company, I jumped for it. To this day, I believe this is the best move I ever made for myself. (*Asdzaa To'aheedliinii*, 3/25/2015)

My life is all about opportunities. The move to the city gave me an opportunity to push beyond my comfort zone. I was used to working with one school as a principal. Now, I work with various Native community schools in the city. This experience has made me a better educator. I am thankful for that. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

**Change.** In addition to the opportunities the city would offer, a challenge for change sparked an interest to relocate to the city. Following are responses to three of the Navajo women:

As for me, I had no room to learn. I could not drive 50 miles a day, in my case it would be in the evenings, to take night classes at NAU. I took some classes in the summer but not enough to actually get my master's degree. I think I was ready for a change and a new challenge. I was afraid but my son was excited and my husband was supportive. We moved that June in 2004. (*Asdzaa Bit'ahnii*, 3/24/2015)

I was not respected as a woman with a career that most men on the reservation held. The men I worked with always flirted with me or never took me seriously. When something needed to be done and I could do it, they always said you need me to check to make sure you did it correctly? I hated that. This negative experience here has motivated me to make a change and move. (*Asdzaa To'aheedliinii*, 3/25/2015)

No particular reason for moving. We just wanted to change. We couldn't decide between Albuquerque, Denver or Phoenix. We decided on Phoenix because of all the immediate conveniences. We wanted a supermarket we could get to in minutes, a theatre walking distance from our home. (*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii*, 3/25/2015)

### **Effects on Culture, Career, Family, and Personal Sense**

This drastic change of relocating off their homeland impacted their culture, their career, their family, and their personal sense of self in various ways.

#### **Effects on Culture**

The cultural transitions these women experienced included struggling to continue to speak their Navajo language, finding appropriate Navajo cultural events, being far from the Navajo reservation, and living in a small apartment.

**Finding appropriate Dine cultural events.** Following are the voices of three of the Navajo women who struggled to continue speaking their mother tongue:

I am worried. I am very worried that my daughter does not have the strong foundation of our culture and language. (Mrs. Whitehorse becomes teary-eyed and chokes up) She speaks very little of it. I try to speak the language to her but she just laughs and says, I don't understand you and walks away. Many times I find myself talking to her in Navajo when I want her to do something. *Iiyah, Nididah, alxwhoosh, t'iih, naah.* These are all command words and she knows what they mean. A few times I heard her use the command language. I know it is up to me to help her learn the language, but, how do you when you are living in a world where the primary language is English. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa 'aanii, 3/24/2015*)

I have four children. They all speak the Navajo language. While I encouraged them to continue to speak the language when we moved off the reservation, it was a struggle, because there were no other Navajos to speak to. The only language they heard on a daily basis was English and Spanish. Despite this struggle, I made it mandatory that we continue to speak it in the home. I had control of that. (*Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhinii, 3/24/2015*)

Here in the city, not very many people speak our Navajo language. That is the biggest and hardest thing for me to accept. There was a lady at the school who was from Low Mountain who spoke Navajo. She and I would sit in the library and talk for hours in Navajo. It was very nice. Otherwise, no one spoke the language. Every once in a while, I would see a Navajo at the mall or somewhere and I would smile ever so big and say *Ya'at'eeh*. Many of them would smile back but few answered me back in Navajo and the other few answered me with a simple Hello. Then there were a few who would simply look away, no smile, no hello, just look away. I vowed never to do that to another native, because it hurt. (*Asdzaa Bit'ahnii, 3/24/2015*)

**Lack of cultural experiences in the city.** In addition to struggling to continue speaking the Navajo language, three of the women faced the lack of cultural experiences in the city. Following are their experiences:

I am worried. I am very worried that my daughter does not have the strong foundation of our culture and language. . . . While we attend the ceremonies on a regular basis she doesn't know or understand the deep meaning of the ceremonies and cultural events we attend. She doesn't have the taste for mutton. She curls her nose when I ask if she wants native foods. This saddens me. She is so successful in the western world but her roots in the Dine world is diminishing. . . . I cry on our drives back to our roots of Black Mesa. She wants her ears pierced and a piercing on her belly button. She wants a tattoo on her back. We argue about the

length of her skirts and the exposure of her cleavage. That's the challenge I am faced with. I think she is lost between the two worlds we are forced to live in. This angers and frustrates me. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

The Navajo culture was not taught in the school system like the Navajo reservation ... It was not till I got here that I realized how important our culture is. I guess I took it for granted. On the reservation, my son learned to weave, make baskets and bead. He made his own moccasins when he was in 5th grade ... Living here in the city has crippled us when it comes to our Navajo culture and languages. Where do we go for ceremonies? Where do we go for cultural events like a *kinaalda*, a blessing way ceremony, a protective way ceremony, a 1st laugh ceremony, a sweat for my son? All these are 300 miles away. When I do go home and participate, I feel like I have rubber hands. (*shila' o'dijool*) My mom, aunts and grandmothers all get after me. Butchering is like riding a bike. Once you learn it, you never forget how. I am good at butchering ... But, yeah, where do I butcher here in the city. I can't butcher in the back of my yard. I would get tossed in for animal cruelty. (*Asdzaa Bit'ahnii*, 3/24/2015)

As far as culture, it is very hard to practice it in the city. We are surrounded by western life that our culture is drowning in it. I have to admit, I don't practice the culture while living here. I don't even try to improvise my culture. I need to try to figure out how to continue our culture here. (*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii*, 3/25/2015)

**Being far from the Navajo Reservation.** One woman shared her struggle of being so far away from her extended family.

We are used to having family close by. When we first moved here, we didn't know anybody. Most of our family members, if they moved off the reservation, moved to Albuquerque or Denver. I think we were the only ones who moved to Phoenix. It gets very lonely for us. My children and I used to walking a few hundred feet just to get to my mother's home. Now we are about 6 hours from her. Most evenings, we would have dinner with my mother and a few other extended family members who lived minutes away and now it's just my kids and I. It gets very lonely for us. This is one of the hardest thing about moving to the city. (*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii*, 3/24/2015)

Living on the Navajo reservation is like living in a big playground. A family's yard is usually not fenced in, but open to nature which can extend to miles and miles of open space. One Navajo woman shared her struggle of adapting to a small apartment after living all her life on a large open acre of land. Following is her reflection:



We were not used to living so close to someone else. Because it was a sudden move for us, we didn't get a chance to look for a home so we moved into a three bedroom apartment. I was used to our home in Crownpoint. We had a one acre piece of open land with a four bedroom home and a Hogan next to it. We have horses which my father-in-law is caring for. We miss farm life and the big open space. (*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii*, 3/25/2015)

## **Effects on Career**

The move affected the women and their careers in various ways. Two women shared their success in their educational growth and another two expressed their success in moving up the ladder.

**Educational growth.** Following is the reflection of their educational growth:

I also had the opportunity to attend classes at a variety of colleges and universities for personal growth. Since I have been here (that's 12 ½ years) I received my Doctorate degree through Capella University, I received my credentials to be an educational consultant. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa 'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

I grew professionally. I received my Master's degree. I learned to challenge myself. I had to because living in the city is a fast life. If you don't keep up, everybody will out-run you. I had to learn fast. I have to admit, I didn't learn much in the BIE school I was working at, but I learned a lot through the schools my kids were going to. They provided classes for parents to help them understand No Child Left Behind. What my husband and I learned there, we applied at the school we worked at. We are learning the same way with Common Core and AZ Merit text. (*Asdzaa Bit'ahnii*, 3/24/2015)

**Moving up the ladder.** Below are reflections on how two women express their experience of moving up the professional ladder:

Moved up the ladder, principal to school improvement specialist in BIE, learned the process to become an educational consultant. Not only did I get the proper training I needed to be successful with my position as a school improvement specialist. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa 'aanii*, March, 24, 2015)

I started out as a 4th grade teacher with Mesa School district. Now, I am a Navajo language and culture afterschool tutor for families who want their children to learn or continue to learn their language and culture. I stay home and work begins at 3:00 pm every day and ends around 6:00 pm. I get groups of 5-8 students an hour. I have 3 sessions a day and I work 5 days a week. I love my job. I am so

fortunate to teach my language and culture to Navajo children living in the city.  
(*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii*, 3/25/2015)

### **Effects on Family**

In addition to impacting their culture and careers, family was also affected. They saw success in their children's western education and they grew stronger together as a family.

**Success in their children's western education.** Following are examples of their children's successful experience in western education:

My daughter is a sophomore in high school with 24 college credit hours. She has taken dancing, gymnastics, karate, tumbling, archery, yoga, sharp shooting and hiking as after-school extracurricular activities. At school she participates in Student Council, Native American Club, Women's Athletics Club and the HOOPs program. She is on the volleyball, basketball and softball teams. The HOOPs program has helped her to earn college credit at Rio Salado College. All her extracurricular activities have not stopped her from getting a job at Harkin's Theatre. Our opportunities have multiplied since we have moved here to the city. I think that is success. However, that's success in only one world; the western world.  
(*Asdzaa Kinyaa 'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

This move has really helped my children to be successful in school. My three oldest are all honor students. My youngest two, they are twins, both go to day care. They are learning really fast what it means to go to school and to play and get along with other children. I know I would not have been able to get this back home on the rez. There are limited day care facilities. (*Asdzaa To'aheedliinii*, 3/24/2015)

**Grew stronger as a family.** The biggest success the women expressed involved growing stronger together as a family. Below are their experiences:

Moving to the city has made a big difference in our family. While we don't have the 1st hand cultural learning, we make it a priority to attend cultural events at the phoenix Indian Center. I am so thankful for the services they provide. We have learned so much from Mr. Johnson and Ms. Joylana Begay. My kids enjoy our weekly evenings trips there. We try to go at least once a week to one of the events. If we are lucky we will attend 2 events. We really enjoy our time together. I think this move has really helped us, as a family, to appreciate our culture and traditions. On the rez, we took it for granted. We didn't spend time together to attend cultural events or just to be together. My son, when he was in elementary

on the reservation, got home and just went outside to play with friends. Any friend that was available to play. Here, in middle school and high school, he would come home, do his homework, get ready for either, baseball practice, piano, band or our visit the Indian Center. Now, he is in college and every so often he will take his sister o one of her events. He especially, enjoys the visits to the Indian Center. If he's not busy he'll join us there. My daughter is in gymnastics and plays basketball. So I guess you could say, coming to the city has really helped us to spend time together, attend structured events and taught us to appreciate our culture and tradition. (*Asdzaa Bit'ahnii*, 3/24/2015)

Our family activities take up a lot of our time. We hike, swim together, go to movies, I would say at least once a week, we eat out a lot, maybe 2-3 times a week, we go to concerts, a lot, even my children. The latest one we attended was Disney on Ice and Phantom of the Opera. My husband and I have a galore of activities we participate in. We make it a priority to have dinner dates at least once a week. We go out to dinners with our adult friends. So, yes, there are a lot of opportunities for us to spend time together and we try to take advantage of it all. (*Asdzaa To'aheedliinii*, 3/25/2015)

Because I have my small tutoring business at home, I get to have more time with my kids. I volunteer a lot at their school. I also get to present our culture and traditions at their school. This move has brought us closer together. (*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii*, 3/25/2015)

My kids each have extra-curricular activities they participate in. All five of my children are in baseball. The girls are all in gymnastics. John, also, plays basketball and participates in karate with Jerri, Trisha and Trent. Becky would rather swim. My kids swim at least five days a week. They are like fish. We are a busy, busy family. (*Asdzaa To'aheedliinii*, 3/25/2015)

### **Effect on Personal Sense of Self**

**Accomplishment.** One sense of self was that of accomplishment.

I feel a sense of accomplishment. I use to rent an apartment on the reservation. Once we moved to the city, I bought a home. I am also a certified cake decorator. Besides working in the school system, my passion is to decorate cakes. I am satisfied with this move. (*Asdzaa Kinyaa'aanii*, 3/24/2015)

The move helped me to realize that I can make it anywhere outside the Navajo reservation. I have always been afraid to move outside our four sacred mountains. I find comfort within those mountains. I feel a sense of protection. Despite this fear I had, I realize I will be fine as long as I know where home is. (*Asdzaa Ma'ii deeshgiizhiiii*, 3/24/2015)

**Strong person.** Another sense of self was that of being a strong person.

I think I have become a stronger person. I had everything given to me back on the rez. My extended family was always there helping me out. Here, I have to tend for myself. I don't have family close by. It's tough, but I'm learning to get through it. I'm pretty proud of myself. (*Asdzaa Bit 'aahni*, 3/24/2015)

You know, when I look at myself, I see a strong woman. While on the rez, I always felt defeated. When I was at work, I felt the men I worked with had no respect for me and my supervisor never did anything about it. I felt defeated! When I was at home, there was very little for my son and I to do and I didn't know how to tell my son I was sorry for that. I felt defeated! Now, I have an awesome job where I am appreciated and respected. My five kids and I have a full agenda every day. I feel this would not have been possible had I not made my move. Only a strong lady will make things happen for the better and that's me. (*Asdzaa To 'aheedliinii*, 3/25/2015)

I have always been a strong woman. But, this move to the big city has made me stronger. I can now live in two worlds; the world of my people, the Dine, and the world of the white man. I continue to practice my culture here in the city. I use corn pollen to pray to the Holy People before the sun rises. I run to the east every morning. I make blue corn mush some mornings for my children. We listen to traditional ceremonial songs in the morning. We talk Navajo at the kitchen table. I have a weaving loom in my living room for my daughter and me. Our home is decorated with Navajo rugs and pottery. We put cedar down most mornings for protection. We do all this in the city. We also live the white man's daily tasks. (*Asdzaa Honaghaahnii*, 3/25/2015)

While these culturally strong Navajo women were challenging themselves and their families to experience the fast life of the big city, they continued to adapt their traditional upbringings in the western society. These women were not struggling in the city. They were strong women challenging western society that their strong roots were impacting their success outside the protection and comfort of the four sacred mountains, the place we call home. They were truly experiencing living in two worlds.

As an educated Navajo mother of four who has gained experience on and off the Navajo reservation, I have learned that living in the traditional society and western society can complement one another. In order to continue a successful traditional life,

you have to adapt to the western culture into your traditional society. I call this living successfully in two worlds.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the study, provides the conclusions, and offers recommendations for further research. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lives of five highly educated Navajo women who, with their children, left the comfort of their homeland to pursue their careers. Using qualitative research methods, they reflected on their lives while on the reservation and in their new location off the Navajo reservation.

The researcher sought to focus on the principal factors that contributed to their leaving the reservation, barriers and supports they faced in their careers, the cultural transitions they experienced, and the effects this had on their careers, their families and to their personal sense of self.

The participants' reflections were examined through the following questions:

1. Would you please tell about your career experience on the Navajo reservation? Type of position you held, number of years, successes you achieved, and challenges you faced.
2. Would you please tell about your career experience off the Navajo reservation: type of position, number of years, supports you received, and barriers you faced.
3. What were your motives for moving off the Navajo reservation? Cultural transitions you experienced, effects on your career, family, and personal sense of self.

### **Successes on the Dine Reservation**

Three themes emerged when asked about the successes the women experienced while working on the Navajo reservation: Self-growth, being treated fairly, and applying skills. Three of the women felt they experienced some type of self-growth. One said she grew as a leader because of the positive support she received from the superintendent. Two of the women said they grew professionally because of the encouragement and support they received from the school they worked at. Of the two, one was able to land a job at another school with the training and experience she received from the first school. With financial support from the district, the second woman was able to receive her reading endorsement.

Another success experienced by one of the women was a sense of being treated fairly. She felt that was a big success because many Native women were typically treated unfairly. One of the women felt a sense of success when she was encouraged and asked to interpret her Native language, a skill acquired as a child, to customers at the bank she worked at.

While there was strong support to grow educationally and professionally on the Navajo reservation, the women felt the location made it difficult to pursue their goals, educationally and professionally. Because the women worked during the day, taking a class to pursue their career would require them to attend night classes at the nearest higher education facility. These facilities are located at several border towns that are approximately 60 miles or more away from the border. The 120-mile, round trip evening drive to attend classes made it difficult for these Navajo women to pursue their education. Despite this barrier, it was presumed that with the support of their supervisors all of the

women gained positive training and experience at their work site on the Navajo reservation.

### **Challenges on the Dine Reservation**

Two themes emerged when asked about the challenges these women faced while working on the Navajo reservation. The women expressed the lack of opportunities and facilities for their children and themselves and the constant change in the school and work system. Two of the women expressed the Navajo reservation lacked western and traditional opportunities for their children. These opportunities included structured after-school activities such as horseback riding, gymnastics, soccer, t-ball, karate, weaving, basket-making, beadwork and various cultural dances.

Not only was there a lack of opportunities for the children, it was expressed that the Navajo reservation also lacked daycare facilities. While the nation and the federal government offer various programs such as Head Start and Family and Child Education (FACE) for children from birth to five years of age, a few of the participants were not eligible for the program due to their high income. As a result, two of the women were forced to reach out to uncertified individuals, friends, and/or relatives to care for their children. Despite the lack of trust or reliability involved in this decision, the women felt they had no choice. Many times they were forced to take leave from their work to care for their children. In addition, two participants felt that the organization they worked for did not offer appropriate trainings for them to grow professionally. One felt that this resulted in her lack of ability to provide the appropriate opportunities for her teachers to grow.

Change in the school system or the work force on the Navajo reservation was another big challenge these women faced. Two participants expressed their frustration



with the constant change in their principals due to the constant change in school board members. This type of administrative turnover forced two participants to worry about job security. One of the two avoided any relatives of the school board members just to ensure she kept her job at the school. There was also one who felt the constant change in administrative turnover caused frustration because the new administration meant a new leadership approach.

Based on these Navajo women's voices, it was presumed that the lack of Western opportunities for their children and themselves, as well as the constant change in the school system and their workforce may have contributed to their motivation to move off the Navajo reservation.

### **Motivations for Relocating Off the Navajo Reservation**

The five women lived on the Navajo reservation for an average of 34 years. For various reasons, these women moved to the city. Two themes emerged from their responses as to why they relocated off the Navajo reservation: opportunities and change. Opportunity for their children, spouse, and/or self were among the reasons.

Having opportunities for their children was expressed by three of the Navajo women. One woman felt the reservation lacked opportunities to be successful in the western world. Another woman felt the reservation did not offer enough opportunities for her son so she was forced to drive 40 miles to a border-town to ensure her son received the additional opportunities. One woman said the reservation was not the place to challenge her son to be successful in the western world. In addition to the opportunities they were seeking for their children, one Navajo woman wanted an opportunity for her husband to pursue his education.

Then, there were two participants who expressed this move to the city as an opportunity to better themselves. One felt a lack of respect from her male co-workers and when she was offered a job at a worldwide technology company she accepted and expressed it as the best move she ever made for herself. The second Navajo woman felt the city would give her the opportunity to push beyond her comfort zone and make her a stronger person.

In addition to the opportunities the city would offer, a challenge for change sparked an interest to relocate to the city for three of the Navajo women. Two of the women said they were ready for a change. One of them said she was ready for all the immediate conveniences such as a supermarket and a theatre in walking distance from her home. The third woman expressed her negative experience at her work-site prompted her to change and move off the reservation. Based on their reflections, the five women were ready for change through possible Western opportunities for themselves as well as their family.

### **Career Experience Off the Dine Reservation**

Prior to moving off the Navajo reservation, of the five participants, two of them were elementary school teachers, one in a Bureau of Indian Affairs school for 16 years and the other in a state public school for 10 years; one was a middle school principal for five years in a state public school; one was a bank receptionist for 12 years; and one was a microwave technician for two years with the Navajo Technology Utility Authority.

Currently, the five participants are living in Metropolitan Phoenix. Of the five, three now own their own business, one of whom has been a school improvement consultant for the past nine years, one has been a financial planner consultant for the past

six years, and one has been running an after-school Navajo culture class from her home for the past seven years; the fourth participant works as a teacher at a Bureau of Indian Education school for the past 11 years; and the fifth participant moved up as a systems engineer for the past five years.

The average number of years the five women worked on the Navajo reservation was nine years and ranged from two years to 16 years. The average number of years they worked off the reservation was eight years, ranging from five years to 11 years. These ranges show that the women worked more years on the Navajo reservation.

It is presumed that the western opportunities in the city allowed the five women to quickly move up the career ladder.

### **Supports Received Off the Reservation**

The five Navajo women were eager to share their successes of being supported and accomplishing personal growth while working in the city. Two of the women felt they were being supported because of the cultural decisions made by their immediate supervisors. One of the woman expressed her supervisor's interest and participation in all Native American's cultures. He went beyond supporting his employees by supporting and encouraging the women's children to continue in school. The second women was supported and encouraged by her supervisor and co-workers to continue using her native language.

In addition to being supported with their culture, all five of the Navajo women were supported by their supervisors to continue with their personal growth. One woman felt her supervisor trusted her teaching, which helped her to grow professionally. The second woman felt respected for her professional knowledge, which also allowed her to

grow. The third woman expressed the appropriate training she received and her supervisors being close by helped her to be successful. In addition, she mentioned the airport being 20 minutes away allowed her to go hundreds of miles to get the training she needed and still be able to return home to her children that same evening. The fourth woman said she took advantage of the opportunities her supervisor offered her to move up the career ladder. The fifth woman said her weekly trainings and the constant critical advice she received from her colleagues, world-wide, allowed her to grow professionally. Based on these Navajo women's reflections, we can conclude that the positive support from their supervisors helped them to continue striving to improve themselves professionally and to continue learning about their culture, language, and history.

### **Barriers Faced Off the Reservation**

Even though moving to the city brought successful change and opportunities, the five Navajo women, also, experienced great challenges in their new work settings. They were challenged with adapting to new work environments and struggling with finding individuals who spoke their mother tongue, the Navajo language.

Two of the women faced challenges while learning procedures in their new work environments. One woman gained experience in a state public school while on the Navajo reservation and when she moved to the city she had to learn the procedures and policies of the Bureau of Indian Education school system. The second woman was challenged with learning the requirements of owning her home tutoring business. Such requirements included financial paperwork for auditing and taxing. With the assistance from Phoenix Indian Center, she was able to learn the procedures.

One of the Navajo women faced the challenge of adapting to a new administration that practiced nepotism. Through experience on the Navajo reservation, she felt that as long as she ignored relatives of school board members, she would be fine. Another woman struggled with working alone in the workforce. While this new job allowed her to work from her home computer and to communicate with her colleagues through technology, she missed the face-to-face interaction with her colleagues.

The biggest struggle three of the Dine women faced when they relocated off the Navajo reservation was the challenge of finding others who spoke the Navajo language. While one expresses her regret of taking her language for granted while living on the Navajo reservation, all three of the women miss hearing and speaking the Navajo language. One woman said she spoke the Navajo language on a daily basis to people at work as well as at home. When she moved to the city she spoke the language only when someone at her work asked her how to say something in Navajo. One of the women said she had to drive over 600 miles just to hear the beautiful Navajo language. To conclude, these woman confronted obstacles, but conquered their challenges by adjusting to the workplace and environment using their cultural beliefs.

### **Effects on Culture, Career, Family, and Personal-sense**

This drastic change of relocating off their homeland impacted the culture, the career, the family and the personal sense of self of these five Navajo women.

#### **Effects on Culture**

The cultural transitions these women experienced included struggling to continue to speak their Navajo language, finding appropriate Navajo cultural events, being far from the Navajo reservation, and living in a small apartment. Three of the Navajo women

struggled to continue speaking their mother tongue. Even though all three of the women said the primary language of English made it hard to speak the Navajo language for themselves and their children, they knew that it was up to them to encourage and reinforce the language. One of the women worried that her daughter lacked the basic foundation of the Navajo culture and language. Another woman said she became friends with another Navajo at the school she worked at and made an attempt to talk with her in Navajo on a daily basis. The same woman said when she went to the mall she made every attempt to say hello in Navajo to other Navajos she encountered. All responded differently. Some would smile and respond back in Navajo. Many would smile back but answer back in English. Then there were a few who would simply look away and not respond at all.

In addition to struggling to continue speaking the Navajo language, three of the women faced the lack of cultural experiences in the city. Even though they did attempt to modify their culture in the city, the three women questioned what they could do to continue practicing their culture in the city. One of the women worried that her daughter preferred tattoos and body piercing rather than understanding the deep meaning of the Navajo culture. She felt her daughter was lost between two worlds. Another woman felt she took her culture for granted while living on the Navajo reservation. She was concerned that the school district in the city did not encourage or teach the different native cultures so she was forced to drive over 300 miles to the nearest Navajo reservation to enrich her children to the Navajo culture. She was deeply concerned that her culture was drowning in the western society.

One woman shared her struggle of being so far away from her extended family. She was used to live minutes from her extended family, but now she was about six hours away from her nearest relative. Furthermore, another Navajo woman struggled with adapting to a small apartment after living all her life on a large open acre of land full of livestock. We can conclude that while the city offers an abundance of western opportunities, the lack of Navajo culture and tradition will gradually diminish.

### **Effects on Career**

The move affected the women and their career in various ways. They felt they grew educationally and professionally. Two of the Navajo women reflected on their educational growth. Because there were a variety of colleges and universities nearby, both women were able to advance in their educational endeavor. One received her Master's in Science, one other a doctorate in education, while another earned her credentials to become an educational consultant.

Two other women felt they moved up the professional ladder. One advanced from a principal to an educational consultant for various Bureau of Indian Education schools bordering Metropolitan Phoenix. One woman started out as a teacher and eventually started her own after-school Navajo cultural based tutoring classes from her home. She felt fortunate that this new step allowed her to attend her children's school activities during the day. Then from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. daily she taught the Navajo language and culture to Navajo children living in the city. The move to the city had a positive impact on each of the Navajo women's career that benefited the entire family.

## **Effects on Family**

In addition to impacting their culture and careers, family was also affected. The five Navajo women saw success in their children's western education and they felt they became a stronger family. Although two women felt their children experienced success in the western education, they both expressed a concern that the success was limited in traditional Navajo education. One woman said her daughter was able to earn college credit at Rio Salado College through Hoop, an early college-high school bridge program administered by Maricopa Community Colleges to help Native American students stay in school and pursue a college degree. In addition, her daughter was very active in school clubs such as Student Council, Native American Club, and the Women's Athletic Club, as well as after-school activities such as dancing, gymnastics, karate, yoga, and sharp shooting. She felt that her daughter's opportunities had multiplied since they moved to the city.

The biggest success the women experienced involved growing stronger together as a family. Four of the women felt the city offered an abundance of activities that their children participated in, and each took advantage of these opportunities. As a family, three of the women spent their evenings and weekends hiking, swimming, going to the movie, and attending concerts; whereas, one of the women and her family attended as many weekly cultural events offered by Phoenix Indian Center. She felt that she took her culture for granted when she lived on the Navajo reservation. Now, she is doing everything she can to participate in the cultural events, which has brought her family together. While the Navajo women's families were successful in the Western society, their cultural tradition was being challenged.



## **Effects on Personal Sense of Self**

A sense of accomplishment and becoming a strong person were the two themes that emerged. Two women expressed their personal accomplishments. One woman, who had rented an apartment on the Navajo reservation, has now purchased a home of her own. The second woman who felt comfort and protection within the four sacred mountains realized that as long as she knew where home was she could be successful anywhere outside the Navajo reservation.

Three women said the move to the city has helped to become a stronger person. One woman, who has always depended on her extended family, has now learned to get through the challenges on her own. The second woman now sees herself as a strong woman who has overcome the lack of respect she received from her co-workers when she worked on the Navajo reservation. She felt more appreciated and respected in the city. The third woman says she is successful in both the western and traditional society. She continues to practice her culture in the city by utilizing her corn pollen each morning as she prays, running to the east every morning, making traditional food (blue corn mush in the mornings), making it mandatory that her family speak the Navajo language at the kitchen table each day, and weaving with her daughter on a daily basis. In addition to practicing their cultural tasks, they also participate in many western activities.

## **Final Conclusions**

Even though the aspiration of being successful in the Western society prompted the five Navajo women to move to the city, they did not foresee the challenges they would face in exercising their Navajo traditions in the city. These obstacles made them aware of the cultural beliefs they took for granted while living on the Navajo reservation.

Despite the challenges, the five Navajo women continued to find avenues to continue their cultural teachings in the city.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The information gathered from this study focused on educated Navajo women who pursued their careers off the Navajo reservation. This same study could be conducted in a similar manner using Navajo women with no educational experience to gain an understanding of their motivations to move off the Navajo reservation.

1. The same study could be conducted using educated Navajo men and or Navajo men with no educational experience to gain an understanding of their motivations to move off the Navajo reservation.
2. An in-depth study could be conducted using Navajo children who have moved off the Navajo reservation with their family to hear their voices of how the move has affected them.
3. The Navajo Nation should use the information to begin discussions to encourage Navajo women to pursue their career on the Navajo reservation.
4. This study has indicated that many Navajo families are moving off the Navajo reservation. Because we cannot discourage these families from relocating, the Navajo Nation should begin strategizing how to prepare these Navajo families to live a traditional culturally rich lifestyle in the city. This would require intense collaborations with officials in the city.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Interview Questions

1. Would you please introduce yourself.
  - a. Full name
  - b. Age
  - c. Clan
  - d. Marital Status
  - e. Number of children and their ages
  - f. Cultural orientation
  - g. Do you speak your heritage language?
2. Would you please tell about your school experience form pre-K to 12<sup>th</sup> grade?
  - a. Schools you attended
  - b. Activities you participate in
3. Would you please tell about your college experience?
  - a. Colleges/Universities you attended
  - b. Year of graduation
  - c. Program of Study
4. Would you please tell about your career experience on the Navajo reservation
  - a. Type of position
  - b. Number of years
  - c. Challenges you faced
  - d. Successes you endured
5. Would you please tell about your career experience off the Navajo reservation
  - a. Type of position
  - b. Number of years

- c. Barriers you faced
  - d. Supports you received
- 6. What was your motive for moving off the Navajo reservation?
- 7. How has the move affected:
  - a. Culture
  - b. Career
  - c. Family
  - d. Sense of self