

Himdag and Belonging at Gila River: Interpreting the Experiences of Akimel
O'odham College Graduates Returning to the Gila River Indian Community

By

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ABSTRACT

Belonging to a tribe or American Indian Indigenous group in the United States, even if one has already been enrolled or accepted into the community, is a lifelong endeavor. Belonging may be achieved by meeting specific criteria during one life stage yet one must continue to behave and act in ways that align with community expectations to maintain a sense of belonging throughout all life stages. This descriptive qualitative case study presents the findings of in-depth interviews, with five individual tribal members, two male and three female participants, ranging in age from 25 to 55, who are college graduates and tribal members. The study aimed to understand the different forms and ideas of belonging for tribal members, how the notion of belonging is understood and achieved over the life course, and how phenotypic arguments, blood quantum, the role of schooling and demonstration of tribal knowledge influences the extent to which belonging is earned and how that can change over time. The study sought to answer the following questions: How do tribal members define “belonging”? How and in what ways do tribal members learn how to become members of the community? And, what can tribal communities and tribal members do to foster a sense of belonging for members who have left to obtain professional or academic training and seek to return to serve the nation?

The study focused on participants the Gila River Indian Community, a tribal community in southwest Arizona with approximately 23,000 enrolled members, who completed a higher education degree and sought to return to serve as professionals and/or leaders at their tribal nation. Interviews were conducted off-reservation in the Phoenix metropolitan area within a 30-day window and held during the month of September

2015. Interviews were analyzed using three iterative levels of content analysis. Findings suggest there can be three methods of belonging within Gila River: belonging by cultural practices, belonging by legal definition, and belonging by both cultural and legal definition. However, the three methods of belonging do not automatically equate to being accepted by other tribal members.

Dedicated to all Indigenous students who strive to carry the flame of change for
their *people*; even though they are not considered the *people*.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER	Page
Introduction.....	1
Organization of the dissertation	9
1. Motivation and Project Background	13
Why seek higher education?	26
The New Generation	28
2. Review of the Literature	30
Belonging by geography, social practices, and biology	33
Conclusion	54
3. Theory	58
Belonging to a community v. belonging to a nation.....	58
Two models of development.....	68
The difference between systems and levels	74
4. Methodology	88
Epistemology, ontology, and axiology	89
Methodology & Research Design.....	90
Researcher Positionality.....	91
Case Study Design & Participant Selection.....	94
Data Analysis	97
Results.....	98

CHAPTER	Page
Impact/significance	100
5. Case Studies	102
Small Community	103
Case Study 1	104
Background	104
How to be Indian.....	105
The disconnect	106
School Impact	106
Perceptions of Native Americans.....	107
Connection to tribal community	108
Case Study 2	109
Background	109
How to be Indian.....	110
The Disconnect	111
School Impact	112
Perceptions of Native Americans.....	112
Connection to tribal community	113
Case Study 3	114
Background	115
How to be Indian.....	115
The disconnect	116
School Impact	116

CHAPTER	Page
Perceptions of Native Americans.....	117
Case Study 4	119
Background.....	119
How to be Indian.....	120
The disconnect	120
School Impact	121
Perceptions of Native Americans.....	122
Connection to tribal community	123
Case Study 5	123
Background.....	124
How to be Indian.....	124
The disconnect	125
School Impact	125
Perceptions of Native Americans.....	126
Connection to tribal community	127
6. How Members Define Belonging.....	129
Tribal Members.....	129
Tribal and Personal Definition change	132
Historical/Contemporary.....	133
The first belonging.....	137
Actions	138
Language.....	138

CHAPTER	Page
Culture.....	141
Biology and Phenotype.....	144
The second belonging.....	146
The third belonging.....	149
Implications.....	150
7. Role of Education and Perception or Desire to Return.....	157
Schematic formations of cultural identity.....	160
Family/Tribal Community.....	161
Formal Schooling.....	163
8. Community’s Preparedness for Return.....	167
Creating a Welcoming Environment for Return.....	172
What colleges can do.....	176
What can families do.....	177
Tribal Member Action.....	178
Tribal Member/Tribe Action.....	179
9. Conclusion.....	182
10. References.....	190
11. Appendix.....	198
A QUESTIONS.....	198
B CODING FORMAT.....	201

List of figures

FIGURE	Page
1.1. Traits of an accepted tribal member (non-urban).	18
1.2. Traits of an Urban Indian who may be challenged.	19
2.1. Factors that influence belonging and identity development in Indigenous communities.	33
2.2. Model of National Identity (David & Bar-Tal, 2009, p. 359).	42
3.1. Ecological systems theory (Hansen, 2014).	66
3.2. Model 1 - Determining how to feel belonging and acceptance	69
3.3. Model 2 – Feelings of acceptance or not belonging.	70
3.4 Indigenous systems of identity development	74
3.5. System Level Differences between Traditional and non-Traditional Learners	84

Introduction

American Indian societies have had specific ideas about what it means to belong to the community, how belonging both learned and earned, and how belonging is maintained. For some communities, members need to be initiated and participate in particular rites or perform specific feats at certain life stages. For others, belonging is based on blood quantum (or sanguine ties), through marriage, or family adoption into the community. For others, belonging is contingent upon demonstrating individual actions that show commitment to the community and gaining the approval of elders imbued with the power to determine membership. In short, belonging can take on many forms and includes both sociological and psychological implications for individual tribal members. Becoming initiated, and earning an initial sense of belonging, is one thing, however, maintaining a sense of belonging, even if one has already been enrolled or accepted into the community, is a lifelong endeavor. Maintaining a sense of belonging can require continuous demonstration of ongoing knowledge and/or participation in traditional practices, speaking the tribal heritage language, living on ancestral lands, phenotypic presentation, participating in cultural ceremonies and many other factors. In short, not only is belonging achieved by meeting specific criteria during one life stage, one must continue to behave and act in ways that align with community expectations to maintain a sense of belonging throughout all life stages.

Further complicating belonging is the notion that there are various types of belonging that can span life stages. Formal belonging is often achieved through meeting the criteria for tribal enrollment. Some may consider possessing a tribal identification card the most basic criteria for formal belonging. However, belonging can additionally be

achieved independent of requirements for formal tribal enrollment. Cultural belonging is achieved through the recognition, inclusion, and acceptance of tribal leaders, elders, spiritual leaders, and/or long-term community members (as may be the case for individuals who have ancestral ties to a tribal community, but do not meet the requirements for formal enrollment). For instance, in some tribes, individuals can be considered for eligibility to serve in leadership, spiritual/ceremonial, and/or community positions, regardless of formal membership status, if they meet the requirements for an organic, community-based recognition of cultural belonging.

Formal education additionally has the potential to limit or constrain the extent to which a tribal member is considered to “belong” to the community and whether s/he can participate in local tribal processes. Considering the history of American education in Indigenous communities which sought to destroy tribal languages, culture, presentations of self, and knowledges, through the promotion of Euro-Western knowledges and violent practices aimed at promoting assimilation, tribal members who have left to pursue postsecondary education and who wish to return to work and live in their tribal community may experience a suspension or revocation of informal or cultural belonging by tribal community members who may be wary upon their return and question their commitment to the tribal group as a result of their decision to leave.

This study examines the experiences and process of negotiating a sense of identity and informal or cultural belonging for those, who have received formal recognition of belonging by the tribe at an early life stage, and who have left to pursue higher education. The study focuses on those who left and sought to return to serve their tribal community and their process as they discovered their place within their tribe and the outside world

upon their return. This research is important for several reasons. First, research has found people who identify strongly with their tribe often report attending college out of a desire to serve their tribal nations or communities (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012). That is, higher education is seen as a way to gain skillsets that can be brought back to the nation and utilized to promote the well-being of the nation's citizens. Therefore, Indigenous students often report understanding it is necessary to temporarily step away from the tribal community, even if they don't want to, in order to acquire these skills, yet still experiencing the tension of wanting to still belong to—and serve—their people.

Re-entry to the tribal community can be challenging. Research is needed that examines how belonging is maintained for those who “step away,” what the process of re-entry looks like for returning tribal members, and what tribal communities can do to make the transition more effective. This descriptive qualitative case study presents the findings of interviews with five members of the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC), a tribal community in southwest Arizona with approximately 25,000 enrolled members, who completed a higher education degree and sought to return to serve as professionals and/or leaders at their tribal nation. This case study was selected after witnessing the manner in which college/university students were treated as they attempted to gain employment within Gila River and how some of those individuals were excluded because of the initial impression they made on others in terms of how they looked, where they lived and how engulfed they were in the culture and heritage of the Gila River Indian Community. Participants were selected via purposive sampling and included two male and three female participants, ranging in age from 25 to 55, who are college graduates and tribal members

of the Gila River Indian Community. Interviews were conducted in the Phoenix metropolitan area within a 30-day window and held during the month of September 2015.

This study aimed to understand the different forms and ideas of belonging for members of the GRIC from a sociological standpoint and how the notion of belonging is understood and achieved over the life course, and how phenotypic arguments, blood quantum, the role of schooling and demonstration of tribal knowledge influences the extent to which belonging is earned and how that can change over time. The study sought answers the following questions:

1. How do members of the Gila River community define “belonging”?
 - 1a. Do tribal and individual definitions change over a member’s life course?
 - 1b. How and in what ways have tribal definitions of belonging changed over time?
 - 1c. What role, if any, does phenotype play in defining belonging?
 - 1d. What role, if any, does formal schooling play in defining belong?
2. How and in what ways do Gila River members learn how to become members of the community?
 - 2a. What role, if any, does formal education serve in shaping these expectations?
 - 2b. What role, if any, does informal education serve in shaping these expectations?
3. What can tribal communities and tribal members do to foster a sense of belonging for members who have left to obtain professional or academic training and seek to return to serve the nation?

The first question examines tribal and individual definitions of belonging and examines the ways in which schooling and phenotype shape the experience of belonging in a tribal community, if at all. Current research does not provide tribes and academic scholars an opportunity to learn how phenotyping plays a role in tribal belonging and develops within tribal communities and the effect of phenotyping on the tribal nation and the development of the tribal member identity. Yet tribal members have expressed in formal and informal settings that phenotyping serves as an important factor in determining who is considered “authentically” Indian and who may not be considered to be authentic. For this reason, this study is important and delves into the extent to which tribes and their members exclude or include their own people independent from the individual’s stated nation building desires.

The second research question examines how cultural knowledge of belonging is acquired over the life span. In other words, while the first question seeks to define what it means to belong, and examines whether factors of schooling and phenotype bias may affect belonging, the second question seeks to explore *how* tribal members acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to belong. The focus on asking whether formal schooling plays a role in shaping the understanding and expectations of the behaviors and knowledges required to belong will help determine whether or how knowledge for belonging is passed down in a systemic or formal fashion, whether it is not, and whether the tribal community sees a relationship between the pursuit of higher education and the ability to belong within the community.

The third research question examines the experience of return, and the role of re-entry, as it relates to tribal nation building, and the experience of tribal graduates who return

with the desire and intent to serve their community post-graduation. For tribal members who leave to pursue higher education, returning to the community can be as difficult as it is to gain the motivation to leave in the first place. Research on Indigenous and students of color has found leaving to attend college generally means having to enroll in predominantly White institutions. Thus, students are more likely to have to contend with instances of unwelcoming campus climates, feeling invisible or hyper visible when discussions of culture and/or race arise, campus hostility and racism, and difficulty in transitioning from the high school social environment to that of college – all of which can influence the decision of whether to stay or leave college (Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Lin et al., 1988; Osborne, 1985; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Spaight, Dixon, & Nickolai, 1985; Tinto, 1993). In truth, researchers suggest that to assist Native American students in making the transition successful from high school to college, universities must consciously consider the academic, social, cultural, and psychological needs of American Indian students (Wright, 1985). So, too, must tribal communities consider the experiences of their students and the extent to which they are responsible for supporting them during their time away as well as to what degree, if any, they are responsible for ensuring a hospitable and welcoming return. This study will provide support for Indian nations about how to build programs and incentives for return and re-entry that can benefit all their membership, allowing them to build capacity in a manner that is welcoming to all members of the tribe, and that does not exclude tribal members based on their educational achievements or physical traits.

The results of the study provide recommendations for Indian communities that seek to understand how they can support tribal members who have left the community to seek a higher education and also prepare for their return to the tribal community. This presents

important implications for what is the idea of *tribal nation building*. Brayboy et. Al (2012) state that Tribal nation building refers to a tribe's conscious and intentional decision to exercise its self-determination and sovereign rights and form a new, independent identity by building capacity and internal leadership in key areas (political, health, education, law, and governance, for example). Furthermore, a nation building agenda actively employs strategies, theories, and practices that build capacity and that align with the tribe's values, desires, goals, and vision (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012).

Nation building is an active counter to the historic practices of hegemonic political and religious think tanks that have sought to exercise arrested development of tribal nations. Cornell and Kalt (1998) assert that nation building, "is the opportunity for Native American peoples to re-envision their futures and rebuild their governments and their economic strategies so as to realize those futures" (p. 2). For Brayboy et al. (2012) this type of nation building is advanced through utilizing higher education to meet the needs of tribal communities in critical areas (building capacity) and preparing Indigenous graduates who are versed not only in Western ways of doing things but in traditional, Indigenous cultural knowledge, practices, and protocols and applied to research and industry practice.

Although this dissertation is focused on a specific tribal community, the Gila River Indian Community, it is structured in a manner that is easy to follow, making it ideal for other tribal communities to learn from and consider for duplication. To this end, the writing is targeted specifically for the benefit of tribal communities and poses implications, from an Indian perspective. It includes my own perspective, as a tribal member who has served in tribal leadership roles within two distinct Indigenous communities, and those of others that I have worked with. The study is written to promote understanding of how tribes shape

the beliefs and futures of tribal individuals and how that construct can be changed and influenced by indigenous knowledge to promote a model that fosters ideologies and practices that promote acceptance of all tribal members. It is important to note that while this study focuses on the acceptance and belonging of individual tribal members; tribal communities also develop and change throughout a person's lifetime.

Since the goal of this study is to provide benefit for tribes, this is facilitated, in part, by using words, concepts, and beliefs that may be uncommon to those who are non-Native, but recognizable to those who come from such life systems. At times I use Rezbonics (code-switching) – a form of communication that combines colloquial terms and phrases with casual modes of talk used amongst tribal members who grow up in reservation communities. According to Kumar & Narendra (2012), “code switching is a linguistic phenomenon claimed to be the most prevalent and common mode of interaction among bilingual speakers” (p. 65). This will help lay out the intricacies of how Indian peoples are making sense of the phenomena explored herein. However, the words and ideas will not be so unfamiliar and isolating so as to not be understood by the general public, since many of the ideas have already been imbedded throughout the field of academia and human development. Indeed, although focused on the experiences of American Indians in the southwest, a person who investigates this dissertation, and the work surrounding it, will find commonalities shared by American Indians, Whites, Latinos/as, and Blacks as basic human beings. To offer a chance for these ideas to be replicated in other fields and other locations, this study will rely on previous work and theories from Urie Bronfenbrenner, and other human development theorists. I discuss their work in more detail in chapter three.

Organization of the dissertation

The next chapter, chapter one, provides a discussion of the motivation for this study, project background, and a research statement. Chapter two is a review of the literature. In this chapter I present various definitions of belonging including a discussion on the role of geography, social practices, and biology on shaping historic and current conceptions of belonging. Geography, in this dissertation, refers to land/territory and includes considerations of where a person was born, where they grew up, and where they currently reside. The role of social knowledge and practices refers to the importance of linguistics. This includes considerations for how norms of introducing oneself and interacting with others shape identity and belonging including knowledge and use of Rezbonics and heritage languages over the use of standard American English and academic jargon in tribal communities. The role of biology is discussed as it relates to phenotype and blood quantum. Such measures for belonging are influenced and reminiscent of colonial definitions and norms historically imposed upon Native communities (Spanish and English). One of the primary issues affecting belonging is postsecondary education. Therefore, this chapter also explores current research about this and discusses reasons why Native peoples who tend to pursue education to serve their nations have a hard time transitioning back. The chapter concludes with a discussion of nation building and the role higher education can play in promoting a tribal nation's nation building agenda.

This dissertation acknowledges that definitions, conceptions, and expectations of belonging are socially constructed and can change over time. Therefore, chapter three discusses the traditional forms of belonging as they have been impacted by the role of colonization in (re)defining it and introduces the theoretical framework guiding this study.

I present the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, Jean Piaget and other human development theorists to consider how identity and belonging are shaped over the life course. In this chapter I apply the work of these theorists to the study topic, introduce in more detail formal and informal requirements for belonging in GRIC, and consider strategies employed by those who have had to leave the community (by choice or necessity), but who return (either to visit or live) and seek belonging to the community. This includes a discussion of the role of communication accommodation, including concerns with accommodation, which emphasizes differences between those who belong and those who don't.

Chapter four presents a detailed discussion of the methods and methodology guiding this qualitative case study. I present information for how I went about answering the research questions, how data were collected, and introduce an additional analytical theory – tribal critical race theory – used to guide the analysis. Brayboy (2006), stated that Tribal Crit (Tribal Critical Race Theory) emerges from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and is rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically – and geographically - located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities. Critical Race Theory evolved in the mid-1970s as a response to Critical Legal Studies (CLS) CLS is left-leaning legal scholarship that argues that the law must focus on how it is applied to specific groups in particular circumstances. CLS exposes contradictions in the law and illustrates the ways that laws create and maintain the hierarchical society in which we live (Gordon, 1990). CRT is “a form of opposition scholarship” (Calmore, 1992: p. 2161) that grew from a discontent that CLS was not moving fast enough in its attempts to critique and change societal and legal structures that specifically focused on race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

In this chapter I also present a detailed discussion of how coding was completed and the major themes that arose during the coding and analysis process. I conclude with a more detailed researcher positionality statement as I discuss the strengths and limitations of the study.

Chapter five presents the case studies of the participants. In this chapter I present a complete description of the participants as a series of case studies. The individual cases are organized according to the following sections: background, negotiating competing tensions/narratives, role of the tribe (in shaping identity, life choices, and outcomes), and perceptions of Native Americans and connection to the tribal community. The background provides a brief narrative description of the participant as he/she is currently; life stories provides a description of their personal and family life; negotiating competing tensions/narratives examines their educational and professional trajectory; while the next two sections provide a more curated view of the role of the tribe and the individual in shaping identity, life choices, and outcomes.

Chapter six presents the findings related to the first research question related to belonging in GRIC. I present a background of the Community including a review of its location, history, formal membership requirements, size, legal requirements and concomitant rights and benefits attributed to membership. Responses from participant interviews are used to shape a discussion of how identity and belonging are imparted over time. Participants discussed connections or similarities to findings reported in the literature review regarding the importance of geography (where you're born and where you reside), social knowledge and practices (speech and relational practices), and biology (as it relates to the role of racial phenotypicality bias). Maddox (2004) provided that racial group

members whose appearance most closely resembles our representation of the “typical” category member are more likely to be viewed through the lens of the category stereotypes and evaluations, he later called this *phenomenon racial phenotypicality bias*.

Chapter seven presents the findings related to the second research question and considers the role of higher education in shaping the perception or desire to return. This chapter examines the following questions: What do participants believe are tribal expectations of tribal members to serve their community? How does education influence belonging and identity for GRIC members? How, if at all, do members believe education is important or related to belonging and serving the tribal nation? Why do members choose to leave, for what purpose? And, for those who have returned, what made them want to come back? How did they maintain connection or sense of belonging while they were away? For those who sought to come back, how did they go about returning? What was the transition like? For those who have not returned, in what ways, if any, do they seek to contribute to the nation?

Chapter eight presents the findings related to the third and final research question and focuses on the community’s preparedness for the return of its citizens. I conclude with chapter nine and present a detailed discussion for what this research means for GRIC, for its citizens, and in moving forward beyond a Native-White binary that seeks to distance Natives who fail to meet (sometimes subjective) criteria for belonging. This research explores the impact an “us” versus “them” mentality can have as findings suggest this mentality results in opposition, alienation, and disenfranchisement for members seeking to make meaningful contributions to the community.

1. Motivation and Project Background

If there is one single cause which has importance today for Indian people, it is tribalism. But creation of modern tribalism has been stifled by the ready acceptance of the Indians-are-a-folk people premise of the anthropologists. Creative thought in Indian Affairs has not, therefore, come from younger Indians. Rather it has come from the generation of Indians supposedly brainwashed by government schools and derided as “puppets” of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (Deloria, 1988, pp. 83-84)

The Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) finds itself in the throes of an identity transformation related to what they are and who they are as a modern tribal people. This process is shaping its current nation building goals and desires. The regenerative experience of needing to establish a modern identity carries over to its tribal members as members may set on a path to attain higher education, in hopes of returning to contribute to their nation and help shape the identity and future of the nation, while not losing their tribal identity.

However, the pursuit of education introduces an important conundrum for tribal communities to contend with. According to Brayboy (2005), for American Indians, U.S. governmental and educational policies have been “intimately linked to the problematic goal of assimilation” ignoring the fact that “Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification” (p. 429). On the one hand, younger generations may have creative ideas for how to address contemporary tribal concerns but may lack the knowledge and skillsets needed to help forge tribal autonomy and sovereignty. Thus, they may not be encouraged to participate at

the tribal social, political, and governance level and gain the experience necessary to be successful in this area. This leaves Indian Affairs at the federal and local level to be guided by generations of Indians that have been schooled in Western leadership and education styles in education systems that promoted assimilation over the development of independent indigenous knowledge and self-identity. As the opening quote illustrates, this presents concerns. Since U.S. educational policies have promoted assimilationist beliefs and practices, this history leaves many tribal nations wary that American Indians educated in Western institutions may have been educated with ideas, skills, practices, and knowledge that do not align with tribal goals related to the advancement and preservation of the sovereignty, self-determination, and self-identification tribes seek. Thus, on the other hand, those who have left to pursue education to participate in shaping the future of their tribal nations may be met with distrust, opposition, and even scorn upon their return and may not be invited to participate in tribal social, political and governance practices. If they succeed in obtaining a leadership position within those domains, their performance and decisions may be derided, scoffed, or questioned by community members who may doubt the tribal leader's authenticity as an Indian.

The dissonance between Western education curriculum and pedagogy and Indigenous ways of learning and education means that tribal members who leave the reservation to attend an institution of higher education to gain the skillsets necessary to serve their nation face a challenging paradox. They may need to prove their cultural identity to family, community, and tribal colleagues to ensure that their cultural identity has remained intact and ongoing during their time away, and again upon their return, in order to preserve their sense of belonging and acceptance as part of the tribal community. Yet,

due to varying definitions of belonging and variables affecting acceptance, belonging can feel like a moving target with no clear-cut definition of how one belongs or what one must do to gain acceptance by the tribal community. The result is that for individuals from Gila River who claim to be Akimel O’odham (River People as defined by original language or Pima Indian as defined by the U.S. Government), authenticity – defined as the construction of “Indianness” – becomes a variable defining acceptance and belonging in each sector of the tribal community.

Noted Lakota scholar and activist Vine Deloria, Jr.’s (1998) explanation of modern tribalism at the beginning of this chapter highlights a tension that permeates within tribal communities and reveals how acceptance and belonging of tribal members gets negotiated and defined by the tribal community. Deloria raises the conundrum individual tribal members face when they simultaneously seek to attain higher education in order to serve Indian peoples while also striving to maintain acceptance and belonging within their community. They are met with hostility. Their “Indianness” and commitment to Indigenous people is questioned and they are viewed as “puppets” who are derided and dismissed by older Indian leaders. This conundrum is not limited to the experience of attending college or university, but can be dictated by involvement in any type of non-community run program or training pursued in an attempt to improve an individual’s future potential. Lastly, the conundrum is also experienced when one seeks personal advancement outside of long practiced cultural and heritage practices of the Akimel O’odham.

Tallbear (2013) writes, “a potential insider – one with a university education – can be suspect, classified as an educated fool” (p.16). Like Deloria, Tallbear suggests tribal members who challenge themselves to apply for admission into college will be met with

suspicion. He goes on to further argue that the reality is that, at some point, those that have left may need to apply for re-admission into their tribal community after they complete their higher education program. “The lack of shared contexts, of shared matrix, leads to the notion of *incommensurability*, which is attached from time to time by those who are threatened by the idea that there might be different explanations for similar phenomena” (Tallbear, 2013, p. 62-63). In short, returnees may need to prove that the knowledge, values, and skills they have returned with align with those of the tribal community.

Deloria suggests there is a collective tribal impact when those who have left to pursue higher education return. While returning, tribal members may have ideas for how to strengthen and serve the tribal community and hope to contribute their skills, the returning tribal member has to be given a platform in which to complete such work or advocate for positive changes within their tribal communities. This platform is contingent upon establishing trust which is built from establishing a belonging or acceptance by the tribe and by its tribal members. Those who leave and seek to return face the risk of having their newly acquired skills and knowledge dismissed, and may instead be greeted with suspicion or hostility. The individuals who return are viewed as different in many eyes at this point, regardless of their previous connectedness.

Beyond the realms of basic cultural practice, Deloria’s observation suggests the act of leaving to become educated in Western systems of schooling renders those who leave potential “puppets” of the federal government. Since tribal communities do not have a strong history of trustworthiness with the federal government, returning members face suspicion or hostility upon return. In short, they may come to experience a sense of no longer belonging to the tribal community and, considering how relations are understood in

Indigenous communities, this sense of mistrust can extend to their tribal families as they are deemed “those people” who think they know everything.

Two labels of tribal members begin to be generated; the first is a tribal member (accepted tribal members) and the second is urban tribal members (those people, those challenged to be accepted as tribal members). While the tribal member may not currently reside within an urban area, the fact that they possess a worldview that differs from the tribal community labels them an Urban Indian.

Past the initial lack of acceptance, if the tribal member is successful in drawing a platform from which to speak or offer ideas to help the tribal community based on their worldview, established tribal members may quickly pursue and challenge the person’s tribal identity and belonging to the community to discount their Indianness and their worldview. This action is a common defense for those who challenge the returning tribal member’s worldview with respect to their thoughts, theories, and methods and is done so by grading (invisibly) the person’s Indianness by probing their language (neok) skillset, cultural knowledge, tribal history and heritage knowledge, and their family ties to the tribal community as well as their physical characteristics. While invisible, it seems that the developed matrices (drawn from the categories listed above) are clearly crafted in a manner to solicit and exploit a person’s connectedness to the tribal community. Thus, the probing and comparison of matrices is intended to dismiss or discount the worth of the returning tribal member; it is executed in order to understand if the tribal member has their own worldview or if the tribal member shares a common worldview of the majority of tribal members. Cordova (2007) noted that, for Indigenous peoples, “There are no individualistic worldviews; an individual holding his own worldview would be defined as *not quite right*”

(p. 61). Therefore, the tribal member’s worldview, if it does not align with the collective group worldview, will be challenged and used against them to discount their belonging, making it difficult for the tribal member to be accepted within the tribal community. Cordova (2007) also notes, “the matrix is not open to examination” (p. 62). It’s important to note that, for Cordova, a matrix is similar to a worldview and consists of a web of related concepts, ideas, and beliefs that create a frame of reference.

Utilizing the work of Cordova (2007), Figures 1.1 and 1.2 demonstrate some key differences identified between accepted tribal members and urban Indians whose identity may be questioned or challenged by reservation or established community members.



Figure 1.1. Traits of an accepted tribal member (non-urban).

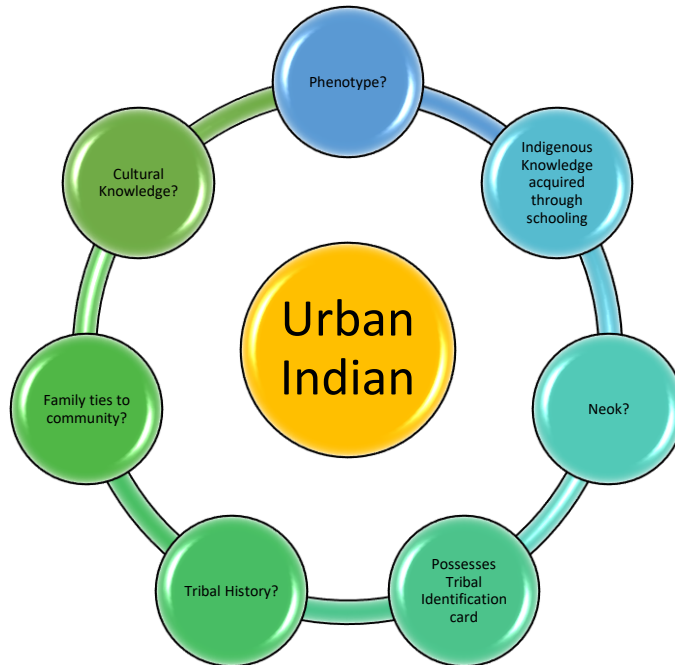


Figure 1.2. Traits of an Urban Indian who may be challenged.

For Gila River, a closed matrix is the problem as tribal members are unwilling to change the parameters of the created matrix to accept or not accept other tribal members. Cordova (2007) describes what transpires when a person is unwilling to change or view other’s worldviews when she noted, “the lack of shared contexts, of shared matrix, leads to the notion of incommensurability, which is attacked from time to time by those who are threatened by the idea that there might be different explanations for similar phenomena.” (p. 63). Regardless of the education brought forward and the possibility that new methods can assist the tribal community are presented by returning tribal members, other tribal members may feel a sense of threat.

What follows is an ugly display of discrimination and exclusion of the returning tribal member. The practice of turning away educated tribal members is a pitfall to the modern tribal community’s pursuit to define and identify who they are as a tribe.

Cordova's writing provides detail to understanding why there is a divide between the tribal member (that left for school) when they face another tribal member that may not have had such an experience. Simply put, the two individuals are perceived to not share any common thoughts or ideas and established tribal members may fear a new level of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) (hegemonic thinking) that has long been present within tribal communities as a result of this knowledge acquired through Western education. Cultural hegemonic thinking is defined as the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society so that their imposed, ruling-class overview becomes the accepted cultural norm of the particular community. The process of hegemony is complex and includes all relationships, activities and experiences of a society (Williams 1977). Gramsci (1971) noted the idea of cultural hegemony, where created reality put in place by the elite, is fed to the masses through cultural institutions such as schools, political parties and media. In this case, the GRIC would be the affected community.

This belief and practice of exclusion stems from a deep rooted belief and notion that attending school beyond the boundaries of the tribal community or attending school within the reservation is counter to the belief systems of Native Americans, regardless if those educational institutions are tribally operated or owned by the Gila River Indian Community. Reyhner and Eder (1992) note that this belief amongst Native Americans may stem from actions that took place in the year 1873 when the federal government opted to repeal the Civilization Fund which provided churches the opportunity to open and operate schools to educate Native American students. In doing so, the federal government stepped in to fill the void, ushering in a new era of federal control over Indian Schools.

Like earlier models, the “new” boarding schools (for Native Americans) were designed, first and foremost, to serve the purpose of the federal government and only secondarily the needs of American Indian students. Such imperialistic purposes were reflected in curriculums that included teaching allegiance to the U.S. government, exterminating the use of Native languages, and destroying Indian customs, particularly Native religions (Spring, 2001). As a result, schooling is now perceived as not only having little applicability to the tribal context but as destroying, ostracizing, or ignoring tribal teachings and practices necessary to be considered a member of the tribal group. These actions make a person feel that others (non-tribal members) will begin to take control of the tribal government and tribal community through the promotion and execution of practices driven by cultural hegemonic thinking.

Loss of validity: Reverse shift of development and thinking?

Concerns with education and its effect on individual tribal identity and authenticity begin early. The K-12 system encourages and promotes the idea that to be successful one must achieve academic astuteness by earning strong grades in the classroom. This is accomplished by becoming an independent thinker and is defined by following particular protocols that publicly draw attention to oneself such as raising one’s hand to answer questions and listening to lectures, without question, so one can get a great job and earn a high income. The focus of school is to help the individual student, not the community, succeed which is demonstrated in Western schooling’s focus on promoting the greatness of each individual student. Kim et. al. (2006), notes “the most widely studied set of American parental beliefs concerns independence...and in recent year’s many researchers have come to believe that independence is a culturally specific goal of childrearing” (p.

146). Scholars (Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006; Yang & Lu, 2007) note that common traits that accompany an independent person's development include the following:

- The person views themselves as an independent entity
- The person is distinct, autonomous, self-contained, endowed with unique disposition
- It is important to know how the person is different than others
- Belief your behavior is independent of others

Different from the K-12 system, the tribal home fosters the development of an interdependent thinker and person that takes part in the home-life, listens and waits their turn so the person can hear the explanation and action so they can take their place in the household regardless of money, education or title. Woolf et al. (2002) describe an interdependent person as someone that is mutually dependent, or simply being dependent on each other. This research finds common traits of an interdependent person to include:

- Seeing yourself as an interdependent entity, focused on how you fit within a group of people
- Includes larger networks in which people are socially connected
- Focus on how one is similar to others is important
- Group members, social roles and relationships to others are important

From this discussion it becomes clear tribal members are faced with two ideas of developing; they can choose a path of becoming interdependent or independent.

The social life within the Akimel O'odham asks that tribal members function within an interdependent thought process while the teachings of Western K-12 systems promote the idea of functioning as an independent person. These two character traits are a challenge

for many to identify and understand and may lead to confusion in human development. Ultimately, American Indians who pursue a strong and rich academic career place themselves in a position to be excluded from the tribe or not be fully accepted by the tribal community, and seen as someone who has lost their tribal identity.

The new generation of O'odham find themselves at a crossroad of deciding which path of knowledge to follow or, find themselves deciding which knowledge supersedes the other. To support this thought, the Akimel O'odham have recited a story for many years when children would question why the coyote howls at night. It is important to note that while this story is cited in this dissertation, most if not all stories are verbally passed on to tribal members, rarely are they written to allow a person to professionally cite. That story is as follows:

Years ago, the medicine man was sitting alongside a fire and held a small leather bag that shined when he would open the top. The coyote, who was seated next to him, would attempt to look in the bag but the medicine man would close it quickly. The coyote, curious by nature, would continue to ask to see the stars in the bag, but the medicine man would refuse as he knew the character of the coyote, a jokester. When asked to see them and hold them, the medicine man declined by telling the coyote, "No, you are a prankster and will only lose the stars, so you cannot be trusted with them" The coyote assured the medicine man that he would be serious and to please, please trust him. Finally, the medicine man gave in and let the coyote hold the bag of stars. Soon after, the coyote, jokingly took the bag, ran and pulled the stars out of the bag and threw them up in the sky. The

stars stayed in the sky and he could not recover them, he then began to howl in sadness. Each night after he threw the stars he would cry and howl because he wanted to have the stars once again in the leather bag. So, the coyote howls each night as he sees the stars and wants them returned.

While this may be conceived as a folk tale, and perhaps lacks merit and validity to many people throughout the world (science may tell us differently), Akimel O’odham revere these stories. This folk tale can be challenged with scientific research by new learners as they enter school, and K-12 schools will provide information and teachings to counter the folk tale. In doing so, what reverence is now placed on the folk tale that has been passed by generation after generation amongst the Akimel O’odham? The student is wrong if they provide the folk tale reasoning for star development in the school and the student is wrong if they provide the scientific reasoning for star development in the home and tribal community.

In fact, many stories and cultural beliefs that have been practiced within the tribal community can be disaggregated with outside knowledge and scientific theories taught in local K-12 schools. Children can hear a story at home from their elders or family members and then as they enter school they find a compromising situation that questions which knowledge base is true and which is not, generating a destabilizing feeling. In a world that encourages independence, Western schooling encourages students to take the newfound thoughts and beliefs of the classroom and take them as valid theories and understanding and defining the world they live within. The student is left to question their indigenous knowledge to feel a sense of belonging within the school. Owens (2001) has argued that American Indians must hide behind the masks created by White America in order to be the

Indian that Whites want to see. Shanley (2001) argues similarly that America loves its Indians as long as they are hidden from view.

Recognizing the variation of academic and social cognition being developed by tribal members as they attend school, coupled with the reduction of physical attributes of tribal members when compared to historical photographs/stories, and the loss of social connotations associated with daily life practices, it is understandable to fear what has become the new generation of tribal members. The new generation is comprised of a tribal membership that showcases a new looking Indian with new knowledge, but that may lack the “authenticity” of prior generations or cultural integrity in terms of their “Indianness” Brayboy (2004).

While it is understandable to attend a Western school between the grade span of kindergarten to twelfth grade (K-12), a tribal member faces another layer of scrutiny if s/he determines they want to pursue education beyond the basic levels of academic expectations. This additional schooling amplifies the usage of pejorative labels that frame the individual as a sellout, inauthentic, or dangerous and includes terms such as apple, cracker, sell-out, and being thought of as someone who is too good for their own people. It is difficult to maneuver through the K-12 system, but it is another to shine and do well within that K-12 system. The beginnings of exclusion begin and the assignment of titles such as “school-boy” are then practiced throughout social circles.

Thus, standing out can be received as a negative trait as traditional O’odham belief asks that a person remain humble and not stand out. Further, the rise above the rest also challenges the family structure as each individual has a purpose and an assignment of expectations dependent on the age of the tribal member. Within Gila River, standing out

can be considered as a person being *too good* (chum skug). Chum Skug is seen as derogative characteristic and, when used, the term spreads quickly to others, and will be used against a person in all social and business settings, thereby disqualifying a person without hearing his or her thoughts, beliefs and ideas on how to help improve the tribal community. The result is that for a returning tribal member to validate his or her Indianness the investment of time and attention doubles upon returning if s/he desires to feel accepted by his or her tribal community. Moreover, this need to be validated becomes a common thread in the fabric of choosing not to attend school or return to the tribal community after completing the program of study.

Why seek higher education?

As stated in an earlier section, studies have found that people who identify strongly with their tribe often report attending college out of a desire to serve their tribal nations or communities (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012). That is, higher education is a way to gain skillsets that can be brought back to the tribal nation and utilized to promote the well-being of the tribal nation's citizens. Therefore, members often report understanding it is necessary to temporarily step away from the tribal nation with a desire to belong to—and serve—their people in their absence while they attend schooling.

While it is important to understand the cultural and heritage practices of the Akimel O'odham, it is not the only form of knowledge needed to survive for an individual tribal member. Limited jobs and limited opportunities sometimes force the hand for those who seek to advance in their lives. Tribal members that possess cultural knowledge and heritage practitioners must add knowledge and skillsets outside of traditional pools of knowledge as these particular skills may not be enough to provide a fruitful living (economically

speaking). Therefore the need for higher education is evident so that an individual can progress personally and professionally; and the need for educated tribal members is needed by GRIC as they seek to fill and “take-back” many job positions within departments and influence tribal programming that are currently managed by non-tribal members.

As a new generation of tribal members emerge, Western education is coming inside the reservation to provide the tribe with scholars and researchers who are prepared to carry the Gila River Indian Community into the future toward what many tribal communities are now coining as nation-building. Nation building is “the conscious and focused application of [Indigenous] people’s collective resources, energies, and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that is identified as [their] own” (Akoto, 1992, p. 3). Further, the process of nation building consists of many layers, including the development of behaviors, values, language, institutions, and physical structures that elucidate the community’s history and culture, infuse and protect knowledge of the past in present-day practices, and ensure the future identity and independence of the nation (Akoto, 1992). Today, tribes find themselves developing programming and opportunities to rebuild their tribal nations to what was present before the settlers/explorers arrived. For Gila River, this intent to re-build a nation is focused on revising long standing managerial and operational methods of tribal governmental practices by supplanting educated and experienced tribal members to help support the sustaining of the cultural heritage and language of its Indigenous inhabitants, the Akimel O’odham and Pii Posh.

To pursue the idea of nation re-building, GRIC is reliant on training current and future tribal members and promotes the idea that the attainment of higher education and pursuit of knowledge (which requires tribal members to attend educational institutions

located outside the tribal reservation) so that tribal members can gain the knowledge necessary to interface with Western institutions and policies, as needed. The caveat is that tribal members are then exposed to new ideas, new ways of thinking and develop new lifestyles and methods of living and may stray from traditional living and learning that have been historically present for GRIC tribal members. However, some members of the Gila River Indian Community view this new generation as lacking the essential ways of knowing how to exist as an Akimel O'odham and the attainment of new knowledge (knowledge outside Akimel O'odham thinking/knowledge) as damaging to the advancement of sustaining the *Himdag* of the O'odham. The Akimel O'odham use this word (*Himdag*) to describe an idea and belief system that only required that you treat others with respect and do right by others; it did not require that you prove how O'odham you were as an individual. This *Himdag* refers to a way of life.

The New Generation

The new Indian (tribal member) arising should be recognized and addressed if Gila River is to create and sustain a community that is inclusive and not divisive. To foster a strong effort of developing an action plan that addresses the new tribal members, the tribal community should seek to understand the experiences of tribal members and what social engagement practices tribal members exercise as a result of new schooling and experiences. This plan should also include an avenue to dissect and disseminate the construct systems that tribal members engaged in, and what changes/revisions to social structures they would like to witness in the future as a result of supporting returning tribal members. Further, the plan must include acknowledging the challenges tribal members, not just the new generation, face when they have a desire to belong and feel accepted after they have sought

to build their own definition of self-identity comprised of both tribal and non-tribal worlds. For the tribal member, the challenge is finding a comfortable place in both worlds they subscribe to, the tribal community and outside the tribal community, and feeling validated as a person that should be accepted regardless of their personal life choices and how those choices measure up to the invisible matrix that defines a true Indian.

These questions and many other hidden questions that surface as a result of researching this topic need to be answered if a strong, positive model of education (that includes both Indigenous Knowledge and Western Theories of Academia) is to be developed for tribal members. These considerations serve as the baseline for developing a new, modern tribal identity that is recognized and accepted by Gila River tribal members. Returning to the ways of the elders, the tribal community and its members can utilize the original thinking and concept of *Himdag* as an avenue to help build a strong future. What has been lost is the true definition and action of the word itself, *Himdag*, a way of life.

This dissertation argues that a shift in human development must be the focus going forward for Gila River. Both from the tribal community and the school systems that tribal members attend that draw focus to developing individuals that see value and encompass both interdependent and independent character traits if Indigenous peoples are to forge a modern tribal identity. The purpose of this study was to formulate an understanding for others to recognize the methods that generate a sense of belonging for tribal members, how tribal identity can be formed and sustained throughout a person's lifetime, and how a tribal member can successfully re-enter the tribal community after they complete their academic program of study.

2. Review of the Literature

We used to think our fate was in our stars. Now we know, in large measure, our fate is in our genes. - James Watson, quoted by Leon Jaroff in the “The Gene Hunt,” *Time Magazine* (June 24, 2001)

In the previous chapters, I offered a background of the research, including the research statement. The present research study concerns itself with examining the notion of belonging for members of the Gila River Indian Community. It asks, how do members of the Gila River community define “belonging”? Do tribal and personal definitions change over a member’s life course? What role, if any, phenotype and formal schooling play in defining belonging? Second, how do Gila River members learn how to become members of the community? Does formal education serve in shaping these expectations? And, lastly, what can tribal communities and tribal members do to foster a sense of belonging for members who have left to obtain professional or academic training and seek to return to serve the nation? In order to answer these questions, it is important to become familiar with definitions of belonging in regards to how a person develops a sense of belonging within their tribe.

This chapter begins by presenting various definitions of belonging including a discussion on the role of geography, social practices, and biology on shaping historic and current conceptions of belonging. Geography refers to land/territory and includes considerations of where a person was born, where they grew up and where they currently reside. The role of social knowledge and practices refers to the importance of linguistics. This includes considerations for how norms of introducing oneself and interacting with others shape identity and belonging including knowledge and use of Rezbonics and

heritage languages over academic jargon in tribal communities. The role of biology is discussed as it relates to phenotype and blood quantum. Such measures for belonging are influenced and reminiscent of colonial definitions and norms historically imposed upon Native communities (Spanish and English). One of the primary issues affecting belonging is education (postsecondary); therefore, this chapter also explores current research about this and discusses reasons why Native peoples who tend to pursue education to serve their nations have a hard time transitioning back. The chapter concludes with a discussion on nation building and the role higher education can play in promoting a tribal nation's nation building agenda and by presenting a discussion for how this study will fill existing gaps within extant academic literature.

Who are American Indians?

According to Garrett & Pichette (2000), the term Native American is often used to describe indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere in an effort to provide recognition, viewed by many as long overdue, of the unique history of the American continent. The United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (1988) legally defines Native American as a person who is an enrolled or registered member of a tribe or whose blood quantum is one fourth or more genealogically derived from Native American ancestry. The U.S. Bureau of the Census (1991), meanwhile, relies on self-identification to determine who is a Native person (p. 3-4). Although there are proper definitions that are acceptable in governmental circles (for legal purposes), there continues to be a deficit when asking tribal communities to define belonging of their own people or tribal citizens.

Indigenous scholar Hilary Weaver (2001) explains there is a distinction between legal membership and cultural membership. "Indigenous identity is a truly complex and

somewhat controversial topic. There is little agreement on precisely what constitutes an indigenous identity, how to measure it, and who truly has it” (p. 240). Weaver suggests that there are two types of belonging for a tribal member: one that belongs to a tribe based on their legal tribal membership that is dictated by a tribe’s constitution (blood quantum or through sanguine ties) and the other who belongs to a tribe by measurement of their cultural practices and effort provided to live a certain lifestyle.

Weaver additionally argues that defining who belongs or who is considered a “Real Indian,” is challenging because it forces us to contend with the difficulty of considering the following questions: how does one measure the quantity of an Indian, and if measured, how is that measurement developed and by whom? “Once we get that sorted out, are we talking about race, ethnicity, cultural identity, tribal identity, acculturation, enculturation, bicultural identity, multicultural identity, or some other form of identity?” (p. 240). This discussion leads to the development of multiple layers of belonging and ultimately, acceptance.

The questions of what makes a person belong and, who determines the construct system measurements of attainment and acceptance have long plagued developmental psychologists. Some argue that when it comes to belonging within a tribal community, certain talk, certain physical look, and overall attitude are what emphasize who belongs and who does not. These same sets of subjective items often carry over into any type of community where “belonging” may be needed. Weaver’s work demonstrates the complexity that accompanies seeking to define Indigenous identity and belonging and begs the question: what happens to those who do not possess the necessary amount of qualities based on legal requirements? What about cultural definitions? How might this affect their

self-identity and self-efficacy? Because of this, an attempt to offer a concise definition creates difficulty.

Belonging by geography, social practices, and biology

Research on American Indian peoples suggests several factors influence the definition of belonging and identity within Indigenous communities. These include geographical/territorial factors, social factors, biological factors, and education (see figure 2.1).

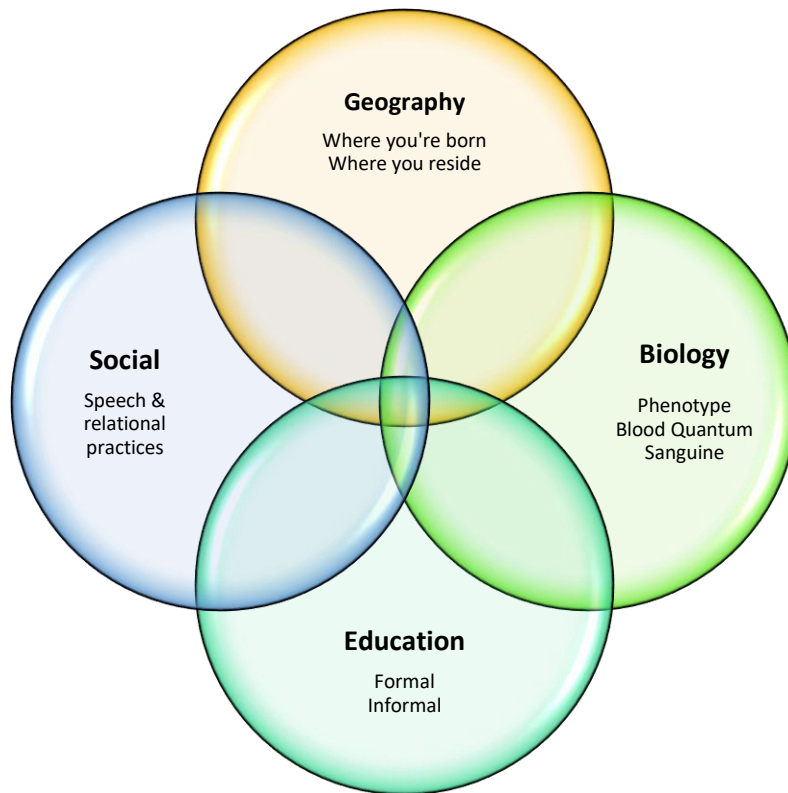


Figure 2.1. Factors that influence belonging and identity development in Indigenous communities.

Malkki (1992) addressed the importance of geography when arguing that the metaphorical concept of having roots involves intimate linkages between people and place. If we are to understand Malkki, these roots begin the process of understanding how tribal

members determine who is accepted and who is not. Furthering this thought, the construct systems that have been created as a result have been tuned and adjusted to set up qualifiers or benchmarks of acceptance. A part of these qualifiers is the idea that “real” Indians are those who reside where they originally derived from. In this case, the space addressed, for many Indigenous peoples, is proximity to the reservation or ancestral homelands. But can a person who is a tribal member by way of the tribe’s constitution and enrollment requirements, still be an Indian if s/he has never resided within the boundaries of the home reservation or ancestral homelands? This question enlists a barrage of variables that can stem from the idea of why the person has not been on the reservation, but within that line of inquiry, one may find that some individuals did not have a choice about where they were born and/or where they live(d) and so we must consider if this residential qualifier is a fair way to determine acceptance or belonging.

The location of one’s residence and type of dwelling may also influence notions of belonging and identity. A powerful means of understanding how “cultures” are territorialized can be found in Appadurai’s (1988) account of the ways in which anthropologists have tended to tie people to places through ascriptions of Native status. “Natives are not only persons who are from certain places, and belong to those places, but they are also those who are somehow incarcerated, or confined, in those places” (p. 37). This thought may contextualize feelings of confusion and disagreement among those aspiring for acceptance who may question, “Can I still be Indian if I don’t reside on the reservation, or can I be accepted once I leave and try to return to the reservation?” The answer to this question has long been sought and will continue its course to find truth and support. However, the support and truthfulness may not be affirmed by all tribal members,

and may increase argument as to who is correct on how to identify true Indians. In fact, within the community of Gila River there can be a variance on how this identification is made by the simple fact that there are numerous villages within the tribe itself. Considering this village concept, it is important to understand that each of these villages, although all are located within Gila River, have their own idea or definitions of what they believe and how they believe someone to be a member of the tribe. All villages do not always agree on this topic or other important topics related to belonging and the future and identity of the tribe.

Another factor that influences definitions of belonging and identity is demonstration of social knowledge and cultural practices. That is, the extent to which a member demonstrates culturally appropriate linguistic norms and behaviors. Within tribal communities the need to belong can be found in several areas of social interaction. This need can be considered a quest to fit in. As Simone Weil (1987) stated, “to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul” (p. 41). For instance, when a person approaches another and greets them, this may include a two-part system of engagement for most tribal members. For the person greeting, s/he must first introduce him- or herself by stating their name which is then followed by a secondary greeting – an “in” card. While most individuals outside of the reservation may simply say, “Hi, I am Ted, glad to meet you.” Most tribal members must approach the introduction in this manner, “Hi, I am Ted, my family is from the Village of or the Clan of...”. This secondary part of the greeting, identifying their homeland and location of their relatives and ancestors, is the first step in identifying a person and understanding if you can accept them.

In 2001, author Karen I. Blu provided support for the protocol related to traditional greeting in her book title, *The Lumbee Problem: The Making of an American Indian People*, as a tool to assist a person to be accepted. Blu states, “In order for a non-Lumbee to have any sense of what it is to be Lumbee, there must be a translation from the insider’s experiences, ideas, and sentiments into terms intelligible to an outsider” (p. X, of preface). What Blu offered was a path to being accepted, a sort of “secret hand-shake.” you must have the ability to have similar traits to those that you are choosing to join or want to join. Blu offers light on a dark area of understanding why it may be difficult to be accepted when she states, “It cannot be assumed, as so many people do, that every individual’s physical appearance importantly reveals either his genetic heritage or his social classification” (p. 7). Blu’s comments suggest it may not be enough to have certain physical or social characteristics without additionally possessing an inside knowledge of what it takes to be one of a certain group – an idea that will be further elaborated upon in the next section.

The established method of introduction has been a long-standing custom throughout Indian Country and is often practiced regardless of which tribe you may be a member. While the meanings for this action may vary, what is important to note is that in this small greeting, many things transpire. The secondary portion allows the listener to form a thought about you, to place you in terms of familiarity, and may also be a stepping-stone to introduce trust to the situation. Montoya (1994) suggests this happens not only with the content presented but that even the language choice of the introduction sends a message. For example, “that They-Who-Don’t-Speak-Spanish [might] see us different, [may] judge us, [may] find us lacking” (p. 415). This thought is absorbed by Natives who may note whether the style of interaction reflects unfamiliarity with the history and impact

of colonial practices (speaking Spanish, English, or the heritage language) and traditional knowledge (speaking the Native heritage language and/or knowing the proper introduction protocol).

From this, dialogue transpires in most cases, but for some, the person being introduced may be limited or reduced from a conversation and/or meeting as a result of this lack of appropriate or accepted introduction and greeting. This action to accept or not accept can be viewed as a filter; a filter that a person or group will utilize to determine their thoughts of accepting the person or not accepting the person. A feeling of homelessness may be the best attempt to describe the feelings a person may have following such an incident, a feeling that they have not been accepted and are now alone without acceptance by the person or group. Feelings of not belonging may begin to surface. The need to belong is important in this stage, as it is a method to gain a seat at the table, a chance to be recognized, included and valued, and to participate in larger tribal processes. To be included is a great feeling but, more importantly, opens up opportunities to contribute to and shape tribal public discourse as well as receive opportunities normally reserved for those considered to be part of the “in” group. And of course, the opposite feeling can be one of embarrassment for an individual as they do not feel included in a group.

One could summarize this by stating that a person can belong or earn a belonging stake if they are familiar with the many cultural customs and traditions that Native people hold dear to them which allows them to experience a sense of rootedness and belonging. Malkki (1992) argues that, “people are often thought of, and think of themselves, as being rooted in place and as deriving their identity from the rootedness. The roots in question here are not just any kind of roots, very often they are specifically arborescent in form” (p.

27). This comment suggests tribal communities possess and practice a multitude of customary methods of acting and living. But is cultural knowledge in introductions enough to be accepted?

Rather than automatically accepting all tribal members who possess a membership card as belonging to the community, many communities determine belonging and membership based on possession and demonstration of ongoing cultural and/or traditional knowledge. Brayboy and Maughan (2009) argue the diversity of today's tribal communities is necessary in understanding that "diversity and plurality of knowledge is fundamental to the dynamism of knowledge systems and the survival of communities over time. The interconnectedness of knowledge, sources of knowledge and experience are critical to understand how Indigenous peoples have survived more than 500 years of genocide" (p. 5). Indigenous communities have long been aware of the ways that they know, come to know, and produce knowledge, because in many instances knowledge is essential for culture and well-being.

According to this thinking, Indigenous Knowledge systems are rooted in the lived experience of peoples (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002, 2009; Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005), provide a possible avenue to be different than the "A" typical Indian who would normally have long hair in a ponytail, cowboy hat and an older vehicle filled with family members. Their writing suggests each person could possibly determine their "Indianness" based on what they perceive will make them happy to be just a human being. However, what has happened to the continuous notion of being accepted has been based upon meeting certain criteria in which to be

considered an Indian an individual must conform to a set of expectations that may or may not be shared across the community.

This standard of definition, the degree to which one possesses knowledge of culture, tradition, protocols, ceremonies, and general Indigenous Knowledge raises another question: what happens to those who are Indian by all other accounts but lack the indigenous knowledge (IK) of their community? Does this lack of knowing make them less of an Indian? If we were to apply a grading matrix of what determines the authenticity of the individual Indian, what would it take to meet all standards and earn a 100% on the grading scale? Who would qualify?

Garrett & Wilbur (1999) reference what can be considered *basic concepts* that Native Americans share in regards to indigenous knowledge when they “consider some of the underlying values that permeate a Native worldview and existence” (p. 194). Several authors have described common core values that characterize “traditionalism” across tribal nations (Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990; Herring, 1990; Little Soldier, 1992, Peregoy, 1993; Thomason, 1991). Some of those values include the importance of community contribution, sharing, acceptance, cooperation, harmony and balance, noninterference, extended family, attention to nature, immediacy of time, awareness of the relationship, and a deep respect for elders (Dudley, 1992; Dufrene, 1990; J.T. Garret & Garrett, 1994, 1996; M.T. Garrett 1996, 1998; Heinrich et al., 1990; Herring, 1990, 1997; Lake, 1991; Plank, 1994; Red Horse, 1997). These underlying values provide what can be learned or attained on a path to one’s Indianness; within Gila River, these traits are a common idea to what is considered the *Himdag* (way of life) of the Akimel O’odham.

Such discussions have led to other problems with formalizing a strong foundation of knowing who you are as an individual and where you might fit in the world that surrounds you. Garrett & Wilbur (1999) offer the following thought, “more or less, the essence of Native American spirituality is about ‘feeling’” (p. 196). However, it is important to note, this feeling is often considered to be informed by knowledge of IK and/or connection to the tribal community through direct experiences with the land and/or its members over critical life stages. For tribal members of Gila River, the feeling is what brings certain tribal members and tribal social groups together. Lacking indigenous knowledge reflects negatively upon the tribal member, thereby reducing the “feeling” that Garrett and Wilbur proposed as the essence of Native American spirituality.

These conflicting thoughts and ideas of feeling a connection to Native American spirituality has led to ongoing debate and confusion among Indigenous peoples – especially when legal definitions of belonging begin to clash with culturally informed definitions. Lobo et al., (2016, 2010, 2001, 1998) stated, “the facets of identity interact with and sometimes reinforce or challenge each other. Give[n] the strong emphasis on the collectivity in Indigenous cultures, it is problematic to have an individual who self-identifies as Indigenous yet has no community sanction or validation of that identity” (p. 32). Lobo et al. provided a broader understanding of the difficulty of feeling a sense of belonging when a person is in conflict with themselves. Sandy Grande (2000) adds that, “the formation of Indigenous theories needs to be, first and foremost, grounded in our own intellectual traditions” (p. 355).

To further understand what may develop as a result of not belonging or feeling Native American, Weaver (2001) suggests that a modified Indianness becomes possible.

For Weaver, this modification may be more detrimental than beneficial and is not reflective of the complex ways in which belonging can manifest: individually in terms of self-identification, collectively in terms of community identification, and federally or socially in terms of external identification (p. 240).

David and Bar-Tal's (2009) work on social identity, at the individual and collective level, helps shed insight into the ways individual's identification with the nation carries two major implications. At the micro level is a focus on "individual society members' recognition of and categorization as belonging to a group, with the accompanying cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences" while the macro level examines individuals' sense of "collective identity that denotes the shared awareness by constituents of a society of being members of a collective" (p. 354). According to David and Bar-Tal (2009) the psychological attribute of identification varies by individuals. Individuals not only "differ from each other regarding the extent to which they identify with their affiliated collectives" but also their "identification with the collective may fluctuate over time because of personal or collective experiences" (p. 359). David and Bar-Tal believe the differences among individuals and fluctuations across time, within the individual, emphasize the subjective and changeable character of identification. Figure 2.2 depicts the tension between micro individual level needs related to belonging and larger macro level needs.

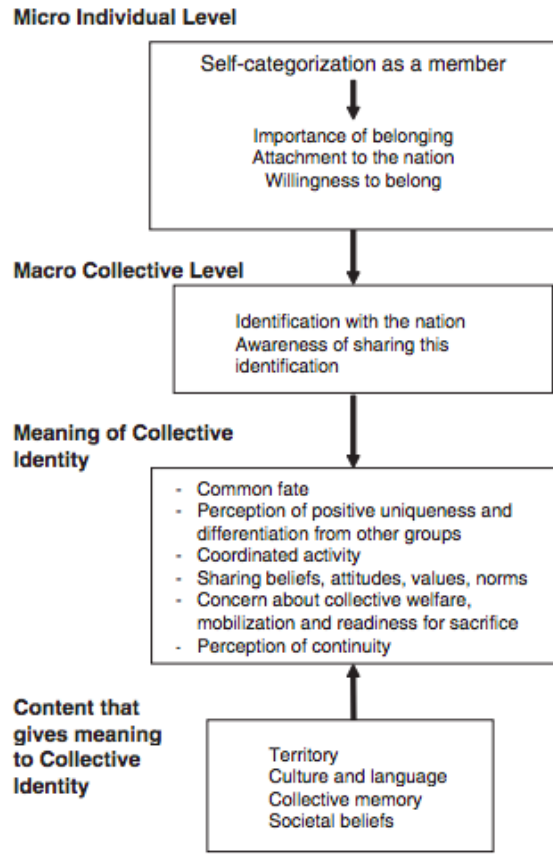


Figure 2.2. Model of National Identity (David & Bar-Tal, 2009, p. 359).

Still, even these levels do not fully address levels of acceptance and belonging for an Indigenous person.

Another form of belonging, often tied to legal recognition, and its concomitant rights and benefits, involves the role of biology. Although knowledge of a tribe's culture is important, for those who look different, not possessing the "A" typical features of a normal Indian, gaining acceptance may be an even tougher requirement to fulfill. Biology and phenotype thus also influence belonging. Beteille (1967) argued, "the most significant membership groups in the society are, however, clearly ones with which the individual identifies himself by reason of birth and through sentiments of common blood and common

ancestry.” Such sentiments are likely to have special appeal in a society that was, until recently, relatively closed and where membership in the most significant groups could be acquired only by birth.

Under biological frameworks, the definitions of belonging and what is considered unacceptable or not Indian enough can be passed on from generation to generation and may vary amongst families. What is noticeable is the increase of “us” and “them” divisions in ideology becoming more prevalent in deciding. I will expand on this idea shortly. Suffice it to say, this form of thinking is increasing as a greater number of tribal members marry or have children with members of other tribal nations or groups outside of the tribal community. Without explaining the statistical formula to identify the many possibilities of cross blood creations, it is safe to assume there are different variations of tribal members, and not one would possibly look the same as the next.

Psychological research has found various assumptions are present when one person attempts to fit another person into a mold of biological definitions of stereotypical race and ethnicity. Maddox (2004) describes the bias faced by racial group members whose appearance most closely resembles our representation of the “typical” category member and argues s/he is more likely to be viewed through the lens of the category stereotypes and evaluations. This phenomenon is termed *racial phenotypical bias*.

Racial phenotypical bias assumes that, for the most part, Indians normally have children with other Indians. Meaning that, as tribes were more secluded in history, the tendency was to marry and or create offspring within your own tribe. As tribes expanded and tribal members left their communities, it was only a matter of time before the full blooded (4/4) Indians began to disappear. When this occurred, many of the cultural and

facial features that may have been synonymous with specific Indian groups began to change and passed on from generation to generation. Today's tribal membership consists of an array of different types of facial features, skin tone, height and weight making it difficult to capture a true sense of what an Indian should look like.

The beginning tenets of phenotypical bias can be traced in several directions, but many Indians feel that it first began when tribal members were taken from their homelands and lost a connection to the tribal community and the belief systems of the Akimel O'odham. Lobo et al. (2016, 2010, 2001, 1998) argues,

Historical circumstances [...] led to thousands of Native people being taken from their communities and raised without community connections through mechanisms such as interracial adoption, foster care and boarding schools. Indeed, there are many indigenous people with tenuous community connections at best, and some of them try to reassert an indigenous identity and find their way home to their cultures (p. 32).

As a result of decades of genocidal and otherwise destructive practices driven, largely, by Western societies post-contact, that decimated the once-great number of Indigenous peoples in the U.S. and separated children from their parents, many tribal members turned to inter-marriage and mixing with other tribes and non-tribal persons to find romantic partners while their children may have been raised by individuals not of their tribe. For many tribal communities it can be rare to find a full-blooded Indian. Tribal and racial mixing has led to unique, identity development for many individuals. As Hall (1996) explains, "identities are [increasingly] fragmented, multiply constructed, and intersected in a constantly changing, sometimes conflicting array." This suggests a problem may arise

when a person attempts to exhibit phenotypical or even cultural bias against individuals from their own group.

Conversations and definition of belonging become even more complex when you begin to consider the extent to which people of mixed heritage fit in Native societies. Federal policies that treated Native people of mixed heritage differently than those without mixed heritage effectively attacked unity within Native communities, thereby turning indigenous people against each other. Arguments and debate can be had to try and formalize a reason for such thinking.

Up until now, this discussion has suggested Indian identity is often influenced by biological and ancestral connections to particular peoples. Although some individuals may explore opportunities to be Indian by reading book after book, or may watch Hollywood movies in an effort to feel a connectedness to their ancestral tribal roots, such an approach may leave them lacking, since not all Indians are the same. One cannot assume that each tribe is the same in their belief systems. Contrary to what may be believed, dream catchers, pow wows and long hair do not lead to automatic true attainment of Indianness.

Often Indians are approached by non-Indians with the assumption that those few identifiers should be present. Anything less—in the mind of those who work from the assumption that all Natives look and behave alike—would disqualify the beauty that one once had for such Indianness. If we were to cast such assumptions on Indians, could we not assume that all Irish people have shamrocks placed upon their bodies and have red hair and freckles? Thus, for many tribal communities, biological definitions may be enough to fulfill legal criteria for membership, in some cases, but fail to meet the cultural expectations necessary for belonging.

In the past, schools historically taught the general education subjects of Math, English, Science, and Social Studies. And as many have learned, Indians attended various types of schools from public and private schools to government and religiously run boarding schools. Each school had a vested interest in preparing tribal youth for the next level in life whether that be entering the work force or entering a higher education institution. However, today, formal schooling differs from its predecessors in, as a result of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (1975), schools may now be actively involved in influencing the Indianness in the tribal student by offering culturally responsive content in indigenous languages of the tribal communities and tribal history. What seemed to be an attempt to eradicate the Indian on behalf of schools (through termination policies of the 1950's and earlier legislation that outlawed Indian beliefs, style of dress, languages, and other customs in schools) has now gone full circle with schools seeking to offer specific language coursework and social studies in hopes that the student can foster a tribal identity.

At issue with indigenous content being offered in this format is the validity of the knowledge and information being provided to tribal members. As mentioned previously, tribal communities have unique identification methods that illustrate the tribal member, their family, and their history. With this, how can an educator provide specific content knowledge if that educator is not from the particular village/district of the tribal member? Certain knowledge is held private and secret depending on the category of the knowledge. Some knowledge is identified as only for males or only for females in some instances. Therefore, it can be argued that the knowledge one is receiving may be diluted or not valid for purposes of generating a sense of belonging.

For this reason, schools and tribes find themselves providing a disclaimer at the start of class to the student, family and tribal community that outlines that the course will be a general knowledge course that does not seek to supersede the knowledge taught in the home or the village. Because certain knowledge and language is associated with specific geographic locations; it is understandable that concerns will be raised when others hear of a school's attempt to teach the language and heritage of a tribal community.

A review of the GRIC tribal website does not mention the belonging of a person by means of culture, but solely by the ability to prove the potential tribal member has lineage of Native American ancestry as defined by the tribal and federal governments. In the case of Gila River, the tribe has prescribed enrollment requirements, based on blood quantum, outlined in their Tribal Constitution. Given this, the website permeates an assumption that a person with a tribal identification card is a member of the tribe and should be afforded all privileges as such

However, a tribal identification card may not be enough as, for many members of the tribe, the card contains flaws toward belonging to the Akimel O'odham as a people. Within the website material there is no mention that the applicant must be of Akimel O'odham descent. Instead the information notes that the applicant "must be ¼ Indian blood." This means that an applicant need only show that their parent(s) were enrolled with Gila River and they possess a total blood quantum of at least ¼ of Indian blood. The enrollment process does not require the individual to be of ¼ Akimel O'odham descent, merely of Native American descent.

When you consider this enrollment qualifier, the definition of belonging has changed over time and will continue to do so over a member's lifetime. While the tribal

government mandates that a person may be enrolled through tribal constitutional requirements, the process does not account for nor include the perception of social acceptance and social events that require more than just an identification card.

The romantic notion of what epitomizes a “true Indian” is a long-lost idea as seen in the examples given. But this vision of a true Indian offers two different normalcies of acceptance of which the tribal member may become confused. They must ask themselves: by which definition of a true Indian am I supposed to subscribe? Should I stay within the reservation, entrenching myself in the language and culture of the community or should I focus on becoming more familiar and educated with the White man’s ways and thinking so that I can satisfy the outside world’s expectations of a true Indian?

What follows is the afterthought of what could have been. This idea stems from the dialogue many tribal members discuss in social circles, attributing this to what would have happened had the White man not come to our lands. Although a far stretch in the distribution, these thoughts assist with the divide amongst tribal members who differ in their genetic and racial make-up. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest a problem with the notion of being rooted along the many facets of a tribal community’s cultural traditions and customs. They write, “To be rhizomorphic is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses. We’re tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots and radicles. They’ve made us suffer too much” (p. 15). More importantly, all of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics.

Although reaching, the idea presented by Deleuze and Guattari does have a place in understanding what occurs when the rootedness of a person is tested and returns us to

an earlier question: who determines the qualifying test of correct facial features, cultural knowledge and other variables involved with determining who belongs and who doesn't? Hebdige (1987) made a more succinct effort to support the idea of Deleuze and Guattari when he stated that:

Rather than tracing back our roots...to their source, I've tried to show how the roots themselves are in a state of constant flux and change. The roots don't stay in one place. They change shape. They change colour. And they grow. There are no such things as pure point of origin...but that doesn't mean that there isn't history (p. 10).

If Indians of today venture off and create families with other racial groups or if they challenge themselves to act differently than what has been so prevalent amongst Native behavior; then the support from Deleuze and Guattari offers that the person is still a Native regardless of the path they take in their lives.

Unfortunately, for those who have detached themselves from the reservation they may fall within the realm of the unaccepted by other tribal members. When this occurs, the individual may scurry to try and capture a connection to the primary tribal group by proving their "Indianness." An added "rez" accent to their voice, a mastery of food groups known only to Indians growing up on the rez (reservation), and an ability to name one or two members of distinction or well-known Indians within the reservation are some methods of belonging and proving worth. To understand this further, and the reasoning behind such pursuit of Indianness, consider the two words often utilized in social circles, "us" and "them," and the negative connotations associated with such usage. When one is a part of the "us" then s/he can consider him or herself as belonging to the tribe or family, but when considered a part of the "them" then s/he is not a part of the tribe or family. While these

two words seem simplistic in their spelling and usage, their usage in terms of segregation is what the focus has become.

Moreover, economic, as well as social factors, can influence or limit terms of belonging. The establishment of Indian gaming has exacerbated feelings of opposition and territoriality in restricting those who are considered to belong. Casinos and the so-called “per capita” money some members receive serve to promote a belief that the larger the community membership, the larger the threat to financial and social resources which are viewed as finite and scarce. However, not all tribes correlate per-cap to casino dollars. It may be true that this idea does not apply to all Indian communities, but for the sake of providing an example of something tangible, this analogy demonstrates the reasons some tribes are pushing for redefining or restricting membership. This thinking has driven a divide in many villages and families. What has followed is the need to weed out those that don’t belong. Setting up barriers to stake their claims on newfound monies and/or opportunities are issues that have arisen. Territories become a notion brought on by an “us” and “them” mentality.

The challenges faced by tribal members who leave the community to pursue higher education outside of the tribal community and return to the tribal community, as well as their plight of being accepted by the community upon their return, have surfaced as another factor that has driven a divide in many villages and families. This creates another mental and social platform to use the terms of “us” and “them” when identifying if a person can be accepted and in formulating territorial boundaries. Identifying those who belong is important in this realm as many tribal members feel that only “us” should be welcomed and accepted. That is, those who meet the criteria for belonging. For example, those who

reside in the community or who speak – not in the language of postsecondary jargon – but reflective of the linguistic practices of the tribal community. To be qualified as “us”, therefore, communities need to consider several factors when making such a determination. But the question remains, “who decides who us is and who is them?” This is a difficult question to answer, and in fact, there has been much discussion at different levels within tribal communities in reference to this topic. It is apparent this thinking has caused great divides and will continue to drive a wedge between tribal members in their effort to prove their worth or their Indianness, specifically for those that seek a higher education.

The ideas of belonging and what is considered unacceptable or not Indian enough are passed on from generation to generation and the content may vary amongst families. What is noticeable is the increase of “us” and “them” becoming more prevalent in deciding. Understanding this, if a person was to remove himself from the algorithm of generation-to-generation knowledge and supplant the following algorithm of generation to college to generation, what will happen to that previous construct systems of determining the acceptance matrix for those who belong and do not belong? More importantly is the increase of tribal members pursuing a higher education and leaving the community to do so, thus, engaging in other social interactions that change their own construct systems of human development and act as the variable in the second algorithm illustrated previously.

As a result, many Natives question themselves, “if an Indigenous Person wanted to move away, to a city, would his or her candle be extinguished?” (Malkki, 1992, p. 59) and to what extent might formal schooling further complicate this? For those considered to be “Urban Indians,” their test of Indianness is challenged by the reality they may have moved

away, therefore the assumption is they no longer belong or that their “Candle of Indianness” has been blown out.

The definition of Urban Indian has been framed as (1) a person who previously resided on the rez, then left to a metropolitan area, regardless of the size, or (2) a person who has always lived off the rez since their birth. As we look at those who leave the reservation to attend school, they can be considered as something different, someone who has further been infected by western theories, beyond what occurs at the K-12 level. Unfortunately leaving – regardless of the reasons – is framed in unfavorable light.

Indians who pursue a different life outside of the reservation thus may suffer for their decision to do so and may be described in deprecating terms by being coined as an outsider or someone that no longer fits within the ranks of the family and tribe itself. As mentioned in a previous section, pejoratives such as sell-out, Cracker, and Apple are common terms associated with those who leave and/or that dare to be different than the stereotypical Indian. While the person wants to be Indian, they also search to be a sub sect of Indian that may be influenced by other worldly thoughts and belief systems in order to be happy or to survive the outside world. Tribal members want to belong across several spectrums of social groups. Phinney and Alipuria (1990) note, “there is a wide range and variation in the importance attributed to one’s ethnic identity across individuals and groups” (p. 499). For Phinney and Alipuria the tribal member understands that there are several barriers and hurdles to belonging in different groups. On the one hand, they want to be Indian, on the other hand, they want to be perceived (from the outside world) that they are an Indian that can cross different spectrums of thoughts and ideas, not just encapsulate themselves within Indian thoughts and ideas. More importantly, the tribal

member wants to belong to other groups outside the tribal community that may or may not be inclusive of solely tribal members.

One alternative explanation put forward is the claim to walk in two worlds, but is this metaphor true and does it exist? “Walking in two worlds” develops as a person strives to stay Indian while assuming the outside world’s expectations of who they should and could be as American citizens. But is this possible? Henze & Vanett (1993) provided that, “Walking in two worlds assumes that two distinct, readily identifiable worlds exist, and that the worlds are internally uniform” (p.119). They further add that to think a person can learn to walk or walk in two worlds may add more confusion to the topic in that, “If these two worlds are taken to represent two cultures (Yup’ik and Western), then we have to ask ourselves, which Yup’ik culture? Which Western culture? And how do students who are learning to walk in two worlds know when they have accomplished their task?” (p.123). To review what Henze and Vanett provided, they pointed out that even if a Native American person was to strive to learn to walk in two worlds, how would that be measured and what exactly would be measured in attempt to prove that person is doing so correctly. They continued to note that in their study, they found that those Alaskan Natives had come from a variety of different ideas of their tribe’s culture, including the indigenous language of the village and the usage of English. Hence, the authors questioned what two worlds would a person be seeking to walk in.

Invisible forces pull at a person who has elected to try and satisfy both worlds of attainment for success of Indianness. That person is then challenged to decide what they truly are, “us” or “them” instead of just saying I am “me” and all that that entails. The

difficulty lies within the facts that both worlds are demanding and both require you meet certain standards of acceptance.

In American mainstream ideology, the purpose of life consists of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” From a traditional Native perspective, a corollary would be “life, love, and learning” (Garrett & Wilbur, 1999). In outside understanding, these two thoughts could be relational to define profession and home life expectations as methods to be successful in their own right. If Garrett and Wilbur’s comments hold true, their definitions provide much more insight to understanding how Indians are at war with themselves to understand what knowledge systems are more relevant and/or important. Their definitions provide an insight to understanding why those from the reservation see those from outside the reservation much more differently and their need to not let them belong.

Conclusion

If tribal communities want to truly invest in sending their members away to become educated with the hopes that they return to help their people, they must be ready to change their ways of thinking and believing of who truly belongs or is accepted and the words of Deleuze & Guattari (1987), and Hebdige (1987), should be reflected upon when they spoke of recognizing that the person (roots) are in constant flux and is subjected to change (person’s life), but this change does not mean it changes its history (where the person comes from in terms of family, culture and community).

The research examined in this chapter suggests geography, biology, and social and linguistic practices serve to influence and define the boundaries of belonging.

Under this framework of Deleuze & Guattari (1987) and Hedbidge (1987)the following could be considerations for determining one’s acceptance and belonging:

1. Living on the reservation versus living off the reservation;
2. Living in a traditional dwelling (mud house) versus living in a modern structured home (this is specific to tribes of the Southwest);
3. Full blood quantum versus less than full blood (mixed blood);
4. Using Rezbonics (much like Ebonics, but for Indians);
5. Ability for a person to identify their family, and;
6. Knowing the social traditions and customs of the tribal community in interaction, greeting, and introduction.

For those who don't fit the qualities of belonging, their fight continues against what seems like generation upon generation of self-discrimination caused by colonial and assimilative practices. To understand one avenue of how this assimilative and colonial practices began, Deyhle and Swisher (1997) provided that, "Boarding schools established by missionaries in the 1600s represented the first assimilate attempts to remove Indians from their tribal and family members, religion, language, and homeland by placing them in distant schools to learn non-Indian ways. This approach gained wide support during the 1700s and flourished in the 1800s when the federal government increased its involvement and responsibility by developing an educational system for American Indians. Viewed as a solution to the "Indian Problem," the boarding school system, in essence, became the problem" (p.114).

These thoughts of segregation will continue to grow larger and be passed from generation to generation until someone answers or provides remedy on how to tear down prior formed construct belief systems in reference to accepting others. In fact, children learn from those who are their models whether that person is a family member or another

member of a child's life. If we are to introduce a variable of difference in the current system of learning and belonging, it is during the stages of childhood and adolescent that should be the focus.

One idea that is present in today's tribal communities is the thirst for knowledge and understanding of what has made them what they are today. Recognizing that those who are not from the reservation, who have mixed blood, and that do not practice cultural practices and traditions are not always at fault for the choices of those who came before them is important. Deloria and others have described in detail the deliberate attempts throughout United States history by mainstream American institutions such as government agencies, schools, and churches to destroy the Native American institutions of family, clan, and tribal structure, religious belief systems and practices, customs and traditional way of life (Deloria, 1988; Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990; Locust, 1988; Reyhner & Eder, 1992). This first step towards understanding could lead to much advancement of Indians and their efforts to rebuild unified tribal nations.

In the near future, this topic will garner greater attention as Native Americans have children with others outside of the tribal membership and continue to dilute full blood quantum Indians, reducing them through fractionation. In comparison, one can compare this loss of Indian worth to the 3/5 compromise of 1787 when blacks were only counted as 3/5 of a vote (a person). True Indians appear to be on a course to absorb into the larger U.S. society, all of which is irreversible and thereby reducing the number of enrolled tribal members within the tribe.

The need to reconstruct those systems that have been established over the years that allow for such spatial segmentation is important to bring down the walls of "us" and

“them”. This should be done in an effort to foster nation building versus applying regurgitated ignorant theories of acceptance and non-acceptance. To put it more aptly, Battiste (2002) states, “within any Indigenous nation or community, people vary greatly in what they know. There are not only differences between ordinary folks and experts, such as experienced knowledge keepers, healers, hunters, or ceremonialists, there are also major differences of experiences and professional opinion among knowledge holders and workers, as we should expect of any living, dynamic knowledge system that is continually responding to new phenomena and fresh insights” (p.12).

In the next chapter, I examine traditional forms of belonging as they have been impacted by the role of colonization and introduce the theoretical framework that guided this study. The work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, Jean Piaget and other human development theorists is presented to consider how identity and belonging is shaped over the life course. Discussions of human development theories are then applied to the study topic and consider strategies employed by those who have had to leave the community (by choice or necessity) but who return (either to visit or live) and seek to be considered as “belonging.” This includes a discussion of the role of communication accommodation, including concerns with accommodation, which emphasizes differences between those who belong and those who don’t.

3. Theoretical Frameworks

The conclusion that is drawn by most social scientists from the data on Indian cultures and Indian intelligence is that the American Indians of today have about the same innate equipment for learning as have the white children of America (B. Berry, 1968, p. 34).

Belonging to a community v. belonging to a nation

For members of the Gila River Indian Community, the path to deciphering tribal acceptance may have been laid when the tribe labeled themselves a “Community,” and not a “Nation,” as other federal tribes have done. The reasoning for labeling themselves as a “Community” is to ensure the inclusion of the two tribes that make up the Gila River Indian Community: the Akimel O’odham (Pima) and the Pee Posh (Maricopa, a tribe deriving from the Yuman tribes in South Western Arizona).¹

The initial word identification sets a path to identifying who those particular people are and what they represent. Within that “nation” concept each tribe then has pockets of individual villages that provide even more definition to their indigenous lineage. With each layer provided there will be a series of layers that help to further describe and define the people and ultimately the person of which the person wants to belong.

For instance, within Gila River there are seven districts, six are comprised of mostly Akimel O’odham and the other comprised mostly of the Pee Posh (Maricopa). For

¹ The use of Nation here refers to the legal definition. I am making the point that although the GRIC is federally recognized, its decision to define itself as a community and not as a tribe or nation emphasizes its traditional cultural, epistemological, and political pathways of belonging that predate colonial political constructs for belonging. For more information on cultural sovereignty and cultural ways of defining belonging see the work of Wallace Coffey and Rebecca Tsosie (2001) *Rethinking tribal sovereignty doctrine: Cultural sovereignty and the collective future of Indian nations*.

purposes of this dissertation, the community of Blackwater (U'us Kus) will be highlighted to draw out the details of how a person can be associated (belonging) to this particular district. Blackwater is the English translation of U'us Kus, which in O'odham means dark water. The people of Blackwater are located in a geographic area that the Gila River once flowed through. In the river bottom there is a particular color of clay that can only be found in that particular part of the Gila River Indian Community. When mixed with water, the water turns a dark color, hence dark (black) water.

The Akimel O'odham practice various forms of religious beliefs and that is a mixture of both Christian and Indigenous beliefs. To this, when a child is born they are encouraged to drink the "mud" in a ceremony called the Bi'ith. Essentially, this ceremony includes that the parents or godparents take the child to a member of the medicine people (Mugwai). During that visit, the medicine person will recite prayers and help the child to drink a mixture of river dirt and water (a slurry). The other adults present will also partake in this mixture and all will know that this child now has a connection to the Earth and to the Akimel O'odham. This tie cannot be broken and will stay with the child for their entire life. It is known that if a person becomes ill they can go and eat dirt or mud from the river or the tribal community for medicinal purposes.

These actions and cultural practices help lay the foundation of how the Akimel O'odham of Gila River learn to become members of the community. Or, it should be stated that the person learns to be O'odham (a citizen) and not necessarily a member of the community.

Culturally speaking, there is no destination outlined by a line in the sand or a marker on paper that annotates that a person now belongs; instead, it is the practice and the

knowledge that one possesses and shares that helps a person to learn to be O'odham and to be accepted as an O'odham. Within Gila River there is a fear or a threat that the Akimel O'odham face the threat of extinction as a people in two forms; lack of blood quantum and through the appropriation of their identity as O'odham by those who do not have historic background or knowledge to sustain the culture of the Akimel O'odham. Building a nation, or rather, re-building a tribal nation comes with the fear that those who leave for college return without ancestral ties to the Akimel O'odham, or more specifically, those who leave for college return with having lost the essence of what makes them an O'odham.

While the aforementioned example explained early indoctrination processes for young members (and takes place shortly after birth), other forms of belonging take place during later life stages. In general, there are two methods of learning to become a tribal member of the Gila River Indian Community: growing up within the tribal community (traditional) and learning from other tribal members outside the tribal community (non-traditional). First, the traditional method includes having access to a construct system that is laced with individuals that possess the indigenous knowledge of the Akimel O'odham that have learned firsthand by residing within the tribal community and participating in the heritage and culture of the Akimel O'odham. This method usually involves immediate family members, village inhabitants and other close group relations. The second, non-traditional method, requires a person learn from others outside of his/her home and traditional village. Tribal members seek indigenous knowledge via formal education methodologies and practices or other non-traditional methods. The classroom has become the newest format in which to learn about Indianness for some tribal members and K-12 schools have begun to offer such experiences and education. This endeavor has gathered

momentum as traditional indigenous education opportunities are becoming a rare commodity within Gila River.

Both methods are dependent upon on the tribal member's environment for influence and validity. While the tribal member may gain indigenous knowledge, this in itself is often not enough to validate the indigenous knowledge attained. The validity of the knowledge is often reliant on the method in which the tribal member learned, how the words or cultural practices were utilized, and what examples were provided during the teaching. When this occurs, the belonging a person seeks is challenged by other tribal members. As mentioned previously, there is a traditional and non-traditional method of learning within GRIC.

For example, when a male tribal member is learning to chop mesquite wood within the tribal community (reservation), that person is privy to not only learning about the action of cutting wood, but can find themselves correlating other areas of indigenous knowledge learning as they are exposed to other subjects, thoughts and ideas that present themselves during a trip to the desert to cut wood. The tribal member may experience the taste and smell of the air while cutting wood, thereby allowing the teacher (family member) to expand the lesson at hand by including other elements of the indigenous knowledge of the Akimel O'odham. Without this direct exposure and experience to that particular element, wood cutting, the learner may not be able to expand their own learning as they cannot anticipate what type of animal may expose themselves, what type of weather they might endure, and what type of participants (family/community) may join the effort. The learner is exposed to the root idea of why the need for cutting wood, which within the Akimel O'odham can develop multiple purposes and definitions. A series of levels expose

themselves as the learner will more aptly not be exposed to all elements of age appropriate or title appropriate actions that accompany wood cutting; this action of wood cutting includes that the learner learn in stages, later promoted to higher stages as they grow older, and can annotate that they have mastered particular actions and language that accompany the action of cutting wood.

On the other hand, the male tribal member that is learning to chop mesquite wood outside the tribal community (non-traditional) may not find the same content or dialogue that is associated with cutting wood in the tribal community. While the action is the same, the content may differ as the learner will not have the exposure to their family's methods of cutting wood. These methods differ from village to village within the GRIC, each with their own special dialect of the O'odham Neok, and each with unique environmental exposure based on the area within the tribal community that the action is taking place. Non-Traditional methods of learning are often cut off and done without a particular purpose to learn the indigenous knowledge.

For instance, the act of cutting wood in the traditional sense includes that the wood will serve a purpose; whether for cooking food, keeping warm and other cultural activities. Whereas the non-traditional method will ask the learner to cut wood to simply learn to cut wood; this is done without a specific purpose and the wood may sit without usage. While the task has been completed, it was completed without a specific cultural intent.

Those actions of cutting wood form two different beliefs and ideas on how to complete and or respond to tasks (schemas) that share a basic tenant of social development. As mentioned, the wood cutting is the same but the exposure to traditional methods and ideology differs. When this occurs, the knowledge learned will be translated and

challenged differently when each individual faces a system of social influence such as dialoging with other tribal members or teaching the same knowledge to other tribal members.

The individual tribal member's attainment of indigenous knowledge or lack thereof appears to follow the systems of ecological development that was illustrated by Urie Bronfenbrenner when he discussed his *Ecological Models of Human Development* in the reprinted *International Encyclopedia of Education* (1994). In this publication, Bronfenbrenner provided definition to his theory of human development, what impacts the development of a person and also provided a graph to help the reader picture his/her systems of human development and how those systems were applied to the individual person. The model presented includes a small circle that is circled by larger circles, totaling five circles. Each circle is connected with each other circle and feeds off one another. The circles represent the different social levels or groups that influence a person during their own development.

Further, Bronfenbrenner's (1986) definition of the theory is as follows: The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation throughout the life course between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives. [This] process is affected by the relations between these settings and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (p. 188).

According to Bronfenbrenner's initial theory (1989), the environment, is comprised of four layers of systems which interact in complex ways and can both affect and be

affected by the person's development. He later added a fifth dimension that comprises an element of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

To provide a visual representation of the, Bronfenbrenner (1994) uses the metaphor of Russian dolls to describe the nested systems within the ecological environment. The innermost system is the microsystem (represented by a small doll), moving to the outermost system, the macrosystem (represented by a slightly larger doll, allowing the smaller doll to fit within), all encompassed within the dimension of time, the chronosystem (represented by a larger doll that fits all other dolls within).

Langer & Lietz (2014) provide more definition and explanation of Bronfenbrenner's theory by providing that microsystems are within the closest proximity to the individual and describe the immediate interpersonal relations, as well as the interactions and activities of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 & 1994). The theory postulates that the individual both influences and is influenced by the microsystem (Johnson, 2008). However, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that too much emphasis is placed on the microsystem with limited recognition of the systemic factors that profoundly influence the behavior of the microsystem.

Next, the mesosystems represent the linkages and direct interactions that occur within the microsystems, where the microsystem is actively involved in the interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 & 1994; Langer & Lietz, 2014). These relationships can be healthy or unhealthy, and either encourage change and growth, or inhibit it (Langer & Lietz, 2014). Bronfenbrenner (1979) also noted that behavior is caused by the interaction between the individual and the environment.

The next system, exosystems, describe the interactions, linkages and processes that occur between two or more systems, at least one of the settings not including the direct individual involved, but causing an indirect influence on the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 & 1994).

Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1994) defines macrosystems as the blueprint that illustrates a culture or subculture, defining the overarching beliefs, norms, values and customs of the system (Johnson, 2008). The happenings in the macrosystem affect the processes that occur within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Chronosystems, later added to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, represents time of a person's development and exists outside of the ecological theory systems. The chronosystem evaluates change, and/or consistency, in the characteristics of both the individual and the environment over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

For tribal members of Gila River, their developmental progresses (their own development), and their knowledge of which they compare their own knowledge to new knowledge is represented in the circles (labeled as systems). These pockets of knowledge are learned by the tribal member's influences during their lifetime as they listen to new information, then compare that information to other's ideas and information at different social levels (see figure 3.1).

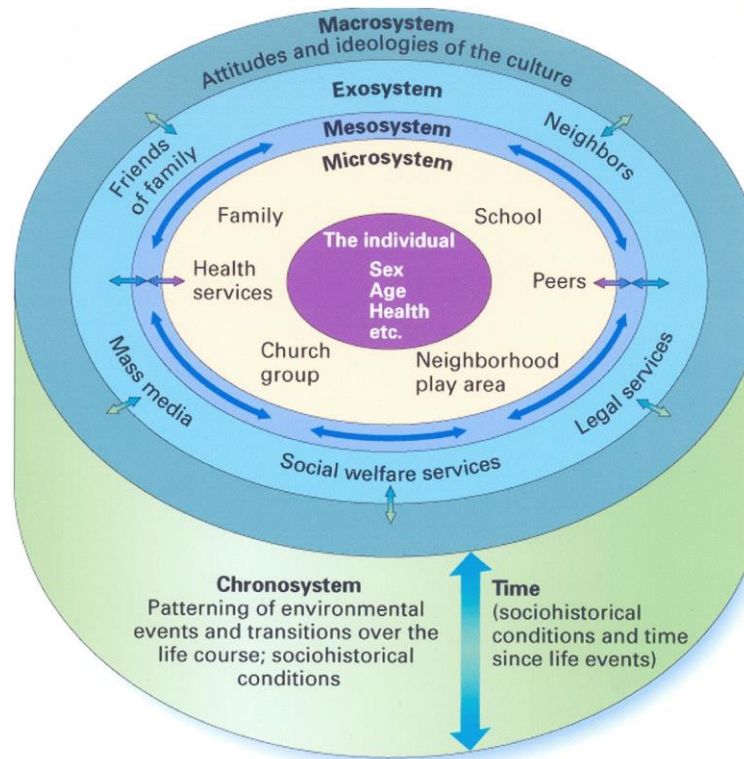


Figure 3.1. Ecological systems theory (Hansen, 2014).

More experienced cultural members rely on many learning processes that help children become increasingly able to participate in culture, including observation, imitation, attention regulation, demonstration, instruction, rehearsal, shaping, scaffolding, guided participation, and trial and error (Berry et al., 2006). Berry et al provided an understanding of the learning process for tribal members and also provides the idea that a person develops schemas to handle particular cultural and life experiences. In all places, there needs to be all levels of learners that include the low, medium and expert but each is influenced by the environment of which they reside or have grown within. Each person learns differently and at a different pace, as Gauvain (2006) noted that when she discussed scaffolding. This is the same terminology used within educational systems by teachers when developing lessons for their students and related to academic studies.

Scaffolding can occur both verbally and through action and involves a variety of instructional behaviors, including modeling more sophisticated approaches to the problem than the child currently uses, encouraging the child to work on the problem and try out new strategies, and segmenting a problem into steps that are more easily understood and managed by the child. Further, Wood (1976) et al. also noted, during scaffolding, a less experienced partner works with a more experienced partner who structures the interaction to support and promote learning. The development of former thinking and behaviors, found within scaffolding, are an important component to tribal belonging and acceptance. This former thinking and behaviors can be referred to as schemas; a view of the world.

Jean Piaget (1952) labeled schemas as “a cohesive, repeatable action sequence possessing component actions that are tightly interconnected and governed by a core meaning” (p. 7).

Piaget’s schemas can also be defined as the thoughts and ideas utilized by the individual to react to incoming information or knowledge presented at different life stages. Wadsworth (2004) added that the schemata (the plural of schema) can be thought of as “index cards filed in the brain, each one telling an individual how to react to incoming stimuli or information.” This working index of cards is utilized by the tribal member in each form of system of development whether accessing the Indian or Non-Indian construct systems.

However, schemas do not follow the same path and cannot be used within social circles if they are not derived from the same base source of knowledge. Indigenous knowledge at this point serves as a divider between tribal members, thereby developing the lack of belonging and acceptance.

Two models of development

Tribal members are expected to gain perspectives in two categories: Indigenous Knowledge (based on Indian epistemologies and ontologies) and Western Knowledge (based on non-Indian epistemologies and ontologies). These two systems of knowledge development are expected to advance at the same pace but are expected to not cross paths and should be used independently when facing hurdles in life, academic, or social settings. Dependent on the situation, the tribal member must switch back and forth between systems, switching codes from Indian thinking and beliefs to Non-Indian thinking and beliefs. This pattern can continue throughout the day and is not only experienced in the school setting but in the home setting.

Some who read this study will argue that the white man's knowledge should not be used to describe the development of Native people. However, the usage of developmental theorists, such as Bronfenbrenner and Piaget, allow us to learn about how all humans could potentially develop, not just Euro-Americans. Yet the concern of Native peoples is also important. For this reason, it is important to note key differences between non-Indian theories of development and Indigenous beliefs related to development. In other words, although Bronfenbrenner provided a model to understand systems of human development; I suggest that for tribal members of GRIC, there can be two different models of tribal development that challenge each other for importance and relevance while striving to achieve the same result of tribal member belonging and acceptance. This can be represented by the two models associated with figure 3.3.

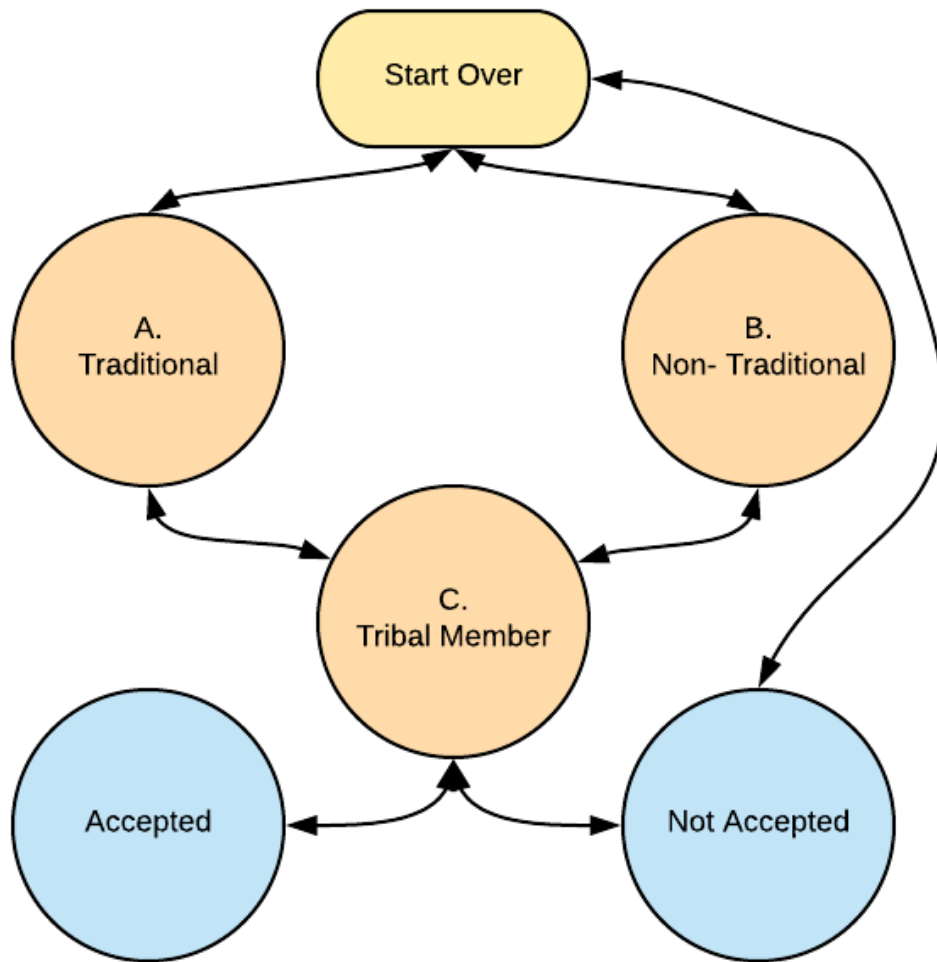


Figure 3.2. Model 1 - Determining how to feel belonging and acceptance.

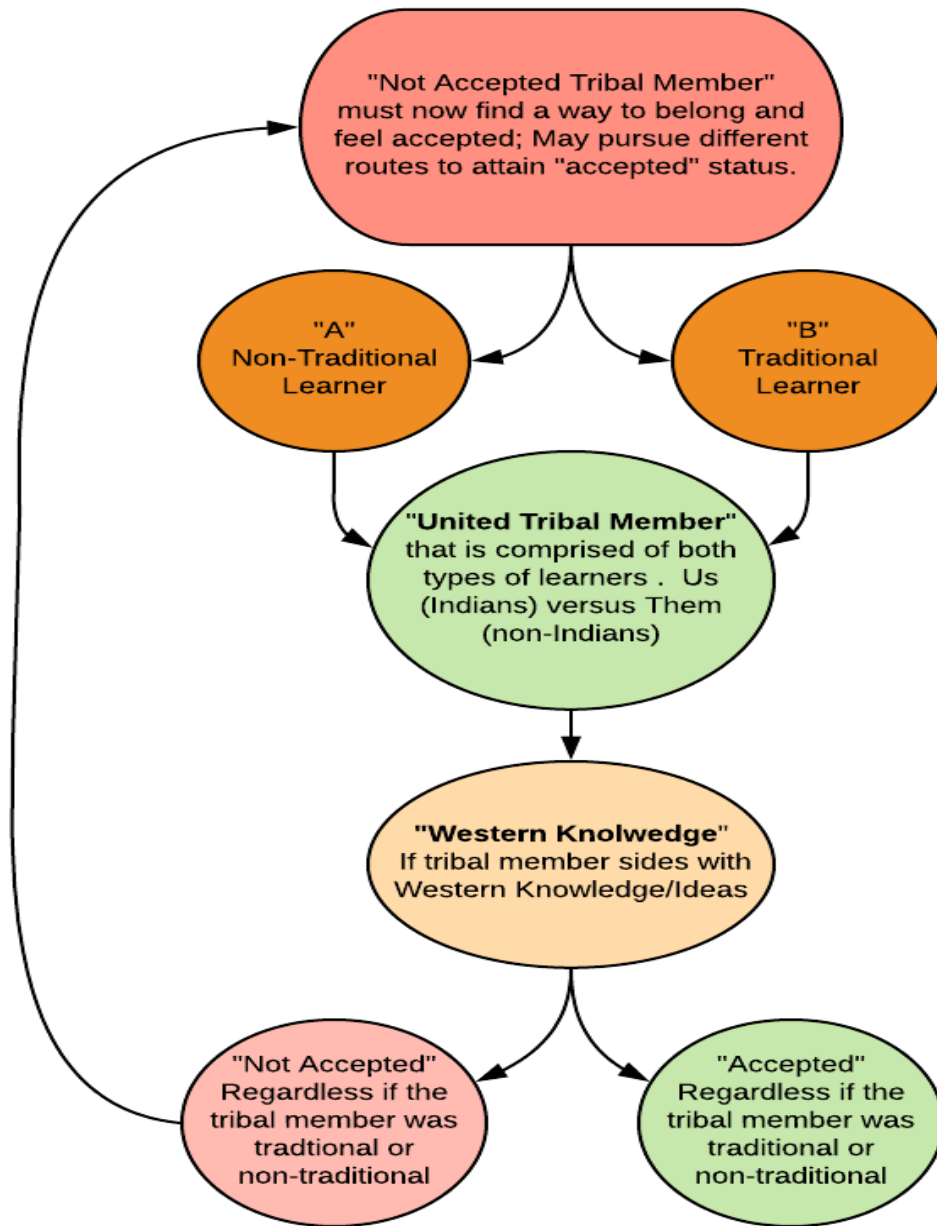


Figure 3.3. Model 2: Feelings of acceptance or not belonging

In an effort to belong within the tribal community, the path to attaining indigenous knowledge may follow two methods of development: the *traditional* method of learning and the *non-traditional* method of learning. These two distinct models have difficulty in providing correlation to one another and stand apart from the other in terms of how each person sees the other and how a tribal member is accepted by the tribal community. Each method develops different schemata towards the same goal, differ, and cannot be interchanged and utilized within certain social settings. That is to say that each tribal member for each tract of learning can develop various and multiple microsystems that will react differently to each situation presented to the tribal member during the person's development.

In addition to defining the ecological systems in which development takes place, (Johnson, 2008) noted that Bronfenbrenner also emphasized the importance of context in human development. In order to model development or change within an individual, Bronfenbrenner built upon the work of Kurt Lewin (1935), who is credited as one of the first theorists to recognize the importance of interaction between the person and environment in describing human behavior. Development can be formulated as follows:

$$Dt = f(t-p) (PE) (t-p)$$

Whereas the initial reformulation of Lewin's work resulted in the relatively simple equation, $D = f(PE)$ in which development (D) was considered to be a joint function (f) of the interaction between the person and the environment (PE), this later revision introduces the element of time at which developmental outcomes are observed (t) and the period(s) during which joint forces, emanating from the person and environment, operate to produce

the outcome existing at the time of observation (t-p). Thus, the characteristics of a person at a given time in his or her life are a joint function of the characteristics of the person and of the environment over the course of the person's life up to the time of observation (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 191).

Model 1 illustrates there can be two forms of developing and attaining indigenous knowledge, which are identified as "A" and "B." These two models are designed to identify two thinkers, two tribal members as they enter life and how they verify or develop their own schemas in relation to the indigenous knowledge of the Akimel O'odham. Following A and B, "C" represents the filtering process to validate the indigenous knowledge one has learned in their lifetime and how it will be challenged or accepted by the person that is identified as mechanism to test the knowledge with an invisible gauge that is developed to measure a person's Indianness (invisibly). From this model, what becomes evident is that traditional learning tribal members may use difference in cultural learning to exclude those tribal members that seem too non-Indian. Non-traditional methods may then be challenged for validity and the indigenous knowledge is challenged for authenticity. If the person (A or B) is successful in meeting the invisible qualities of an Akimel O'odham, then they are accepted; if the person is unsuccessful in meeting the invisible qualities of an Akimel O'odham, then they are not accepted and will have to find a different approach to being accepted.

Figure 3.3 further demonstrates that as tribal members pursue the attainment of indigenous knowledge, systems of development not only break into two separate models of tribal member development but the attainment of indigenous knowledge creates a battle to show which is more valid than the other. More importantly, this challenge to validity of

indigenous knowledge contributes to developing belonging and feeling connected to the Gila River Indian Community. The tribal member may be challenged with racial segregation when they are either too Indian or too Non-Indian in their thinking and methods to maneuvering through life lessons and academic achievement and may question which to use and which is appropriate, thus feeling forced to have Indian and Non-Indian thinking compete with the other.

Model 2 identifies two types of learners (traditional and non-traditional) and their connection to western knowledge. Each tribal member, regardless of their path to indigenous knowledge is expected to partake and strive towards academic achievement. Of note is that the two models of learners do not connect, this represents the types of tribal members that are found within Gila River and the belonging and acceptance a person may or may not achieve during their lifetime. The same two individuals, however, will be expected to work side by side to strive towards tribal nation re-building, but may not share the same ideologies towards belonging and acceptance. Their ideas on cultural values may vary, hence the lack of belonging for one or the other, dependent upon the social group that is active at the moment. While the battle between belonging and acceptance (culturally) may manifest outside the classroom; it is common to think that because both are tribal members, both should unite and be against the school setting, the classroom, and western knowledge. If either tribal member opts to assimilate and accommodate to the school setting, becoming academically successful or striving toward academic achievement, then the person is considered an outsider and will not be accepted by the tribal members that have joined together which may be comprised of both non-traditional and traditional tribal members.

The classroom has a large influence at this point and will lend to determining the belonging and acceptance of a tribal member. A tribal member does not want to be labeled as an outsider or a sell-out by their fellow community members. Each of these actions host the ability to develop new schemata, assimilating, and accommodating to the newfound areas of belonging and acceptance.

The difference between systems and levels

Bronfrenbrenner’s systems of human development theorized that the person (tribal member) develops with the influence of his/her environment. Bronfrenbrenner’s theory identified five different systems within each individual with the following understanding of definition, those definitions are provided in the following tables with the addition of how these systems are identified within tribal communities.

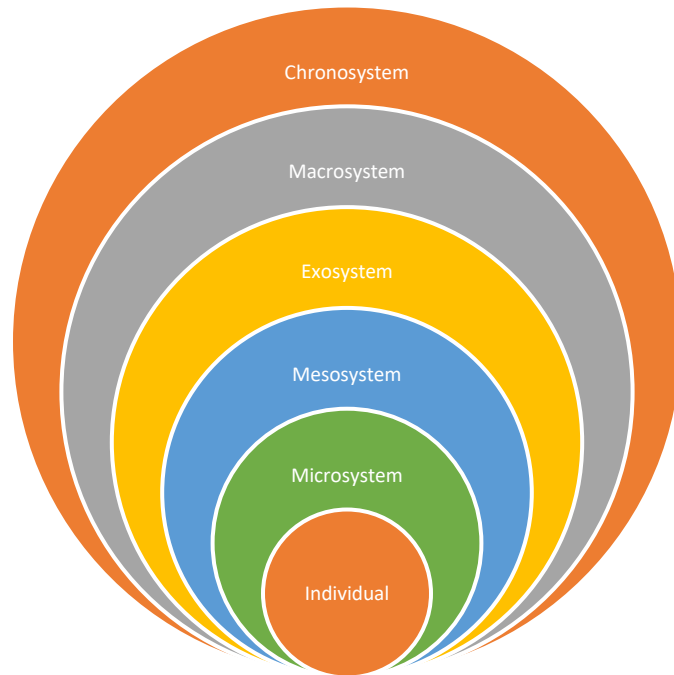


Figure 3.4. Indigenous systems of identity development

- **Microsystem:** The microsystem includes the immediate influences that a person may have within their lives and is considered the system in which the individual most directly participates. How the tribal member reacts to his/her microsystems will influence how the tribal member will develop and influence how the tribal member will be treated in return. Those interactions include personal relationships, tribal cultural participation/exposure, the geographic location, the usage of English or O’odham Neok and the immediate family.
 - **How it appears:** Within Bronfrenbrenner’s model, these microsystems are represented by small circles within the middle of the model. Each circles represents different individuals/microsystems.
 - **Traditional Learning:** This initial influence on a person’s tribal development helps to form initial schemas; the methods in which the tribal member can face the tribal environment. Those schemas developed within the traditional learning method have a greater chance of fitting within the norm of the tribal community social circles as the influences stem from individual tribal members who have learned within traditional models of learning. This provides an Indian experience or an Indian insight to the environment.
 - **Non-Traditional Learning:** Learning as a non-traditional learner, the tribal member faces a disadvantage to receiving “true” Indian knowledge. Schemas developed for non-traditional learners may not carry the same weight as a traditional learner, these same schemas face a challenge in the

latter stages of Bronfenbrenner's systems of development when the tribal member seeks to interact outside the his/her immediate environment. What was thought of as Indian knowledge faces dismissal from traditional learners who challenge the validity of the knowledge from non-traditional people/family.

- **Mesosystem:** The mesosystem identified the ability or paths for microsystem to work together to either support or not support the thinking or influence of the individual people/communities that could be identified as a microsystem.
 - **How it appears:** The mesosystem is represented by the interactions between the microsystems. Within tribal communities, to garner more experience, there should be several microsystems that are working in unison to help develop an individual tribal member. The more microsystems you have, the greater the chance for a more widened base of knowledge and experience is available for the tribal member.
 - **Traditional Learning:** Traditional learners have a common theme amongst their microsystems, allowing for common Indian thinking. This Indian thinking includes ideas, thoughts, social interactions that are developed within the tribal community and offer a unique glimpse into "Rez" life, reservation life. The tribal member can relate to other tribal members within the tribal community and with other tribal members outside of the GRIC; this includes commonalities amongst individuals who grew up with the traditional model.
 - **Non-Traditional Learning:** The non-traditional learner's microsystems

may work together, forming a strong foundation of development for the tribal member, but may differ in the validity of the indigenous schemas that are accepted as common amongst the tribal community, specifically those of the traditional learner method. Therefore, while the tribal member is experiencing common acceptance and cooperation within the microsystems, the development and knowledge may be found lacking as it does not include Rez life attributes, thereby discounting the indigenous knowledge. The tribal member is considered an outsider, an urban indian, a cracker or an apple in the eyes of traditional learners.

- **Exosystem:** The exosystem references the environment that the tribal member may not be a part of, but can have an influence on the tribal member's development. For tribal members, this may include decisions made or directed by family elders. Tribal members within GRIC historically follow the lead or direction given to them by the head of the family, not necessarily the household, that include the oldest member of the family. This system is important in the development of indigenous knowledge attainment as it teaches patience, understanding, respect and works within a scaffolding model of learning. The tribal member cannot advance past a learning point unless given the authority to do or is recognized as a person that can be shown or included in the next level of learning or decision making.
 - **How it appears:** The exosystem acknowledges that the tribal member is not viewed as someone that must be given complete freedom to learn primarily through personal experience and exposure to tasks. Rather, with the assistance of the tribal community/village/family, the tribal member

learns to become a tribal member according to how the group(s) defines a tribal member of the Gila River Indian Community.

- **Traditional Learning:** Traditional learners have the advantage of building a foundation of knowledge that is influenced by others within his/her family, particular elders of the family and/or tribal community. While direct knowledge may not be present or distributed, learning from the environment around the tribal member is a positive trait. Indians have a great opportunity to learn from when they see others “do” versus the tribal member “doing” an activity. This trait is a common characteristic of Himdag, a way of life, for the Akimel O’odham and provides a platform to develop personal traits that are expected of each tribal member which may depend on the status of the tribal member within a family.
- **Non-Traditional Learning:** Non-Traditional learners differ within this system as their teachers may not follow this path of learning and may exclude common practices of environmental influence that come with traditional learning methodologies. This may occur as a result of lacking the knowledge of how learning is formed and why learning is needed for that particular task or project. This system may lack the structure of a family that includes elders that lead and teach and afford their young learners with an opportunity to watch and learn and accept the decisions that are made as a result of an elder’s direction or vision for the family/tribal community.
- **Macrosystem:** The macrosystem can be identified as the tribal community and its influences on the indigenous knowledge of a tribal member and how it can help

shape the indigenous knowledge or dismiss the indigenous knowledge. The tribal member can use the macrosystem of the tribe as a method to validate their knowledge. If the tribal community can accept the tribal member's knowledge, then the belonging and acceptance follow a positive path. Defraying from the support of the tribal community can result in the tribal member not feeling a sense of belonging and acceptance as a tribal member.

- **How it appears:** The macrosystem is represented from the vantage that the child must be socialized or shown how to act within a particular pattern of behavior that is understood to be specific to the Akimel O'odham, of which he/she wants to belong to and be accepted. The ideas one develops in reference to tribal culture and language are measured during this stage of development.
- **Traditional Learning:** The indigenous knowledge learned as a traditional learner has the advantage of being accepted by the tribal community as the base of knowledge may have stemmed from a family member, a family elder or a village. As a result of this path, the tribal member's knowledge has a greater chance of being accepted as tribal members acknowledge the learner's path of indigenous knowledge attainment as similar to their own systems of development.
- **Non-Traditional Learning:** The indigenous knowledge learned has a disadvantage as the base of knowledge did not originate from a family member, a family or a village or with an intent for attainment. Rather, the knowledge may have been pursued to feel connected or a belongingness to the

tribal community. Thus the process of development may not have followed the indigenous scaffolding model of learning and therefore may not be recognizable as an acceptable form of learning. Further, this learning may be deemed as lacking in the eyes of the tribal community

- **Chronosystem:** The chronosystem refers to the dimension of time in relation to a person's development. Within the tribal community, the timing of an event or the timing of when indigenous knowledge is shared influences the development of the tribal member's indigenous knowledge. Within tribal communities, traditional learning normally follows an unpublished timeline that can be viewed as a scaffolding model of learning, each level relying on the previous level of learning and mastery. The tribal member is introduced to a topic/subject, then slowly integrated until they master one level, moving to the next. The tribal member cannot start at the beginning of a lesson, then jump forward to the final lesson. In the non-traditional setting, because the elder is lacking, the process asks the student to mimic what would have been done without the actual practice of the topic/subject.

- **How it appears:** The chronosystem recognizes two different perspectives. In general, the euro-american conducts his attempts to understand his world on the assumption that there are definitive explanations to be discovered. He searches for what I call the "universal-absolute:" there will be one universal-all encompassing- and absolute-beyond question- Truth. The Native American on the other hand, understands the world as a more complex place. There can be no universals in the face of an infinity of

complexity. There are no absolutes. The complexity is infinite because part of that complexity is change, motion. Whatever is, is in motion, and change is inevitable in the world. Motion, change, and complexity are absolutes. But they are absolutes that differ from the notion that there is one TRUTH that can be discovered.

- **Traditional Learning:** The traditional learner often follows what is termed as a scaffolding approach, but without time limits or time expectations. The amount of time in learning is not as important as the content that is mastered. The traditional learner has this advantage as the knowledge may be deemed a part of everyday life and not influenced by outside knowledge or construct systems. The knowledge provided serves is purposeful and has meaning, the skills learned serve to passing on indigenous methodologies and systems of thinking of the Akimel O’odham.
- **Non-Traditional Learning:** The non-traditional method is often hurried or pushed to complete a task or accomplishment, a destination if you will. This differs from the traditional learning as that method follows the path of a journey versus the destination. Learners may feel that they want to learn so they can be a part of something, be a part of the tribal community that is accepted versus learning as a part of everyday life as a tribal member. Tribal members may not be exposed to the idea that the Akimel O’odham learn within a process of development that is dictated by the person’s age and status within the tribal family and tribal community. More importantly, this lack of knowing places the non-traditional learner in a position to not be

accepted by the tribal community and its tribal members.

For purposes of this dissertation, Bronfenbrenner’s systems of human development is further applied to the context of identity development for a tribal member. In this context, microsystems are essential for those wanting to learn to be a member of Gila River as the attainment of tribal identity, tribal belonging and tribal acceptance is much easier when the person has those influences early on in life to learn from that allow a level of trial and error (gaining feedback) for the development of the individual tribal member. However, when we consider the non-traditional path to learning how to be Akimel O’odham (from the viewpoint of the participants), that center position may not have the same influences or relationships as another person who was born within the tribal community or is exposed to those tribal members of traditional tribal community. Given this, we can understand how two tribal members can differ in developing their pedagogy of authentic Indianness. Figure 3.5 illustrates this.

System Level	Traditional Learner	Non-traditional Learner
Micro	<p>Initial influence on a person’s tribal development helps to form initial schemata.</p> <p>Schemas developed within the traditional learning method have a greater chance of fitting within norm of the tribal community social circles as the influences stem from individual tribal members who have learned within traditional models of learning.</p> <p>Believed to provides an "Indian" experience or an Indian insight to the environment.</p>	<p>Tribal member faces a disadvantage to receiving “true” Indian knowledge.</p> <p>Schemas developed may not carry same weight as a traditional learner, same schemas face a challenge in the latter stages of Bronfenbrenner’s systems of development when tribal member seeks to interact outside the his/her immediate environment.</p> <p>What was thought of as "Indian "knowledge faces dismissal from traditional learners who challenge the validity of the knowledge from non-traditional people/family.</p>
Meso	<p>Common theme amongst microsystems, allowing for common Indian thinking.</p>	<p>Learner’s microsystems may work together, forming a strong foundation of development for the tribal member, but may differ in the validity of indigenous schemas that are accepted as common</p>

	<p>Indian thinking includes ideas, thoughts, social interactions developed within the tribal community and offer a unique glimpse into “Rez” life, reservation life.</p> <p>Tribal member can relate to other tribal members within the tribal community and with other tribal members outside of the GRIC; including commonalities amongst individuals who grew up with the traditional model.</p>	<p>amongst tribal community, specifically those of the traditional learner method.</p> <p>While tribal member is experiencing common acceptance and cooperation within the microsystems, development and knowledge may be found lacking as it does not include Rez life attributes, thereby discounting indigenous knowledge.</p> <p>The tribal member is considered an outsider, an urban Indian, a cracker or an apple in the eyes of traditional learners.</p>
<p>Exo</p>	<p>Traditional learners have advantage of building foundation of knowledge influenced by others within his/her family, particular elders of the family and/or tribal community.</p> <p>Direct knowledge may not be present or distributed, learning from environment around tribal member is a positive trait.</p> <p>Indians have a great opportunity to learn from when they see others “do” versus tribal member “doing” an activity. This trait is a common characteristic of Himdag, a way of life, for the Akimel O’odham and provides a platform to develop personal traits that are expected of each tribal member which may depend on the status of the tribal member within a family.</p>	<p>Non-Traditional learners differ within this system as teachers may not follow this path of learning and may exclude common practices of environmental influence that come with traditional learning methodologies. This may occur as a result of lacking the knowledge of how learning is formed and why learning is needed for that particular task or project.</p> <p>System may lack structure of a family that includes elders that lead and teach and afford their young learners with an opportunity to watch and learn and accept the decisions that are made as a result of an elder’s direction or vision for the family/tribal community.</p>
<p>Macro</p>	<p>Indigenous knowledge learned has advantage of being accepted by the tribal community as base of knowledge may have stemmed from a family member, a family elder or a village. As a result of this path, tribal member’s knowledge has a greater chance of being accepted others acknowledge the learner’s path of indigenous knowledge attainment as similar to their own systems of development.</p>	<p>Indigenous knowledge learned has a disadvantage as base of knowledge did not originate from a family member, a family or a village or with an intent for attainment. Rather, knowledge may have been pursued to feel connected or a belongness to the tribal community. Thus, the process of development may not have followed the indigenous scaffolding model of learning and therefore may not be recognizable as an acceptable form of learning.</p> <p>This learning may be deemed as lacking in the eyes of the tribal community</p>

<p>Chrono</p>	<p>Often follows what is termed as a scaffolding approach, but without time limits or time expectations.</p> <p>Amount of time in learning is not as important as content mastered. The traditional learner has this advantage as the knowledge may be deemed a part of everyday life and not influenced by outside knowledge or construct systems.</p> <p>Knowledge provided is purposeful and has meaning, skills learned pass on indigenous methodologies and systems of thinking of the Akimel O’odham.</p>	<p>Non-traditional method is often hurried or pushed to complete a task or accomplishment (or to reach a predetermined “destination”).</p> <p>Differs from traditional learning as that method follows path of a journey versus the destination.</p> <p>Learners may feel desire to learn so they can be a part of something, be a part of the tribal community that is accepted versus learning as a part of everyday life as a tribal member.</p> <p>Tribal members may not be exposed to idea that Akimel O’odham learn within a process of development that is dictated by the person’s age and status within the tribal family and tribal community.</p> <p>This lack of knowing places non-traditional learner in a position to not be accepted by the tribal community and its tribal members.</p>
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Figure 3.5 System Level Differences between Traditional and non-Traditional Learners

Building from the microsystem, we consider that once a person’s micro-systems have been developed, the linkage (meso-systems) enter the development of an individual which is considered the communication between what the person has learned from family in correlation to what a person may learn from others in their immediate social circles such as other tribal members, a school, or social setting. The person has the ability to take what they have learned, bouncing that knowledge and experience on another, possibly assimilating or accommodating that attained knowledge, possibly forming new theories or sustaining what had already been established. For each individual listed previously this

two-way communication is taking place but may not contain the same variables needed to gain an authentic collection of indigenous knowledge.

Further, as the person (tribal member) progresses in their development, those systems continue to grow into what Bronfenbrenner labeled as exosystems of human development. This exosystem could be comprised of larger circles of interaction a person develops as they grow. For instance, as the person ages their social circles grow from immediate family to extended family members and their peers found within close proximity to the home such as the neighborhood now has grown to those peers found in a larger community setting that is comprised of several neighborhoods. When this occurs, the person's mesosystems continue to bounce the prior knowledge against those new pockets of knowledge (schemas) that are held by the growing social circle members. The last system listed by Bronfenbrenner is the macrosystem, which consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exo-systems that include the timeliness or the steps to developing as a tribal member.

The Gila River Indian Community has recognized deficiency in retaining and sustaining the culture of the tribal community and has therefore employed an academic program that seeks to train and to credential tribal members to become classroom K-12 teachers that are employed to teach the history, culture and language of the Akimel O'odham. I hypothesize that the GRIC is attempting to reignite or re-create the microsystems of tribal members, thereby allowing a person to feel and think as other tribal members to help create an equal level of acceptance and belonging and Indianness. However, a different level of learner brings with it predetermined notions and ideas of how the world functions. An attempt to mimic or introduce microsystems later in a person's

life may not be successful and will require more understanding and research in which to develop methods to create microsystems that focus on the *himdag* or the culture and language of the Akimel O’odham. Johnson (2008) stated, the interactions among multiple layers of the complex system that comprises the ecological context of a school could result in any number of unforeseen outcomes, and seemingly small changes or fluctuations in, say, the economic condition of the community surrounding the school (exosystem) may have far reaching long-term consequences in the absence of a dimension of time. That is to say that although GRIC seeks to re-create and establish methods to develop microsystems for an individual or group; GRIC must recognize that the environment will play a large part in the ability to be successful. Marshall & Zohar (1997) noted that complex systems, i.e., systems that fit Bronfenbrenner’s field of theoretical model, balance precariously between stasis and entropy, and are constantly evolving and developing around this critical state.

This same concept is being designed to enter the ranks of colleges and universities as well. Combining indigenous and western knowledge is an active idea that prophesizes that tribal members can learn to live in both settings (Indian and non-Indian worlds) for the benefit of advancing the Gila River Indian Community’s path to nation re-building.

The school model to learning indigenous ways and methodologies faces a challenge and a battle for significance when compared to the need to learn “core” subject matters such as Math, Science and Language Arts within the K-12 setting. The indigenous knowledge of the Akimel O’odham does not follow a daily schedule, nor does it hold itself to following a pacing guide as the core subject matter normally adheres to in the daily school schedule. Rather, indigenous knowledge follows a slow process of learning that

allows for tribal members to learn as needed and at the pace of the teacher. This process of learning closely matches the tools used in the K-12 setting in terms of scaffolding; that is, indigenous knowledge relies on the tribal member to master one level of learning, then learning another step to that particular task, and continuing until the member has acquired the entire portion of indigenous knowledge content being taught.

Non-traditional methods of learning are challenged as the knowledge that is commonly provided from one generation to another within a tribal household has changed; tribal members and their families now seek it elsewhere. For many reasons, the make-up of tribal members has changed, thus, the method in which the knowledge is continually passed down from one generation to another has changed. In short, sharing of indigenous knowledge has taken a backseat to the dominant culture that has exposed itself within the tribal community. Today, tribal members have the influence of larger communities/town/cities that include a barrage of various cultures, language and heritage (systems that affect the development of the tribal member). As a result, there are other options a tribal member can choose to pursue. Moreover, the indigenous knowledge, as once practiced learned, held a different meaning for its usage and attainment. In the next chapter, I present details for how this research study was designed as well as information about data collection, analysis and preliminary findings.

4. Methodology

This descriptive qualitative case study examines the following questions: how do members of the Gila River community define “belonging”? How and in what ways do Gila River members learn how to become members of the community? And, what can tribal communities and tribal members do to foster a sense of belonging for members who have left to obtain professional or academic training and seek to return to serve the nation? In this chapter, I present the epistemological and methodological orientation used in the study including information regarding the methods, data collection and analysis procedures, as well as study significance.

First, I define the epistemological stance used, including considerations for the moral influence (axiology) of the study. This section focuses on understanding Western ontology as opposed to tribal worldviews and cosmos and presents considerations for understanding how the Akimel O’odham episteme influences and guides this study and why that influence is necessary given the focus of the study. The next section describes the qualitative methodological approach used and presents a statement of researcher positionality. This section includes a discussion on the American Indian studies paradigm, Indigenous studies paradigm, and Western academic paradigm and how that shapes the selection of the methodology used. Understanding colonialism and how colonization works is important for understanding my choice of using Indigenous research methods and approaches. Next, I introduce the research approach (case study) and a discussion on participant selection. This is followed by an explanation of data collection methods. The following section presents information regarding the analytical coding process and presents

initial research findings. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the significance of the study among three areas: research topic, theoretical framework, and public benefit.

Epistemology, ontology, and axiology

From an epistemological stance, this study utilized the common terms and ideas that are found within the Gila River Indian Community and most other Native American communities. To this, there is a common universal language of understanding amongst Native Americans that is mostly identified and utilized within particular social settings. Listening and reviewing each of the interviews was crucial to understanding the purpose and use of Rezbonics from the dialogue that transpired between the interviewer and the study participants. Taking this line of thinking and translating it into something that can be comprehended by readers outside of Native American communities was an important task. Each candidate provided their own prior experiences as tribal members of the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC), which may not be synonymous with the experiences of others from GRIC. Each interview was unique in that sense and provided a limitless amount of knowledge and understanding of what a person may feel regarding their experiences with belonging and acceptance as a GRIC tribal member. More importantly, the interviews allowed each participant to note what they felt was important in their formation or non-formation as a tribal member.

The study also provided a platform for each participant to erase or modify what is considered common knowledge from the world outside of the GRIC reservation and held by others who may believe that all Native Americans are the same or subscribe to the same ideologies and methodologies of indigenous thinking. Those western ontologies were identified by participants and noted within their case studies following this chapter.

Participants noted some stereotypical expectations that others held them to during initial and continued contact both as a tribal member and as a non-racialized American attending

Methodology & Research Design

This descriptive qualitative case study examines the following questions:

RQ1: How do members of the Gila River community define “belonging”?

1a. Do tribal and personal definitions change over a member’s life course?

1b. How and in what ways have tribal collective definitions of belonging changed over time?

1c. What role, if any, does phenotype play in defining belonging?

1d. What role, if any, does formal schooling play in defining belong?

RQ2: How and in what ways do Gila River members learn how to become members of the community?

2a. What role, if any, does formal education serve in shaping these expectations?

2b. What role, if any, does informal education serve in shaping these expectations?

RQ3: What can tribal communities and tribal members do to foster a sense of belonging for members who have left to obtain professional or academic training and seek to return to serve the nation?

In order to answer these questions, in-depth interviews were conducted.. This method allowed each participant to voice their unique thoughts and ideas so that the essence of their viewpoints and experiences could be highlighted for future reference and future dialogue. Because this method is highly dependent on in-depth semi-structured or

open-ended interviews (either at the individual and/or the group level), observations, and participant-research as a form of data collection, the research closely mimics the social cultural practices within the Gila River Indian Community and shadows the dialogue that occurs amongst tribal families and tribal communities/villages; this includes long discussions that involve several parties. In the instance of this study, the qualitative approach seemed more applicable and welcoming to the participants. Each participant selected shared their own beliefs on how they defined belonging and acceptance and the factors and experiences that help shape those definitions. Their experiences as tribal college graduates led to understanding and exploring the research questions posed in this dissertation.

Researcher Positionality

As a result of choices beyond my control, I grew up in close proximity to but off my reservation. Although I did not live full-time on the reservation, I was raised by my grandparents within traditional Native environments and spent some weekends and some summers on the rez with my mom and her family. My housing status changed as an adult when I was offered professional opportunities that brought me back full-time, so to speak, and I lived off-reservation with my wife (who is also Native) and children and visited her reservation quite often. These experiences shaped, and continue to shape, who I am as a person and my professional and personal goals and vision for the future.

The notion of belonging and not-belonging to a tribal nation you wish to serve is not unforeign to me. As a young man, I was raised by Native family who provided me with the language and knowledge of our people, our customs, culture, and land. I grew up speaking English, Spanish, and hearing O'odham and Yaqui. Although it is my personal

belief that I'm not fluent in a language until I can pray and dream in that language, I know enough to not go hungry in these four different language communities.

The idea of being Native American was never an important topic to me or my family because we just *were*. In other words, I never thought about this consciously, as being Native was a way of life, until something would happen – an event would take place or someone would say something – to draw my attention to my Native identity. It wasn't until I reached adulthood that things seemed to become complex and that is when I found myself needing to “prove” or show my Indianness. In other words, my Native status only became important as an adult, when I would have to fend for myself to get services or when I was trying to get a job. Prior to that, I would half-consciously think about it when we were ushered around by our Indian status in K-12 schools for services. My Indian status seemed to become ever more public during certain parts of the year when a van would come get us to go to Indian Health Services (HIS). So we would go as a group of Indians to the hospital and to partake in other programming.

I recognize that everyone's story is different, some Native people may read this and see points of similarity and connection in my story while others may not. My experience is unique to me but is not unfamiliar for other Native people. As this dissertation has argued, every Native person's path to identity development may be unique, but there are also shared points of connection. For me, school was one of the systems that vividly taught me what it meant to be part of an “us” versus “them” dynamic yet it also provided me with the skills necessary to complement my Native worldview and to help me seek the answers to the questions that were plaguing me. I chose an academic path of learning to help answer the many questions I had as a young man. Attending school, including college, was not a

decision I made simply as a means to advance my career, rather, it stemmed from the need to know why my mother deserted me at an early age, leaving me to be raised by my paternal family and leaving me with so many complex questions that I knew I could not approach anyone with to provide me answers.

Without consciously intending it, school became inextricably linked to my identity development. From moments as early as grade school when I would be called to the office with other brown kids with dark hair similar to mine. We would be lined up and to follow each other to the “Indian” trailer where we would be inspected (as I called it) for medical/dental screenings. My first taste of who I was as a person was delivered via this experience as I grew to know that I was Indian, but not as Indian as those who were lined up with me that came from the Gila River Indian Reservation. Their looks of unfamiliarity towards me drew from the fact that they didn’t see me in the dirt roads playing with them, didn’t see me at family functions with them, and didn’t see me during cultural festivities. However, I learned that I shared some commonalities with them such as riding in the back of a pick-up, being left in the back seat at a celebratory dance as my parents and family danced, and the fact that we had shared physical features. To this day, I relish moments of shared connection, in college, when I talk with other Native students and we laugh at our similar experiences.

While moments of laughter remain welcome, the reality is that schooling also served to develop a deep pain regarding who I am and where I belong and served to foreshadow what was to come. My early experiences drew the line of acceptance and belonging as a Native person and were heightened by my desire to be socially involved in school, excel in school and overall be a different person who didn’t wear the same clothing

and listen to the same music as my Native counterparts. Being called an apple, cracker and sell-out were not uncommon in my venture through grade school and high school. Little did I know that these terms would stick with me throughout my entire pursuit of a higher education. With this base of knowledge to draw from, I entered a world that I needed to quickly learn if I was to be successful in the eyes of my family while satisfying the outside world's definition of success.

What has followed in my life has been a successful (in my eyes) achievement both academically and socially, serving in high capacities in tribal government and developing well founded behavior modification techniques to improve Indian Education. This dissertation was written out of spite toward everyone that has ever questioned who I was and who made me feel inadequate. Participants in this study provided content and information that led me to believe they were like me (or I was like them), confused and challenged by the people we had hoped would accept us. These experiences brought me to a point where I know I need to provide more answers and help to develop a path so others (like me) can follow. My own thoughts and theories about Native people pursuing higher education have grown with confidence so much that I steer students to disregard what others say and to realize what they will potentially give up or trade when they seek to become educated and challenge the normalcy of what an Indian Reservation has prescribed for them.

Lastly, I note, it is lonely at the top...especially for educated Indians.

Case Study Design & Participant Selection

The research framework employed by this study lies within descriptive research. It focused primarily on the experiences of individual tribal members of Gila River in terms

of how phenotyping and education biases affected their sense of identity and belonging. Over the years, the tribe has invested millions of dollars into financially supporting its tribal members and their pursuit of a higher education with the idea that these same tribal members can and should return to gainful employment opportunities.

To proceed with the study, an Institutional Review Board approval was sought with Arizona State University. Because all participants were recruited via social media, and all interviews took place off the tribal community's boundaries, the study did not require an IRB from Gila River. Moreover, the study did not solicit any information that could be construed as being "sacred" or "secret" to the tribal community of Gila River.

The study began its recruitment by posting social media posts, followed by emails to potential participants who responded via social media. Emails were followed by individual phone calls or personal meetings to go over the study and its purpose. All participants that showed interest in the project were accepted as a participant, with the only required selection criteria being that participants needed to be tribal members and hold at minimum a bachelor's degree from a university. A total of five participants, all members of the GRIC, were selected for participation. Each participant was additionally asked to identify a date, time and location for each interview. The five participants varied in age and gender and were recruited within the city limits of the Phoenix Metropolitan area. There were no limits on the number of members from a particular tribal village of Gila River.

To understand the procedures of the dissertation, each participant was provided an informational handout and consent form that listed the purpose of the study, how the information would be collected and utilized, how the participant's data and information

will be protected and the ability for the participant to cease participation at any time during the study. After understanding the purpose of the study, participants were asked to affirm their participation by completing and signing a participant acknowledgement form. This acknowledgement gave consent to be interviewed and recorded with the purpose of transcribing the recordings.

Interviews were conducted within a 30-day window and held during the month of January 2016 with five Gila River members who sought higher education and completed their undergraduate degrees. With the permission of participants, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed and lasted approximately one hour but some interviews surpassed this time allocation as participants were not restricted in their ability to answer the research questions to their fullest ability and perception of effective dialogue. The research included a qualitative questionnaire that was provided via a one-on-one interview within the selected location of each participant. All interviews were conducted at local coffee shops. The idea of providing the questions via electronic email to the participants was considered but was later dismissed as the lack of technology for the participants may have hindered their participation. This questionnaire afforded an opportunity for the participant to provide narrative responses to each research question, and each participant was provided a copy of the questionnaire to follow along as the questions were read aloud.

During individual interviews, participants were asked a series of questions (qualitative) that probed them for information in relation to the three research questions of this dissertation. Each participant was given ample time in which to ponder the question and then provide an answer. The interviewer then provided follow-up questions, when

needed, to gain an understanding or receive clarity in relation to the content provided by the participant.

Next, the data provided by the participants was transcribed from audio recordings to typed documents. After completing the interviews, audio recordings were transcribed by a local transcription service. The audio recordings were then transferred to the Arizona State University campus and secured in a locked cabinet.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the format for content analysis. This process began by reviewing the typed transcriptions several times, looking for key words or terms that provided substance to the dissertation's research questions. These particular terms were given check marks (noted on the side of pages) to reflect that particular word or phrase had a correlation to the dissertation. These transcriptions were then reviewed several times, looking for key words or terms that provided substance to the dissertation's research questions. These particular terms were given check marks (noted on the side of pages) to reflect that particular word or phrase had a correlation to the dissertation. Codes were then created in relation to the text and information and were later used to inform the creation of categories and subcategories.

Following a series of reviews, more succinct information was identified by highlighting and underlining particular text and portions of the interview transcriptions that further added to the dissertation. Then, another series of review transpired that focused on reading and re-reading the highlighted information provided by participants. Later, this reviewed information was used to provide a more in-depth focus on the themes and labels that arose to the top of all the information.

This iterative process allowed for codes, categories, and subcategories to be formed into clusters of information within a particular, specific tree of topics that derived from isolating key words, terms and phrases within the interviews. This included the attachment to the three research questions posed in this dissertation. Categories outlined in this dissertation were identified by carefully reviewing individual interviews with the five participants and identifying any distinctive patterns, thoughts, or ideas that surfaced. Categories and subcategories were then defined and correlated to the three research questions that this dissertation set out to define and answer how members of the Gila River community define belonging, how and in what ways members learn how to become members of the community and what tribal communities and tribal members can do to foster a sense of belonging for members who have left the tribal community.

Results

The first question guiding this study sought to understand and identify how tribal members of Gila River define belonging as it relates to their particular tribal community. The question was posed to seek information in relation to how feeling of belonging or acceptance was formed within a historical or contemporary context. Further, the research questions also sought to understand what role “phenotyping” played within the ability to accept someone within the tribe and also how phenotyping providing particular feelings of belonging and acceptance on behalf to the tribal member themselves.

The second category was derived from the research question that wanted to understand how a person’s identity was formed and how they learned to become tribal members. Specifically, who might be responsible for forming the identity of a tribal member? To this, the second category questioned if the family/community of a tribal

member was the creator or did the tribal member rely on formal schooling to help guide them to formalizing an individual tribal identity?

The last and third category created was titled, “Future Focus,” and was developed after citing many of the comments and suggestions that the participants provided during their interviews. It was interesting to note that each individual participant provided details and planning efforts on how the tribal member, tribe, institution of higher learning and the families of a tribal member could help improve in the areas noted within the first and second research questions. This category was correlated to the final research question that asked what tribal communities and tribal members can do to foster a sense of belonging for those who have left to obtain a higher education.

Each category and subcategory formed was done so in a manner to reflect the interviewee’s thoughts and ideas in relation to this dissertation. The first categories formed under the first code of, “Belonging and Acceptance,” focused on the belonging and acceptance of a tribal member and what influenced that feeling or idea. To pinpoint participants’ thoughts and expressions, two categories surfaced: historical and contemporary contexts. Each category was then assigned four sub-categories: (A) Actions, (B) Language, (C) Cultural Participation, and (D) Location. While there were two separate categories that prefaced two separate definitions of how a person can belong or be accepted, the sub-categories provided a shared point of how each particular category could be developed within those two categories. Added to the first code was a third category titled, “Phenotype,” which was created after several participants provided details on how their particular physical characteristics and behavior may or may not have excluded them from a feeling of belonging or acceptance.

The second code (Formation of Tribal Identity) provided two categories and no sub-categories: Family/Community and Formal Schooling. The participants of this study gave details and clear information as to how they felt their own identity was formed in both informal and formal contexts. For the purposes of this study, the “informal” context was attached to the tribal member’s base of identity forming from the tribal community or the family of the tribal member. The “formal” context was then attached to the tribal member when they felt they formed their identity with the help of any entity or program that was outside the family and tribal community.

The last code provided attention to understanding a future focus, that is to say, what should or could be the focus in the future for tribal members and tribal communities to form tribal identities and a feeling of belonging and acceptance. However, while the dissertation initially thought that this focus would identify ideas and suggestions for tribal members and their communities, the participants provided a stream of ideas that encompassed not only the person and the tribe, but rather they provided information that could reach out to tribal member’s families and the colleges and universities that tribal members attended. Therefore; this last category supplied four subcategories titled: (A) What tribal members can do, (B) What tribes can do, (C) What colleges can do, and (D) What families can do.

Impact/significance

The results of the study provide new support for Indian communities that seek to understand how they can prepare for the return of tribal members who have left the community to seek a higher education. This is an important area of interest and leads to the idea of Nation Building, which is the ability for tribes to form a new identity by

rebuilding their tribal community and employing strategies, theories, and practices that are in tune with what the tribe wants. Nation building is an active counter to the historic practices of hegemonic political and religious think tanks that have sought to exercise arrested development of tribal nations. Cornell and Kalt (1998) provide an understanding to what Nation Building can hold for a tribal community when they stated, “It is the opportunity for Native American peoples to re-envision their futures and rebuild their governments and their economic strategies so as to realize those futures” (p.2). The next chapter, provides a case study for each study participant and delves into a deeper background for each participant. Each participant’s life experiences and personal feelings are analyzed and provided a glimpse to understand where each participant’s feeling of belonging and acceptance materialized towards their tribal community.

5. Case Studies

This dissertation examines some of the strife that individual tribal members face during their process of identity development as they seek to be accepted by their tribal community. Belonging and acceptance is ongoing a lifelong process that depends upon individual level decisions as well as formal and informal practices and protocols of the tribal community. Participants in this study provided a broader explanation and definition for the processes that guide belonging and acceptance. The feelings and thoughts of each participant was recorded and noted to tell a full story. Moreover, the story of each person is presented here so that readers of this dissertation can gain a deeper perspective and background of each participant and how those words/ideas informed this dissertation's focus and research questions. Their contributions to this dissertation provide an in depth understanding of how belonging is perceived and how belonging is an important attribute for a tribal member.

Participant Demographic

Name	Male/Female	Schooling Level	Resides	Age Range
Samuel	Male	Post- Graduate School	On Reservation	35-45
Martha	Female	Graduate School	Off Reservations	50-60
Randall	Male	Graduate School	Off Reservation	30-40
Elizabeth	Female	Undergraduate	Off Reservation	25-35
Laura	Female	Undergraduate	On Reservation	45-55

Small Community

The Gila River Indian Community, while large in land mass, is small in social settings. Because of these small social circles, the content provided during interviews had a greater chance of exposing each participant, which resulted initially in hesitation to speak freely. While outside the reservation such information wouldn't seem detrimental to an individual, for tribal members, such information can lead to exclusion of the participants within social circles, family circles and tribal employment circles. Being *too good* would be the only message deciphered from information shared by the participant.

During initial contact with participants there was an undertone of concern regarding their participation in this study. For this reason, participants were informed that they would remain anonymous and their private identifiers would not be disclosed to anyone outside of this study. Thus, each participant was provided a pseudonym to protect his/her anonymity. Further, the case studies only provide general information that is related to the study itself and does not provide the participant's current employer, program of study for academic institution, domicile information, family structure and other basic demographics.

Analyzing each interview, I utilized my own perceptions and background to provide a bridge of understanding from the participant to the general reader of this dissertation, translating their stories from "Indian" talk to lay talk. Plainly stated, if you haven't grown up with Indians or on the reservation, many of their thoughts and comments would not make sense. Coded messages were provided by the participants, and utilizing my own perceptions and experiences as a Native American allowed me to bring those forward.

Each individual case study is presented within similar frameworks, drawing on the life stories and comparisons of each participant to provide a background of each participant and their definition of belonging to their tribal community; careful to not include my own biases. Each case study begins with a selected quote of “identity,” selected from each participant’s interview to help provide definition to the interviewee. This is followed by a brief background of the participant and continues with life events that shaped the participants tribal identity and their ability to belong and be accepted as a tribal member.

Case Study 1

“I guess I just knew I was Native American...I lived on the reservation. So, we would always call it the Res bus and it was also a smaller bus because there weren’t that many kids that came off the reservation...it was kind of dusty and beat up.”

Background

Participant 1 (Samuel) is a male figure between the age of 35 and 45. He grew up on the reservation, leaving for a short time to attain his undergraduate and graduate degrees. Both of his parents were of Native American descent and included other tribal heritage aside from Akimel O’odham and Pee Posh. Growing up within the reservation, he was raised by a single mother who provided minimal identification to know who his father was and to understand the impact of his paternal parent. Working for the tribal community, Samuel has held professional positions within the tribal community while also volunteering to serve on his local community committee that provided recommendation and guidance on local community issues. Samuel noted that being Indian was not an important factor in his progression in life. Being Indian was a given fact and not an identifier he strived to attain.

How to be Indian

During his interview, Samuel indicated that he just knew he was Native American and that perhaps this was because he lived on the reservation. When asked how he learned to become Pima (Akimel O'odham), Samuel noted that he never did, supporting this thought by admitting that he doesn't speak Pima and is not immersed in the culture of the Pima. Samuel noted that around the age of six, first grade, is when he noticed he was different from other kids in his school. While he listed a few identifying markers that would identify some Native Americans, Samuel admitted that he felt that he would disappoint in this arena as he didn't fit the mold of those identifying markers. Samuel stated that language was an important indicator of someone being Pima coupled with some cultural activities and other personal actions to help the person stand out and up towards holding themselves out to be Pima. Further, clothing seemed to be an identifier for Samuel as he noted that some Native Americans also wore t-shirts with an Indian on it as a method to identify as Native American.

When describing his perception of culture, not just Native American, Samuel expressed that it extends beyond one's tribe. For him, "culture [is] the world, it [is] painting, writing, dancing, music, not just of any Native American tribe but of the world." As a young man, his mother would take him to the local library, it is here where Samuel gained a larger exposure to things that were different, not just Native American content. Samuel was also exposed to other things outside the reservation such as museums, camping, and other experiences that weren't attached to the reservation. At this point, Samuel provided no correlating attribute or identifier that he had previously noted in his interview.

The disconnect

The disconnect from the tribe stemmed from him doing different things outside the reservation and learning things that were not related to the tribe. “I guess it was the way I was raised and by no means do I find it as a fault.” Samuel brought to light an important point when he noted that his upbringing, in his eyes, was not a negative experience. The upbringing of Native Americans can be seen as a negative if you did not subscribe to similar lifestyles and social settings as other Native Americans. In today’s social settings, specifically the tribal government, tribal officials will highlight the need to be “traditional” and how the traditional living plays a vital role to exercising the “*Himdag*” of the tribal ancestors. Samuel noted that he felt isolated as a result, “When you’re isolated you have no connection even though there are experiences and people around you, then you have no connection with them.” Wearing all black clothing was an identifier that separated Samuel from the others, noting that he wears professional clothes.

School Impact

When considering the role that school settings play in building tribal identity; Samuel broadened the idea of a school setting by including any class that is provided to help build a person’s tribal self-identity. Samuel expressed that learning the language and culture of the Akimel O’odham was helpful and he was glad to know that student’s that attend schools located on the reservation are given the opportunity to learn the language and culture of the Tribe. However, he countered this thought when he noted what his maternal grandfather stated in regards to someone learning the Akimel O’odham Neok. His grandfather had been sent away to a boarding school for Native Americans, as a result of that experience, his grandfather stated, “Don’t teach your children Pima because it won’t

do them any good.” Instead, his grandfather advocated, “Make sure they get education before anything else that way they can make their way in the world.” Heeding his words, Samuel’s mother raised him to become educated in outside academic content and not the Himdag/Language & Culture of the Akimel O’odham.

His attainment of higher education has not had an impact on his development as a tribal member as he never felt a part of the community. No connection. Aside from residing within the GRIC reservation, he grew up outside of his tribal community, forming friendships with others outside of his Native American race.

Perceptions of Native Americans

Samuel shared that when a person has an identity of their own, that person gravitates toward others who share the same ideals and similarities as their own. As a result, Samuel noted that he did not share the perceptions that the world outside the reservation expected of him and he did not share the perceptions that the world inside the reservation expected of him. For example, the outside world expected him to be likened to other Native Americans that dressed, spoke and behaved in a certain manner. Within the tribal community, he was also expected to be like his fellow tribal members where a large majority of tribal members would dress a certain way, speak a certain way and act a certain way; these expectations were the stereotypes that he had witnessed in school. Early on, Samuel focused on influential people. Specifically, Samuel noted that he began to admire “white” heroes. He strived to be like them and followed paths to attain status because he could not find heroes within the reservation to look up to.

While at college, away from the reservation, Samuel mentioned that others would question his ethnicity, sometimes thinking he was Hispanic as he didn’t exhibit

stereotypical characteristics of Native Americans. When probed, Samuel expressed that his fellow college students would state, “I didn’t know you were an Indian, you don’t look like an Indian.” This was followed with questions such as: do you live in a tepee, do you ride a horse? And, do you drink?

Connection to tribal community

Samuel maintained a connection to the community by visiting his home quite often and volunteering within the tribal community while serving on community committees that were formed to help address local needs, projects, and other tribal programming. Using his education, Samuel felt as if he were “subhuman,” but felt good as he knew he was doing something good for the tribal community. It was his education that was outside of the tribal community, but impacted the tribal community positively, that allowed Samuel to utilize a level of learning and knowledge to help the tribal community.

While he had a working connection to his community, Samuel described that his physical features provided him another level of acceptance and belonging. Being bigger in size was one of those indicators that Samuel identified as a direct connection to being Native American. His size provided him with resemblances to his tribal community; he looked like them, he was one of them.

Without a physical or social resemblance of other tribal members, a person would stand out and tribal members would inherently be suspicious about someone who stood out. According to Samuel bias would emerge as a result of not possessing these attributes of Native Americans followed by comments and questions such as, what’s wrong with them? They’re too good. They think they are better than we are.

Samuel also noted that initially people such as himself would be excluded and it would take some time to be accepted. Samuel dressed the part of those he had admired growing up, such as U.S. Presidents, which encouraged him to dress in business attire on a regular basis and pursue a level of vocation that was different and required an advanced degree from a higher education institution. Samuel had also engulfed in seeking social circles and knowledge that were outside of common Native American social circles. His return to the tribal community was rooted in a strong idea that he needed to give back to the tribal community as they had given him so much in terms of college funding.

Case Study 2

“Being an Indian? Well, being an Indian isn’t just that you are wearing feathers and dancing. Being an Indian is more representative of who you are, if you truly are an Indian. There’s a lot of wannabes out there, but you can usually sniff them out.”

Background

Growing up outside of the state of Arizona, participant 2 (Martha) is a female (between the ages of 50-60 years of age) whose parents consisted of a non-Indian father and Indian mother. Marrying a non-Indian, her mother was disinherited by her Native family. Years later, her father passed, and her mother moved the family back to Arizona to live within the reservation with her maternal grandparents. Following her mother’s employment, Martha expressed that she would move when the need presented itself. Martha left her home for a short time, attending a boarding school that was supported by her church. She and her sibling were both expelled from the school. Soon after she heard of an academic scholarship that targeted reservation youth, applied and was selected to attend a bachelor’s program at an in-state university after high school.

Completing her program of study within four years, Martha attributed this fast track as a result of not visiting her home during her course of study. She began her first master's but did not complete it. Instead, she returned home to Gila River after being advised, "You need to come home, you need to pay back the tribe for everything they paid for." Shortly after, she entered the workforce, working within the GRIC. She attempted to reside within the tribal community but later opted to return to the city as she just didn't fit within the tribal community.

How to be Indian

While attending school out of state, Martha noticed that she and her sibling were the only Native Americans in the school. She noted that the school would bring people in the classroom to observe them, possibly because Native Americans in the school was not a common finding. She initially identified as Pima although she had roots to two other tribal communities. The influence of her maternal grandmother provided the connection as a Pima. Her grandmother held physical characteristics of a Pima woman and Martha resembled her grandmother. Martha noted that there was a strong connection to one another as a result of that similarity. Her paternal grandfather was fluent in the O'odham Neok. According to Martha, you had to know O'odham or else you wouldn't be able to survive with him. He expected a person to understand what he was saying.

Her grandparents provided her knowledge and understanding of her Akimel O'odham heritage and traditions, attending pow-wows and other traditional gatherings during her youth. Her grandfather would share stories with her and the family before evening meals, "one of the old stories." Martha noted that these same "old stories" were currently present in today's books and other publications within the GRIC. Martha

mentioned her regret in not truly listening to the stories over the years of upbringing with her grandfather. At the time she felt tired of hearing those stories. Her grandfather would end those stories with a prayer offering, “Thank God I was born an Indian cuz I will always have some place to live, and I will always have somewhere to be.” Martha witnessed her grandfather grow flowers from the seeds he had traded with the Japanese people that were located in the Japanese Internment Camps within GRIC; he would trade fresh vegetables with them.

The Disconnect

Martha’s mother was the only family member that had married a non-Pima and others noticed this. She was considered a “half-breed,” or a person that did not have Native American parents, thereby reducing the blood quantum of Martha. The reduction in perceived “blood quantum” was a negative perception against her, others would attempt to make her feel bad for this.

She recalled people would chastise the color of her skin, encouraging her to get a “tan.” Because she looks different than other tribal members, Martha shared that she will often feel out of place when walking into or participating in a social function. Her feelings change if she notices someone familiar at the function, that person(s) usually serves as the initial bridge over for Martha to be accepted by others who may not know her and exclude her based on her skin and facial features. She tends to gravitate towards those pockets of people, as they make her feel accepted and if she belongs. Regardless of age, the lack of physical features continues to be a disconnect for Martha, a part of her life that she cannot grow out of.

School Impact

Intent to pursue a higher education, Martha left home to attain her bachelor's degree and felt well prepared to do this as she had been away from home during her boarding school part of her life. The boarding school was not a tribal boarding school but was an international boarding school with students from different races and locations. While she didn't return to the reservation during her college years, her mother would come to visit her, bringing a part of home with her during each visit. Her mother would later move near the college to be near Martha.

Martha has been the focus of some tribal member's intent on attending college, looking to her for advice on how to do well in school. She attributes this to others thinking she is smart, but she didn't feel as smart as they thought of her. While at college, she would debate with professors and their take on Native Americans. She once got into a verbal fight with a professor who attempted to label Native Americans as Aborigine. She would rebut those claims with, "I am not Aborigine, I am Native American, I am Native American." Martha dropped that course as a result with the indifference between her and the professor. She couldn't recall the name of that professor that brought that feeling of anger to her.

Her schooling did not play a pivotal role in forming her tribal identity, but did provide tools that would allow her to help other tribal members such as her grandfather.

Perceptions of Native Americans

Martha mentioned that others perceive Native Americans as having hair braids, black hair, and dark eyes. Further, Martha noted that Natives have dark skin and have a slightly chunky body frame. Healthy? Martha offered this identifier as a common joke amongst Native people. Native people will say that a larger person (chunky) is a result of

eating lots and lots, thereby making them “healthy,” someone who isn’t sick or losing weight.

Martha didn’t share some of the other common social ills present on the reservation such as alcoholism. Martha noted that when people can’t identify with you they treat you differently. Perception of you as an Indian is important, “anything that’s not in the box is hard for people to comprehend.” Martha commented that she doesn’t practice many of the things that others do such as drinking, smoking or partying. Lack of participation makes a person’s life difficult, she expressed.

Connection to tribal community

In her younger years, Martha recalled that other children would make fun of her based on her skin color. While she looked like her grandmother Martha’s skin was light colored, unlike other Indians in the tribal community. During that time, she was called things such as an “apple,” to which she seemed confused as she didn’t understand that identifier.

When she probed her grandfather for definition of this comment, he shared that they were inferring that Martha was red on the outside and white on the inside. (This is a common reference amongst Native Americans when wanting to describe someone that looks Indian but acts White). Martha’s response to her grandfather’s description was “I’m white on the outside and red on the inside.” Martha was referring to her light skin that made her appear as a Caucasian in the eyes of tribal members and her internal “red” spirit that she felt made her a tribal member. Martha gained support from her closest friends who would stand up for her during these times of name calling, sometimes the boys would fight with others as a result.

Her maternal grandmother was not of Pima descent, but was Native American and showed Martha how to make cultural items that were not of the GRIC. While those items, from an outsider's perspective, were associated with Native American genres, they were not of Pima descent. The moccasins, leggings and outfits that Martha created served as another barrier between her and the tribal community. Later, Martha would caution herself in sharing her grandmother's traditional knowledge so as not to feel the same experience she had been exposed to in her younger years.

As the years have passed, Martha did not feel a connection to the community as a result of her long-standing employment within the tribal community. She has made a name for herself and because she has worked so long within the tribal community, other tribal members have reduced the questioning of her Indianness as they and others had done previously with Martha. However, strangers continue to question her connection or belongingness to the GRIC, often labeling her as an outsider.

Case Study 3

“It's just that being educated just created a separation between me and other community members...We were stronger together....at the same time...more community members despised us more, because they thought, oh, these guys really think they are better than us.”

Background

Participant 3 (Randell) is a male subject between the age of 30 – 40 years of age and a member of the GRIC with tribal affiliation with two other tribes. His mother was Native American and his father of Mexican descent. Randell considered himself most identifiable with GRIC versus the other blood lines. Growing up outside of the tribal community, Randell moved from a small rural community to the Phoenix area to attend college where he completed his Associates of Arts and Bachelor's Degree. Upon graduating, he elected to leave the city and move back to the GRIC reservation where he became employed within the tribal government. After spending time within the tribal community, Randell elected to move back to the Phoenix area, purchasing a home. At the time of this study, Randell was enrolled as a graduate student pursuing his Master's Degree.

How to be Indian

Randell recalled that he always associated himself as being Hispanic; which was easy as he held what was considered a Spanish surname, raised around Hispanics, and grew up in an environment where Spanish was spoken in the home. Because he grew up around brown people, Randell thought all brown people were Mexican, it didn't seem to appear that he knew of Native Americans.

Moving from the Phoenix area during his youth, Randell moved with his mother and was exposed to his maternal grandparents who were both Native American. During this time, he was privy to learning about Native American traditions, language and storytelling, "all that stuff," from his grandparents.

For Randell, learning to be O'odham also stemmed from the identification his maternal grandmother made when she would tell him that he is O'odham. Further, his

grandmother would tell him that he was Akimel O’odham (River People), and as such he needed to be a part of the Earth, part of the river, as he was part of the River People. And while he shared tribal ancestry with two other tribes, his grandmother made it clear to make sure he knew he was O’odham and not the other tribes.

Further, to be O’odham, his grandmother stressed that he form a relationship with another O’odham person, helping to retain his tribal culture and traditions. These same teachings are something Randell pursued when he sought out local knowledge and literature. This information and knowledge helped to understand the significance of running, farming, and caring for the Earth as his tribal ancestors had done in previous years.

The disconnect

Learning the language of the O’odham is an important trait for a tribal member, but the infighting that occurs when discussions circulate on how to teach the O’odham Neok, those efforts simply create a gap versus creating opportunity to learn. As a result of this fighting, Randell illustrated that many are losing touch with the tribal community as the language is not being sustained. When the language and culture are not sustained, many tribal members opt to detach themselves from being Native and try to be a part of other racial and/or social groups aside from Native Americans.

School Impact

After completing high school, and beginning work within the tribal community, Randell elected to attend college in the Phoenix area. Supported by his maternal grandmother, she emphasized that the attainment of education could change his life. Having attended a tribal boarding school when she was younger, his grandmother stressed the importance of education, advising Randell that education was the most important thing

in life. Randell viewed education as an equalizer when measured against his non-Indian counterparts. His pursuit of a higher education was to advance him professionally, but what occurred within his family was disheartening to Randell.

His cousins would say things such as, “You think you’re better than us now, You ain't nothing, You ain't better than us.” The comments were accompanied with negative attitudes towards Randell. However, school had a positive impact on Randell, it provided him with a different view on tribal government and management. His education made him realize the importance of knowing and practicing his Akimel O’odham culture and he was able to retain both the college and Indian knowledge through his years of schooling.

The knowledge his family provided in the home made it possible for Randell to distinguish outside knowledge from O’odham knowledge which was evident when the school would teach about the Thanksgiving holiday. Randell was able to decipher the differences and what to accept as true knowledge for his own good. “Being educated, telling your family members or your children who you are, your identity, and what it is to be Native American versus what someone’s saying are two different things.” Regardless of the content provided to him at school and how it went against his cultural beliefs, Randell simply participated in school for the grades. Randell saw college knowledge as BS and ignored it for the most part while still keeping true to what he had been taught by his family.

Perceptions of Native Americans

During the interview, Randell mentioned that people in surrounding communities to GRIC (Phoenix, Gilbert, Chandler) have a different idea of Native Americans. Those ideas included that Native Americans are not educated or clean. While the outside world

had thoughts on how to identify Native Americans, Randell illustrated that Native Americans had their own methods to identify what or who was Indian.

Randell mentioned that facial characteristics (hair, nose, ears) were strong dominant features of Indians. Further, he stated that Natives have that “shine” (referring to the oil that surfaces on a person’s face), making them look younger than they are. Randell continued to express that a person’s body language was a way to identify other Indians.

While working in the college setting, Randell recalled a time when a colleague did not believe that he was Native. When he questioned her as to why she didn’t believe he was Native, she replied that he did not look Native and that he looked Hispanic. Randell had offered a verbal affirmation that he was Native, but she wouldn’t believe him until he showed her his tribal identification card. Her thoughts of what constituted a Native person included several characteristics of the Navajo people. Randell explained that not all Native Americans looked one way or practiced the same culture and spoke the same language.

Connection to tribal community

As a young man, Randell lived outside the tribal community, but spent almost every weekend within the tribal community, visiting and staying with his maternal family. While he lived in several places throughout his lifespan, Randell noted that he “loved going back home.” I took this to mean GRIC, which is what he affirmed in his interview. It was interesting to note that Randell could have labeled his other domiciles as home, but chose to list GRIC as home.

When he visited GRIC, Randell stated that he would often feel like an outsider as he didn’t possess the same physical characteristics as his family members. Also, his family

knew he was of mixed races and would use that against him, sort of taking passive jabs at his Indianness. Blood quantum seemed to make a difference in feeling connected to the community and Randell mentioned that others with common physical characteristics and that were full-blooded O'odham seemed to garner more of a connection and ability to feel acceptance by other tribal members. Randell is under the half-blooded mark but enough O'odham to allow him to be enrolled in the tribe; he is also light skinned, does not have long hair and has the ability to grow facial hair. Randell stated that the ability to grow and show facial hair was not a common trait of Native Americans.

Randell mentioned that it is difficult to feel a sense of belonging when you are bi-racial. When he is with his Native family he is seen as Mexican, and when he is with his Mexican family he isn't Mexican, he is Native American. His inability to feel connected to either race led to being beat up by family members and spat on by family members because of his lack of physical traits and language for his Native American and Mexican side.

Case Study 4

“That Rachel Dolezal case was fascinating to me because I can relate to her, where you want to be it so bad. She wasn't. I get that. She wasn't African American. I get it. My heart went out to her cuz I was like I know how she feels. She wants to be in a circle so bad.”

Background

Participant 4 (Elizabeth) is a female subject between the ages of 25-35 years of age and a member of the GRIC. Elizabeth has attained her undergraduate degree and expressed that her family has always been on the high achieving side of education, encouraging the

attainment of higher education knowledge. Growing up off the reservation for the majority of her life, Elizabeth is a mixed-race person with her father being a tribal member of GRIC and her mother a non-member of GRIC.

How to be Indian

While in the second or third grade, Elizabeth understood who she was as an Indian when her father arrived in her classroom during the social studies segment of the day. During this time, her dad provided a presentation to her classmates that revolved around history. Throughout her life, her father would provide indigenous knowledge for her to hear and learn. Utilizing the teachings of her father, she recalled a time when her father described the Indianness of her sibling. Elizabeth offered that her sibling was not a practitioner of morning prayers and ceremonial functions and that his spouse would often recite, "I wish he was more like you," in reference to her desire for her husband to act more Indian. Her fathered replied, without anger, "He is very O'odham. He gets up, he goes to work, he provides for your family. He works for the tribe, everything he does is very O'odham." Her father continued by closing his statement with, "That's the most O'odham thing he can do is to take care of your family." These words shared by her father gave Elizabeth a glimpse to understanding who is Indian, specifically what an Akimel O'odham represents. Lastly, Elizabeth stated that learning to be Indian could not be explicitly taught, rather, you pick it up by experiencing cultural activities or being amongst those who are familiar with the Akimel O'odham.

The disconnect

Elizabeth was bullied in school by Native Americans who felt she acted too good for them and because she was different than other Native Americans in elementary and

high school. This type of behavior was also present within her own family who would haze and harass her because of her differences. Her upbringing had an impact on her felt disconnect from her Native counterparts as she spent most of her summers with her mother's family (non-Indian); she was unaware that there was a difference in how her mom and dad lived their lives and shared their cultures with her.

Her physical characteristics are items that others use to disconnect her from GRIC. Elizabeth is light skinned and some tribal members never let her forget that she is part White when they would see her in social settings or tribal functions.

School Impact

Participating in school functions and activities were a strong part of Elizabeth's upbringing. She liked to arrive at school early, but was chastised by other Native children for her willingness and desire to be at school and to be active in school clubs, sports, and activities. She was called names by Native Americans such as goodie two shoes and worse; at times the Native students would spit loogies on her locker and bullied her throughout high school.

Later, as she attended college, Elizabeth found similarities with other Native students that attended the college. She felt they had likeminded ambitions and goals in life, this differed from high school where she stood out as different. In college she found confidence to be Native without feeling isolated and ostracized for her type of Indianness. During this time Elizabeth also joined a college advocacy group that focused on organizing social protests, a trend that her mother also participated in her youth. The lure of organizing activities and social events inspired her to continue that same mentality after college within

GRIC as she looks to bring attention to social issues and matters that affect the Akimel O’odham.

Also, in college, Elizabeth aspired to follow a path of education that could lead her back to help her people, the Akimel O’odham. Having witnessed the illness of her grandmother and the lack of communication that was had between her grandmother and the nursing staff, Elizabeth aspired to provide some remedy for not only her grandmother but other tribal members that faced the same plight.

Perceptions of Native Americans

The language and history of the Akimel O’odham has shifted over time and while some learn to speak the Neok, Elizabeth mentioned that some things were still missing from the acquisition of the language. Elizabeth referenced that “honorifics” was missing in today’s perception of how the Akimel O’odham were identified. Elizabeth went on to clarify her statement by describing the usage of honorifics in the O’odham language; these honorifics were used to fully describe people, places, or actions. In the English-speaking world, one might describe their mother’s sister as an aunt or the brother as an uncle and the same title would be used when describing the father’s sister and brother as well. However, within the Akimel O’odham the language provided a rich description of those individuals by providing specific titles for the maternal siblings that differed from the paternal siblings. This is the same for other family members, actions, and other items. Elizabeth acknowledged that this unique usage of words set the Akimel O’odham apart from other people/groups, but that is not the case today.

Elizabeth also mentioned that when attempting to provide a succinct definition of what epitomizes an Indian, there can be no such definition as each tribal member is unique

to their chosen lifestyle. “There’s no one way to be Native because what’s taboo to me isn’t taboo to them, and what they can’t talk about, I can talk about. There’s no one way to be Native, cuz we’re not monolithic. We are of mixed beliefs, our songs are not the same, our medicine is not the same, our food is not the same and our language is not the same. There is no one way!”

Connection to tribal community

Elizabeth participates in current social functions within the GRIC, specifically she participates in the unity runs that bring together runners from the tribal community. But even in doing so she feels that she will ever feel 100% accepted as she is still excluded by other tribal members because of her upbringing, education and the way she looks.

Aside from participating in the running events, Elizabeth acknowledges that she feels a connectedness to the Akimel O’odham as she recites morning prayers, utilizes medicinal plants to better her health and continues to learn new plants that the Akimel O’odham used in the past. This knowledge is provided by local tribal elders who have learned to trust and accept Elizabeth based on her work within the tribal government and who her dad is. Although not a practitioner of the culture and language of the O’odham, heeding the words that her father provided in reference to her brother, Elizabeth feels that she is connected to the community and contributes to the overall heritage of the tribe by acting O’odham.

Case Study 5

“I think knowing your culture, your language, has everything to do with being a part of your tribe, your community. It not only helps you learn but helps you to be able to teach others.”

Background

Laura is a female between the ages of 44-55 years of age and currently resides within the GRIC. Laura grew up out of state, later returning to the reservation during her high school years. Shortly after graduating high school she began her family, volunteering within the reservation at a tribal government facility.

Pursuing her bachelor's degree, she took advantage of a program that would assist her to enter college and support her endeavors. During this time, Laura was exposed to cultural and historical knowledge of the Akimel O'odham, strengthening her feeling of tribal identity. Surprising herself, but with the support of her family, she has successfully completed her undergraduate degree, but still ponders why she has not changed her career track that would allow her to utilize her college education.

How to be Indian

Laura offered that she first began to know she was Indian during her elementary years of schooling and became active in learning her tribal heritage once she had returned to the reservation during high school. "I didn't realize what I was and where I was supposed to be." Laura also recalled when she first rode the school bus; being among people of her own kind and hearing the O'odham Neok really impacted her.

The experience during high school differed from her elementary years as she remembered that she was teased because of her Native heritage. Being teased provided reason for her not to want to be Native. Fast forward to high school, Laura felt differently, she felt comfortable in being Native. Laura described being Native as a person to subscribing a way of life (Himdag), practicing this lifestyle on a regular basis. During her

stint at college, this way of life was highlighted in the course content which allowed her to feel more confident in who she was and who her people are.

The disconnect

The disconnect for Laura occurred when she lived off the reservation, feeling that she lost a lot of her culture and heritage as a result. Laura did not learn the language of the Akimel O’odham and was not privy to learning her tribal culture until she began high school. Currently, within the tribal community, she feels that the disconnection between the tribe and tribal members is a result of those individuals wanting to return and work within the tribal government. She feels that the Tribe wants their “own” people running the tribal programs and departments but may not want those who differ from the social norm of the tribal community. When someone looks or acts differently, Laura noted that the Tribe and its members may feel threatened by such individuals who may bring change to the current workforce.

Laura expressed that when she looks forward, she doesn’t want her granddaughter to be rejected because she doesn’t possess the physical characteristics of the Akimel O’odham (dark thick hair, dark skin) because she is half-white. However, she can’t help but feel that if she was not half-white and maybe another ethnicity with dark skin, those feelings may not be present regardless of her lack of blood quantum.

School Impact

Laura described her experience of not knowing the language and culture of the Akimel O’odham until she was in her mid-adolescence. She now feels that school can play a pivotal role in providing instruction in the culture and language of the Akimel O’odham.

This thought was based off her own experience and gaining knowledge when she attended high school and having other tribal youth provide that opportunity to her.

Her college experience helped her realize that she can be a role model for other tribal members that include her family, the tribal community and friends. Further, the college experience also provided a different perspective, allowing her to associate life within the reservation to theories and methodologies provided to her in college.

Perceptions of Native Americans

Laura noted that she felt that people perceive Native Americans as those that know the tribal language, participate in tribal culture, and are able to express or tell someone about the culture of the tribe they associate with. Tribal members that do not speak the language or know the culture of the tribal community may not know or be able to connect to the tribal community surroundings, never truly understanding the significance of the lifestyle.

Further, Laura provided what she felt were perceptions of Natives and those included physical characteristics. Laura replied that some may consider darker skin and long hair as features of Native Americans. She also felt that O'odham people indicatively had long thick hair, this was a trait common to O'odham. During her initial years in high school, many of her counterparts thought of her as a Mexican because of her light skin. She would reply that she is Native, but she wanted to have similar skin tone as her Native friends, just to fit in better.

She knows how it feels to not belong based on skin color and the lack of physical characteristics and noted that she wished this wouldn't be the case and that all tribal

members were accepted. Specifically, she hopes that this type of belonging does not carry over to her granddaughter who does not share the common traits of the tribal community.

Connection to tribal community

Laura noted that as a young person she would hear her parents speak in O'odham, but they didn't share the language with her or her siblings. She felt a connection to the tribe when she was able to connect several environmental items together such as the language, the land, and the reservation. Early on, as described previously, Laura knew she was a Native, but she was surrounded by non-Natives who teased her about her ethnicity. While back within GRIC she was able to bring together her definition of being O'odham. Her college experience included several culture classes of the Akimel O'odham, at times, her classroom work focused on projects or programs within the GRIC. When she faced school knowledge that challenged her own constructs of thoughts and ideas, Laura would talk with her mentor and the director of her college program, asking them for guidance and clarity.

In her personal life, Laura mentioned that her feeling of connectedness stemmed from the fact that she knew her family was from GRIC, she mentioned that as far back as she could remember, her family was from the tribal community. That memory helped her to feel a connection to her tribal community. This feeling of connection has carried over into being able to be involved with the tribal community for Laura thereby developing a sense of belonging for her. Her desire to be involved more stemmed from her schooling at college where her coursework was uniquely tied to the Akimel O'odham. This differed from others who may not have received such knowledge and understanding in their college coursework. The coursework she took illustrated the importance for tribal communities to

develop and sustain tribal culture, language and history, passing it on to the children of the reservation.

This chapter presented a more in-depth background for each participant of this study. The case studies presented provided each participant's life story and voice. Each comment collected was utilized to help form this study and future possibilities of providing rich and meaningful dialogue to creating bridges between tribal members, tribal communities and educational institutions. The next chapter examines the findings related to the first research question related to belonging in GRIC. I present a background of the GRIC including a review of its location, history, membership requirements, size, legal requirements and concomitant rights and benefits attributed to membership.

6. How Members Define Belonging

This study examines the notion of belonging for members of the Gila River Indian Community. The first research question asked: how do members of the Gila River community define “belonging”? Do tribal and personal definitions change over a member’s life course? How and in what ways have tribal collective definitions of belonging changed over time? What role, if any, does phenotype play in defining belonging? What role, if any, does formal schooling play in defining belong? This chapter presents the findings related to the first research question related to belonging in GRIC. I present a background of the GRIC including a review of its location, history, membership requirements, size, legal requirements and concomitant rights and benefits attributed to membership. Responses from participant interviews are used to shape a discussion of how identity and belonging gets imparted over time. Participants discussed connections or similarities to findings reported in the literature review regarding the importance of geography (where you’re born and where you reside), social knowledge and practices (speech and relational practices) and biology (as it relates to the role of phenotype).

Tribal Members

The Gila River Indian Community is comprised of several villages (similar to towns/cities) located within seven governed districts (similar to Arizona counties) within the Gila River Indian reservation (similar to the State of Arizona). In the beginning, as tribal members have advised, if you lived among the O’odham, you were O’odham. The particular place in which you resided within the reservation provided a more distinct character and cultural identification. For instance, if you resided in what is called Blackwater (Us Kuk, Dark Clay), then you generally were known to derive from the part

GRIC that you could find dark clay along the riverbed of the Gila River. If you resided in Sacaton Flats, that community was named Hashan Kehk (Standing Cactus), traditionally this area is known for Saguaro Cactus, which are not found unless you travel westward in the reservation.

However, not all O’odham can be found living within the reservation today, which challenges the idea that an individual can be identified to belonging to a certain part of the GRIC reservation. For various reasons, tribal members have elected to reside off the reservation in cities such as Phoenix and other states such as New Mexico and various other U.S. locales. As a result, individuals have developed the ability to identify from which area on the reservation their ancestry could be found in terms of the location of their family’s historic village or district. This new option provides the ability to retain a sense of belonging to the tribal community and continues to provide a platform to be accepted by those who resided within that particular village.

The movement of tribal members from traditional geographic locations to the city has led to the formation of two types of O’odham: “O’odham” and “Urban O’odham.” As a result, a member is considered to either belong to the tribal community or belong to the community outside of tribal community. Further, this movement of tribal members has set a path to reducing the Indianness of tribal members with the conception that if you do not live within the reservation then you are not O’odham. This same premise is used when tribal members seek higher education off the tribal community boundaries, starting the identification of “us” and “them” within social circles.

The location of where a person chooses to live allows for an easier association between the tribal member and the tribal community, building a sense of belonging. If an

individual lives in one of the local villages, over time their neighbors will treat them as a neighbor thereby fostering the feeling of belonging. If s/he lives amongst the O'odham then they are O'odham, however; to live amongst the O'odham asks a person to subscribe to *Himdag*.

The O'odham define a way of life as *Himdag*, and this *Himdag* comes with a list of unwritten and unpublished character traits and personal actions and beliefs that have been long practiced within the tribal community. If a tribal member is probed, particularly an elder of the tribal community, and asked to define *Himdag*, they may go on to state things such as, it is a way of life.... It is how you treat others.... It is living traditional.... or, it is living O'odham. A shrug of the shoulders normally accompanies these responses, which only leaves a person with a larger quest to understand what *Himdag* actually involves.

This example speaks to how difficult it is to define belonging within Gila River. That is to say, one cannot expect to subscribe to coursework or correspondence courses as a method of learning what *Himdag* truly entails without residing within the tribal community of living amongst those that have learned how to follow *Himdag*. There is no fixed definition to *Himdag*, but rather, this epistemological worldview is passed down and serves as a social construct system that exhibits what is known as positive character traits such as mutual respect for others, treating others with compassion and care, respecting your elders of past and present, and a basic treatment of placing others before the individual. It asks that a person subscribe to a collective approach to knowing their role in life and on this earth. The definition is not fixed; it is not written in ink and should be considered inscribed in pencil, allowing for change and flexibility to fit the needs of the people.

Tribal and Personal Definition change

Long before the O’odham were identified as Pima Indians, they were simply the Akimel (river) O’odham (people), a name given as a description because they lived alongside the Gila and Santa Cruz River, hence people who live by the river. There was no identification card to acknowledge the individual’s membership to GRIC. However, in today’s tribal community, tribal members are identified with an identification card and/or a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB), not with geographic location. The identification card does not include unique identification markers found historically when a person could identify which village they derived from; it simply provides a unique number sequence to help distinguish one tribal member from another.

Regardless of card status, in some social circles, tribal members and tribal communities argue that belonging within a tribal community requires certain talk, certain physical attributes, and a specific attitude or demeanor not just the possession of legal documents of tribal membership. Cordova (2007) notes that “Indians” have managed to survive all attempts to become eradicated by utilizing a “pattern system” of “forms and categories” that could be taught without full knowledge of the language. The “pattern” consists of more than words and speech; it includes a way of being in the world. She goes on to explain that, “It is not, perhaps, necessary to become fluent in the language (of a group), but it is necessary to know at least how the language works, the structure. It would be necessary to also understand how cultural transmission occurs through families, schools, and so on” (p. 56). For the O’odham, Himdag seems to provide some of this structure.

Cordova’s work provides a basic idea of what is expected of a person who wants to be considered a tribal member and one wants to be accepted and feel that they belong to a

tribal community. It is one thing to show you belong, it is another thing to act as though you belong. This concept helps guide the analysis to the first research question which focused on understanding and identifying how tribal members of the Gila River Indian Community define belonging and how they define their feeling of belonging. As the interviews were reviewed, an interesting point was brought out by participants when they exclaimed that being part of a Native American tribe serves as an “identity marker, and that within the belonging to the tribe, they felt this is where they may disappoint some people.” However, what was equally made evident is that although a person wanted to belong, identifying what exactly made him/her a member of the Akimel O’odham could not be found with any “real strong identification to the tribe.” That is to say, that while the participant felt adequate enough to identify with the tribe, perhaps their own feeling did not generate a strong connection to the tribe. Such comments led to expanding the concept of belonging to include the sense of being “accepted” by the tribe. Specifically, what exactly could a person do or what lifestyle could a person attain as a primer to being accepted and feel that they belonged?

Historical/Contemporary

With this, the first research question crafted two methods in which a tribal member could potentially develop a feeling of belonging and acceptance within Gila River. The first was the historical definition of how a tribal member feels they belong to the tribal community and how they are accepted. The second was based off the same constructs as the historical definition, but pursued a base of knowledge in reference to the contemporary definition of how a person could be accepted and belonged to the tribal community.

These two ideas are near in thought when spoken or introduced, but it was clear within the interviews that the participants expressed that the individual may feel they belong to the tribal community, but it was another thought to feel as though they were accepted by the tribal community. For instance, several participants noted that they self-identified as an Akimel O’odham (River People) tribal member, but it did not necessarily mean that they were automatically accepted by the tribal community or even their immediate family. One participant added substance to this notion and described dialogue and actions between herself and another “Native.” She began by describing that she was wearing a Man in the Maze² bracelet and had always worn it for as long as she could remember. She was seated within the employee cafeteria in Salt River when a man approached her and said, “What gives you the right to wear that?” She responded, “I actually told him where I was from and who my family was. Then once he heard who my family was, he really dialed his anger down and was a lot cooler about it.”

These questions of defining belonging have long plagued Gila River tribal members and the tribal community as they attempt to provide clarity and knowledge to learn from, to carry forward (for others to learn), and to help improve the formation of tribal identity and belonging for individuals. The need for clarity is important if the tribe wishes to replicate and implement tribal wide; finding the magic formula is the goal for the tribal community’s leadership. However, identifying the actual qualities or characteristics of a tribal member have gone unpublished; the unpublished ideologies foster the development

² The Man in the Maze is utilized as a cultural/people symbol amongst the four O’odham tribes in southern Arizona, the Tohono, Akimel O’odham located in Salt and Gila River, Ak-Chin and the Tohono O’odham nation.

of invisible tribal expectations that many are measured against thereby making it more difficult for tribal leaders to list or outline for future usage. Perhaps the reason for the unpublished characteristics is that the characteristics are not visible traits, but instead are intrinsic and practiced and placed into action unbeknownst to the practitioner internally. A person may simply complete the actions without regard to others observing and ignoring the social implications or invisible social capital.

The initial inhabitants of what is now the Gila River Indian Community spoke the Neok (Language) of the Akimel O'odham or O'odham, but that has changed. English is predominantly the chosen language of day to day business and communication amongst the tribal community. Cordova mentioned that although a person may not be able to speak the language, it may be enough to know from whence the language came and its purpose. The usage of English makes it difficult to identify members of the tribe whereas in years past, if the person spoke in O'odham then you assumed they were of the Akimel, Ak-Chin, or Tohono O'odham tribes (all are sister tribes, speaking similar language). This method of belonging to the tribe has changed the landscape of who belongs and who doesn't. Today, the non-usage of O'odham Neok does not play a larger role in a person's belonging as it may seem the norm not to speak the indigenous language. However, that does not preclude a person from excluding others at their own choice when tribal members choose to use the lack of language acquisition against those they do not approve of or want to exclude.

To dissect this feeling of belonging and acceptance, this dissertation identified two definitions of belonging and acceptance as noted previously. The first was in reference to the historical definition of being accepted and the feeling of belonging to the Gila River

Indian Community, and for the purposes of this dissertation, the historical definition was correlated to knowledge and information provided by immediate family members. The second definition, how a tribal member can find experience belonging and acceptance by attaining knowledge and information from entities outside the immediate family, is a contemporary definition. Both definitions are interesting in nature and the participants of this study provided rich dialogue and suggestions as to how this could be examined in the future and also discussed in the current moment.

Weaver's work demonstrates the complexity that develops when seeking to define Indigenous identity and belonging and begs the question: what happens among individuals who do not possess the necessary amount of qualities based on legal requirements? What about cultural definitions? How might this affect their self-identity and self-efficacy? Because of this, an attempt to offer a concise definition creates difficulty amongst tribal members and tribal communities. Moreover, an attempt to define belonging varies from person to person and day by day. And, the definition of belonging will be determined on which avenue the tribal member would like to be accepted, legally or socially. From this, Gila River finds itself with at least three types of tribal members under the "O'odham and Urban O'odham" categories of tribal members. This notion of having three methods of belonging to a tribal community is perceived to have been adopted over the years and may not have been present within tribal communities as noted in work completed by Jill Doerfler and later cited by Kimberly Tallbear in her book titled *Native American DNA: Tribal belonging and the false promise of genetic science* (2013). In the book, Tallbear notes that Doerfler found that concepts of blood (blood quantum) were absent from or indeterminate in Anishinaabeg assessments of who was "mixed." To the contrary,

assessments of mixedness, especially as reflected in the indigenous language, had to do with lifestyle rather than biogenetic inheritance. One of Doerfler's interviewees attributed full-bloodedness to a "way of living," not to "blood."

The first belonging

As noted previously, a person's belonging to the tribal community has changed from living a certain lifestyle and living within a certain geographic location to belonging to a tribe based on legal requirements of belonging to a tribe (blood quantum). Hence the creation of applications to apply for tribal membership. However, a person can subscribe to both methods of belonging today, or by choosing one of the methods listed above, but the chosen option does not provide an automatic sense of belonging and acceptance by community members. This thinking brings forward two terms that are often used in social settings: tribal members and Indians.

A tribal member is one that is a member of a tribe, defined by an enrollment number whereas an Indian is thought of as a person who lives like an Indian. To put this into context, a person may live in tune with tribal beliefs and practices on a daily basis. When noticed, that person may be deemed as, "Eeeee, he's sure chief (drawn out pronunciation), or, he's sure O'odham (drawn our pronunciation)." The longer drawn out pronunciation appears to allude the level of Indianness a person exhibits. What this statement refers to is that the person identified as living a particular way is a real Indian, they are a practitioner of Native American/Tribal living practices.

Granted such phrases and expressions are often hidden with the social fabric and Rezbonics that Native Americans utilize amongst each other, but serve as a clear social indicator as to how a person is perceived. Social acceptance need not a tribal identification

card to show a person “belongs” to the tribe. The actions exhibited by the person seem to annotate that they are “Indian” based on their ability to act Indian with genuine thoughts and care for practicing handed down knowledge and ways of living. For members of Gila River, this method appears to carry more weight for the individual, somewhat increasing their level of belonging and how others perceive the individual. In short, if the person acts O’odham (Indian), then they are O’odham. The coding of interviews provided four separate ideas/suggestions that the participants felt were contributing factors to developing a feeling of belonging and acceptance: actions, the language, culture practiced and location of the individual (where a person may have grown up or been raised).

Actions

Participants noted that they may or may not feel a sense of belonging to the tribal community because they did not act like the majority of stereotypical Gila River members. One participant explained that, “As a Native American, you have your own jokes, and you laugh, and I didn’t really act like that.” In turn, because they may not mimic or practice typical actions of Gila River members, they were prone to not feeling accepted by the tribal community because they may not have subscribed to a certain pedagogy of dialogue and actions. Again, the tribal member could feel they belonged but that feeling could be trumped if the person was not accepted by the tribal community and in this case, they were not accepted because they did not practice the same verbiage and actions synonymous with the Akimel O’odham.

Language

Following the “actions” of a tribal member, the next category that was formed was the “language” used by a person. Practicing tribal dialogue was further broken down by

participants when they expressed that within the tribal community it was important to practice your language (Akimel O’odham) if you wanted to belong to the tribe and be accepted by a certain faction of the tribe. However, an interesting item to note was that although an individual may not be a fluent speaker of the “O’odham Neok,” (the people’s language), s/he could offer another form of language that was not traditional in sense but was a supplemental cue for acceptance and belonging. Rezbonics (similar to the definition of Ebonics) was identified by participants when they expressed that when identifying other tribal members, one could include them as a tribal member if they practiced certain “rez” terms and “lingo.”

When probed about this notion, several participants could not pinpoint just one term, and in fact had difficulty trying to describe that form of communication and would use their hands to gesture a comment. The participants attempted to define this form of communication by not providing full phrases, but rather by providing small words or mixtures of sounds. All participants expressed that when they were able to use certain key words and sounds, regardless if they were fluent in “O’odham,” they would feel connected to that person or group of tribal members. Without the usage of these terms, sounds of fluent language, they identified that they struggled to feel as though they belonged or that they were accepted as a tribal member.

However, while the usage of sounds and terms could be utilized by the tribal member, it was the usage of the “O’odham” language that was paramount to feeling as though one belongs and is accepted. Later, the theory of phenotypicality bias will be introduced and discussed in length, but it is important to note this theory during this section as the person’s physical appearance was referenced when wanting to be accepted in

combination with language utilized. In a sense, a person could not act as a tribal member or even look like a common tribal member, but if they were to be a practitioner of the language (both instances), they would be given a pass of sorts on their path to feeling that they belonged and were accepted. This theme signified that it was understand why language was an important attribute to one's *tribalness*.

According to one participant, language is important because "We had honorifics in O'odham. I know other cultures have honorifics, too...there's a word for older brother's wife and there's a word for younger brother's wife. In the old ways there would've been different ways of relating to him (brothers)." From this it was understood that when a person doesn't use the O'odham words/language they couldn't participate in that particular conversation or dialogue.

This idea was also supported when the following was offered, referring to a meeting that one participant was privy to attending amongst elders where she heard several attendees discussing a word (she couldn't pronounce or spell the actual word) and its origin, "It was fascinating to hear all the elders debating and things like that." What transpired was the following, "There was, of course, as you know, always disagreement. One guy said it had to do with the way these mountains are flat, and then he said some other word. Then another guy said it had to do with there are these people from there, the way their noses were shaped, that came from that area." The participant was able to lay clear rationale as to why the language was important to practice when she noted she did not understand the initial word, as a result, she wasn't accepted into the group's conversation because she could not contribute on that word usage platform.

This thought created another path of understanding, and one participant was asked to describe the need to use the “O’odham” language if they wanted to feel accepted. She provided that there are just certain things that can only be colored with rich definition if the “O’odham” language is utilized. Trying to use the English language simply did not provide the same definition as the O’odham language. Participants offered that the Akimel O’odham Neok (Pima Language) contained colorful detail when a person wants to describe a particular action, item, relationship, person and when they strayed away from using the language, the meaning or the description lost its true essence. Further, they stated that when they did not use the Akimel O’odham language, specifically in group settings of elders, s/he would not be accepted which in turn would generate a feeling that they did not belong.

Culture

In small circles, tribal language and culture are often conflated, but as noted previously, these two terms are different. The participants clearly drew two separate ideas as to what each term meant. Understanding this, the following should be offered to provide clarity and draw lines between the two that *culture* is what you do and *language* is what you say. This distinction suggests that although a person can speak the language of the Akimel O’odham, this doesn’t necessarily mean that s/he can participate in cultural activities and vice versa. However, it was clear (just as with the usage of language) that if one was knowledgeable in the culture of the Akimel O’odham, then s/he stands a greater chance of being accepted and developing a feeling of belonging as those around them could identify their actions and nuances practiced in relation to the O’odham.

Further dialogue transpired on the importance of how a person could practice the culture of the Akimel O’odham regardless of where they are located in proximity to the ancestral grounds of the Akimel O’odham. Could a person who lived in California or New York hold the same knowledge as a person that resided within the Gila River Indian Community? Throughout the interviews, the participants could not identify one particular cultural practice that may be provided as a method or avenue towards feeling acceptance and belonging. Rather; the participants commonly noted a “himdag” (Way of living) as a commonly accepted definition of culture. Participants provided that this *himdag* had many facets to provide definition; they expressed that *himdag* could be described in reference to a person’s character and how a person lived their life on a daily basis.

One participant offered a rich explanation of “himdag” when she gave a brief example that her father had provided to her sister in law when she wished her husband would be more O’odham like the participant (who described herself as culturally involved). While her sister-in-law cared for her husband (brother to participant), one day she expressed that she wished her husband could be more O’odham and practice cultural beliefs like her father in law. “He said, ‘Chuck’s very O’odham. He gets up, he goes to the office, he provides. He also works for tribe. Everything he does is O’odham. That’s the most O’odham thing he can do it to take care of your family. Now granted, he isn’t off at Red Mountain, he isn’t doing this and he doesn’t do things like she (participant) does. When you look at him, he’s an O’odham man because he does something he doesn’t always want to do, but he does it for the benefit of his family.”

What this statement suggests is that although a person may not be found outdoors harvesting roots and plants for medicinal purposes or singing traditional prayer/blessing

songs, a person can be a cultural practitioner by simply following the steps on what an O’odham does in life, which is the *himdag*. The O’odham have a tradition of helping others and demonstrating humility through their actions, it isn’t common practice to reach too far out and showcase cultural practices for others to see. The participants’ statement additionally suggests that although one might not see key cultural indicators, the subtle and modest actions of an everyday person practicing a modest life of providing for others is the basic root from which the Akimel O’odham can be included in terms of a cultural aspect. Boasting or flaunting one’s actions of helping others and participating in cultural activities such as singing and dancing could lead to being disconnected (rejection or revocation of belonging/acceptance) by the tribal community because they would be considered too “Chum Skug” which translates into a person thinking/acting like they are too good.

So, while a person may practice or want to practice their cultural beliefs so they can be accepted and develop a feeling of belonging they need to be cautious that they do not overexpose their cultural participation to the point that it is held against them. This finding produces an interesting point that develops when one considers a person who wants to show or prove they are O’odham but may not get the chance to do so as what they may have learned may not have included the essence of O’odham teaching. That is to say that tribal members can attain or absorb indigenous knowledge via their families or tribal community or via a contemporary school model found within current school models on and off the tribal reservation. However, while they may learn the language and culture of the tribal community in a school setting, the student may not be offered the true essence and construct systems of how to utilize that knowledge.

Building on the areas that define how a person can feel they belong or are accepted, the last sub-category that was created framed the idea of how the location of person's upbringing and domicile contributes to a person's sense of belonging and acceptance. Within the interviews, participants listed their birth location (on or off the tribal reservation), where they grew up, what school they attended and where they live now. Further, they were asked how these locations affected their feeling of belonging and acceptance.

First, while a person may have been born and lived on the tribal reservation, this didn't equate to automatically being accepted by the tribal community or to the development of a sense of belonging. One participant offered that they were not like other tribal members because he didn't wear dark clothing or wear his hair long as other tribal members appeared to do daily. Second, while a tribal member may have been born or raised off the reservation, they did not automatically feel a sense of belonging and acceptance simply by their physical features, regardless of their usage of the Akimel O'odham language and lack of cultural practices and knowledge.

Biology and Phenotype

The last category within the first research question focused on the acceptance and belonging based on the physical features of an individual. Participants discussed whether they felt they possessed physical attributes (Phenotype) that are commonly found amongst the Akimel O'odham. These attributes can be described as the traits (genes) that may be passed on from a parent to their child. For instance, if a mother has curly hair, one may think that that curly would be passed on to the child and the same can be said for skin tone. Dialogue with the participants provided details on how theory of phenotype attributed to a

person feeling like they belonged and if they were accepted. When probed, participants listed several physical characteristics that they felt Akimel O’odham's possess including hair type, color and length (thick, black, long, unkempt), skin tone (dark), and body size (large, obese in shape).

Building from this, the comments provided by the participants outlined that at times they did not feel they belonged to the Akimel O’odham and/or they were not accepted by their tribal community because they did not feel they possessed those characteristics. Participants were asked to provide details to their thoughts and then provide how it made them feel. During these instances, some participants experienced emotional reactions, and even cried, when they were asked a series of questions in regards to describing their feelings that were generated by the probing questions.

Several stated that these basic physical traits of dark skin, or thick dark hair were primers to being accepted and developing a feeling of belonging to the tribal community. Feliciano (2016) adds that phenotype is used as an indicator of ancestry. For the participants, the attributes were a connection to the Akimel O’odham. Feliciano (2016) explains that, “I find that despite the growth in the multiracial population, observers tend to place individuals into monoracial categories, including Latino. Skin color is the primary marker used to categorize others by race, with light skin associated with Whiteness, medium skin with Latinidad, and, most strongly, dark skin with Blackness” (p. 393).

Walking into a room of familiar faces was also difficult as the participants exclaimed that their own family members (who have known them for years) were also prone to acting in this manner towards, feeling as though they continuously had to prove their worth as a tribal member. A participant offered “people don’t let me forget that I’m

part white.” Along the same lines, if the participant walked into a room of individuals that they did not know, they felt compelled to have to start at square one and earn their way into belonging and being accepted by the group. The participants also stated that in both instances, the feelings generated made them feel worthless and as an outsider. Strange looks, whispered comments and pointing were strong indicators if they were accepted or not, and indicators of acceptance by those in the room was provided by a smile or offered joke, a sort of kidding with the participant.

When asked why having specific physical attributes is necessary to being accepted, participants expressed that they felt viewed as outsiders if they didn't and that O'odham needed to feel trust and similarity to form a relationship with them. They additionally noted that over time, the physical characteristics have begun to be differentiated. Whereas a person doesn't have certain physical looks as in years past this is a result of lower blood-quantum, marrying outside of the tribe and producing mixed race children. “Again, I think that being mixed now is probably way easier than it was for me or my brother ever, growing up,” confessed one participant. The participant was referring to her observation that many tribal members, specifically the youth, have non-traditional characteristics as were provided within all interviews.

The second belonging

The term “tribal member” is used when seeking to be granted access to a particular government (federal/state) funded program or during all-Indian sports tournaments. This tribal member status does not equate to living “chief” or “O'odham,” thereby reducing the person to only belonging to one group and does not require the person to show their

Indianness. Instead; a person need only prove they have the appropriate level of blood quantum that is required to be identified as a tribal member.

While the Gila River Indian Community does not illustrate a matrix for belonging in terms of an “Indian,” they do provide necessary information to apply for tribal membership. The GRIC website is designed for tribal member usage. When visiting the webpage and clicking on the enrollment tab the website provides verbiage to allow tribal members to understand the need for a tribal identification card. “Tribal Identification cards are used to verify your membership with the Gila River Indian Community” (www.mygilariver.com). Furthermore, the website provides information for potential tribal members and what is needed to apply for tribal membership. When applying for membership with Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) the following is required in accordance with Title 3 of the Tribal Code: A biological parent MUST be currently enrolled with GRIC and the applicant must be at least 1/4 Native Blood and submit an original birth certificate as well as an original social security card with application. For those who have a parent enrolled with another federally recognized tribe, GRIC requires verification of non-membership for the applicant as well as a certified degree of Indian blood for the parent who is enrolled with the other federally recognized tribe.

The definition of belonging to Gila River has changed over time and perhaps for reasons laid out by Tallbear (2013) when she noted, “We privilege our rights and identities as citizens of tribal nations for good reason; citizenship is key to sovereignty, which is key to maintaining our land bases” (p. 32). This sense of belonging resulted as a means to survival as a people, to be recognized by the Federal government, to keep the sustainment

of trust responsibility in an effort to sustain the reservations that the tribe resides upon. Simply put, without Indians there is no reservation.

This sense of belonging resulted as a means to survival, not as a means to include others culturally or in the historical lifestyle of including all who happened to be around you including family and those who partook in cultural events without the goal of belonging. This definition of belonging to a tribe has created friction amongst tribal citizens and has created two groups, as noted previously, tribal members and Indians. In essence, these new groups have drawn a line of “us” and “them,” which strays from the traditional O’odham belief systems of welcoming everyone into your community and family.

Coulthard (2007) warns against the effects of inducements, particularly as they result in economic gains for individuals. He argues that when recognition is granted through mainstream forms of economic development, it inheres the potential for creating a “new elite of Aboriginal capitalists whose ‘thirst for profit’ comes to ‘outweigh their ancestral obligations’” (p. 452). Grande (2004) further adds that the preoccupation with identity politics prevents a critical discourse on oppression and power. Furthermore, as Tippeconnic (2015) explains, “The obsession with identity will continue as American Indians grow in numbers, become tribally and racially mixed, pursue tribal membership, and seek eligibility for real or perceived benefits for tribal members. Indian identity politics will continue to be divisive, especially in the distribution of goods and services, decision-making, and with political and economic agendas” (p. 39).

The third belonging

While there have been two types of belonging to the Gila River Tribe, there should be a third type of belonging. This third type of belonging is created when a person holds both the cultural and legal definitions of belonging. As one participant mentioned, a person can act Indian and be accepted, and the person can apply to be a Tribal Member but there should also be consideration of a person who qualifies for both methods of belonging.

A person that is labeled as “chief/O’odham” and that holds a tribal member identification is deemed extra Native American and is thereby provided full acceptance and belonging. This third method provides an almost defensive shield around a person and many cannot challenge the Indianness of the person, unless the challenger holds the same credentials of belonging. As this person has shown the proper social and legal items of belonging to the tribal community, there still lies another layer of belonging that would amplify the belonging. This layer includes the possession of the “appropriate” physical characteristics that are and were found amongst the original Akimel O’odham (Pima). Long thick hair, dark skin, high cheek bones, usage of the language (Neok) are some of those characteristics.

The definition of what defines an Akimel O’odham has taken many forms over the years and continues to change with new variables (social changes) that are developed as the population continues to grow. With this, the physical characteristics that were specific to the Akimel O’odham will also change and create new pockets of identifiers. The outside world now has a large influence on the tribal community; young members now attend schools off the reservation or even on the reservation with non-tribal members. The potential to procreate with non-tribal members or non Akimel O’odham is highly probable.

It is then probable that as the lineage of blood changes so too does the physical characteristics of tribal members.

Implications

Each participant in this study provided substance to how a person can belong and be accepted by their community. While they noted that education had a role in that acceptance and belonging, they also stated that the idea of belonging and being accepted relied on the culture and language practices of an individual. Further examination of the variables of acceptance and belonging allows one to draw a line between those items that are similar and share a connectivity. The idea that there can be one definition to define a path that a person must follow to be accepted and ultimately feel that they belong varies with every person that you may encounter. A person's actions that include the usage of O'odham language/culture were strong indicators to define if a tribal member was enough Indian to be accepted, which was followed by the location of a tribal member and where they may currently reside, where they had previously resided and also included where the tribal member's family could be traced to. While these definitions may not be of worth to many, for the tribal member it was essential when wanting to belong to Gila River.

Essentially, the participants alluded to the idea that in order to feel that they belonged to Gila River, they must attain or hold a certain level of indigenous knowledge that was indicative of the Akimel O'odham. It seemed that the only distribution outlet to provide such knowledge was found to be from tribal members who resided within the community or those that had already been accepted by the tribal community. This knowledge was unidentifiable in terms and could not be measured in a matrix or other

graphing scale. Instead, the participants noted that this knowledge was more of a way of life (himdag), to which only had the definition of how one lives.

When considering a person's domicile in lieu of being accepted or feeling that they belong, it was clear that the person should have some tie or be able to tie themselves to the Gila River reservation. If a person were to examine the merit of having a locational tie to Gila River, it was supported by Malkki (1992) when she noted that "being rooted in a place and as deriving their identity from the rootedness.... The roots in question here are not just any kind of roots, they are specifically arborescent in form." This is to say that regardless if a person claims they are a tribal member, they in essence should have spent some time within the Gila River reservation. Further, this connection to the land of Gila River must be specific to Gila River if a person is wanting to feel that they belong. During the conversations with participants they had an array of geographic locations to which they attributed their growth as an individual, but each was clear to try and annotate a connectedness to Gila River as a method to validate their Indianness. While they would identify areas off the reservation, each were able to make a connection to someone that resided within the Gila River Indian Community, listing those locations by identifying a particular district or village area.

This study produced deeply reflective thoughts and feelings from each participant. Participants were colorful in their expressions and comments and many times cried and became emotional when questions surfaced drawn back feelings of resentment, hurt, and sadness in correlation to feeling they were not accepted as a member of Gila River. Further, the participants' interviews provided a path to how a person could feel that they belonged, which appeared to germinate from the feeling of being accepted. One cannot belong to a

group or an organization without first being accepted. As illustrated in the interviews, two different claims to be a member of the tribe can be identified: self-identification of being a tribal member of the Gila River Indian Community and when someone else identifies the individual as being a tribal member of the Gila River Indian Community.

The first derives from a person's intent to want to be or claim to be a tribal member of GRIC. In certain situations, the individual can mark that they are tribal member and claim such belonging when they exclaim they are a tribal member/Native American amongst friends, colleagues or groups where it may be politically incorrect to challenge a person's self-identity. To add substance to this topic, a person can be safe when they are not being challenged by other Natives or individuals that are familiar with a particular tribe's identity and enrollment policies. During interviews, within Gila River, the participants noted several districts and villages within the tribal community and with understanding that it is clear that unless one is from Gila River then they would more than likely not know the differences or nuances of the reservation.

An interesting point that was drawn from the study's participants was the fact that while they claimed to be Native American outside the tribal reservation or any reservation, they were not challenged, they were accepted and then labeled to belong to such a tribal community. However, this same premise of self-identification took on a different action and interaction when the same individual would try to claim they are Native American (O'odham) when in the presence of other O'odham. This self-identification began a different format to be accepted, one that countered that self-identification with a series of challenge questions or actions.

This series of small questions and actions appears to provide a small test of the Indianness of the individual. Participants noted that they needed to prove who they were in unfamiliar circumstances and that simply claiming they were O’odham did not seem to be adequate for other O’odham. As a result, the participants noted that they felt there were different levels that needed to be achieved before a person could feel that they belonged, and this path had several acceptance qualifiers that were created differently for each individual.

For instance, participants noted that while they may carry a tribal identification card that signified they met the legal definition to be a member of the Gila River Indian Community, it did not equate to meeting the social constructs that can be found within tribal members of the Gila River Indian Community to be included and accepted as a member of the tribal community. It was important for the tribal member to have a base of which to build and generate trust by other tribal members; this included the ability to trace their family roots and provide a person’s name or family’s name that the challenger could accept if they were unfamiliar with the individual.

Each participant was able to attach themselves and their family to certain villages within Gila River, they simply didn’t claim that their family was located in Gila River. This information was drawn in the first portion of the interviews and each participant was quick to offer this attachment or belonging to a particular part of the Gila River Indian Community. This differed when the individual was self-identifying outside the reservation, when they would only state they are a member of the tribe and give the location of the tribe and the name of the tribe; they would not identify a particular district, or village within Gila River.

Also, the participants noted that while it was important to be able to attach themselves to a particular part of the reservation and family residing in the reservation, it was also important to understand and utilize cultural practices and language in those same instances. When doing this it helped to garner more acceptance, ultimately generating a strong feeling that they belonged.

However, when a tribal member achieved such status it did not equate to being accepted by all tribal members in other social scenarios. In fact, the participants had to double their effort and start from the beginning and earn and prove their Indianness once again, and again. Why is this important, and who should have to disclose such information?

While it should not be required by an individual to provide such private information Castano et. al, (2002) states that some argue that individuals are biased toward excluding others as members of their own group because of a desire to maximize their in-group's distinctiveness. Further, others have added that acceptance may be shaped by familiarity, such that individuals are more likely to recognize a range of phenotypes as members of their in-group (Chen & Hamilton, 2012; Willadsen-Jensen & Ito, 2006). Both theories lay foundation and understanding to tribal members' willingness to have individuals prove their Indianness. In the case of Gila River, these theories lead to traditional practices of how a person is greeted and welcomed within a tribal group.

The participants noted that tribal elders and other tribal members had created a system of identifying a person, and even though they might not know the individual, the person could accept that individual if they were able to identify their family and village from which their family had historically resided. This action or Himdag was an age-old action that had been present in O'odham heritage for many years, and was possibly created

to serve several purposes. When building trust, it was important for tribal members to know who you were and prior to Facebook or other social media outlets, a conversation was the primer to getting to know a person to build a connection as a family member, an ally or an enemy.

The definition of being accepted and belonging thus followed two tracts: a historical definition and a contemporary definition. To put it simply, the historical definition is one that is utilized by tribal members that may reside or reside closely to the reservation where one may find a more robust social activities calendar such as Piasts (Dances/Celebrations), religious events, tribal supported activities, all Indian Rodeos/Sports Tournaments and other events that test your Indianness and need to prove your Indianness to participate. These situations prescribe a need to be a tribal member in order to participate.

The contemporary definition followed the historical definition but has been created and utilized by those who leave the reservation or who may not have grown up on the reservation. These individuals use the contemporary definition in an attempt to gain entry or access to help develop feelings of acceptance and belonging in social settings such as a school setting, applying for social programs and other self-identifying scenarios that allow for a person to gain entry or have access to tribal programming. However, in both definitions the need to act Indian, to use Indian language, to practice Indian culture and have an attachment to Indian land seems to be required, but at different rates. Society both on and off the reservation place these requirements on each person who is or who wants to be an Indian, which includes the final test of acceptance and disqualification.

A person can go through the various levels of acceptance to belong to Gila River, but can generate a feeling of mistrust or non-acceptance by the way they look and act. To provide depth to this idea, one must consider the phenotype that an individual possesses or the genetic make-up of an individual which is influenced by the environment of the individual. This phenotype is not synonymous to Native Americans but can be found in most any ethnic or racial population that serves with a special connotation to it.

The next chapter, presents the findings related to the second research question and considers the role of higher education in shaping the perception or desire to return. This chapter examines the following questions: What do participants believe are tribal expectations of tribal members to serve their community? How does education influence belonging and identity for GRIC members?

7. Role of Education and Perception or Desire to Return

The previous chapter presented findings for the first research question guiding this study. This chapter presents the findings related to the second research question and considers the role of higher education in shaping the perception or desire to return. This chapter examines the following questions: What do participants believe are tribal expectations of tribal members to serve their community? How does education influence belonging and identity for GRIC members? How, if at all, do members believe education is important or related to belonging and serving the tribal nation? Why do members choose to leave, for what purpose? And for those who have returned, what made them want to come back? How did they maintain connection or sense of belonging while they were away? For those who sought to come back, how did they go about returning? What was the transition like? For those who have not returned, in what ways, if any, do they seek to contribute to the nation?

The second research question focused on understanding how and in what ways do Gila River tribal members learn how to become members of a community, specifically, what entity, group, or events shaped this feeling or action of belonging. To gain a better understanding on this topic, the interviews were reviewed and later identified two underlying factors in identity development; or rather, the interviews provided two paths in which tribal members may gain a feeling of belonging in a path to developing tribal identity. The first was family and community as a source of identity development while formal schooling served as the second source.

An interesting note to make was that while the dissertation stipulated that all participants must be a tribal member of the Gila River Indian Community, this requirement

did not ask that the participant be a full blooded (blood quantum) individual. All but one participant was of mixed blood, and not considered a full blooded Akimel O’odham. For the purposes of Gila River, a tribal member need only 1/4 blood lineage to enroll as a tribal member and can also have that blood quantum supplemented by other tribal community blood lines so long as the parent(s) is an enrolled member of Gila River. Understanding this, it is clear to identify the need for Gila River to be called a community and not a nation as found in other federally recognized tribes within the United States. This is noted because it is important when deciphering some of the comments made by the participants. Further, this topic generates dialogue that fuels some of the confusing thoughts that were exclaimed by the participants when asked to identify topics, cultural practices and history that helped them to identify as a member of Gila River. In short, if the person was not required to be a full blooded Akimel O’odham or Pee Posh, then how could they be expected to act like a full-blooded tribal member of Gila River?

Internal social influences: Family and community

The first source of learning, family and community, was provided by the participants when they described that they learned that they were Native American as a result of their family informing them and by their family teaching them. This method of learning was not synonymous to family located within the boundaries of the reservation, but rather, it relied on the participant simply learning from their family or community in whatever location they were raised. While they could not specifically identify traits of the Akimel O’odham or Pee Posh (Historical tribes of Gila River), they were able to note that there was an underlying “way of life” that had been taught. This information included firsthand cultural practices, language usage, and overall heritage of the Gila River

community, but was supplemented by other tribal influences of which the participants identified as being a part of in their lifetime. For instance, they may have family or blood lineage from the Sioux tribe (not any Sioux tribe in particular), so they formed a way of life based on these teachings or the combination of teachings. Participants noted that their location often influenced how they were taught or raised with Gila River having seven identified community districts of which tribal members reside, each of those districts had unique characteristics that identified each separately from another district.

These characteristics included the usage of the O’odham Neok (People’s Language) with different dialects, different plant and animal life, different geographic locations and natural resources. Understanding this, it was clear that while the participants may have had a basic foundation of who they were (identity), it may differ from what would be taught in other areas of the reservation. Taking these comments into consideration, this dissertation found that while the participants were tribal members, they may not have grown up within the reservation and in fact were labeled as “urban” members having grown up in any part outside of the Gila River reservation. This outside living provided yet another layer of how a person learned from their family/community.

External social influences: School and outside agencies or programs

The second category identified that the person’s identity was formed with the assistance of any entity or individual outside of the family and community of the participant. While some participants noted that they may have learned how to be Akimel O’odham or Pee Posh from family/community, some identified that they established their identity by learning it within a formal setting such as an educational entity. This was noted as most participants were raised or lived off the reservation boundaries therefore not privy

to the same “everyday” knowledge that seems to be present around those tribal members that reside within the reservation. In some cases, the participants noted that some tribal members do not know anything about being O’odham or Pee Posh, and first learn how to be Native American by attending school and participating in Culture and Language coursework prescribed by the school.

To explain the offering of culture and language in the classrooms, participants noted that within Gila River there has been a rise in the availability of culture and language cadre that are found within the Kindergarten through 12th grade school systems. These culture and language teachers are charged with providing a basic understanding and exposure to the culture and language. Further, the participants noted that while they may have formed a foundation of knowledge from their family/community, that knowledge and identity was often strengthened or supplemented by knowledge provided by formal schooling. And at times, teachings within school systems were challenged by other tribal members who felt that some aspects of the culture and language should not be taught within a school setting therefore the authenticity of such knowledge should be discounted and not counted as valid. However, some participants felt that without the offerings within the school settings or formal education settings, they would be without the knowledge of what helped them to form a tribal identity that was of Gila River.

Schematic formations of cultural identity

As stated in the previous section, participants offered that the formation of tribal identity and how a person learned to be Akimel O’odham was typically developed within two settings: the person’s family/tribal community and formal schooling received during their lifetime. Knowledge gained by the participant formed schemas that allowed each

participant to approach and respond to various situations with differentiated coping methodologies.

A portion of the *Himdag* of the Akimel O’odham relies on the idea that tribal members should be at peace with themselves and should strive to learn from the environment that is placed around them. However, a review of each participant’s struggle to learn how to become a member of the Akimel O’odham placed Piaget’s theory into motion when some of the participants felt their identity was changing and, in some instance, not changed enough. Participants found that they had aged with thinking and believing towards several types of social grouping and social actions; only to find that those personal choices may not have been accepted by other Akimel O’odham or had been rejected thereby leaving the participant to feel off balance. They would utilize their prior knowledge as a method to approach new ideals and belief systems in an effort to gain acceptance to the Akimel O’odham. When this new approach was not welcomed by previously established construct systems (schemas), then the participants were thrown into a feeling of unbalanced when they had to accommodate the new knowledge thereby forming new schemas that were unfamiliar to them.

Family/Tribal Community

The importance of learning from their family and community was paramount during the interviews and appeared to take the lead on forming a stronger tribal identity as participants noted that rich and colorful knowledge seemed to be more *authentic* when coming from their family member or straight from the tribal community and its stakeholders. This thought of being real or authentic was found laced within the comments and dialogue that each participant provided.

During the interviews, participants quickly cited their family roots and identified a specific part of the Gila River Reservation from which their family bloodline stemmed. Not one participant noted their family origin stemming from outside the reservation. Several subsequent questions followed this offering of information, specifically; how and where did the participants learn to open dialogue with such information? Participants noted that the usage of these introduction methods was derived from their family and elders, stating that it (introducing yourself) was a common and important practice that had been passed down and was found to be the first steps to greetings others, especially when greeting elders. Several other layers of information provided by each participant described that this knowledge and practice rose out of a desire to carry on family knowledge that had been passed on. Further, each participant stated that these practices were common amongst other parts of the tribal community.

When probed further, this demonstration of cultural authenticity seemed to form as a defense mechanism for each participant. It wasn't enough to claim to be Indian, but rather, it was more important to claim yourself as an Indian and show your Indianness. However, that Indianness had to be infused with authentic knowledge or actions from the Akimel O'odham such as the utilization of the O'odham Neok (People's language). These actions would help the participant gain a sense of tribal identity by showing others that they were in fact practitioners of the Akimel Himdag (People's way of life). The usage of such actions in conjunction with claiming their stake of Indianness seemed to fend off would be challengers to the participant's tribal identity, regardless of their physical features of other Akimel O'odham.

Formal Schooling

While each participant provided family as the first path to attaining a tribal identity, it was also clear that each participant had to fill in the blanks for missing information that had not been provided. Only one of the participants could state that they had been born within the reservation, and that they had lived within the reservation for a majority of their lifetime. So, what happens when those who are not born into the reservation and do not have the ability to learn from their family and tribal community, where do they receive their introduction into the multifaceted layers of indigenous knowledge?

It was evident that each person sought out this knowledge by means of formal schooling, or rather, any source outside of the family and tribal community which included course offerings within school settings, printed literature, and attending social events on their own. In comparison to the knowledge received by family and tribal community, this attainment of knowledge would often be questioned as authentic by others from Gila River. Participants noted that while they could cite parts of indigenous knowledge, that knowledge would not be valid unless they could attach that knowledge to specific traits of indigenous knowledge held by those who had been taught by family and the tribal community. For instance, if a person could identify a plant (within terms used by a botanist) that is located within the community such as the sage plant as a medicinal plant that is commonly used in religious ceremonies, it was not enough. In fact, participants noted that a person should have the knowledge of where that plant can be found, who can use the plant, how to harvest the plant and how to utilize the plant for particular events. This second layer of knowledge is what participants described as a deficiency in their tribal identity and how they learned to be a member of the Akimel O'odham.

Taking this into consideration, the participant's dismay was easy to understand when they felt they were not connected enough to form a strong tribal identity. According to them, it was disheartening to know that as hard as they tried to fight against the lack of authenticity (as seen by others) indigenous knowledge and their particular constant pursuit to chase this indigenous knowledge forced them to feel in constant tension or truly attain their Indianness. To put it in another context, their indigenous knowledge and Indianness could be compared to someone purchasing and using the Kool-Aid brand of refreshment versus the Flavor-Aid brand of refreshment. While both strived to quench your thirst, there would always be those who whisper and note that one is always better than the other and the practice of using Flavor-Aid should be considered passé.

When a tribal member is encouraged to become educated, beyond what is offered in grade school systems, this notion is often challenged to go and learn different methods and theories. The thought of self-determination, self-governance and ultimately nation building become relevant as tribal communities promote the education of their youth for the benefit of the tribe. However, while these ideas and vision sound encouraging, it is discouraging to know that what transpires as a result of this marketing of schooling and the effect it potentially has on the individual's feeling of belonging to the tribe and an overall action of being accepted as tribal members. This study placed focus on the feeling of belonging and the attainment of being accepted by the tribal community and focused on those tribal members that pursued a higher education model and wanted to be a part of the general "traditional" culture and language practices. While there can be many variations of this idea.

This dissertation took comments from the participants to sustain this path of understanding. Participants were clear that they wanted a connection to their tribe, both culturally and linguistically. During the interviews, participants noted that as they thought of attending a higher education institution, they felt a drive to do so with an intent to help better their people (Gila River). Regardless if they resided within the tribal reservation, they still felt compelled to return and make a positive difference. However, each participant listed challenges to this romantic thought, and provided details of how the attainment of education created a larger separation between them and their tribal community. First, participants noted the difficulty with gaining a sense of belonging within their tribal families and their tribal community and then spoke of how they formalized different methods and strategies to prove their Indianness to others in an attempt to feel an acceptance and ultimately feel as though they belonged to the people of Gila River.

Then as they may have received such an acceptance, the pursuit and attainment of a higher education left them in a category of those that thought they were too good (Chum Skug) which then pushed them outside the circle of acceptance. An “us” and “them” environment ensued, much like what the participants felt as they described the task of lacking certain characteristics (physical features and cultural actions and dialogue) when they attempted to join other tribal members during events and gatherings. While the Gila River Indian Community provides a generous higher education scholarship for those tribal members that want to attend college/university or a vocational school there seems to be some lacking policies and procedures that serve to help better such situations. One participant provided that during her time, such scholarships were not available to tribal

members and that scholarships were very competitive. “You just didn’t see too many tribal members going to college.”

When asked about the difference would in higher education opportunities previously offered to that of today the participant offered that, “Today everyone can go to college, but many don’t.” Further, she noted that the difference from then and now was the idea and practice of someone caring for you, and showing that concern as they would visit with the student both in person or on the phone or through correspondence. Each participant noted a difference of how they were viewed and how they viewed themselves before, during, and after college, providing detailed approaches and ideas to building a future focus for all stakeholders involved in a tribal members education.

This chapter presented findings related to the role of higher education and its shaping of a tribal member’s desire to return to the tribal community. The next chapter, chapter eight, presents the findings related to the third and final research question and focuses on the community’s preparedness for the return of its citizens.

8. Community's Preparedness for Return

The Gila River Indian Community is a vibrant community that seeks progressive methods to advance their people, working to pursue nation building. This includes the support and advocacy for their tribal membership to graduate high school, attend a higher education institute and return to the tribal community to form systems of change for the benefit of advancing the tribal community. The tribe also provides a generous scholarship for every enrolled member seeking to go to college, a full-ride scholarship that requires no pay back to the tribe. The previous chapter discussed the role of family and schooling in shaping how a tribal member learns what it means to be Akimel O'odham, which shapes their experience of belonging and acceptance within the tribal community. This chapter presents the findings related to the third and final research question and focuses on the community's preparedness for the return of its citizens.

While policy is created to promote such an initiative, what is not found is the policy of how to welcome those tribal members home to the tribal community or a method to help foster continued tribal identity and inclusion of those tribal members as they choose pursue higher education. As a result, this portion of the dissertation focuses on future possibilities for tribal members, tribes, tribal member families, and colleges/universities to improve systems to support and welcome back those tribal members that seek higher education without losing a foot of Indianness or someone to question their Indianness.

This dissertation focused on how a tribal member from Gila River defined their belongingness, and how that definition may have changed over a period of time. This included the way a person talked, held themselves, how they looked in terms of wanting to be accepted by the general population of the Gila River Akimel O'odham. Throughout the

interviews it became evident that each participant lacked a positive self-esteem and were deficient in opportunities to exude self-efficacy during different parts of their lifetime and even today as this dissertation was in draft form.

Although participants may have formed a high self-esteem as a tribal member, they appeared to lack the self-efficacy present within knowing you are a tribal member. In essence, a person can feel good about themselves (self-esteem) but it is another thing to feel confident they can complete a task that may be asked of them as a tribal member (self-efficacy). For example, participants noted that within group settings or tribal community events, they would often feel less Akimel O’odham because they did not speak the indigenous language of the Akimel O’odham, which ultimately did influence their self-esteem in that situation. Participants also noted that their geographic location played a part in their confidence to feel they belonged to the tribal community; thereby discounting the idea that although they may have attained indigenous knowledge of the Akimel O’odham it was possibly not good enough in the eyes of others who may have resided or continue to reside within the confines of the tribal reservation. Local knowledge seemed to always trump outside knowledge of the tribal members. The internal feeling of knowing they are Akimel O’odham was often overshadowed by the idea that they felt confident in their identify formation. To illustrate this idea, the theory of self-efficacy must be introduced to help define and decipher this invisible feeling.

Participants also noted that they received partial information throughout their upbringing, if they received any knowledge at all. However, participants also noted that while they received partial knowledge, the giver of knowledge (an elder person or parent) clearly held more knowledge as they had presumably grown up in an environment that

provided a rich and colorful opportunity for that person to attain a tribal identity that was associated with Gila River Akimel O’odham. To continue this notion, participants appeared to hold low self-efficacy but high self-esteem. To explain this, Bandura (1982) noted that, “such self-referent misgivings create stress and impair performance by diverting attention from how best to proceed with the undertaking to concerns over failings and mishaps. In contrast, persons who have a strong sense of efficacy deploy their attention and effort to the demands of the situation and are spurred to greater effort by obstacles” (p. 123).

Considering this theory, participants of this study fell within this thought process and in fact felt stress and in times did the minimum to develop a sense of belonging and acceptance by their fellow tribal members and community. Towards the latter part of the interviews, participants also stated that as much as they tried, they could not fully attain tribal acceptance by their peers, with most of this driven by what they felt were a lack of physical characteristics, cultural practices, and language usage of the Akimel O’odham. Self-efficacy towards belonging within the participants was questioned and the formation of self-efficacy and later self-esteem suffered arrested development. If self-efficacy is described as one’s personal judgments of how well he/she can execute courses of action required to successfully complete prospective situations (Bandura, 1982). Then self-efficacy is the feelings and anticipated control that people have to produce and regulate certain events in their lives and have successful outcomes. People’s judgments of their capabilities influence their thought patterns and emotional reactions during anticipatory and actual transactions with the environment. Those who judge themselves as inefficacious in coping with their environmental demands tend to dwell on their personal deficiencies

and imagine potential difficulties as more formidable than they really are (Beck, 1976; Meichenbaum, 1977; Sarason, 1975).

However, as interviews progressed, and regardless of this lack of inclusion, each participant still felt compelled to return to the tribal community and utilize their skills attained while attending the different higher education institutes and regardless if they did not reside within the community boundaries. This lack of self-esteem and self-efficacy is important to focus on when considering a future focus for tribal members who seek to attend higher education institutes. As stated by participants, a future focus should not only include the individual tribal member, but rather, should also include the tribal member's family, tribe itself and the institutions in which tribal members may attend.

This dissertation identified that not all tribal members who enter college will come directly from the tribal reservation and identified that tribal members can be found outside the tribal reservation as well. Those participants who grew up within the tribal community found similar difficulties with their pursuit of a higher education and how that impacted the ability to feel they were accepted as an Akimel O'odham. For purposes of this study, however, the future focus still includes wording and suggestions for all tribal members, regardless of their starting point of residency.

When comparing identity development in regards to self-esteem and self-efficacy, it is critical to focus on exactly what has been taught and provided to the learner and during what stages of their lives. If we consider the knowledge of a tribal member, and identifying the notions that the participants provided, it is imperative for a person to get a full breath of a particular topic of knowledge if they were to get a good grasp on the topic at hand. However, while a person may be on a track to learn and experience vital cultural and

language of the Akimel O’odham, what happens when there is a lapse or a pause in that personal tribal development?

Participants noted that as they quenched for knowledge and acceptance, they understood that much of the knowledge of the Akimel O’odham seemed to develop in stages and knowledge relied on previously developed methods of viewing the world and the community (schemas), a sort of scaffolding of learning. With this, if a person was not privy to one initial level of learning it was hard to attain the next without the proper foundation of learning having transpired. Wood et al. (1976) offered the following definition of scaffolding: “Those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence” (p. 90). When considering the formation of a strong self-esteem, efficacy, this prior knowledge was important to improve these two personal beliefs.

These members rely on the continuous support from their peers, family, tribe and college. Most face two worlds of competing rhetoric that unknowingly place labels upon the tribal member. Apple, Cracker, Sell-Out are some labels that are placed on a person who wants to know more than the common folk, or a person who does not have the physical attributes of most Akimel O’odham. And while a tribal member may possess all the common characteristics of the Akimel O’odham, an interesting transformation occurs when that tribal member leaves to college and begin to absorb the college culture that later effects their dress, their talk, their discourse and overall outlook to solving problems or predicaments that arise. These new attributes place that tribal member in a category that was listed in the paragraph above and most times than not (per the participants) it is the

family and community who place these labels upon the individual. How do these invisible lines of exclusion improve? As mentioned previously, this effort must include the variables of this social equation to include; the tribal member, the tribal member's family, the tribe and the college.

Creating a Welcoming Environment for Return

The tribal member should step out front of these negative ideas that are promoted by their family, friends, and fellow tribal members and desire to promote a new and innovative curriculum and educational experiences that lend themselves to helping a tribal member not only become educated in new theories and academia, but also keep one foot grounded within indigenous knowledge systems that are present within tribal communities so that they will not be subject to negative connotations and name calling. The tribal member should go further to promote this idea of inclusion by utilizing tools and methods that encompass both non-Indian and Indian methods of communication. Who better to know than the student?

Second, tribes can take a positive approach and become invested in the future of their tribal members by taking an active role in the formation of preparing students to attend college, supporting those students while they are in college, and welcoming those students when they are prepared to return. It is simple to tell a student to go to college, but what support is given in an effort to truly help the student? Does a new student understand what will be required, what challenges they will face? Adding to this, specifically, is the student aware of what may transpire as a result of them leaving for college? This is not an easy topic to discuss, but for future focus, each tribe must be truthful and open to informing and educating future scholars of the hurdles they will face.

Utilizing methods of the old ways may assist with this dissemination of knowledge. Historically, tribal members would speak with their members as they left the reservation, submitting what would happen when they leave, what will happen when they are away, and what they should expect in the world. Particularly, these discussions would occur when a tribal member left for the United States military. However, it does not negate the idea that was proposed by Deloria (2001) when he stated “even the most severely eroded Indian community today still has a substantial fragment of the old ways left, and these ways are to be found in the Indian family” (p.43). Deloria’s comments allude to the idea that regardless of the advancement of a tribe, they still hold some traditions. For the GRIC, these traditions involve the sit downs or the family discussions that had historically taken place with the passing of knowledge to one another. This type of preparation can only serve to better a system that encourages tribal members to become educated by identifying hurdles that they will face with an intent to allow them to prepare.

As noted in interviews, participants were troubled with this characteristic of acting “too good” after they went to college. This structure of thought formed regardless if the tribal member provided updated information on what they had learned. Instead, tribal member’s family members were often prone to providing that label before any discussion had been made. Different voice cadence, different dress, and looks that differed from the “a” typical O’odham that was provided during interviews were the main identifiers to exclude the tribal member.

This theory of learning is also true for tribal members, but requires the addition of indigenous knowledge to this aspect. To provide clarity, while a tribal member may have become accustomed to providing answers in the classroom, speaking out in the classroom

and encouraged to challenge theory and ideations, this type of personal activity is frowned upon within tribal communities, but the tribal member attending school must have assimilated and accommodated to this form of learning.

Tribal members are often educated or pursue basic tales or beliefs that are indicative to tribal knowledge and history to help strengthen their belonging and acceptance. However, if given opportunity, these tales or beliefs can often be dismissed, challenged and proven otherwise (in the eyes of the educated) by applying western theories of science, math and history when they attend college. This is another example of the assimilation and accommodation that a tribal member must develop; the tribal member develops a base of knowledge to reach personal balance. As noted previously, this type of thinker and learner is encouraged to flourish as the student is attending school and therefore becomes part of the personal construct system that has developed within the particular tribal member yet this method of learning and expressing themselves strays from the traditional methods found within the Gila River tribal community.

Within Gila River it is imperative that specific content be passed on from one generation to another, and when individuals stray from this, trust is broken and leads to the exclusion of individuals. Regardless of how educated you are, your education can be trumped by an elder or a person that is believed to hold specific cultural and heritage knowledge (regardless of your ability to disprove the knowledge). Tribes wanting to help their students must help the tribal member to understand that with new knowledge comes new responsibilities to know your place, to an extent. While it is not encouraged to stay still and remain silent in schools, these attributes are seen as respectful characteristics in a path to living in a good way (Himdag) and should be advocated for and encouraged to be

found within students that leave for higher education systems. Therefore, tribes should develop programs that seek to bridge the student with the Himdag of the tribal community, which is a new endeavor. A method to connect both worlds (tribal community and community outside of reservation) must be created and fostered. The bridges formed however, should include the notion that indigenous learning follows a path, and that all individuals learn differently, which should require tribal programs to develop methodologies and theories for all to learn from in an effort to help tribal members belong and be accepted.

Gauvain (2006) noted that when she discussed scaffolding. This is the same terminology used within educational systems by teachers when developing lessons for their students and related to academic studies. “Scaffolding can occur both verbally and through action and it involves a variety of instructional behaviors, including modeling more sophisticated approaches to the problem than the child currently uses, encouraging the child to work on the problem and try out new strategies, and segmenting a problem into steps that are more easily understood and managed by the child” (Gauvain, 2006, p. 23). Further, Wood (1976) et. al also noted, “during scaffolding, a less experienced partner works with a more experienced partner who structures the interaction to support and promote learning” (p.17.) The development of schemas is found within scaffolding, an important component to tribal belonging and acceptance.

Graduates cannot be ignored and tribes need their new methods, theories and suggestions on how to help improve the tribal communities on this path to nation building. However, the tribe also needs individuals to know their place and be respectful of traditional methods of life and daily practices within the Akimel O’odham. To this, a tribal

graduate must be able to function in two separate worlds as needed while still holding a strong grip on each. Learning when and where to exercise either side of knowledge (two worlds) is imperative for positive and progressive tribal community and tribal member development. Tribal members leaving for college have increased in the recent years, as described by the participants, and must be met with the same diligence that it took to encourage students to pursue higher education. But with this increase of students, the tribe would do good to recognize that this large number of students may return and should have systems in place to welcome them back in great numbers.

What colleges can do

Colleges and universities have a great stake in the formation of a person's identity and hold the key to providing rich dialogue and opportunities that not only seek to educate a tribal member, but support the idea that the tribal member can hold both Indian and non-Indian ideologies and schemas and still be considered a valuable member. However, colleges and universities should develop programming that does not seek to place all Native peoples under one umbrella by recognizing that within their institutions there is intertribal diversity. Not only is each tribe different but it is important to remember that differences may exist intratribally (even *within* the same tribe). One size does not fit all in terms of indigenous cultural participation and programming. However, to assist, tribal members and other Native Americans attending higher education institutions should advocate for the creation of such programming. Instead, researchers have found that many Native American Indian students are hesitant to receive any attention (Collier, 1973; Deyhle, 1995; Dumont, 1972; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Foley, 1996; Lipka & Ilustik, 1995; Macias, 1987; Philips, 1972, 1983; Suina & Smolkin, 1994). Phelan (1995) argues that

visibility may lead to a colonialist appetite for desire. This thinking among Native Americans has to change and must include the ability or desire to become outspoken for the benefit of other Native Americans and future Native Americans that attend a higher education institution.

While the participant may want to or be able to discuss societal topics or issues that are found outside the tribal community, finding their counterpart or a person that is interested in their thoughts was difficult. It was when the tribal member was amongst other tribal members (in college) that they felt a stronger sense of belonging and acceptance. Although this group was a fraction of Gila River, it was a group composed of like-minded thinkers that had similar agendas of returning to their tribal communities to help.

What can families do

Lastly, positive support and structure can be built from the onset of a person's educational endeavor. Families of tribal members are often very supportive but not involved in a person's education. This is an important item for discussion. While a parent can give encouraging words, provide a stable home to feel secured and overall support, this differs from when a person is involved. Participants noted that while they pursued their next level of education, the feeling of us and them was prevalent during conversations when the participant would strive to be engaged in functions and gatherings.

Families can take a step toward supporting the tribal member by reaching out and asking probing questions and being prepared to listen as the tribal member has been encouraged to do so. This idea strays from what is found in tribal homes where silence is golden (at times), but tribal members of today are forming from a different type of material

that has not been found previously. This requires new methods to greet and welcome that serve to erase these barriers of “us” and “them.”

Further, families would do well to recognize the new type of tribal member that is emerging from higher education institutions, and welcome those tribal members back by recognizing that while the tribal member may differ from their counterparts, ultimately the tribal member’s theories and thoughts are authentically created by tribal members. Therefore, these new ideas and theories that are developed by recent graduates should be added to the general indigenous knowledge that is found within Gila River.

Change is inevitable and while tribes pursue self-governance and nation building, new methods of doing things must be created. Driving wedges between the tribal members, based on their education level, only serves to defray the dream of Gila River becoming a strong and vibrant tribal community that rivals other groups who attempt to take advantage. Families can do better by allowing the definition of a traditional tribal member to be altered, revised in a manner that does not take away from the nature of what it takes to walk and practice Akimel Himdag. When families can take this important step, the results may be very surprising and ultimately strengthen the family and helping to foster self-efficacy and self-esteem for the tribal member so that they feel as though they belong.

Tribal Member Action

The member should strive to develop their self-esteem in a way that does not rely on their ability to conduct a task with cultural or linguistic fidelity. The member should feel good about themselves as a person, regardless of what comments and innuendoes are laid upon them. This premise is not common to Natives, but is common amongst all walks of humans. Each day schools, coaches and parents provide comments, coaching and

guidance to help form a strong individual and these same practices should continue regardless of a person's acceptance or formation as a tribal member. Further, when the tribal member hears negative comments or is thrown questions that challenge tribal identity or tribal acceptance they should consider the fact that there is no valid test of Indianness. Therefore, there is no way to fail if they truly believe in who they are and that the knowledge they carry is enough for them to feel great about themselves.

A new Indian is surfacing, one that questions the authentic methods in which to walk in this world and seeks to change the Himdag of what has been traditionally known. The fact is that as many would want to weigh in and judge those for not being enough Indian and lacking traditional ways of living, one need only look to the environment in which those individuals (the questioners) are utilizing. Those methods follow a new path to live and walk this world, and it is not such a bad thing. When a person can develop this sort of thick skin and stand their ground, then they help shape a new path for others to follow without fear that they will lose their Indianness. The person should consider that while their new self does not fit traditional models of Akimel O'odham, their new ways can be considered authentically developed by a tribally enrolled member of the Gila River Indian Community.

Tribal Member/Tribe Action

Focus should be applied to the family and peers of the tribal member and tribe itself if things are to improve for future tribal students/members. Within tribal communities you may hear inklings of Hegemonic Thinking or comments such as, "that guy isn't even O'odham, how can he know what we want or need," but how does this end? It ends by encouraging tribal members to attain a higher education that focuses on erasing hegemonic

thinking and placing tribal members in positions that allow for positive change developed by tribal members, methods that seek to erase colonialism and reverse the notion of assimilating and accommodating to tribe to outside rules and expectations. This in itself is what is encouraged through United States federal policies of *Self Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975* and *Indian Self Governance Act of 1994*. This belief that tribal communities can exercise their tribal sovereignty must start with the education of their own tribal membership and must include a path that allows the ability to form those future leaders without chastising and excluding them for following a path that was created by many former tribal leaders.

To improve, tribes should focus on developing social programs that seek to support these individuals who attend higher education institutions, but also focus on developing seminars and workshops that help tribal families and their peers to understand that the tribal member is changing and how to accept and identify with such endeavors. Also, while the tribe develops these informative opportunities, they would do well to develop formats that allow for the families and peers to understand the effects of excluding and questioning one's Indianness and recognizing the effects it has on the tribal member. However, these should be done with an infusion of social constructs and indigenous knowledge methodologies that seek to build bridges versus build walls to keep out this Menegan (Caucasian) methods of understanding human development.

Next, tribes should also place a large emphasis on how to support those higher education students and welcome them back to the tribal community with ideas and suggestions that rival the efforts put forth to encourage those individuals to seek higher education in the first place. Each participant noted the difficulty in trying to return to the

tribal community, often feeling frustrated that they did not qualify for positions that they felt would help impact and develop positive programming for their fellow tribal members. Instead, they faced the reality that while they qualified for employment as a result of their higher education degrees, they lacked the experience needed to be hired. This is where the tribe should focus on developing a plan that allows for professional growth and provides much needed experience to coincide with the higher education degree, thereby forming a unique tribal member that can maneuver through the often complex business world while retaining and using Akimel O'odham culture and heritage as a common denominator in all facets of tribal operations.

Chapter eight focused on what the tribal community could do in an effort to prepare for the tribal members return from schooling. The chapter provided dialogue to bring forward ideas that can help the progression of the GRIC, allowing for a robust set of construct systems of who belongs and who determines a person's acceptance. I conclude with chapter nine and present a detailed discussion for what this research means for GRIC, for its citizens, and in moving forward beyond a Native-White binary that seeks to distance Natives who fail to meet (sometimes subjective) criteria for belonging.

9. Conclusion

A look at history books and items collected within the Huhugam museum (Gila River's museum) illustrate a time and age where the tribe was closed off from the world and only relied on the local pedagogy and construct systems that had surfaced as a need to survive. The actions of the Akimel O'odham in years past were solely undertaken in efforts to accomplish or meet the needs that they faced at that time. Today, those needs have changed as the GRIC has created many economic development ventures, solicited *Public Law 93-638* funding from the Federal Government to operate their own hospitals, fire departments, police departments and many other facets of tribal government. The need for a tribal member to be educated in these new ventures is crucial for the community to survive now and in the future.

To build on prior practices, tribal members at one time would weave their own baskets as a method to store food, collect water, and utilize around the village area for cultural reasons. Today, in current time, the need to weave a basket has been overshadowed by the reality that one can purchase a plastic bowl or storage device to complete the same tasks of storing food, collecting water and saving other household items. The need to weave a basket was born from the fact that one could not purchase a basket as you can today; the weaving of a basket was done to supply an object that could not be readily found or purchased.

When probed, tribal leaders and tribal members will advocate that one must not lose touch with knowing how to weave a basket or other traditional cultural practices; adding that when a person does not know how to weave a basket they lose a piece of who they are and become disconnected with the tribal community. However, lacking from this

expectation is the explanation to the tribal member as to why it is important to retain or attain basket weaving skills. This then creates a disconnect between the expectations and goals of a tribe versus what is needing to be learned by an individual for their survival. Why weave when you can purchase a bowl? And raises the further question of, did every tribal member at one point weave baskets? If not, what did those tribal members think of others if they could not weave baskets?

While one can list multiple reasons or purposes to justify the need to weave baskets, or any other heritage practice of the Akimel O’odham, this dissertation focuses on the social and human development that forms from partaking in such cultural and heritage practices, which lends itself to establishing a feeling of belonging and acceptance amongst tribal membership. When a person can understand the reason for their actions, not how to do basket weaving, then the person can begin to understand what defined Akimel O’odham as River People originally both from a psychological and sociological viewpoint.

This dissertation sought answers and definition on how Gila River members defined belonging, and if and how those definitions changed over time. Considering this, the dissertation further focused on what variables may affect this feeling of belonging; things such as formal and informal education and the physical characteristics of any individual. For Gila River members, many are challenged and motivated to leave the community and attain a higher education, but this dissertation questioned what effect this would have on an individual that pursued such an endeavor. Future research should continue in this area, but also include how colonization has influenced and will continue to influence to individual tribal member’s decision making on how they treat others and how they define belonging and acceptance.

This dissertation sought to illustrate a forward focus, that is to say, what can a tribal member do to help understand and possibly improve this realm of self-identify. However, in keeping with the thought of an extended family concept, this study went further to identify possible methods and actions that could be exercised by the construct systems surrounding the tribal member. Those systems include the tribal member's family, the tribe itself and the higher education institution that welcomes the tribal members to their campuses.

Each participant for this study provided a glimpse and many thoughts in regards to what has defined them as a tribal member over the years and what has kept them from feeling that they belonged to the tribe. Whether it was their facial or physical features, their language used during conversations and gatherings or the level of education they attained, what was clear was the desire for each participant to want to belong or be accepted by their tribal community.

This endeavor seemed as a journey and not a destination as the social fabric that defines the tribal member is in constant flux. Within the questions that were provided to the participants, they were asked what their definition was of a Tribal Member and an Indian. Some may argue that the term "Indian," is a derogatory term, but this very word is used within the tribe. Therefore, the question was posed to identify a definition to each term that is used within the tribal community. At first, participants provided that a tribal member is a member by issuance of a tribal identification card or certification of Indian blood (CIB) and that that person should be accepted no matter what. However, the participants then referenced their own education as a primer to allowing such an acceptance

and one stated that, “someone who has a card should be accepted Indian with my education and with my training.”

When asked to define an Indian this question yielded a moment of pondering, later all participants except for one, laced their description in a similar fashion. This included that they described an Indian “as being more representative of who you are, if you truly are an Indian. There’s a lot of wannabes out there, but you can usually sniff them out.” Taking this comment and reflecting on prior information provided during the interviews, this study focused on the idea that although someone could hold a tribal identification, it didn’t mean that they were truly an Indian. This definition of an Indian also included that people must recognize you by where you live, how you live and with whom you associate. Participants noted their feelings when they offered, “These Indians that hold themselves to be Native American should be given the right to claim such a title (of Indian) and when they are somehow exposed to them (Indians) or live with them (Indians) would give you the right.” The participants were referencing their stance on how they felt someone could earn the right to call themselves an Indian; their comments suggested that, regardless of the tribal identification card, the person wanting to be included as an Indian should live amongst the Indian of which they sought to be a part of as a tribal member.

This continuous change is driven by the fact that people change and, therefore, the definitions of belonging and acceptance may also change. Participants noted that while they may be considered tribal members (they meet blood quantum), tribal membership does not equate to full acceptance as a tribal member. While this may seem confusing it speaks to the idea of who defines whom and who is not a tribal member? A participant noted that a tribal member should not be accepted as a tribal member by their possession

of a tribal identification card, but rather, the participant noted that the person should only be accepted by “some type of community decision or collective decision.” If this were to hold true, who would structure the matrix of acceptance, and what would be included in this formula for acceptance?

“A way of living,” seemed to be a common thread of which to build a matrix of belonging and acceptance upon. This matrix could include family teachings in relation to *Himdag*, but what happens when this information is not passed on, does this equate to an erasure or revision of how someone can hold Akimel O’odham values if they have never been privy to learning them? How does this impact the social structure of being an Akimel O’odham? This idea sets in motion many conversations and debate on who is a tribal member and who is an Indian, further it sets in motion much dialogue and hurdles of how a person can belong or be accepted.

Each of these ideas are influenced in many ways, but given the information from the participants it may pay dividend to recognize that these definitions have changed over time and will continue to change with influence of tribal members that are being enrolled who come from various locations, with various backgrounds, who may not be a full-blooded Akimel O’odham, and who seek to change things by way of having attained a formal education that may seem to challenge the indigenous knowledge of Gila River.

The time for action, to determine a collective course for shaping the factors for belonging of the members of the modern GRIC is arriving quicker each day. The tribe can no longer ignore the reality that the membership is changing – with increasing interracial and intertribal unions as well as diversity in living situations, both on and off the reservation– the window of time to reconsider membership, belonging, and acceptance

cannot be left open indefinitely. The call for action must include planning for the future to determine how all partners that influence the belonging and acceptance of tribal members can work together to develop a meaningful sense of Indianness for individual members – both on and off the reservation. The tribe must provide practices and opportunities to revitalize those who want to be included and do so in a manner that does not deflect the vital knowledge that can be offered outside of indigenous knowledge systems.

Each participant was able to identify key attributes they felt assisted a person to gain acceptance and belonging to Gila River. The constant common denominator seemed to revolve around culture, language, and ideals for living. This includes the actions a person takes and the location of the individual striving to be accepted. Further, each participant was able to offer the historic and contemporary arguments for why these factors serve as historic and present-day identified markers of acceptance and belonging. They argued that while indigenous language and culture demonstrate desire for cultural understanding, the way of living, influenced by the location of the tribal member, is what determines to what extent the member is truly able to absorb the lessons that serve to generate a person's Indianness. When considering the ability for a person to truly feel Indian, would they need to reside within the community of Gila River?

One participant brought up the usage of *honorifics* within the context of language, and when she mentioned the idea of not being *monolithic*. The latter term, monolithic, is an interesting point as it speaks to something being cast of a single piece, perhaps a common cloth, which is not the case of the Gila River Indian Community as the community is comprised of seven separate community districts with each having their own individual communities (villages) within each district. Add to this the pockets of tribal members that

have established themselves in areas outside the reservation and you can begin to form the belief that the Akimel O’odham are not monolithic as some may assume they are. This is to say that while tribal members may share a tribal identification card, the path, bloodlines and lifestyles are different from each other tribal member. This differentiation is what is found within Gila River where many would like to hold onto the theory that all O’odham should and can only be cut of one cloth (monolithic). This in itself has erected walls that stray away from allowing all tribal members to feel they belong and should be accepted.

Future research should expand on the ideas and theories of belonging that were presented by participants in this dissertation study and should focus on how colonization influences both the psychological and sociological development of individuals and tribal communities. While understanding the problem of establishing and/or maintaining a sense of belonging and acceptance for those who seek a higher education and desire to return is important; the next stage of research should include an exploration of how the development of a tribal school that offers culturally relevant and responsive educational programming within the tribal community impacts feelings of acceptance and belonging. One idea is to develop a magnet school that presents state required courses while also providing different tracks specific to indigenous knowledges and traits that are important for the GRIC such as tracks for basket weaving, language, hunting, and botany/medicinal plants. Specifically, within GRIC the tribe holds enough financial resources to exert their sovereignty and tribal self-determination to develop a system of schooling that not only includes the “core” subjects of a K-12 and college school system but also include required coursework that focuses on revitalizing the culture, language, and heritage of the Akimel O’odham. What

would be the impact of a truly tribally controlled and operated school for tribal members to attend?

Lastly, the focus in this dissertation has targeted the lack of belonging and acceptance of tribal members as they attained higher education, but I believe that research going forward should strive to understand the self-identity formed by tribal members that have secured vocations outside the tribal community and the potential impact this has on other tribal members who fall to the same social exclusion and also the changes that tribal communities endure as they receive new tribal members. This recommendation for future research is offered based on the fact that although GRIC has an approximate 23,000 enrolled tribal members, a majority of those members do not reside on the reservation and have no intentions of returning. Therefore, there may be a shift in tribal and self-identity that may have an impact the vision and scope of tribal nation (re)building for the Gila River Indian Community.

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APPENDIX A
QUESTIONS

Instructions: You will be asked a series of questions, and may be asked secondary questions based on the answers that you give. All information will be kept anonymous. I ask that you be as honest as you can. You have the right to stop the interview at any time without any penalty. If you do not understand any portion of the interview or the questions, you may ask for further definition and clarity. The answers given during this interview will later be utilized to construct a publication that will be available to the general public, including you.

1. Please tell me a little about yourself. Also, include what tribe you are enrolled in.
2. When did you first become aware you were (insert name of tribe or group)?
 - a. What does it mean to be (insert name of tribe or group)?
 - b. How did you learn to become (insert name of tribe or group)?
3. Tell me what you believe a sense of belonging means to you? This belonging is related to how you feel or don't feel you belong to your tribal community.
4. Please note what applies to you:
 - (A) I live on the reservation. How long have you lived on the reservation?
 - (B) I have lived on the reservation but later moved away from the reservation.
How long did you reside on the reservation, where did you move?
 - (C) I have never lived on the reservation.
5. Do you consider yourself a contributing member of your tribe, from a culture standpoint?
6. Briefly, can you list some characteristics of what you feel epitomize a true Indian?
7. Do you think you have the features of a Native American? Specifically, do you think you look the same as other members of your tribe, family?
8. How do you feel when others claim to be Indian, but do not look like Indians?
9. Have you heard of Phenotypicality Bias? Please provide your definition if you have heard of the term.
10. When did you decide to attend college?
11. When you decided to leave for college/university, how did your family and friends react initially?
12. After leaving for college/university, please describe how your family has reacted during the first, second semester and later through your program of study as you returned to the home or reservation.

13. What effect do you think attending college/university has had on your development as a tribal member and as a contributing member of the community located outside the reservation?
14. How did you maintain a sense of connectedness to your tribe?
15. Have you ever encountered a time when your facial features made you feel as though you belonged or not belonged? Whether it was a negative or positive experience, please share how it made you feel?
16. Why do you think tribal members are treated differently if they do not look as Indian as others and do not act as others within the reservation?
17. What do you think could have been implanted to improve your transition back to the community?
18. Do you work for the Gila River community or have ever worked for the Gila River community? If so, please provide a brief background of that employment and your status as an employee.
19. What do you think the tribe could do in an effort to welcome their members to the workforce?
20. Do you think all should be accepted as Indians if they possess a tribal identification card, regardless if they look like an Indian or act like an Indian?
21. If you could offer suggestions on how to improve the belonging of all tribal members, regardless of what they look like, what would you say?
22. Is there anything else you would like to offer on this topic or the questions that I have asked you?

APPENDIX B
CODING FORMAT

Research Question #1: Belonging and Acceptance

- A. Historical Definition
 - a. Actions
 - b. Language
 - c. Cultural Participation
 - d. Location
- B. Contemporary Definition
 - a. Actions
 - b. Language
 - c. Cultural Participation
 - d. Location
- C. Phenotype

Research Question #2: Formation of Tribal Identity

- A. Family/Community
- B. Formal Schooling

Research Question #3: Future Focused

- A. What tribal member can do
- B. What tribes can do
- C. What colleges can do
- D. What families can do