Set the prairie on fire: An autoethnographic confrontation of colonial entanglements

by

Sean Alexander RedCorn

B.S.E., University of Kansas, 2005
M.S.E., University of Kansas, 2013

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2017

Abstract

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Abstract

There is minimal scholarship related to modern Osage perspectives in the field of education. Yet, the pursuit of cultural healing relies on self-representation to move Osages toward a higher degree of self-determination, and calls for voices within the community who share zones of cultural and professional intersectionality. Using Red Pedagogy (Grande, 2008) and traditional Osage ribbon work (Dennison, 2012, 2013) as a framework, this critical Indigenous autoethnographic inquiry works to advance conversations about settler-colonial entanglements in education from the perspective of an Indigenous (Osage)-White educator and educational leadership doctoral student. This inquiry uses writing as both field and method (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) to explore Osage perspectives related to topics of *Transformational Indigenous Praxis* (Pewewardy, 2017), White privilege (McIntosh, 2003) as a pale-skinned American Indian, American Indian mascots (Pewewardy, 2000) from educational leadership perspectives (NPBEA, 2015; Waters & Cameron, 2007), and ecologically informed consciousness (Cajete, 1994).

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My brothers--Ryan, Jon, and Studie--also played an ongoing role in this dissertation, and I appreciate their wit, humor, and sarcasm through it all (most of the time). I have had many conversations with each on a variety of topics related to my doctoral work, and their collective influence on this work is substantial, even if not explicitly stated. Ryan is the first person I ever heard talk about the prairie in these creative and powerful terms back when we were playing in metal bands through high-school and while undergrads. Back then, we were exploring song and album titles, but when I was pushed to re-engage with my creative side during my doctoral coursework, driving across the prairie back and forth between Salina, Manhattan, and Kansas City triggered those memories, which eventually found their way into the title of this dissertation. Furthermore, Ryan and my father's wife, Louise Red Corn, also provided me with a collection of stunning pictures of the prairie which I used for my final presentation--I appreciate these artistic contributions. Studie, while on his own doctoral journey, patiently nodded his head through several long conversations when I had dissertation on the mind, and he also read through some of the manuscripts as I tried to fine tune some ideas. His feedback and ideas substantively improved my thinking, and this dissertation. While Jon's support has been less direct to the specifics of the dissertation, he consistently delivered encouraging words, and simultaneously helped me take care of other important family matters, like building a house, allowing me to focus on my dissertation. Overall, I cannot thank my family enough for their lasting influence and support throughout this doctoral journey.

Furthermore, I had several academic mentors who were essential to this work. Dr. Bhattacharya's mentorship was unexpected as I entered the program, but it has been truly life altering. Aside from scouring through hundreds of pages worth of manuscript drafts at all hours of the day and night, Dr. Bhattacharya pushed me out of my comfort zone from the first moment

we met in her introductory qualitative methods course, as she nudged me into the world of critical, Indigenous, and arts-based scholarship. As a result, I truly feel as though I am mentally in a better place--a place where I feel like I can simply be me in ways that I never felt were possible. Not only did she personally mentor me as my Major Professor, she created a graduate school learning environment where I was able to develop close friendships with peers who were also working through their own doctoral journeys, and she made space for us to celebrate and commiserate together as we pushed one another along. I am forever grateful for her mentorship and the learning environment she provided through my doctoral program.

The influence of Dr. Dennison on my work is explicitly stated throughout the dissertation, but I cannot thank her enough for the space that her scholarship has made for me, and her personal feedback and attention to detail in my drafts throughout the process. She continues to push my critical thinking and awareness, and I truly appreciate that. I hope that I may continue to build upon her work in an appropriate and respectful way, as I believe that her contributions to Osage scholarship and education are essential for us to continue to move forward as a community of critical thinkers.

Ultimately, Drs. Bhattacharya and Dennison were tending to the seeds that Dr. Pewewardy planted long ago, as his mentorship during my years as an undergrad has endured. While at the time I was not in a place mentally to engage in the level of critical consciousness that he was trying to instill, his lessons remained even if there were times when they appeared to be dormant in my daily actions. I am grateful that I was eventually able to reconnect with him in my doctoral journey at several conferences and re-engage with his mentorship. The positive influence he has had on my brothers and I is profound; I will forever appreciate his teachings and wisdom, and I know that my brothers feel the same.

were essential to my growth, and I appreciate their time and effort, as they helped me in a variety of ways.

There are also several elders who I must thank, as they visited with me throughout the dissertation writing process, allowing me to intrude on their time and space. Through the writing process Eddy Red Eagle Jr. was instrumental in helping me consider how I might more appropriately write about Osage education, spirituality, and our ceremonies. Not only did he visit with me on a handful of occasions, he also took the time to review key portions of the manuscript and offer feedback. Henry Ben Harrison was also instrumental in the same manner, as he gave honest feedback and cautionary tales regarding portions of my writing, and I will always appreciate my visits with him through the writing process, and I look forward to many more. Also, several elders of mine in my family influenced the content of this dissertation through various visits. Specifically, Aunt Kathryn Red Corn, Talee Red Corn, Moira Red Corn, and Yancey Red Corn all talked through various topics with me, and I truly appreciate their time and honest dialogue. Furthermore, Uncle Mog (Herman Mongrain) Lookout, Aunt Mary Liz Ricketts, Uncle Vann Bighorse, Melvina Prather, Rhonda and Scott Kohnle, and Bob Hamilton from the Nature Conservancy all took time to visit with me on various topics within this dissertation. While I do not want to claim that everything in this dissertation was reviewed and sanctioned by these individuals, their ideas and feedback influenced various topics discussed throughout. Mostly, I am very grateful that each of these people took the time to sit down and talk to me throughout the writing process, and I look forward to more visits in the future.

In conclusion, it takes a village to write a dissertation, and beyond my immediate family, many of my friends, family, relatives, and mentors from Kansas State University and the Wa.ha.ko.li^n district of the Osage Nation collectively contributed to this dissertation. I am

forever indebted to all involved, and I hope that I can represent my communities and family in

the best ways possible in my upcoming academic endeavors as a way to pay it forward.

Dedication

To Mom

Without your encouragement and love, this would not have been possible.

Preface

I am Osage (Wah.Zha.Zhi) and my Osage name is Tse.Moi (Walking in Death). I come from the Tzi.zhu wah.shta.geh (Gentle Sky/Peacekeeper Clan) people and my family's roots are in the Wa.ha.ko.li^n district of the Osage Nation, which is near Pawhuska, Oklahoma. Let me begin by saying that unless you already know me, my voice doesn't sound like the one you likely imagined when you read the above introduction, and if you happened to have pictured me as you read, my blond hair and blue eyes likely do not match either, because I am also White. I have spent much of my life living in predominantly White communities, because my family moved four hours away from the reservation into a suburban area in the Kansas City metro limits just before I went into the first grade. My parents made this decision to move based on the opportunity for my father to have a better job--a hunt for financial capital and quality schools for my three brothers and me.

This move across the ancestral lands of the Osages set off a chain of events that led to my brothers and I advancing through blue-ribbon local schools, and all of us graduating from Kansas University and moving on to promising careers in our respective fields. I am proud of these developments, and I am proud of my family. In the predominantly White community of the suburbs, we may have encountered some cultural dissonance, but we also thrived and gained perspective on life. We met many lifelong friends, I met my wife and her family, and we went about our lives as part of the community. These key pieces of my life in the White community shaped us into who we are today, but my family members and I have found our ways back to the Osage reservation in one manner or another.

After we graduated from college, my father moved back to the reservation in Oklahoma and became involved in our new Osage tripartite system as a Congressman, Speaker of the

Congress, and currently Assistant Principal Chief. My brothers have all moved back and jumped into the fabric of the Osage community as they took on various roles, such as graphics and media specialist, village board member, architect and community designer, political campaign manager, and more. All the while, my extended family has held jobs and roles across the Osage Nation in elected and appointed positions. Personally, I have always maintained a connection to the Osage Nation, but only recently have reconnected with the Osage Nation in a professional context. Although I remain in Kansas, I recently helped coordinate and develop a partnership program between Kansas State University and the Osage Nation, which is currently training a cohort of Osage educational leadership students. Collectively, this is a snapshot of my family's involvement with the Osage community. I include this background here to help readers interpret my positionality with the Osage Nation.

Regardless of why we moved to the suburbs in the first place and who I met along the way, my family members and I have spent our lives weaving in and out of Indigenous, White, Indigenous-White, and other diverse worlds; consequently, I have carried with me a unique hybrid identity, rife with colonial entanglements. I am a walking entanglement, and my brain carries these traits no matter what my skin, eye, hair color, or blood quantum suggests.

Now, as a social studies teacher and an educational leadership doctoral student working on a dissertation, I am encountering decolonizing and Indigenous minded literature and philosophies, which have struck harmonious chords with my worldviews, and they have begun to replace some of the cultural dissonance in my life with clarity and focus. This has become a transformational learning experience (Mezirow, 1998), and my critical consciousness (Pewewardy, 2015a, 2017) matures with every new page I read, and with every new conversation or lesson I engage with my mentors. Honestly, I did not know that I had such

dissonance lurking in my identity development until I was given the tools to read the disciplinary scholarship in qualitative inquiry, and was then prompted to explore the world of decolonizing and Indigenous literature. I knew this world existed and I thought I understood it, but I underestimated what it had to offer to the various layers of my identity. Qualitative research conversations and readings about various topics, such as critical consciousness (Pewewardy, 2015a, 2017), colonial entanglement (Dennison, 2012), decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 1999), Red Pedagogy (Grande, 2008), and Indigenous healing (Bhattacharya, 2015), have served as an entry point and foundation for this transformation and I am grateful for the guidance I have been given.

As I entered my doctoral program, I never imagined that I would be constructing a nontraditional dissertation, especially this project--an Indigenous autoethnography. It took me a while to consider this approach to qualitative inquiry, because since it so different from how I thought a dissertation should look. Thinking along traditional dissertation lines, I had trouble conceptualizing how autoethnography could be scholarly work. For me, this method was hard to define.

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010), who are leaders in the field, define autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (p. 273). Furthermore, they explain how autoethnography is "both process and product" (p. 273). I was unaware this type of work was a possibility, and early on this method was not a serious option for me. In fact, the first time I was told, "You ought to consider writing an autoethnography," I laughed it off and politely said, "No, thanks."

But the more I read Indigenous and decolonizing work (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999; Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird, 2012) and perspectives from scholars who specifically challenge the traditions of the dissertation (Jacobs, 2009), the more I began to realize how much I had been adamantly following mainstream curricular structures throughout my entire life: through K-12, undergraduate teacher training, teaching, and then as a masters and doctoral student. Eventually, I began to realize I had been trained to think inside certain hierarchical systems, and that these same systems had long marginalized and misrepresented Indigenous ways of knowing. I had been taught to value certain knowledge making over others, and simultaneously to think that Other ways of knowing in the world were less legitimate because they were not filtered through proper hierarchical processes. As I continued my doctoral studies, I read Osage and other Indigenous perspectives in academia, and realized that there are rigorous and well respected Indigenous spaces that have been opened within these systems at the highest levels.

Building on the work of scholars such as Smith (1999), these Indigenous and decolonizing spaces questioned Western scholars researching *on* Indigenous peoples, and cautioned Western scholars about the ethical implications of appropriating Indigenous cultural knowledge for the benefit of the researcher--not the Indigenous population (Mihesuah, 1998). Furthermore, Indigenous scholars were critical of how academics were often writing narratives that framed Indigenous peoples as exotic Others--as strange obscure beings on the margins of mainstream. Consequently, Indigenous academics began to encourage the priority of local voices and insider representation, and to encourage research projects that were less focused on the traditions of academia and more focused on providing tangible benefit to the Indigenous communities they represent (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999).

Specifically, Smith (1999) established a research agenda that placed priority on Indigenous projects that were intended to disrupt the ongoing forces of colonialism and make decolonized spaces for Indigenous knowledges. Her agenda outlined a need for projects that focused on survival, recovery, and development through processes of cultural healing, mobilization, transformation, and decolonization. She implored that these projects should disrupt the ongoing forces of colonialism in Western academia, and in turn focus on helping Indigenous populations move towards the ultimate goal of enhanced self-determination. As a doctoral student, this was new to me, because I had thought that my priorities lied primarily with satisfying the traditions of the educational system--something I was used to after a lifetime of mainstream schooling.

Through this process I began to see--for the first time--that it was acceptable to position being Indigenous (Osage) at the center of my studies. My Indigeneity could be not just a subtopic within another conversation, or an exotic note in the margin, but a foundation for producing knowledge and research, and moving Osage-specific conversations into the future.

The more I read, the more I realized that my intersectional lived experiences may have value for the Osage community. As I continued to engage in the Osage educational landscape through my studies and my work, I began to see that there were few actively involved Osages who had the collection of professional education experience that I had acquired, and eventually I started to consider that I had something to offer to our community in a time when Osage Nation educational programming was in a period of substantive growth (Osage Nation, 2016). My initial hesitation with using autoethnography was rooted in my belief that I am by no means special, and this approach to scholarship struck me as self-indulgent and not humble. However, I began to see that the focus of autoethnography was not just my story. It is about identity

exploration in complex human environments, while simultaneously focusing on using personal

story to explore the intersections of sociocultural spaces--all of this to sharpen our knowledges

and understandings of the relational landscapes between individuals, cultures, and systems

(Anzaldúa, 2015; Bhattacharya, 2015; Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; Boylorn & Orbe, 2013).

From this position, I became more comfortable with using autoethnography and pursuing a

nontraditional dissertation, because I realized that I could help connect the professional field of

education to Osage perspectives in an effort to bridge theory and praxis in our specific contexts.

Furthermore, I realized that I may be able to cultivate conditions that could move Osages toward

a higher degree of self-determination by creating spaces which enable opportunities to enhance

Osage professional education capacities in a more culturally appropriate manner.

In this sense, I am trying to do my part for my community as best I can, and that is my

primary motivation--what we call wash.ka^{n}. Therefore, creating an Osage-specific Indigenous

autoethnography makes sense for an agenda that is beyond obtaining an academic degree, an

agenda that is driven by a need to document social perspectives that are minimally present in

education, because not many people have been in a position to write such perspectives.

Therefore, it is not with arrogance that I speak, but with utmost humility that I enter this space of

storytelling, knowing this will always be a work in progress.

Reading this Dissertation

With this nontraditional format, this dissertation is not intended to be viewed from the

traditional lens of executing a research plan; instead, it is meant to be read as one of many drafts

in the never-ending process of confronting colonial entanglements. It is a collection of scholarly

narratives that are illustrative of complex sociocultural intersectional realities relevant to Osage

education. These narratives might appear fragmented and somewhat disconnected, yet they are collectively relevant to the greater cause of Osage education.

With this format, there are also unconventional uses of text that require explanation. Using writing as both method and field, autoethnography has opened spaces for incorporating creative arts-based approaches (Anzaldúa, 2015; Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; Leavy, 2009; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), and this project embraces those creative possibilities. Creative approaches include new ways of thinking about voice, data, space, writing style, and the integration of creative genres of data representation and the documentation of the knowledge construction process. These creative approaches are used not only to add an aesthetic merit to the work and open new ways for readers to see and interact with complex sociocultural lived experiences, but they are also intended to enhance the impact on the reader to help move people to action (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). In this project, I periodically use short personal stories and poetry (Leavy, 2009) as a way to both represent and explore my perspectives. These poetic moments are intended to open an affective path through the page to the fragmented aspects of my identity and voice. These poems and personal accounts are interwoven throughout this work into the fabric of the scholarly narrative and analysis, which can be seen in other autoethnographic narratives (Boylorn & Orbe, 2013). These efforts are not meant as novelty or gimmick; they are legitimate stories and emotional reflections connected to the scholarly topics about which I write.

Additionally, the way I utilize words on the page in some areas is considered poetry in the literary sense, but I hesitate to name it such because my motivation for using space on the page is meant to reflect the oral cadence and tone of how I would speak on the matter. Yet, I indulge with space and text beyond this oral speaking notion in some areas, and it is in fact poetry; but my intent is for most of those sections to be read in my voice speaking to the reader

as if they were in the room with me--an aesthetic sensibility with which I would engage people

of my community, those whom I have imagined as my primary audience to focus on an

Indigenous Osage agenda for this dissertation.

The ultimate aim for these poetics and story-telling measures is to allow for more of a

personal conversation tone--a further glimpse into my lived experiences, a way to show the

reader the careful in-depth analysis of my thoughts, and not just tell them about what occurs on

the surface. This is a necessary step in creative autoethnographic projects because authors need

to provide enough self-exposure (and vulnerability) for the work to adequately inform the reader

and expose the nuances of the sociocultural intersections that the work is intended to interrogate.

So, as you read this nontraditional academic text, please keep in mind that the creative use of text

in this dissertation is intended to add aesthetic merit, and to break rank with traditional academic

practices to make space for Indigenous ways of knowledge-making through thorough and careful

analysis of my lived experiences against larger sociocultural discourses that affect Indigenous

lives and education.

Consequently, the chapter structures also do not follow a traditional path. Instead, they

follow a format that begins with my transformational journey as an Osage graduate student, a

story that is inextricably tied to the development of the conceptual framework that informs this

dissertation and is outlined in chapter one. Chapter two focuses on a discussion of

methodological foundations, and in chapters three through six I outline four specific narratives

that interrogate specific entanglements I encounter in my intersectional realities, which I describe

in more detail below.

I have chosen to bypass a traditional structure of literature review because I am aligning

with Indigenous methodologies, which emphasize local capacity building and encourage

academics to steer away from projects that continue to support the dominant narrative of Indigenous people being stuck in the past as an exotic Other (Smith, 1999). As a modern Osage educator, my lived experiences are linked to non-Eurocentric worldviews that are often perceived as intriguing and exotic Other perspectives from mainstream Eurocentric perspectives. These narratives which are often framed as historical anthropology inform my lived experiences, but my focus is on the modern contexts of Osage professional education. Currently, much of the academic literature on the Osage people is through accounts and perspectives which focus on Osages as people in history (Bailey, 2010; Burns, 1984, 2004; Callahan, 1990; La Flesche, 1995; Mathews, 1961; Rollings, 1992; Rollings, 2004), not modern professional education. For this project, I am positioning my priorities with building capacities and exploring the tensions of modern Osage education, and the reality is that there is no gap in the literature for this specific space-- it is more akin to an open field. So, as I position myself in that field as an Osage educator, the purpose of this project is not to identify a gap in historical and anthropological Osage literature, but to bring some of those historical and anthropological perspectives into this field of education to create new spaces for Osage educators to consider. In this sense, Osage literature review becomes part of the autoethnographic project--data, in a sense, which is interwoven throughout and not a predetermined academic exercise needed to identify a gap in Osage knowledge.

Furthermore, Osage political anthropologist, Dennison (2012, 2013), has focused almost entirely on our modern contexts and recently shifted the focus of Osage literature towards the present. This has opened spaces for other Osages, such as myself, to have a modern context to build on, and it is for this reason I have chosen to use her Osage ribbon work metaphor, a symbol for settler-colonial entanglements, as the conceptual framework for this autoethnography. This

positioning further emphasizes my focus on framing this project in the present, and therefore pulling various historical accounts into that context instead of visa versa.

Finally, in using the phrases *colonialism* and *settler-colonialism,* I aim to bridge this work to scholarship in Indigenous studies and anthropology, fields where it is common understanding that the processes of colonialism, and subsequently settler-colonialism, are not merely a topic reserved for history, but an ongoing process that continues to unfold into the present. Specifically, I employ Dennison's use of the term *entanglement* as she channels the work of Mbembe (2001), Smith (2009), and Stoler (2002), in an effort "to highlight these moments of complexity and follow how they serve to at times bolster and at other times hinder" (Dennison, 2012, p. 7). Beyond this reasoning, I immediately found the phrases *settler-colonial entanglement* and my subsequent *confrontations of colonial entanglements* useful, as it allowed me to break down overly simplistic understandings of what it means to be Osage and White in and across complicated lived realities and intersections. It descriptively acknowledges the messy relationship between settler-colonialism and Indigeneity and all of it inheritors, and simultaneously suggests that no matter how we all (Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples) got in this position, it still is what it is. To move forward, we must explore ways to understand our entanglements, whether we created them or not. In general, I have found this term to be a highly productive description of modern Indigenous lived realities, which is why I choose to employ it throughout this dissertation.

Within this context of settler-colonial entanglement, Dennison (2012) also implores, "the Indigenous body has long been a site of colonial power, where race served to justify colonization" (p. 51), and while channeling the work of several scholars (Baker, 2010; Barker, 2011; Kauanui, 2008; Wolfe, 2011) she states that when:

Indigenous populations are primarily a group marked by biology, rather than a

polity with control over a territory, settlers are able to further entrench their own

claims over the land. Through such processes of colonial entanglement, the

indigenous body has become a site of consequence and contestation. (p. 51)

In this context, as I specifically place my own lived experiences front and center, and

make honest assessments about entanglements with diluted Osage blood and Whiteness, my

body becomes a "site of consequence and contestation". In these efforts, there is risk that

shallow interpretations of my perspectives and lived experiences might lead some to conclude

that my alignment and belonging with Whiteness paired with my diluted Osage blood quantum

delegitimizes my claims to political and sociocultural belonging with an Indigenous nation.

While historically "U.S. officials used blood to monitor, measure, and categorize Indians in the

hope of turning sovereign nations into individual wards" (Dennison, p. 59), my narratives here

stand as a continued and ongoing resistance to that aim. Furthermore, my autoethnographic

analyses serve to enhance understanding of Osage sociocultural entanglements which lie beyond

blood quantum, while simultaneously offering a broader context for Osage existence and

belonging that continues to move forward--entanglements and all.

With the above considerations, the chapters will take on the following emphases, in the

following order:

In chapter one, I describe where my transformational learning experiences began as a

doctoral student, where I started to rethink my existence as an Indigenous (Osage)-White

educator. Embedded in this story is the growth of my conceptual framework for the entire

dissertation, which utilizes an Osage ribbon work metaphor (Dennison, 2012, 2013). I position

this framework as an Indigenous methodological approach (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999) situated

within Grande's (2008) Red Pedagogy. Here I also state my research purpose and the questions that guide the project as I move forward.

In chapter two, I provide the methodological foundations for autoethnography, complete with a history of how the method emerged. I share methodological literature on autoethnography and explain the specific versions of autoethnography with which I align: critical, Indigenous, and mixed-media approaches. Additionally, I provide structure and standards for using writing as both method and field while I describe the nuances of merging both process and product. Finally, in this chapter I discuss how accountability pertains to this Osage-specific project, and conclude by discussing the limits, possibilities, and value of this work.

In chapter three, I outline my experiences with learning and curriculum in and out of Osage contexts, while using those experiences to guide the construction and development of a new graduate-level Osage Nation Educational Leadership Academy (ONELA). In doing so, I discuss my reflections as I encountered Pewewardy's Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (2017), and I consider how it influenced my path forward. Particularly, I discuss my time in and around our Osage I^n.Lon.Schka as a learning environment, and I interrogate the separation of the terms *education* and *culture* throughout the Osage Nation while I also discuss the need for educational leaders to develop a vision that merges these terms and efforts moving forward.

In chapter four I engage in a form of academic code-shifting from critical Indigenous language to educational leadership paradigms while addressing the issue of American Indian mascots in schools. I frame the issue in the context of the recent school improvement emphasis in the national standards for educational leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) in an effort to better connect American Indian mascot scholarship with the field of educational leadership, and address practical considerations from that position. I

conclude the chapter by shifting back into the critical Indigenous voice I carry throughout this dissertation, and consider personal confrontations regarding American Indian mascots in schools.

In chapter five, I confront the question of, "am I a person of color?" and articulate my complicated positions with White privilege using McIntosh's (2003) famous essay as an entry point. Through this narrative, I interrogate the reality of being a recipient of privilege as a pale-skinned male while simultaneously having an Osage disadvantage. Additionally, I address how as a real pale Indian who passes for White and is an enrolled member of a native nation, I occupy a unique zone of intersecting privileges and rights across educational institutions that only someone fitting my profile is privy to having.

Finally, in chapter six I engage in a form of introspection informed by Cajete's (1994) notion of ecologically informed consciousness. In doing so, I look to the tallgrass prairie and its knowledge to visualize a framework for settler-colonial entanglements and how competing knowledge systems operate within my own learning and identity development. In doing so, I conceptualize myself as a biome of lived experiences, with various ecosystems of knowledge and experience within and across it—ecosystems that includes the prairie. Then I consider the pedagogical value of setting the prairie on fire, and within that framework I revisit the content of the dissertation's previous chapters and reinterpret my own reflections.

In conclusion, this dissertation ties together several topics in modern education that have not been addressed from Osage-specific vantage points, and in this way, adds to literature from a variety of angles. However, at its core, this dissertation is also about *the process* of confronting colonial entanglements and exposing the confusion that comes with my neophyte engagement and immersion into the critical Indigenous world of academia. For the first time in my educational career, I place my Osage-specific orientations front and center as a student and an

educator, and examine my own habits and worldviews after decades of educational experience across mainstream institutions. These efforts amount to an unfolding juxtaposition of feeling clumsy, confused, and inadequate, while simultaneously being inspired and energized. So, as an Osage who continues to pass through mainstream systems of education, I hope to expose some of this process, and its confusion. . .

...maybe I can help set the prairie on fire,

as others have done for me.

Chapter 1 - Stitching New Patterns with Indigenous Frameworks and Autoethnography

Introduction

I have always loved overanalyzing slices of the social and the complexities of cultures, societies, and systems. I became a social studies teacher so I could spend my professional days discussing and exploring those grey areas found between the neat demographic, political, and cultural boxes into which mainstream society likes to package and organize our curricular conversations.

I love those grey areas.

I live in those grey areas.

As an undergraduate student, I remember professing this love to others while we got nerdy in our social science courses. When we engaged in class debates, I had to consciously tell myself to shut up and let other people join the conversation because I could easily get lost in my overzealous curiosities and quickly become "that guy" in class--the one who talks too much and responds to too many questions--but I loved it, and I still do. While I advanced through my undergraduate program, I began to engage in courses specific to the field of education, and the philosophies and sociocultural role of education merged with my greater intrigue for social science. I found relevance in not only studying the social, but becoming a player in one of the more important socialization processes--education.

I became an educator, and I loved it.

When I entered my doctoral program, I was no different, and with seven years of social studies teaching experience in my back pocket, I was ready for the next step; I was ready to continue building on the foundation that I had already laid. I still found enjoyment dabbling in those grey areas, though, and I had an affinity for studying the subjective.

At that time, what I didn't realize, is that I would become the subject.

Looking back at the essay I used in my doctoral application in 2013, I wrote:

> Born as an Osage, I've never looked the part. I have lived on both a reservation and in the suburbs, and have grown to understand both worlds. Living in two worlds has provided me with a perspective that many people don't have, and it has given me an appreciation of the multicultural world in which we reside. I see the world through two lenses, and sometimes when looking through both lenses at the same time, things don't make sense.

This illustrates the state of my critical consciousness as I began my doctoral studies. I thought I understood our social landscape, and my slice of it, rather well, but I was unaware and somewhat naive. Reflecting on what I wrote, it is obvious to me now. There are several layers to this passage that I am gradually acquiring the skills to put under the microscope, and I can now unpack some of my statements in new ways, such as when I reference:

> *"living in two worlds"*...

> *"two lenses"*...

> and how *"sometimes when looking through both lenses at the same time...*

> *things don't make sense."*

That last line of my statement now strikes me--that innocent little line about sense-making. I crafted those words as a way to give strangers on the other side of my application a glimpse into my brain, my identity, and the unique intersectional boundary zone that I occupy--my slice of life.

Now I'm the one looking at the passage, at a former me.

When I began my doctoral program, I was looking forward to building on my knowledge base and skill sets as an educator. Little did I realize that this little line was a slight opening that would lead to so much more.

It was a fault line.

A break, fracture, and eventually a shattering.

I'm not here to build on my foundation, I'm here to question it, expose it, unpack it...excavate it.

I was the grey area.

I was going to dive into that fault line--that abyss:

Again, as I read those words from former me--the dissonance is clear:

"Sometimes...when looking through both lenses at the same time...things don't make sense."

I am not sure I will find them, but I am seeking harmonies within,

Wash.ka^n

trying to make sense as best I can

as best I know how.

...so I can move forward and find ways to better serve Osages and other educators who work in Indigenous spaces,

because I'm not the only one.

Recognizing Entanglements and Stitching New Patterns in Red Pedagogical Spaces

In trying to excavate that fault line, my Indigenous-White hyphen, I floundered around for a while looking for answers but only found more questions. In true graduate student fashion, finding a focal point for my studies was on my agenda, yet I couldn't locate the line item. I was intrigued with everything and I was in a seemingly chaotic cycle of graduate student critical social analysis.

read, reflect, question, interrogate, unpack, excavate, rebuild, deconstruct

destroy, reflect, read, interrogate, question, excavate, unpack

interrogate, deconstruct, reflect, question, interrogate, unpack, excavate, rebuild.

Reflect.

With a full cycle or two of exploration completed, I eventually came all the way back around to the reading which delivered the decisive first blow to my dualist foundation, which is an Osage ribbon work metaphor outlined by Dennison (2012, 2013), an Osage political

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anthropologist. She uses this Osage-specific metaphor to describe settler-colonial entanglements during the 2004-2006 Osage Nation constitutional reform efforts, and I found immediate and lasting relevance in using that framework as a lens to see my own entanglements and lived experiences. Since her work was one of the first pieces of Indigenous scholarship I read as a doctoral student, I moved past it and continued to explore the landscapes of Indigenous academic and nonacademic spaces for a few more years, but I was never quite able to pin down something with as much personal relevance as her metaphor. I kept returning to her Osage-specific framework to give structure to the chaos I encountered as I continually engaged in neophyte versions of social and critical deconstruction. I found that structuring my settler-colonial entanglements was a difficult task, and I am thankful for her work. Additionally, when interpreting and employing Dennison's metaphor within the larger Indigenous lens of Red Pedagogy (Grande, 2008), it becomes a strong tool that can be used to create new spaces in education that have an Osage-specific quality, yet at the same time it is not limited to Osage-only interpretations.

Ultimately, this autoethnographic dissertation is a collection of critical narratives that illustrate my complex sociocultural positions as a walking entanglement traversing the betwixt and between (Turner, 1964). I frame these critical narratives as new ribbon work patterns that I am stitching together to help move into the future conversations relevant to Osage education -- conversations created out of my unique collection of intersectional lived experiences. As Grande (2008) might suggest, I am an Indigenous-White graduate student engaging with "ideas in motion," and that my "gaze is always shifting inward, outward, and throughout the spaces-in-between" from a position of "consciousness shaped not only by my own experiences, but also those of my peoples and ancestors" (p. 233).

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In this chapter, I introduce Dennison's (2012) ribbon work metaphor and how I reconceptualize her framework for my autoethnographic approach. In doing so, I explain my personal ethnographic ribbons, my interpretation of stitching new patterns through the creation of personal narratives, why these narratives can be of benefit to Osage and other Indigenous communities, and finally, I explain my research purpose and questions. I conclude with an explanation of how Dennison's ribbon work metaphor, along with my interpretations, are all situated within larger frameworks of Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999), specifically the precepts of Grande's Red Pedagogy (2008).

Finding Relevance in Ribbon Work

I live in and across boundary zones, the grey areas found between the neat sociocultural categories we use as we attempt to pre/re/define people. The academic tag lines I carry in my invisible backpack (McIntosh, 2003) are plenty:

I am an entangled (Dennison, 2012) boundary broker (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) who has lived experiences across the indigene-colonizer hyphen (Jones & Jenkins, 2008); I live in the liminal betwixt and between (Turner, 1964), a nepantla searching for underground cenotes of understanding and interconnectedness (Anzaldúa, 2015), and I reside in various zones of hybridity (Bhabha, 2004)--those grey areas.

If I were to fill in the appropriate bubble for myself, I would search for the one labeled "An Osage, White, Indigenous-White, reservation-to-suburban raised, lower-to-middle to upper-middle class, middle/secondary certified social studies educator turned Indigenous educational leadership academic...male." That bubble doesn't exist, so I have had to settle for the American Indian/Alaskan Native and White bubbles to speak for me. Through the lens of social

demography and census efforts, I traverse these various bubble boundaries, and I now more appropriately see myself as a walking entanglement.

Before my doctoral program, I thought I knew what decolonizing and Indigenous philosophy was, but I was wading in shallow water; I needed to go deeper in search for cenotes (Anzaldúa, 2015), those underground rivers and connections. I needed to engage in a new level of critical consciousness (Pewewardy, 2015a, 2015b), and reconsider the notion of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination (Smith, 1999) in ways well beyond the naked political definition I had been carrying through my social studies teaching career. Dr. Bhattacharya, in my first qualitative methods course, realized this and began to poke and prod me to *interrogate*, *unpack, dig deeper*, and for the love of god (or Wah.Kon.Tah), "Read some de/colonizing and Indigenous literature!" So, deeper I went into the fault line, that curious hyphen that separates my neat little Indigenous-White worlds, and what I found were intense, transformative philosophies that struck the core foundation of my knowledge base, my ways of knowing and being, and their dichotomous and dualist footings.

The first strike to my "two world" mentality came from reading Dennison (2012) for a self-selected book review in a qualitative methods course. She eloquently outlined a new way of seeing Osage political development based on the concept of entanglement. As a social studies educator, I was not new to cultural or political analysis, but I found her writing relevant in ways that previous writings had not, because it was Osage specific.

In fact, I am not sure that I had *ever* read Osage texts in an academic setting, especially anything with such modern relevance. I had developed a perception that my academic training and professional experiences were detached from my Osage world. These were two different spaces--separate--but they intersected when I was the only American Indian in the room and

therefore responsible for teaching others about my "exotic" Osage life that existed beyond the "normal" curricular paths in "education."

Even though my training had been in education, and not political anthropology, Dennison's (2012, 2013) analysis cut to the core of my experience of modern Osage existence. She outlined a metaphor for people like me to better understand and process the complicated world of Osage settler-colonial entanglements. Although her writing began to give me structure, at the same time it began to put cracks in my dualist "two world" foundation. In describing the process of the Osage constitutional reform efforts of 2004-2006, she wrote:

> For their part the Osage and all American Indian nations have long understood the colonial process as at once devastating and full of potential. Osage ribbon work, born out of eighteenth-century trade with the French, is perhaps the ideal metaphor of colonial entanglement. Using the raw material and tools obtained from the French, Osage artists began by tearing the rayon taffeta into strips and then cutting, folding, and sowing [*sic*] it back together to form something both beautiful and uniquely Osage. In picking up the pieces, both those shattered by and created through the colonial process, and weaving them into their own original patterns, Osage artists formed the tangled pieces of colonialism into their own statements of Osage sovereignty. Osage ribbon work reminds us that it is possible to create new and powerful forms out of an ongoing colonial process. (Dennison, 2012, p. 6)

The ribbon work patterns she references are an important piece of our Osage identity (see Figure 1). It is commonly known amongst educators that to deliver a successful lesson, teachers must have the student's attention. The lesson becomes exponentially more influential if the

teacher provides students with personal relevance--a hook for them to hang their hats on, or a roach for them to put their eagle feather in. Dennison did exactly this for me with the ribbon work reference, because growing up as an Osage I was surrounded by these patterns.

Figure 1. Osage Junior Female Ribbon Work Skirt

Figure 1. This junior-sized Osage skirt with ribbon work is worn by my daughter during the I^n.Lon.Schka, and was made by Jerry Smith.

Osage ribbon work is everywhere in the Osage community, and as Dennison (2013) and Powell (2014) explain, it is an ongoing expression of Osage nationalism. I grew up around it. During a lifetime of participation in our annual dances, the I^n.Lon.Schka, my brothers and I have worn a variety of ribbon work patterns on our broadcloth suits--some old, some new. I grew up looking at old patterns in my father's extensive collection of antique Osage photographs, and in my grandparent's cedar chests and closets; now, I watch my brother incorporate some of those patterns into modern digital art for a variety of media purposes, some of which can be found in Dennison's book and discussed in some of her other pieces (Dennison, 2015). At the

I^n.Lon.Schka, ribbon work is found on the wool broadcloth suits, skirts, blankets, and purses worn by hundreds of dancers who proudly wear these patterns and colors while we dance around The Drum to old songs, creating a stunning kaleidoscope of diversity amongst a community of collective belonging. It's an annual glimpse through the Wah.Zha.Zhi space-time continuum into the old ways, as we pull them into the present through stitching, dancing, singing, cooking, and conversing them into the future.

Recently, my eldest brother Ryan (the I^n.lom.pah) designed a new family pattern for us and we commissioned matching suits to be made for us (my suit pattern is seen in Figure 2) While the pattern is the same, each of us chose a unique collection of ribbon colors to fit our individual creative preference. In the end, we now have a matching family pattern amongst us, but a unique combination of colors that set us each apart. That's the beauty of Dennison's ribbon work allusion--the permutations are seemingly endless, bound only by the artist's imagination and the number of ribbons available. Each ribbon, each color, each cut, allows for every pattern to be part of a collective Osage style, but still unique to that individual.

Figure 2: Man's Osage Ribbon Work Suit

Figure 2. This is the suit I wear during the I^{n}.Lon.Schka, shown as several pieces laying on top of one another (leggings, tail piece, breech). Osage ribbon work design by Ryan Red Corn, sewn by Jarod Buffalohead.

Also, inherent in the ribbon work metaphor is the notion that although forces of colonialism are highly destructive to Indigenous ways of life, those systems can at times be modified to produce *new* items out of those colonial processes--items that are Osage specific. This is important for someone like me who had primarily interpreted our Osage way of life as merely maintaining and preserving the old ways of the past. For a large portion of my life, I had participated in our ceremonies while simultaneously learning about American Indians as a people of the past. In doing so, I had built up the notion that the Osage spaces in my life were almost

entirely about preservation of the old. I had fallen into the Euro-American social science narrative--that snare--I had Othered my own people and our existence as figures of the past, even while I participated in the present. This snare had been built through several levels of education, as a student and as a teacher, and it was--and remains--difficult to shift my thinking to a more appropriate narrative, one that reflects the nuanced realities of my hyphenated existences and challenges too-simple dichotomies.

I read Dennison's metaphor at a crucial time in my studies, and she provided me something I had had little of in formal education, as a teacher or student, and that was *Osage-specific relevance*. Even though Dennison did not write from the perspective of an educational researcher, her message created tectonic movement across my hyphenated "two world" foundation, creating a much-needed realignment, a rebirth, a fresh start in my thinking.

It was liberating.

As if that hadn't been enough, after I had chaotically dug through the mountain of graduate rigor (only to find out it is a foothill), I came back around to her work, and was able to I excavate scholarly details that were now easily applicable. Her structure provided harmony to the chaos.

With this newfound harmony, I could see relevance in using Dennison's (2013) ribbon work to frame my sociocultural positions and lived realities, especially as it pertains to the conceptualization of settler-colonial entanglements on a personal level. Her metaphor helps capture the evolving collage of sociocultural boundary zones that are me and my lived realities in and across plural versions of the betwixt and between (Anzaldúa, 2015; Turner, 1964). In

Turner's (1964) work studying cultural rites of passage and corresponding ceremonies, he emphasizes the learning potential to be had in these in-between spaces, which he refers to as liminal, marginal, and transitional. He urged researchers "to focus their attention on the phenomena and processes of mid-transition" (p. 55), and he stated, "it is these...that paradoxically expose the basic building blocks of culture just when we pass out of and before we re-enter the structural realm" (p. 55). To consider our liminal spaces of mid-transition not only helps us expose the building blocks of culture, but it also helps us conceptualize Osage colonial entanglements, the primary lived realities that Dennison's metaphor (2012, 2013) so eloquently illustrates. To build on Turner's concept of liminality, Anzaldúa (2015) adds productive creative and spiritual layers that she ties to Indigeneity. She refers to these transitional zones as nepantla spaces that are traversed by a nepantleras--people who have lived experience shuttling across multiple boundary zones, people like me. She writes, "nepantla is the point of contact *y el lugar* between worlds - between imagination and physical existence, between ordinary and nonordinary (spirit) realities" (p. 2). These liminal spaces of midtransition, these nepantlas, are naturally embedded in the ribbon work metaphor and they come together to form a unique whole--a one--composed of a plural collection of liminal spaces and transitional boundary zones. As the patterns transition from ribbon to ribbon and color to color, the artists make those transitional spaces work together in beautiful ways, and in some cases, even highlight them with transitional ribbons to make the pattern stand out (see white ribbons in Figure 1). But in the end, the overall collection of colorful shapes and transitional spaces are what make each piece unique, while remaining part of the whole, and as Dennison (2012) states, it becomes "something beautiful and uniquely Osage" (p. 6). I read Dennison's work again after I became familiar with some of the larger academic conversations about sociocultural complexity and boundary zones,

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and I soon began to see myself in the patterns--a collection of complexity that becomes one, yet still belonging to the Osage collective.

I realized

I am not someone walking in "two worlds."

I am a plurality of experiences walking in one world.

A ribbon work world.

I now see that I occupy many ethnographic spaces and the boundary zones between them, which can be represented by individual ethnographic ribbons; when these ethnographies are cut, folded, and stitched together in various ways, they create new patterns that accommodate in-betweenness, liminality, and intersectionality--all in one complete package. Therefore, there is a sense of wholeness encompassing fragmented hyphenated identities. The actual practice of ribbon work takes precision, time, focused effort, and years of practice to reach the high standards of quality considered worthy enough to wear, but the end product is a beautiful, balanced, and harmonious joining of ribbons that are ultimately a collection of smooth and precise transitions. I began to conceptualize these ribbons and the transitions in between as all of the diversity and liminality embedded within, which work together to form new and powerful stories that shed light on the complexities of settler-colonial entanglement.

This conceptualization of ribbon work also helps lay the foundation for why Indigenous autoethnography is a congruent and aligned methodology for this inquiry. Specifically, since

autoethnography is a blend of autobiography and ethnography (Ellis et al., 2010), the ribbons I describe below are the ethnographic arenas I occupy, and they serve as key spaces not only for data collection, but data analysis and interrogation, as well. When considered as a whole, these ethnographic spaces are the foundation for this autoethnography.

In the same way I chose ribbon colors for my latest dance suit (Figure 2), below I describe the ethnographic ribbons I am choosing to highlight for these narratives of entanglement, the ones that have brought me to my current position as an educator. These are the primary ribbons, the raw materials, that I will use to create new academic ribbon work patterns--autoethnographic narratives--that weave together my lived experiences and perspectives to create new spaces for Indigenous and Osage education, spaces that are needed so we can continue to move some of our perspectives into the future.

My Ethnographic Ribbons

My Osage ribbons. I was raised in a proud Osage home, and many of our ways were passed on to us through my father, Raymond Red Corn III (Lah.tah.nun.tse), my grandfather, Raymond Red Corn Jr. (Mah.zeh.non.pah), and through my White grandmother, Waltena Red Corn , who married into the tribe and spent her life in the Osage community. My three brothers and I extend several generations of known Red Corn men linking back to my great-great-grandfather, Wy.in.gla.inka. We know we are linked to more than this, but these are our known Osage roots.

I was given an Osage name at a young age (Tse.moi) and taught that I was part of the Gentle Sky and Peacekeeper clan (Tsi.zhu.wah.shta.geh). My Uncle Charles Red Corn named me and my siblings. The authority--and responsibility--to name us was passed down to him from Wakon Iron as an important part of our Osage traditions. We have participated in Osage

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ceremonies our whole lives; those ways have always been a large part of who we are, and who I am. My parents and grandparents always encouraged us to be involved in the Osage community in any way we could. I will not claim to have participated in all of the manifestations of Osage culture found across the community, but even when we moved away from the reservation, we still visited often and maintained strong ties to the Osage community. Pawhuska, Oklahoma and the Wa.ha.ko.li^n district of the Osage Nation, is one of the few places I've called home.

My White ribbons. I look White, and I am White. Although I stated earlier that I was raised in an Osage home, I was also raised in a White home by a loving White mother from a large Irish-Catholic family, and my father also carries an Indigenous-White identity, as his mother (Waltena) was from a large White rural Oklahoma family. In fact, three of my four grandparents were White, and even my Osage grandfather had a White mother; his was the first generation to break the Red Corn full blood line. I carry all of those ancestors with me in some manner, just as I carry my Osage ancestors.

Also, after we moved from the reservation to the predominantly White suburbs of Kansas City when I was in elementary school, we essentially grew up in a White community. My brothers and I graduated high school in this community, and I began my teaching career in this community. Additionally, I met my wife and her family, a White family who descend from German and French settlers, and I am very much a part of that family.

My social studies educator ribbons. Although I have not taught high school social studies since I began my doctoral work, after seven years of professional experience it is still a large part of my identity. I have analyzed and taught U.S. history, U.S. government, economics, world geography, and more. I eventually acquired a Master's degree in Social studies

Curriculum and Instruction, and I have experience building curriculum and teaching at the middle school, high school, undergraduate, and recently graduate levels.

To add to my entanglements, like most social science teachers, I had exposure to non-Western topics in my studies but the core of my professional training was from a Western European perspective, so I taught from that perspective. At times this was strange, because I enjoyed adding Osage perspectives to what I taught, but for the most part, I taught the curriculum as written. I leaned on the provided materials and textbooks as most teachers do, and I sharpened my skills and knowledge with those materials. In many ways, this work with mainstream curricula shaped my thinking for years. I also leaned on the mainstream media for access to current events and stories, so although I tried to diversify topics, my teaching was primarily mainstream execution of social science curricula.

After finishing my undergraduate degree and beginning my teaching career, my personal learning focus was more about acquiring social studies content knowledge for lessons and improving my pedagogical skills as a professional educator--and somehow that barely scratched the surface of critical social analysis. I find it interesting that when I started teaching, I led social studies lessons that prompted students to critically analyze the complexities of human systems, but my personal maturation and engagement in new levels of critical thinking plateaued. From my observation of this former me teaching at a high school level, I maintained a critical thinking skill set that hovered only a few notches above my students.

Now, from an educational leadership perspective where we are trained to think at a systems level, I can see a larger picture. I can see a picture that shows me not just how educational systems have shaped and guided my thinking, but also the perspectives and stories that I was steered away from in my formal settings.

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My tribal education department (TED) ribbons. When I was conducting research for my master's degree, I chose to focus on Tribal[1] Education Departments (TEDs), which are the educational arms of native nations. This focus shifted my attention from the social sciences, in the general sense, to the inner workings of American Indian education systems from the perspective of these sovereign governments. At the doctoral level, because I am studying educational leadership, I chose to position my internship efforts in mostly Osage education contexts, and consequently I have spent considerable time in these unique educational settings.

I found this transition from mainstream education to Indigenous education to be difficult. I did not have an advisor who knew much about tribal education departments, so I had to lean on the few publications that exist (Mackety, Bachler, Barley, & Cicchinelli, 2009; TEDNA, 2006, 2011), as well as make personal contacts with knowledgeable individuals in the field who were outside of my institution. As a social studies educator, I was taught how to run a class and teach about the diversity found in and across societies, but nowhere in my training did I learn much related to American Indian education systems, which comprise a complex network of overlapping jurisdictional grey areas that demand a unique skill set and knowledge base. As I began examining these systems from the perspective of native nations, I started to realize that many leaders and educators operating in these systems were not trained for these specific

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[1] As an academic writing about Indigenous peoples, especially when referring to governing institutions, I use terms such as *tribe* or *tribal* knowing they can have fraught baggage as demonstrated by Indigenous leaders like Albert Hale (former president of the Navajo Nation), who stated a preference for *nations* (Hale et al., 2006, p. 88-89). I continue to employ these terms because they are still frequently used in common parlance and bureaucratic titles in the field (i.e.. *federally recognized tribes*, *Tribal Education Department National Assembly*, *tribal education departments/agencies*). When possible, I prioritize terms such as *Indigenous*, *Osage*, and *native nations*, while simultaneously recognizant of the continued need for terms like *tribal* on a limited basis in order to align this work with current language and institutions in the field.

professional duties because there are few programs in the country that adequately prepare educators or leaders for these jobs.

Simultaneously, native nations such as the Osage are building language revitalization programs, cultural curricula, education outreach programs, early childhood centers, K-12 and university partnership programs, and more. This is a highly active field, and there over 560 federally recognized tribes in the United States, so there is a great need for research in these spaces, especially as it relates to tribally specific approaches.

My multicultural education ribbons. Coming from a social science background that often discussed concepts of culture in a classroom setting, teaching about culture was a natural fit within my skill set, even if I had yet to peel back the deeper layers associated with doctoral level work. As I shifted professional gears during my transition to my doctoral program, I began teaching as an adjunct at a small private college. I taught two undergraduate 100- and 200-level courses: Human Geography, and Social, Cultural, and Linguistic Diversity in Today's Classrooms. With this transition in the time before I identified with the specific fields of critical and Indigenous Studies, I identified as an emerging scholar in multicultural education--a prominent field in education, especially considering that almost every educator-training program requires a multicultural education course.

I still view myself as an active member in this field; however, I have also noticed that this field is so large that even though Indigenous-specific conversations in this field are related and intertwined, it is easy for in-depth conversations about indigeneity to get lost, especially when digging into specific conversations about particular native nations. Therefore, I acknowledge that I am associated with this field, but I am finding a preference for the specific language and topics in critical and Indigenous studies, which allow for stronger links to anthropology and

ethnic studies. The field of multicultural education is valuable and well-established, and there is need for stronger bridges to be built between this field and the disciplines found in critical and Indigenous studies.

My educational leadership ribbons. My degree program, an educational leadership doctorate, has trained me in the topic of leadership and how to run educational institutions. Although I have little administrative experience in the formal school sense, at this point I have a doctoral student's level of understanding of the philosophies, norms, values, and processes found in the administrative levels of our educational systems. Recently, I have become increasingly active in educational leadership efforts at the university level; I helped cofound a faculty, staff, and student alliance that aims to improve the campus climate and culture for American Indian students as well as build bridges and programs in partnership with native nations and Indigenous communities (RedCorn, 2016). Furthermore, I recently was invited to engage in dialogue with educational leaders in area school districts on relevant American Indians topics within their respective settings.

In my educational leadership program, I have developed a fluency and skill set within the field of educational leadership. I have studied educational finance (Thompson, Crampton, & Wood, 2012), organizational theory in schools (Hoy & Miskel, 2013), school community relations (Fiore, 2002), research with McREL along with balanced leadership frameworks (Waters & Cameron, 2007), educational law (Dunklee & Shoop, 2006), principalship (Sergiovanni, 2006), and more. I am also familiar with the standards that drive the field (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; National Policy Board for Educational Adminstration, 2015). My practitioner degree is driven by practical courses and conversations about educational leadership, and there is value in adding these perspectives and exploring ways to bridge the

highly articulated sociocultural conversations that occur in other Indigenous-specific fields with the practical applications of educational leadership. Although much of what I explore in this dissertation might appear to be detached from the specifics of educational leadership, I want to emphasize that with everything I discuss, I aim to bring to the practical spaces of educational leadership in Osage and other Indigenous spaces, and eventually move the ideas forward through curriculum construction and program building.

My qualitative inquiry and philosophy ribbons (which were an entry point into Indigenous and decolonizing philosophies). Since the early stages of my doctoral program, I have continuously engaged in qualitative inquiry grounded in the intertwined spaces of the methodological and philosophical discourses. This eventually exposed me to local, national, and international conversations about indigeneity and colonialism in a manner that my Western-style social science and mainstream education training rarely engaged.

As stated earlier, I have found that this academic arena spends a greater amount of energy focusing on the sociocultural details and nuances of plural complexity that is more relative to my Indigenous-White lived realities than does the practitioner conversations in educational leadership, or the more generic conversations that occur in the field of multicultural education. I noticed this value and separation when I started branching into this academic space and reading Indigenous and decolonizing material from scholars such as Smith (1999), Dennison (2012, 2013, 2015), Bhattacharya (2009, 2015), Anzaldúa (2015), Pewewardy (2015a), and more. These studies struck vibrant, resonant, and harmonious chords within me, and put me in a natural onto-epistemological learning environment that I was previously aware of, yet ignorant of its value because I was not fully engaged with the in-depth philosophies that accompany it.

These Indigenous spaces in academia are liberating and extremely valuable
environments, but in many ways, they are still detached from the practical educator training
environments, as evidenced by the fact that I did not fully encounter the depths of this field as an
educator until I was slightly veered off my mainstream learning path by a few mentors. I could
have easily made it through my doctoral program without engaging in this important and relevant
field of study, which may have prompted me to fall into the trap Deloria & Wildcat (2001) warns
of when they state that Indigenous professionals can sometimes "leave their Indian heritage
behind and adopt the vocabulary and concepts of non-Indian educators and bureaucrats,
following along like so many sheep" (p. 153). I am not entirely convinced that I have avoided
this fate all together, as colonial entanglement is a complicated reality; however, I can
confidently say that without my introduction and engagement to this field, this would have been
my most likely fate.

Stitching the Ribbons Together: A Brief Example

When trying to define my lived experiences, if viewed separately as isolated
ethnographic spaces, these ribbons are one-dimensional and incomplete slices of my life. I am
plural, my identities are plural, and they evolve and shift constantly into memories and
imaginations of the past, present, and future. When these ribbons are taken as a collective, and
sewn together into new patterns, they can create a more robust picture of my entangled realities.
For example:

I speak White

I speak teacher

I speak pedagogy

I speak suburban

I speak Western philosophy and social science

I speak educational leadership

I speak academia and can cite specific scholars

but...

I can also speak of a name, and a clan

> *I can speak res, and cite family relations*

>> *I can dance, and I have been given that right through proper ways*

>>> *I can sing old songs on The Drum, although not with as much*

>>> *confidence*

>>>> *I still can't land all of those Saturday night songs*

I can cook, with guidance, over the open fire-at our family camp and outside Wakon Iron.

I can speak Osage...

> *Socially...*

>> *culturally...*

>>> *politically...*

>>>> *even economically...*

but not literally.

That began with my grandfather, and eventually made its way to me.

Now I can just try my best.

> *Wash.ka^n.*

These ethnographic ribbons are not the only ribbons in my personal patterns, but they help highlight the core sociocultural zones and intersections that I occupy, which will ultimately play important roles in these autoethnographic narratives. Each narrative will possess qualities I inherited from these lived experiences, yet just as ribbons are cut, folded, layered, and sewn through a variety of geometric and color permutations, the presence of each ethnographic ribbon in each narrative will take on new forms, new positions, and new roles. Ultimately, these ethnographic ribbons will serve as the raw materials--my lived experiences--that I use to create many new patterns throughout this critical autoethnographic process.

Stitching Osage Perspectives into the Fields of Education

With Dennison's ribbon work metaphor as my conceptual framework as an Osage-specific foundation, I soon began to consider how I might be able to advance conversations relevant to Osage education. Although not everything I discuss throughout these autoethnographic narratives will be Osage-specific, my Osage perspectives will be interwoven into every narrative somehow, starting with this initial effort to move Dennison's metaphor to new spaces such as education--a place where it has immense pedagogical, methodological, and even theoretical value. One goal is that these new patterns can help link Osage perspectives with other academic topics within the field of education and create spaces for new Osage and Indigenous thinking in the field.

Ultimately, Osage education is at an important place in our history, one that has seen rapid growth in resources and programming. Although there were a few smaller Osage Nation gaming facilities and education programs in existence before the constitutional reform efforts from 2004-2006 (Dennison, 2012), the passage of the new constitution coincided with growth in gaming and educational programming. While these developments occurred around the same

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time in parallel and intersecting ways, this growth represented a new era of enhanced involvement in the education of Osage citizens--an important move towards a higher degree of self-determination. Specifically, this era of educational expansion coincided with the creation of a Language Department, Education Department, Cultural Center, and various other programs with educational value to the community.

Within these new structures, the Osage Nation expanded educational services for students from cradle to the grave, making the current landscape a highly unique and dynamic educational setting. Currently, the Nation operates several early childhood centers, provides afterschool services for children in K-12 schools, and offers financial assistance to Osage citizens attending post-secondary institutions. The new Cultural Center, located in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, hosts a variety of community courses related to cultural preservation and vitality, including courses on how to make Osage ribbon work and other items worn by Osage dancers. Additionally, the Cultural Center manages an heirloom seed garden intended to preserve traditional foods, hosts guest lectures from relevant academics, and hosts important Osage social events for the community, such as dances, hand games, meals, cultural gatherings, and Osage book clubs. They have also been hosting off-campus events, such as the Cultural Walk to signify the last Osage move from Kansas to the current reservation, and the creation of a collection of traveling trunks filled with Osage items (e.g., dance clothes, art, games, cooking supplies, etc.) that can be taken to local schools and educational events to teach about the Osage people.

In the Osage Language Department, Osage language teachers instruct students from early childhood to adulthood in multiple locations, including online and in the local high schools. Although these high school teachers conduct their classes within the public schools, they are employees of the Osage Nation. In a similar manner, the Osage Nation Education Department

pays for full-time liaisons to work in the local public schools and act as resources for services such as counseling, financial support for school supplies, tutoring, parent engagement, after-school assistance, and more. Furthermore, Osage Nation educational leaders have built partnership programs with several local education agencies, as well as with a local community college; beyond what I list here, they do so much more for Osage students on a daily basis from pre-K to adult education. Ultimately, the Osage Nation has a wide variety of educational programming (Osage Nation, 2016), and scholarship directly aimed at this unique space could be highly productive.

To understand the Osage education landscape, one must also be aware that the Osage Nation does not currently operate a full K-12 school system, and aside from early childhood centers, Osage students attend local public schools that are non-Osage institutions that are outside, yet overlapping, the jurisdictions of the Osage Nation. This is quite common across Indian Country, since over 90% of American Indian students are attending general public schools in mainstream education, as opposed to schools run by the Bureau of Indian Education or a native nation (TEDNA, 2011), but this is an educational reality for Osage educational leaders. The Osage Nation simply does not control much in the way of K-12 contexts. Recently, however, Chief Standing Bear's administration has begun the process of constructing a birth-12th grade system, and prioritized the development of an Osage language immersion school, starting with early childhood, which ideally would begin to feed an Osage-centric elementary school currently in development. With this as the vision, the nation has consulted with various firms and professionals about this growing possibility, and these efforts are ultimately becoming closer to a lived reality. As this develops, and as Osages continue to take on a more active role

in education, scholarship that explores Osage perspectives and its effects on curricula, pedagogy, and leadership could be of value.

With this emphasis on professional growth in modern Osage education, and the development of scholarship in this space, it is important to note that much of the Osage literature tends to focus on historical perspectives (Bailey, 1973, 2010; Burns, 1984; Callahan, 1990; Mathews, 1961; Rollings, 1992, 2004; Wolferman, 1997). This literature has immense value to the Osage people, but aside from Dennison's work (Dennison, 2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2015), and students connected to her work (Powell, 2014; RedCorn, 2016), less has been written about Osage's specific experiences in modern contexts, especially in professional education. Local and regional periodicals occasionally mention the Osage, but scholars have written little about Osage perspectives in education, Osage Nation education systems, culturally responsive pedagogical approaches, language preservation and redevelopment techniques, Osage educational partnerships, Osage leadership in education, and any other topics that one might find in any research across the vast field of education. I do not intend to advance all of these topics here, nor do I have the time and capacity to do so in one project, and some education conversations should remain in Osage contexts since not all Indigenous perspectives need to be documented and analyzed in academic arenas. However, the lack of scholarly literature creates a disconnect between Osage education and larger topics in the fields of Indigenous education and academia, creating a barrier for new learning to occur and new patterns to be developed as new Osage curricula, pedagogy, and leadership continues to evolve.

Literature that is specific to modern Osage education has not been moved to academic contexts. This becomes a barrier for both Osage students and educators, because their only options are to lean on disconnected pan-Indian conversations about Indigenous education, and/or

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adapt the work of academics and practitioners in other native communities. Looking for related links to other Indigenous conversations in academia is not a bad thing; in fact, I do this throughout in my narratives. Rather, I argue that there is a lack of specific conversations about Osage education in academia, and that there is a need to create new spaces for these specific conversations, especially in modern contexts. Ultimately, new literature of any kind in this void can serve as an important catalyst, one that links Osage perspectives with the larger fields of Indigenous studies, American Indian education, multicultural education, curricular studies, educational leadership, and the many other subfields found in educational scholarship. Through this process, new dimensions can be added to Osage education efforts that acknowledge our entangled realities as we navigate and negotiate in and across the larger systems of education, and those new perspectives are good for both Osage and non-Osage scholarship. In other words, this effort advances scholarship for Osage education, but also contributes to evolving educational scholarship across Indian Country and the larger fields in education.

Most importantly, new literature in this void can create new spaces for Osage-specific conversations, and a key purpose of this autoethnography is to do exactly that: cultivate new spaces for Osage-specific conversations in the fields within education, especially ones that address the complicated lived realities of settler-colonial entanglements.

Imbalanced Patterns: Exploring the Sovereign Self through Ribbon Work

With the lack of literature linking Osage education to larger conversations in academia, my ribbons have given me the materials needed to help create new patterns--ones that can be seen by educators in the Osage community--while also bringing Osage perspectives to non-Osage educators. However, in this position I encounter an internal hesitation, because I am not an expert on Osage cultures, nor should I be interpreted as speaking for all Osages.

I am Osage and I am a knowledgeable educator, but that does not automatically make me an Osage expert, just as being a White person teaching U.S. history does not make me an expert on all the White people who founded this country--although I did learn more about White founders than prominent Osage leaders through my training. I have been trained in Western paradigms for the primary purpose of preparing students for responsible citizenship in the United States of America, and specifically, in Kansas (which sits upon ancestral Osage territory). This is not the same thing as preparing students for citizenship in the Osage Nation and moving traditional ways into the future. Those courses were not available in my formal training, and I never once had an Osage teacher in school.

Often even our most knowledgeable elders preface discussions on traditional matters with phrases such as "I don't know for sure, but the way I was always taught . . ." or, "The way my family always did this . . ." as humble disclaimers to the reality that often we do not know for sure about all Osage matters, and we hesitate to speak for others. This is an important gesture deeply engrained in Osage ways, one that I believe is relevant here as I position this work. In other words, this autoethnography is intended to be interpreted as my reflections based on my own lived experiences in and out of Osage and non-Osage contexts, and this content is not intended to be generalized to all Osages.

With this in mind, this academic ribbon work exercise is more akin to beginning ribbon work lessons and running through the trials and errors of trying to get it right. In reality, learning how to create new ribbon work patterns is a long and tedious process, and it takes a while to develop the skills and knowledge to make neat, tight, and balanced patterns--patterns worthy of wearing during ceremony. In this sense, I reiterate my position as a learner, and this autoethnography then becomes an unveiling of my honest introspections, and the realities of

fumbling through the processes of decolonized learning and confronting colonial entanglements, especially as someone trained in mainstream education systems.

I find comfort in the words written by Pewewardy (2015a), one of my longtime mentors, who states:

> I advocate the need for a critical awakening of Indigenous peoples with an emphasis on the fact that this awakening can occur only through a systemic study of our own rich tribal heritage. I believe the first step in becoming self-determined is examining the "sovereign self." (p. 70)

While many Indigenous peoples in the United States define sovereignty in mostly political and legal terms, here Pewewardy advocates for Indigenous leaders to step outside of our Eurocentric training, and explore the liberatory power of our own lived experiences. Furthermore, he implores that the path to self-determination for Indigenous peoples begins with individual introspection. From this context, this project is the documentation of examining the *sovereign self*, and the confusing processes that come with it. While this work does aim to stitch Osage perspectives into education, this is not an effort in anthropological or historical discovery of traditional Osage knowledges--it is more about how Osage perspectives in the present can help us identify and assess what adaptations might be necessary within education as we all continue to evolve.

Moving forward, this academic ribbon work comes from a position of learning, and aims to unveil some of the associated learning processes when confronting colonial entanglements. In turn, this dissertation becomes an introspective mining exercise for relevant Indigenous and decolonized approaches to education, not an apex of expert achievement on a linear trajectory towards a doctoral degree. Therefore, this work is not necessarily the final product to be worn

during ceremony. Rather, it is a gathering of ribbons, the preplanning of various patterns and designs, and the stitching of short practice strips of ribbon work that one might make before committing to making a whole suit, blanket, or skirt. It is from this position that I intend to stitch new patterns for Osage education by creating a collection of new autoethnographic narratives-- narratives that both confront and embrace the complexity of my colonial entanglements, and interrogate some of the fault lines found within expanses of my Indigenous (Osage)-White hyphen and all of the other hyphenated fault lines and cenotes shifting and moving in my internal ecosystems.

Research Purpose and Questions

In creating these autoethnographic narratives, the primary purpose is to: 1) invite Osage and other Indigenous educators to (re)consider certain topics and positions in an entangled reality, 2) cultivate conditions to revive and reconsider Osage ways of thinking and how they may be applied to modern and future contexts, 3) open up new spaces in academia for Osage perspectives, much like the space that Dennison has made for students like me, and link those perspectives into the larger works in the fields of education and Indigenous studies, and 4) mobilize Osage and other Indigenous perspectives into the future.

To address these goals, the following research questions will guide this inquiry:

1) In the field of education, how does the concept of settler-colonial entanglement manifest itself in my lived experiences, in relationship to the intersectional ethnographic spaces that I occupy?

2) How do my lived experiences inform my interpretations of settler-colonial entanglements found in Indigenous education, mascots and imagery, and an ecologically informed consciousness?

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Situating Academic Ribbon Work as Red Pedagogical Indigenous Un-Methodology

As part of my effort to stitch Osage perspectives into the academic fields of Indigenous studies and education, I am situating my conceptual framework within specific Indigenous academic spaces. In general, I am positioning this framework--Dennison's (2012, 2013a) ribbon work metaphor--as an Indigenous methodological approach that is a tribally centered (Kovach, 2010), and aimed towards moving Osage education towards a higher degree of self-determination (Smith, 1999). More specifically, I am situating this work within Grande's (2008) precepts of Red Pedagogy, who might suggest that I am an Indigenous-White graduate student engaging in "ideas in motion," and that my "gaze is always shifting inward, outward, and throughout the spaces-in-between" from a position of "consciousness shaped not only by my own experiences, but also those of my peoples and ancestors" (p. 233). Ultimately, as I rework Dennison's metaphor in both methodological and pedagogical contexts, there is a natural fit with these overarching Indigenous methodological frameworks (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999) and specifically with the precepts of Grande's Red Pedagogical Un-Methodology (Grande, 2008).

Academic Ribbon Work and Red Pedagogy: An Osage and Indigenous Methodology

With this reliance on academic ribbon work as a conceptual framework, one that is congruent with Red Pedagogical tenets (Grande, 2008), I am positioning this work as an Indigenous methodological framework that aligns with both Smith's (1999) and Kovach's (2010) work as leaders in Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies.

When discussing Indigenous methodologies, Kovach (2010) emphasizes:

To start, this work is premised on the belief that nested within any methodology is

both a knowledge belief system (encompassing ontology and epistemology) and

actual methods. The two work in tandem. Second, Indigenous methodologies

can be situated with the qualitative landscape because they encompass

characteristics congruent with other relational qualitative approaches...that in the

research design value both process and content...*Finally, and most significantly,*

tribal epistemologies are the centre of Indigenous methodologies, and it is this

epistemological framework that makes them distinct from Western qualitative

approaches. [emphasis added] (p. 25)

As Kovach suggests, Indigenous methodologies are situated firmly within the larger

academic discourses and methodological approaches of qualitative inquiry. Also, as an

Indigenous academic and a citizen of the Osage Nation, I draw from this statement that there is a

fundamental need for me to center this project around Osage frameworks, or in this specific case,

Osage ribbon work. This is an important methodological choice for Indigenous academics

because if Indigenous communities continue to use non-Indigenous frameworks to build

knowledge and move ideas into the future, there is a fundamental risk of continuing to position

Indigenous peoples as an exotic Other, further undermining Smith's (1999) decolonizing agenda.

Ultimately, Kovach (2010) and Smith (1999) both emphasize the need for Indigenous research to

prioritize local voices and frameworks to interrupt the problematic practice of Westerners doing

research *on* Indigenous populations, which creates stories of exotic Others for Western

consumption yet does little to help the local communities (Smith, 1999).

By focusing on an Osage-specific framework, I am also positioning Osage educators as a

privileged position in my audience since this is a project intended to build capacity for Osage

education. This does not mean that other educators cannot learn from this work, but this is a

project that brings nuanced modern Osage perspectives into larger Indigenous and multicultural

education conversations in the academy. These are fundamental methodological choices that I made to properly align this work with the larger field of current Indigenous academia.

In the end, I am grateful to have something such as Dennison's ribbon work metaphor as Osages such as myself try to engage in Smith's (1999) decolonizing research agenda. In a humble way, I hope this project can nudge us a bit closer to that goal of enhanced self-determination by articulating and acknowledging some of our entanglements so we can move forward. .

Considering Grande's Red Pedagogical Precepts as Ribbons

My adaptation of Dennison's (2012, 2013) ribbon work metaphor as a framework situates well within Grande's (2008) work with Red Pedagogy. Grande (2008) positions Red Pedagogy as an "indigenous pedagogy that operates at the crossroads of Western theory-- specifically critical pedagogy--and indigenous knowledge" (p. 234). This emphasis on academic intersectionality naturally aligns with Dennison's metaphor, as they both incorporate the multiplicity of intersections and entanglements that Indigenous people must negotiate. Furthermore, Grande (2008) emphasizes the "social engagement of ideas is [her] method" (p. 233). She states:

> My research is about ideas in motion. That is, ideas as they come alive within and
> through people(s), communities, events, texts, practices, policies, institutions,
> artistic expression, ceremonies, and rituals. I engage them 'in motion' through a
> process of active and close observation wherein I live with, try on, and wrestle
> with ideas in a manner akin to Geertz's (1998) notion of 'deep hanging out,' but
> without the distinction between participant/observer. Instead, the gaze is always

shifting inward, outward, and throughout the spaces-in-between, with the idea

itself holding ground as the independent variable. (p. 233)

Here, Grande helps describe how Indigenous methodologies embrace the messiness of

life and sociocultural inquiry, and it helps illuminate the dissonance found between the rigid

traditions of Western-based research and the Indigenous versions of social inquiry. In the quote

above, one can see the notion that ideas "come alive" and are inherently nonstatic, yet connected

to people and our expressions. She emphasizes how ideas are "in motion" and that they

ultimately move through the researcher in a variety of ways to be forever connected and brought

into the complex web of interconnected and nonstatic life. When she states that "the gaze is

always shifting inward, outward, and throughout the spaces in between" (p. 233), I interpret this

to be an acknowledgment to the value of introspection and personal reflection (important to

autoethnography). Additionally, I read this as a need to analyze the plurality of the spaces-in-

between (liminality and nepantla spaces). These are foundational methodological and theoretical

characteristics of this project, and this emphasis helps demonstrate alignment with this

nontraditional methodological framework--what she coins in her title as an un-methodology

(Grande, 2008).

Additionally, Grande (2008) acknowledges the lack of distinction between participant

and observer, which is tied inherently to conversations about insider/outsider dynamics in

research (Bhattacharya, 2009). From a traditional Western researcher lens, my position as an

autoethnographer is at times considered problematic because I am both an insider and an

outsider, which prompts the need for key methodological considerations.

As a citizen and active member of the Osage Nation, I am a cultural insider and I have

the skills to interpret Osage perspectives in a more appropriate manner than an outsider would.

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However, it would be arrogant for me to say that I have the right to represent all Osage people--our community possesses its own internal diversity. Spending so much of my time in the suburbs, I missed out on some Osage learning experiences specific to the reservation and many other Osages have their own unique stories to tell. Even if I had spent my entire life on the reservation, it would be erroneous to say that I understood all Osage versions of life. I simply do not. As one person, I could not.

As someone conducting academic work and analysis, I also must recognize that I am simultaneously an outsider. Grande (2008) captures this when she states, "the gaze is always shifting inward, outward, and the spaces-in-between" (p. 233). Even as a cultural insider, as I conduct analysis as a researcher, I position my thinking from different angles. This gives me an ethical responsibility that I must acknowledge, and prompts me to ask where my primary responsibilities lie. In consideration of this question, I am privileging Osage perspectives and privileging the primary audience to be the Osage people because my ethical responsibilities in this case lie mostly with the Osage people. Also, I must always be cognizant of whether I am creating new narratives that are productive for the Osage people, or whether I am recycling my Western education and producing exotic narratives for Western consumption. Yet I know that there may never be a pure Osage way of producing any narratives because my ribbons are always already entangled. These insider-outsider dynamics are built into the ribbon work pattern as a whole, built into the fibers and dyes of each ribbon, working together to create something new and uniquely Osage--to pull Osage perspectives out of a history-only context and move them into the future.

But as Grande (2008) suggests, her un-methodology is the process of "filtering and gathering data through an indigenous perspective . . . as an indigenous scholar," and that her

perspective is "shaped not only by [her] own experiences but also those of [her] peoples and ancestors" (p. 233). I am aligning myself with this perspective, as someone filtering information through an Indigenous (Osage) lens, and simultaneously considering my connections to my people and my ancestors throughout the process. Ultimately, these statements also align with my autoethnographic approach of using academic ribbon work as an un-methodology. As Grande outlines the precepts for Red Pedagogy, I see correlations with Dennison's ribbon work metaphor being used as a framework--Grande's precepts can be ribbons unto themselves that are sewn together to create new and powerful forms of indigeneity. In this manner, their work aligns rather naturally, and it becomes logical to situate these two frameworks together as yet another conceptual ribbon work pattern.

Ultimately, Grande (2008) frames the "following seven precepts as a way of thinking our way around and through the challenges facing American education in the 21st century and our mutual need to define decolonizing pedagogies" (p. 250)[2]:

1. Red pedagogy is primarily a pedagogical project that is inherently political, cultural, spiritual, and intellectual.

2. Red pedagogy is fundamentally rooted in indigenous knowledge and praxis that is particularly interested in knowledge that furthers understanding and analysis of the forces of colonization.

3. Red pedagogy is informed by critical theories of education and searches for ways to both deepen and be deepened by engagement with critical and revolutionary theories and praxis.

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[2] These precepts are summarized and condensed while maintaining much of Grande's language

4. Red pedagogy promotes an education for decolonization; within Red pedagogy, the root metaphors of decolonization are articulated as equity, emancipation, sovereignty, and balance. An education for decolonization makes no claim to political neutrality, but rather troubles capitalist-imperialist aims.

5. Red pedagogy is a project that interrogates both democracy and indigenous sovereignty. In this context, sovereignty is broadly defined as, "a people's right to rebuild its demand to exist and present its gifts to the world...an adamant refusal to dissociate culture, identity, and power from the *land*" (Lyons, 2000, p. 457).

6. Red pedagogy actively cultivates praxis of collective agency by building transcultural and transnational solidarities among indigenous peoples and others committed to reimagining sovereign space free of imperialist, colonialist, and capitalist exploitation.

7. Red pedagogy is grounded in hope that is not the future-centered hope of the Western imagination, but rather a hope that lives in contingency with the past--one that trusts the beliefs and understandings of our ancestors, the power of traditional knowledge, and the possibilities for new understandings.

To build on the notion of these precepts being ribbons unto themselves, one can see that these concepts can be woven into the fabric of my autoethnographic narratives; they can be embedded into my language, my posture and position, my scholarship and citations, and more. When woven together in specific contexts, they can take on a variety forms that can be of value to Indigenous peoples. To take that concept even further, one could also conceptualize these seven precepts as some of the ribbon fibers, threads, and dye pigment, which can be found throughout the make-up of each pattern and each narrative. In this interpretation, they can be

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embedded into the entire pattern, not as visibly obvious to the project as a whole, but ubiquitous nonetheless. Ultimately, there are many qualities found in these precepts that are scattered across my ethnographic ribbons and embedded in my lived experiences, and it is my intent to ensure these qualities are present throughout this autoethnographic project, and I will consciously be incorporating them in and across these new narratives.

Merging *Critical* and *Indigenous* with Red Pedagogical Ribbon Work

Critical is an important theoretical concept in my autoethnographic approach, and there is a need to address my interpretation of the term *critical* in the context of positioning Dennison's ribbon work metaphor (Dennison, 2012, 2013a) as a Red Pedagogical approach (Grande, 2008).

Fundamentally, in academia the terms *critical* and *Indigenous* are often used together and sometimes interchangeably (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008), indicating their alignment. As Grande (2008) explains, critical work is often centered on disrupting power structures that reinforce social exploitation and systems of oppression. She claims that Red Pedagogy lies at the crossroads of where these efforts intersect with Indigenous spaces, claiming that they can work together. Simultaneously, Smith's (1999) approach to decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies share this same spirit, as it is fundamentally aimed at disrupting the imbalanced relationships between Western academia and the Indigenous world. Thus, these two fields are connected to one another, hence the interchangeability of the terms.

With this acknowledgement that Grande's un-methodology has strong connections to critical studies, and specifically revolutionary critical pedagogy, I must also acknowledge that although Dennison's (2012, 2013) metaphor has strong critical qualities, it has less emphasis on linking directly to revolutionary critical theory. Therefore, I should state the nuances of how I situate *critical* within this Red Pedagogical academic ribbon work structure.

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In this dissertation, I engage in critical conversations found across the fields of Indigenous studies and education through the interrogation of power dynamics within and across educational systems. These educational systems, and the capitalist aims that they are inherently tied to, are built upon the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and lands, and these settler-colonial processes continue to unfold through teaching, learning, curriculum and policy making throughout these systems. While these dynamics are woven into the substantive content of this dissertation, I do not carry forward Grande's (2008) specific language use that ties to Marxist revolutionary critical theory. Ultimately, since I am operating from a position that views *critical* and *Indigenous* as terms that are often used interchangeably in academia, I consider the *critical* presence in my narratives to be channeled through the Indigenous foundations of this project - Smith's (1999) decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies. Although there will be critical qualities inextricably linked and embedded into each pattern--each narrative--it is important to state that I will not explicitly be tying these narratives to the language of revolutionary critical theory as Grande (2008) does.

Conclusion: My New Foundation

Through this graduate student learning process, I have cycled through intense interrogations of my knowledge foundations, and I have experienced important tectonic shifts in my thinking. On an onto-epistemological level, I now see the world differently. Dennison's (2012, 2013) ribbon work metaphor has become more than a methodological framework for this academic project; it has made a profound impact on my worldview as a member of the Osage Nation and how I view my Indigenous-White lived experiences. The structure embedded in her metaphor has allowed me to tear down my dualist and divisive "I walk in two-worlds" mentality, and replace it with a more fitting vision for my complex lived existence. To me, ribbon work is

now more than something I wear during our ceremonies, it is a symbol of my identity as a person--a collection of complex lived experiences, complete with intersectional and liminal spaces in between.

In so many ways, common language has taken on new meanings. As I use terms such as *foundation* to describe the footings that support my thinking, this seemingly benign term has even taken on a new interpretation. Early on in my studies, I would have envisioned that term to mean a concrete foundation upon which I was going to erect a building.

That foundation has crumbled to the ground due to the agitation of my fault lines.

In its place, I am starting to chart the patterns,

   eventually, ribbons will be cut and laid.
   The first layers,

      the foundation for new patterns, new ideas;

         which can in turn potentially create new spaces for Others...

Using Dennison's (2012, 2013) work as my foundation, I am better able to align my work with the re-emerging world of Indigenous knowledge-making and its corresponding methodological considerations (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999). I am thankful that I am able to use an Osage framework to add Osage perspectives to the field of education, while also being able to situate these ideas within Grande's (2008) concept of Red Pedagogy.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodological considerations pertaining to this Indigenous autoethnography, where I continue to cut new ribbons to add to this foundation.

Chapter 2 - Autoethnography: Foundations, Methods, and Considerations

Introduction

Even though this Indigenous autoethnography is a nontraditional dissertation, it is still scholarly work, which requires that I establish a methodological foundation and demonstrate that this project resides in a legitimate scholarly space.

In general terms, autoethnography is a method of inquiry and representation which relies heavily on personal narratives to articulate complex sociocultural situations by blending elements of autobiography and ethnography (Ellis et al., 2010). This method of qualitative inquiry was historically born out of an era of scholarship which started to question traditional academic processes related to how knowledge was created, how research was assessed for legitimacy, and what populations it was intended for. Ultimately, the questions being addressed revolved around the accuracy of *representing* certain social groups, the *legitimacy* of those knowledges, and the processes by which that information transferred to actual *praxis* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This created a need to interrogate traditional research practices such as the relationship between researcher and participants, the insider-outsider dynamics of representing social groups, and the foundational question of whether scholars can actually remove themselves from the representative narratives which they write - no matter how tight the research design. Therefore, this era of qualitative inquiry began to prioritize insider voices and self-representation, and interrogate the traditional separations between researcher, data, method, and product, which became blurry from the perspective of traditional research philosophies. It is out of this era, as a solution to these crises, that the method of autoethnography was born.

Since autoethnographic projects merge process and product, along with researcher and participant, it would be easy to conclude that traditional research components are entirely absent,

which would be untrue. In autoethnography, although research processes and structures become less defined, there is still a need to identify key methodological components in the project, which is the purpose of this chapter.

Methodological Foundations: Emphasizing Critical, Indigenous, and Mixed-Mediums

In this chapter, I begin by outlining the historical foundations of autoethnography and explain how I specifically align this work with critical, Indigenous, and mixed-media versions of this method (Anzaldúa, 2015; Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; Boylorn & Orbe, 2013; Whitinui, 2014). Then I move on to discuss several important structural considerations related to the research process, which are also found in many traditional dissertations. Specifically, I discuss methodological standards by which the project can be assessed, sites of data collection, the limitations and value of this work, and measures of accountability throughout this process. Additionally, I discuss why autoethnography is scholarly work as opposed to an exercise in navel-gazing. Ultimately, the purposes of this chapter are, on one hand to explain why this project blurs the lines between researcher, participant, process, and product, and on the other hand, to identify important methodological considerations that are still present within those blurry lines.

Finally, since this is an Indigenous autoethnographic piece that prioritizes stories about cultural healing (Smith, 1999), I conclude this chapter with a narrative about the personal value of this autoethnography as I transition from student to scholar. Specifically, I explain how this study of the self helps me lay a more culturally appropriate scholarly foundation for my own understandings before I engage in larger research projects outside of myself, in the field.

History of Autoethnography: Grown out of Crises in Qualitative Inquiry

Autoethnography and self-narratives as methods grew out of a few merging and evolving crises in qualitative inquiry, which began to take root in the 1980s within education although it was prevalent earlier in other fields, such as anthropology. In this era, key shifts in social research began to take place during what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe as the postmodern era's crisis of representation, which revolves around the idea that "no interpretive account can ever directly or completely capture lived experience" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 48). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) elaborate on this crisis stating:

> The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, any discourse or genre, or any tradition or novelty has a universal and general claim as the right or privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism suspects all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles. (p. 961)

Hence, during the crisis of representation (a concern that still affects and informs qualitative research) scholars such as Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), Denzin and Lincoln (2005), and others began to question traditional notions of truth and knowledge production. They began to interrogate traditional practices of linear research models aimed at truth building, and argued for a focus toward interpretive, theory-integrated, and flexible research designs. These designs were believed to better accommodate multiplicities of lived experiences and the representation of marginalized groups. This moment in qualitative research prompted scholars to explore alternative ways to research and represent unique sociocultural landscapes, and to open up spaces for qualitative inquiry outside the linear traditions. Eventually, this crisis of

representation moved "qualitative research in new and critical directions," and shifted into the realization of a "triple crisis" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 19).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe the development of this triple crisis as the intersection between concerns of *representation, legitimation*, and *praxis*. So, overlapping with concerns in the crisis of representation, there were two additional concerns, which made problematic some key assumptions in qualitative inquiry and the process of conducting and representing qualitative inquiry.

First, as a continuation of the crisis of representation, there was the concern that "researchers can no longer directly capture lived experience" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 19) since those experiences are created and captured primarily in text. This suggested that the sociocultural complexities of lived experience cannot be fully captured through the sole use of traditional academic texts because the structures of language have limits, and in turn package the complexity of lived experience into that limited structure--a structure most often aligned primarily with the majority culture. As a short example, I listened recently to an elder discuss how the Little Old Men, a historical group of knowledgeable Osages who had important cultural status in our old Osage systems (Burns, 2004), were referred to as *priests*; this elder insisted that the use of this term did not quite fit the reality of who these men likely were. He insisted that this term signified a tie to Western notions of religion, and therefore limited the interpretation to the reader. It is these types of nuances that the representation concerns were addressing, much of it tied to the limits of language and traditional academic text.

Second, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) further explain that the "traditional criteria for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research" prompted "serious rethinking of such terms a validity, generalizability, and reliability" (p. 19), which was the foundation for the crisis of

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legitimation. This criticism indicated a shift away from the traditions of positivism and linear

research design, which sought to create grand truths and grand narratives, and began to consider

more focused narratives founded on more interpretive philosophies of inquiry. The basic

assumption was that the way in which a person lives life and makes sense of it is subjective, and

thus neither correct or incorrect, but contextually informed. Therefore, measurement that

reduced these differences into sameness, into one thing that can be replicated and generalized,

were incommensurable to this form of inquiry. Consequently, such realizations raised questions

about traditional research criteria regarding what is or is not legitimate research and

representation in qualitative inquiry. Furthermore, this shift prompted critical questions about

lived experiences that were unwritten, marginalized, or silenced through traditional research

processes, which in turn opened up spaces for a growing acceptance of more personal, insider

accounts to accurately represent the multiplicity of society, while creating a space for methods

such as autoethnography.

Lastly, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe, these first two assumptions paved the way

for the third crises of praxis, which prompted the question, "Is it possible to effect change in the

world if society is only and always a text?" (p. 20). This important question forces scholars to

consider the actual influence of their work in practice and consider the various ways that

knowledge is transmitted in the world, and how society interprets that information. In other

words, interpretive work, whether based on researcher-participant(s) collaboration or a

researcher-centered autoethnographic narrative, should make broader arguments for influence

and implications, or else there is no praxis element in the work and the work could be vulnerable

to criticism such as navel-gazing and careerism. Taking into account these crises, there is

potential for scholars to open up new spaces of ontology and epistemology, produce knowledge from minoritized locations, and make broader structural arguments to inform praxis.

Together, these crises urge scholars to consider whether the complexity and diversity of lived experiences are being accurately reflected by the knowledge production systems that claim to describe them. Ultimately, as a response to these concerns, several new theories searching for answers to specific--often localized--social problems began to take root next to the larger generalizable truth-seeking grand narratives.

In this environment, new spaces for the cultivation of autoethnography were created. Consequently, the academy has since produced substantial literature to support this method (Boylorn & Orbe, 2013; Chang, 2009; Ellis et al., 2010; Holman Jones, 2016; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Wall, 2006, 2008; Whitinui, 2014), as scholars began to give value to focused narratives based on interpretive and critical theories and deconstructive critiques. Such valuing of theory-driven focused narratives reflected the ways in which social structures played out in the lives of the people most richly affected by said structures. Thus, even if the issues are local, rich, and personalized, the goal of an autoethnography is always to map personalized issues into the larger discourse of the sociocultural and political contexts. Below I offer a general overview of scholarship related to autoethnography, with a specific focus on critical, Indigenous, and mixed media approaches to this form of inquiry.

An Overview of Autoethnography

Ellis et al. (2010) provide a great entry point into understanding autoethnography. They describe how in the 1980s, social science researchers across various disciplines started to consider the power of narratives in the world of qualitative inquiry--especially stories that shed light on unique sociocultural and marginalized spaces and lives. Information discovered through

these types of inquiry were largely absent from positivist and post-positivist studies and therefore, arguments were made for making space for such knowledge-making. The notion of inquiry built solely on structured and rigid truth-seeking methodologies aimed at finding grand narratives was strongly disrupted. Qualitative scholars (Denzin et al., 2008; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) began to further consider the world as a collection of smaller localized truths that can be mapped onto larger sociocultural and political constructs. With this shift in thinking, there was a newfound emphasis on privileging stories of the marginalized in calculated attempts to disrupt the power dynamics of the sociocultural systems in place--including academe. Scholars such as Ellis (1991) began to place more value on introspection, and this postmodern climate created new openings for different ways to consider difficult, localized questions related to research and knowledge construction and the ways in which the localized conditions came to exist, implicating larger social structures.

This was the scholarly climate from which autoethnography was created, a method that Ellis et al. (2010) describe as the merging of research and writing through a process of systematically analyzing personal experiences in order to help understand complex lived experiences. This is a brief yet fitting description of the overarching goals of this project; I intend to analyze my personal experiences as they relate to my ethnographic ribbons to help shed light on the entanglements that reside in and across their intersections, especially as it relates to the field of education.

This definition of autoethnography, paired with its history, allows for understanding how this method provides possibilities for praxis in response to a complex intersection of several concerns in qualitative inquiry regarding research with Othered populations (Bhattacharya, 2009). Unapologetically, this method opens up space for privileging insider perspectives from

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authors who are more culturally fluent and socially knowledgeable about the lived realities of their respective social groups, as opposed to outside researchers interpreting lived experiences for them. Additionally, scholars who operate in and across several social intersections, such as nepantleras who traverse the betwixt and between, now have a platform to create powerful narratives that discuss these complex sociocultural intersections, and bring those layered stories out of the shadows (Anzaldúa, 2015; Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016). Ultimately, by privileging these critical insider perspectives, autoethnography allows for a disruption in the power dynamics of our knowledge-making systems.

Chang's (2009) work on autoethnography emphasizes a conceptual framework grounded on assertions such as "culture is a web of self and others," and "reading and writing of self-narratives provides a window through which self and others can be examined and understood" (Chang, 2009, p. 13). Chang's work emphasizes the relationality and interconnectedness of people, their stories, and their cultures, and how reading personal narratives prompts a process of introspection and increases the chance for adaptation to subsequent social change. Therefore, powerful stories can create change in practical terms. Her explanation also emphasizes the need to support personal stories with deep analysis and interpretation, which adds scholarly layers that are not found in typical autobiographies and thus further legitimizes this kind of work as scholarly practice. Ultimately, Chang (2009) posits that "autoethnography is an excellent instructional tool to help not only social scientists but also practitioners - such as teachers...counselors, and human service workers" (p. 13). Here, Chang (2009) is emphasizing how autoethnography has the potential to better translate scholarly work to praxis, especially since stories can cut across multiple disciplines and can be accessible to various groups of people. Thus, the possibilities of moving people to praxis are rich and fertile with powerful,

analyzed narratives, creating a momentum towards changing oppressive conditions, thereby addressing one of the key concerns of the triple crisis. I have learned firsthand the impact of this translation.

I read Wall's (2006) unique autoethnographic account of herself as a graduate student called *An Autoethnography on Learning about Autoethnography*. She outlines the dissonance she encountered while trying to transfer traditional thinking about research into these modern, complex, and relatively flexible scholarly spaces, which were created in the wake of the triple crisis. Because I was also a graduate student hesitantly considering autoethnography at the time I read this account, I was able to relate and engage, and as I interacted with her story my thinking began to shift beyond the traditional conceptualizations of research based on linear designs, validity, generalizability, and reliability. In short, I began to understand that engaging in nontraditional research was a long learning process, which took time, and that this method was not a gimmick, but had a wealth of reasoning behind it. I also began to see that it was not just a method, tool, or instrument that I could pull from a list, but a thoughtful approach to solving real issues using research while understanding the value of social construction of knowledge. Eventually, the result was that I was able to learn, adapt, and grow, which supports the notion that autoethnography transfers well to praxis and has the potential to create actual change as it did for me, inspiring me to become a change agent for my community and for the field of educational leadership.

Scholars such as Spry (2001) prefer to bring attention to the performative qualities of autoethnography, and emphasize the need to "explore the emancipatory potential of autoethnographic performance, and its use as a method of inquiry" (p. 709). Although I encountered the same dissonance that Wall (2006) did when she first attempted autoethnography,

I have also begun to experience the "emancipatory potential" that Spry mentions above--not emancipation from the rigors of academia, but emancipation in the form of cultural synchronicity, where I have the opportunity to be more comfortable engaging with Osage perspectives academic spaces. With this flexibility, this autoethnographic project has allowed me to position myself in a much more culturally appropriate manner, since I am able to develop my narratives as a learning Osage exploring how to create academic ribbon work, not as an Osage cultural expert. Spry (2001) further states that "autoethnography contributes to the burgeoning methodological possibilities to representing human action" (p. 727), and poignantly declares that as a method it is "unseating the privileged scholar from the desk in the Master's House, and de-exoticizing the non-White-male-objective scholar from the realms of the academically othered" (p. 727). Spry's argument helps illustrate how this work is not just about telling an interesting personal story and trying to relate to people. For me, Spry's argument situates autoethnography as part of a calculated effort to bring diverse and marginalized perspectives to the scholarly world in order to disrupt the existing structures that have long characterized Indigenous and non-Indigenous Others as exotic people who are only on the periphery of the mainstream (Smith, 1999).

Ultimately, autoethnography is more than simply blending autobiography and ethnography. It is a method that was born out of the triple crisis, which emphasize the practical learning potential of personal stories paired with scholarly analysis. Scholars recognize its utility in transmitting scholarly conversations to practitioner spaces in various formats of representation. Furthermore, it is also a method that is intended to disrupt the power structures that have long marginalized Other perspectives, which is why this project specifically aligns with critical, Indigenous, and mixed-media approaches to autoethnography, which I discuss below.

Informed by Critical Autoethnography

Although this work can be viewed with multiple lenses, by aligning with Indigenous frameworks (Dennison, 2012, 2013; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999), and specifically Grande's (2008) Red Pedagogy, it is important to acknowledge how this work is informed by critical autoethnography. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the terms critical and Indigenous are often used interchangeably and are linked in academics (Denzin et al., 2008), and Indigenous and decolonizing methodological work (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999) is inherently critical since its foundations are intended to disrupt power dynamics in our systems and influence praxis in Indigenous communities. This is an important distinction to make as I align myself within Grande's (2008) precepts, which emphasize how Red Pedagogy "can both deepen and be deepened by engagement with critical and revolutionary theories and praxis" (p. 250). Here, as Grande describes the interactive relationship between critical studies and Indigenous studies, she emphasizes that the intersection of these scholarly spaces can be productive opportunities for new discourses, and it is here that this project resides. Therefore, although this work could be perceived and labeled with multiple lenses and terms, I am calling this work Indigenous autoethnography because it is a more fitting label for the Osage-specific substance and foundation of this work. However, as I explain the specific methodological foundations of autoethnography, I must also acknowledge how this work is informed by critical autoethnographic scholars such as Boylorn & Orbe (2013) and Holman Jones (2005). These leaders in the field emphasize how critical autoethnography prioritizes marginalized and intersectional experiences for the purpose of not only privileging those perspectives in the scholarly discourses, but also for the political purpose of influencing social justice praxis. Here I explain how this project aligns with these specific qualities of critical autoethnography.

Boylorn and Orbe's (2013) work with critical autoethnography prioritizes marginalized voices and experiences borne out of intersectional identities. They emphasize how "autoethnography is a powerful method for working with topics of diversity and identity" and that it is "predicated on the ability to invite readers into the lived experience of a presumed 'Other' and to experience it viscerally" (p. 15). Within the fields of multicultural education and identity development, autoethnography becomes a key form of inquiry. Further, if educators could experience these Othered stories, they might develop an empathetic and culturally responsive understanding while working with minoritized populations. Additionally, Boylorn and Orbe's (2013) emphasis on inviting people into lived experiences of those who have been Othered allows me to connect such agenda with Smith's (1999) Indigenous and decolonizing frameworks, which also emphasizes the need to infuse perspectives of those who have been Othered into the scholarly landscape. Boylorn and Orbe (2013) succinctly state, "We write as an Other, and for an Other" (p. 15). Engaging then as an Other, and writing for an Other, I need to remember to prioritize an audience of Indigenous peoples in the field of education--people who are trying to navigate their settler-colonial entanglements on a daily basis. Thus, I write as an Indigenous-White walking entanglement, for other Indigenous walking entanglements, especially Osages. As I connect to Dennison's (2012) ribbon work metaphor and emphasis on settler-colonial entanglement, I posit that the marginalized and diverse perspectives emphasized by Boylorn and Orbe (2013) reside in complex zones of intersectionality. These are the zones Anzaldúa (2015) refer to as nepantla spaces, but through Dennison's (2012) work I also interpret nepantla spaces as spaces of settler-colonial and Indigenous entanglements, and I am a walking entanglement with my intersectional lived realities. So, as I align this work with critical

autoethnography, I aim to highlight my interpretation of marginal, intersectional, and entangled perspectives, and stitch them into the larger social discourses.

With critical autoethnography's prioritization of marginalized and intersectional stories, it is also important to acknowledge the political nature of this work, and the reality that these projects are inherently tied to praxis in social justice politics. As Holman Jones (2005) describes, autoethnographers should understand that their work does not "stand alone in the world" and that "it does not act alone" (p. 763). Holman Jones reinforces that when these personal accounts are being stitched into the larger scholarly discourses, they are intended to create discursive and material solidarity amongst similar projects to create change. Elaborating further, Holman Jones emphasizes that autoethnography is "meant for more than one voice, for more than personal release and discovery, and for more than the pleasures of the text. It is not text alone." (p. 764). Here she again emphasizes the political interconnectedness to other social justice discourse and praxis; however, she is also emphasizing the notion that even though this work possesses therapeutic qualities of personal introspection, this type of work is about more than that. It is about stitching into other scholarly discourses with Other marginalized voices in order to influence the praxis and politics of social justice. So, when Holman Jones (2005) asks whether academics would be "willing and able to say that we are in a moment when the point of creating autoethnographic texts is to change the world" (p. 785), my answer is yes. I am willing to say that the point of this work is to evoke and bring possibilities for change, and I am not writing from a place of neutrality. I am writing from place of marginalization and settler-colonial entanglement, and my intent is to create stories that influence social justice praxis, especially in spaces of Indigenous education and educational leadership.

So, as I conceptualize these autoethnographic narratives as academic ribbon work aligned with Grande's (2008) Red Pedagogy, there is overlap with critical autoethnographic methodologies. Grande's precepts, along with the work of Boylorn and Orbe (2013) and Holman Jones (2005), are ultimately fibers, dyes, or ribbons unto themselves that are being woven into the conceptual framework of this project, which in turn makes it substantively Indigenous, but inherently critical. This work is Indigenous (Osage) specific, yet it is still a project that intends to prioritize my marginalized, entangled, and intersectional perspectives for practical purposes of social justice work, especially as I work with our brand-new Osage Nation Educational Leadership Academy.

Moving forward, I focus on the methodological versions of autoethnography that I intend to specifically employ in this project: Indigenous and mixed media approaches; approaches which are all born in part out of the ideas above, yet continue to add layers and push the boundaries of this new methodological space.

Aligning with Indigenous and Mixed Media Autoethnography

As the field of autoethnography continues to grow out of the triple crisis, new versions of this method are developed in unique intersectional spaces. Specifically, I define this project as an Indigenous autoethnography (Anzaldúa, 2015; Whitinui, 2014) utilizing mixed media arts-based approaches (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016). In this section, I discuss Indigenous autoethnography, followed by the specific application of Anzaldúa's (2015) autohistoria-teoría and Bhattacharya and Payne's (2016) interpretation of that method as it is merged with arts-based inquiry.

The same triple crisis that made space for autoethnography also made space for the (re)birth of Indigenous and decolonizing fields in qualitative research. Indigenous knowledges

and knowledge production systems were around long before Columbus landed in 1492, but over time, settler-colonial systems destroyed and/or marginalized those knowledges as exotic Othered ways of knowing or seeing the world. It is worth noting that Osage writer and historian, John Joseph Mathews, writes about Othering long before the crisis of representation made its "profound rupture...in the mid 1980s" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 18). Mathews, (1961) states the following when discussing his concerns during data collection for his book:

> [I was] on guard when I read the Amer-European and European documents. One had to keep constantly in mind the basic interest of the writers of military reports, trappers' letters and stories, Spanish, French, and American official reports, and missionary journals and letters home. One had to make allowances for the smugness of the traveler whose interest was chiefly academic. No matter how sincere, honest, and objective the Europeans and the Amer-Europeans were, their unconscious economic, political, military, social, and religious interests often nullified all three. (p. 54)

This writing demonstrates that even though postmodern scholars such as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) brought attention to concerns about representation in academia, there were likely many scholars and philosophers who came before Denzin and Lincoln who were also Othered, and were well aware of these matters prior to development of a more public discourse about these crises. Although Mathews' words are likely not the only expression of these concerns before the crisis of representation came to the forefront, they demonstrate the need for Indigenous people to represent themselves as often as possible. Modern Indigenous scholars have extensively documented these historical criticisms of dominant Eurocentric research practices, which often misrepresent the colonized as the exotic Other or focus on research that

does not benefit the Indigenous populations from which the information came (Dennison, 2012; Jacobs, 2009; Mihesuah, 1998; Pewewardy, 2015b; Smith, 1999; Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird, 2012). Consequently, there is a strong Indigenous argument in academia for exploring more accurate and innovative methods of representation and knowledge construction.

With these autoethnographic and Indigenous methodological spaces so closely in line during this triple crisis, it becomes a logical step to combine them, which is precisely what Whitinui (2014) does. Whitinui discusses autoethnography in the context of Indigenous and decolonizing approaches to inquiry and posits that it is "an authentic Native method of inquiry" that "aims to address issues of social justice and to develop social change by engaging Indigenous researchers in rediscovering their own voices as culturally liberating human-beings" (p. 456). Whitinui's assertion not only reinforces alignment of Indigenous autoethnography with critical autoethnography as it relates to social justice praxis, but it also positions Indigenous autoethnography as a process of rediscovery. This shift emphasizes an effort to reconnect with Indigenous ways of knowing through a process of cultural healing, which also aligns with Smith's (1999) Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies. Whitinui (2014) further emphasizes this Indigenous and decolonizing alignment when he states that Indigenous researchers should "ground one's sense of 'self' in what remains 'sacred'...and in the way we choose to construct our identity" (p. 456). In trying to (re)construct my identity grounded through the practice of academic ribbon work, and process the nuances of settler-colonial entanglements, I enact Whitinui's advice. Although this work is about creating change in Indigenous education, it is simultaneously a project about personal Indigenous introspection and identity (re)construction on a new Osage-specific foundation (ribbon work). In this sense, I am re-grounding myself on a new Osage-specific footing to influence social change.

As Whitinui (2014) describes in his work, there is also a layer of spirituality to be considered with Indigenous autoethnography, a notion that Anzaldúa (2015) also emphasizes through her autoethnographic approach, which specifically emphasizes complex social intersectionality. As explained in the previous chapter, Anzaldúa adds creative and spiritual layers to Turner's (1964) conceptualization of liminality with her emphasis on moving in, out, across, and in between complex sociocultural spaces; this is a fitting description for people such as me who traverse multiple ethnographic ribbons and intend to explore the variety of ways in which they can be stitched together. Ultimately, though, these conceptualizations are put into motion through her version of autoethnography, *autohistoria-teoría*, which emphasizes personal narratives, cultural landscapes, interrogation of social structures of oppression, spirituality and theorization, and the honoring of ancestors.

Through her explanation of autohistoria-teoría, she explains that her "work is about questioning, affecting, and changing the paradigms that govern prevailing notions of reality, identity, creativity, activism, spirituality, imagination, a psychology of the image" (p. 2). This not only supports alignment with critical work in the field, but it also creates additional spaces for Indigenous creativity and spirituality to be explored. Spirituality, in this sense, is not necessarily defined from the traditional definitions pigeonholed in what many Westerners might define as "religion," but more so an opening to consider our complex interconnectedness while exploring the notion of an ecologically informed consciousness (Cajete, 1994)--a concept embedded in one of my research questions that emphasizes our interconnectedness as living beings from a more natural, ecological perspective, as opposed to a more inflexible Western-based approach to social categorization.

While explaining her autoethnographic approach to rewriting identity, spirituality, and reality, Anzaldúa (2015) states:

Using a multidisciplinary approach and a 'storytelling' format, I theorize my own and other's struggles for representation, identity, self-inscription, and creative expressions. When I 'speak' myself in creative and theoretical writings, I constantly shift positions - which means taking into account ideological remolinos (whirlwinds), cultural dissonance, and the convergence of competing worlds. (p. 3)

This is the multidisciplinary approach that this autoethnographic project specifically aligns with; it is a writing project in which I generate stories that help readers see the shifting positions prompted by settler-colonial entanglements, and the cultural dissonance that occurs throughout the spaces in between. I agree when Anzaldúa (2015) also states, "I am the one who writes and who is being written" (p. 3), and my autoethnographic goals align with her "attempt to show (and not just tell) how transformation happens" (p. 7). Through this work, as I answer my research questions and aim to advance Osage perspectives into important scholarly work in the field of education through narratives that may appear fragmented, those fragments are pieces of me--my story of transformation, my ribbon work patterns--stories which cannot be separated from the whole, the I, the me. Although my primary aims for this work are external, my internal story is still part of the educational value of this story--a complex and fragmented Indigenous transformation process in education.

The value of autohistoria-teoría's identity exploration through creative expression has not gone unnoticed by other scholars, as Bhattacharya and Payne (2016) have pushed the bounds of the space even further by enacting Anzaldúa's (2015) work with other arts-based and

contemplative forms of inquiry. Through what Bhattacharya calls a "self-excavation" and a "collaborative, contemplative, mixed medium arts based project" (p. 1), she explores her nepantlera-esque journeys through liminal spaces and the corresponding mental shifts she encountered through the process of creating a collaborative art project that carried personal meaning. Throughout this project, she not only collaboratively creates a physical mixed media art project, but she also creates fragmented narratives that reflect the constant sociocultural (re)positioning she experienced through the process.

As Bhattacharya and Payne (2016) enact Anzaldúa's (2015) autohistoria-teoría, Bhattacharya explains that "while such storytelling can be informative and illuminating, I remain mindful of glamorizing unity" (p. 2), and therefore she chooses to employ fragmented narratives about her artwork (process and product) and her conversation with her collaborator, while she interweaves her personal reflections and storytelling throughout. Again, this method of using fragmented narratives is aligned with this autoethnographic project as I create separate narratives that help demonstrate the fragmented, yet connected, perspectives found in my entangled boundary zones in and across settler-colonial entanglements in education. This emphasis on personal multiplicity can also be seen through Dennison's (2012, 2013) ribbon work metaphor, where patterns are as eclectic as the colors and shapes chosen by the artist, yet still collectively Osage. Osage ribbon work is diverse, but has a unique collective identity--recognizable oneness--in which the fragmented ribbons are reworked into separate patterns that all reflect the Osage collective identity. Thus, the diversity is built into the metaphor allowing for an expression of oneness while simultaneously allowing for diversity within; the ribbons work to distinguish separation and diversity, while at the same time unify.

Moving forward, Bhattacharya's work with Payne (2016) also addresses the personal levels of identity exploration. She describes this process as:

. . . an invitation for me to engage with my shadows, make my wounds visible to me, understand the ways in which some of my worldviews lie in contradiction to each other, and attend to the ways in which I create shadows and the shadows create me. (p. 2)

This quote reveals not only the complexity of intersectionality and the contradictions that come with the life of people who live in and across the betwixt and between and in marginalized spaces, but it also helps shed light on the personal struggles, wounds, and shadows that come with those lived realities. These are the qualities that I intend to express in this work as I mix the theoretical, the academic, the personal, the spiritual, and the creative as part of my mixed-media work.

In doing autoethnography, especially akin to the work of Anzaldúa (2015) along with Bhattacharya and Payne (2016), it is important to allow for the creative self to open up. For me, this is mostly through poetry, as the reader has likely noticed. As scholars continue to merge with more creative means of data collection, expression, and representation, scholars such as Leavy (2009) have encouraged the role of poetry in these spaces. She discusses how it opens up new possibilities, new interpretations, and helps give voice to the researcher. I don't think of it as poetry in the literary sense--I think of it more as my oral voice and organizing the space on the page to match how I would pace myself as I would speak to someone, what I would emphasize, and where I would pause. This is the creative medium that I mix in to this autoethnographic work as a mode representation and exploration.

I will be completely honest. I would have never guessed that poetry would be a part of

this dissertation.

However,

       I found that when I used space,

              I can in a way mimic the cadence of my oral voice.

              With pause for reflection.

                 and for contemplation,

                 like telling a story, or like a teacher....

waiting for a response.

That is how it started at least. But then...

I also found that

            I

                                                                 could

create

                                          dissonance

                  and

 mimic

                                          the

                                                          messiness.

the confusion found in the betwixt and between...

the places we don't often see

nepantla

spaces.

The marginal.

As a method, I find poetry useful, not only as a mode of representation, but as a way to explore my thoughts about some of my sites of data collection.

Thus, Critical, Indigenous, and mixed media autoethnography make a strong partnership, which is a reasonable approach to remedy the triple crisis as it relates to Osage perspectives in professional education. These approaches not only inform this academic ribbon work, but they also allow me to accurately express my learning from a more appropriate place culturally, and academically. Next, I discuss writing as both the method and sites of academic exploration.

Writing as Method and Site: Merging Process and Product with Structure and Standards

In their overview of autoethnography, Ellis et al. (2010) explain how researchers use "tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, *autoethnography is both process and product*" [emphasis added] (p. 273). This merging of process and product is important in understanding the transition from traditional linear research methods to newer flexible methods born out of the triple crisis. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005)

outline this joint notion of process and product in *Writing: A Method of Inquiry,* and emphasize that writing itself is a legitimate and scholarly method that should be held to high standards. In this section, I discuss how this method aligns with Indigenous frameworks and autoethnography, the merging of process and product, and the standards and structures I used within this flexible method as a way to help create focus.

       Writing with standards: Process and product. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) push established boundaries when they detail how writing combines both process and product as a legitimate method of inquiry, and they provide guidelines for understanding the value of this work. Richardson posits that "language is how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where one's sense of self - one's subjectivity - is constructed," and then she moves on to suggest that that this makes "language a site of exploration and struggle" (p. 961). This statement, which reiterates concerns from the triple crisis, positions the process of writing as a place where social construction of power occurs, which aligns with the work of Indigenous autoethnographers Whitinui (2014) and Anzaldúa (2015) in two ways. First, the statement reiterates the notion that privileging marginalized Other perspectives, and their subjectivities, helps disrupt the power dynamics of social systems across the knowledge-making landscape. Second, it makes strong connections to exploratory and creative writing as a space for identity development and cultural healing which can then transfer into the key social organizations of power--educational systems. These are both priorities in Indigenous research methodological landscape (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999). Writing not only helps me identify emerging understandings, it also helps me articulate those nuances to others to help shed light on the liminal spaces found across my ribbon work patterns. Ultimately, with writing as both my method and field, as well as process and product, I am able to align with my overall

methodological frameworks. Additionally, I am able to explore my entangled realities while simultaneously stitching corresponding narratives into the power structures of education through language construction.

However, since autoethnography can be a contested form of inquiry, one that has been called "problematic" (Sparkes, 2000, p. 22), Richardson has attempted to bring structure and standards to this method by defining these works as *creative analytical processes* (CAPs). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) acknowledge that "sacrosanctity of social science writing conventions [have] been challenged" through the growth of CAPs, and argues that "science is one lens, and creative arts is another," and that "CAP ethnographies are not alternative or experimental; they are, in and of themselves, valid and desirable representations of the social" (p. 962). Furthermore, she acknowledges that these CAP ethnographies should still be held to a high-level expectation of rigor, and that "mere novelty does not suffice" (p. 964). To account for this, she maintains the following standards when reviewing CAP ethnographies:

1. *Substantive Contribution.* Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective? Does this piece seem "true"--a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real?"

2. *Aesthetic merit.* Rather than reducing standards, another standard is added. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does this use of creative analytical practices open up the text and invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?

3. *Reflexivity.* How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the

reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold himself

or herself accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he or

she has studied?

4. *Impact.* Does this piece affect me emotionally or intellectually? Does it

generate new questions or move me to write? Does it move me to try new

research practices or move me to action? (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 964)

I have chosen to use this method as a way to align with my Indigenous sensibilities, and

simultaneously stitch Osage perspectives into the field of education for the productive social

justice purpose of opening up space in academia for Osage educators. These CAP ethnography

guidelines are flexible enough to fit this vision, yet also establish a level of rigor and structure

that assists me through this flexible process of inquiry. Ultimately, in using writing as my

primary method of inquiry, I embrace the messiness as I merge process and product, yet produce

work that can be deemed acceptable by disciplinary standards--otherwise, I have not obtained my

goal of stitching Osage perspectives into the field of education.

Beyond writing as a method and site: Elaborating on sites of data collection. As

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) suggest, writing is not just a method of inquiry, it is also a

research site. With this nontraditional and rather open-ended approach to qualitative inquiry,

there is a need to explain in more detail my sites of exploration and sources of data using

Bhattacharya's (2009) diagram of intersecting continuums in relationship to sites of inquiry.

Bhattacharya outlines two intersecting continua. One continuum represents the deliberate

and unintentional sites of data collection, which gives value to both the "planned and

serendipitous nature of qualitative research" (p. 123); this continuum highlights the notion that

some sites we plan to explore, while other sites we happen upon through research and self-

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reflection. The second continuum represents the tangible and intangible nature of qualitative inquiry, and how some places are finite and restricted to time and space constraints while others are not. She explains, "If the sites are tangible and finite, then access is limited by time and space...when the sites are intangible...then access to the site is infinite and unrestricted by time and space" (p. 123). These two intersecting continua ultimately create four quadrants, and these quadrants describe the sites of inquiry I used for data collection in this autoethnographic approach, as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Research Sites and Data Sources

Research Site is Fixed
in Time
Limited Access

1, 2, 3, 5   6

Deliberate   Unintentional
Site of   Site of
Research   Research

4   6

Research Site is Fluid
Unlimited Access

Figure 3: These are my identified research sites and data sources that inform this project, as outlined on Bhattacharya's (2005) diagram of intersecting continua in relationship to sites of inquiry.

Above I have plotted the sites from which I drew data in this autoethnography (Figure 3). The numbers correspond with the following:

1. My tangible work as graduate student. These are files from all of my coursework and related studies. This includes my digital data storage as a graduate student at Kansas State University (KSU), starting with my application to the program (which I have already utilized in this opening chapter), to my most recent documents, such as this dissertation and all of its drafts. Also included within this are my internship experiences within Osage Nation education settings, and the corresponding documents from those experiences. This also includes emails from my inbox and printed items I have kept related to my coursework.

2. My notes as a graduate student. These range from my digital and analog underlining, highlights, and notes scribbled on post-it notes and in the margins of my books or downloaded journal articles, to my digital notepad stored across my phone, computer, and tablet, which I used to track dissertation and research thoughts and ideas.

3. My tangible work as a teacher. This includes my stored lesson plans, handouts, PowerPoints, etc., throughout my teaching career. I have digitally stored files from when I taught world geography, U.S. history, U.S. government, and economics at the middle and high school levels, and also when I taught Human Geography and Social, Cultural, and Linguistic Diversity in Todays Classrooms. I do not use information from my past students.

4. My memories and lived experiences as they pertain to each of my ethnographic ribbons (see "My Ethnographic Ribbons" section in previous chapter).

5. My work at KSU as a graduate assistant and as Special Coordinator for Indigenous Partnerships in the Educational Leadership Department, and my role as a founding member and co-chair for the newly formed KSU Indigenous Alliance. This data has

strong links and overlap to my work as a graduate student, but there are distinct differences in the type of work I do here compared to my work in the role of graduate student. In this position, I have helped create the Osage Nation Educational Leadership Academy, which I am currently involved in and continually generating new material from. This academy took a year to organize and plan, and has recently started as a two-year cohort with 10 Osage students. Also in this role, I have participated in coauthoring and conceptualizing major educator training grant proposals aimed at building capacity in American Indian communities. Also, as I cofounded the KSU Indigenous Alliance, I helped plan and organize significant campus events related to Indigeneity, education, and partnership building. I currently have many digital files related to this work, and a growing collection of related materials, files, and email messages.

6. My lived experiences across all of these topics between proposal and dissertation completion. I could not predict what new experiences lay ahead at the point of proposal, but I had several new experiences, professionally and personally, which influenced this dissertation, such as: teaching and curricular efforts with the Osage Nation Educational Leadership Academy, interactions with Indigenous and non-Indigenous academic peers at conferences, outreach and advisory efforts with area schools and being invited to serve on committees related to mascots and American Indians in schools, experience in a variety of educational leadership contexts in and across the university, and more. Some of these experiences produced tangible data, while others did not.

These are the specific sites of data collection that inform this project. Some can be specifically defined and seen by others, some cannot. The less defined and more fluid and/or unanticipated sites of exploration were primary drivers for my writing, especially since the words

I put on paper are the resolutions and motions of my past experiences democratically searching for consensus in an effort to allow only certain words and syntax to make the page as my consciousness filters the words to be released. However, just as the process of writing continually excavates and interrogates my fluid and flexible lived experiences, the tangible sites of data collection play a role in this project as well.

Although this is an autoethnographic and nontraditional dissertation, there are substantial sites of tangible data collection that help illuminate my story not only for others, but for me. On a practical level, though, in an effort to illustrate the amount of data available for each specific site, it is not feasible to separate the quantity one could find in each of these locations because many of them overlap. For example, as a graduate assistant and employee, my work in the Educational Leadership Department as both an employee and student has prompted me to constantly shift positions as a student, employee, colleague, and now instructor. This makes separating emails and establishing quantities of data at each of these specific sites implausible and illogical. Ultimately though, as a student and as an employee at KSU I have approximately 2,200 digital files, and from seven years of social studies instruction at the high school level I have approximately 4,500 files. These files range from lessons and assignments (as teacher and student), research papers and projects, publication efforts, journal articles, critical reflections, presentations, and much more. Additionally, I have thousands of emails in two separate inboxes, and I have over 100 notes (and counting) on my digital note pad (Apple/Mac), along with all of the notes in books I have acquired through graduate school (highlights and post-its included, both digital and analog). Since the proposal stage, I have acquired many new books and created many new notes in their margins, each accompanied by new post-its.

These are my sites of data exploration and collection, yet this does not mean that I sifted through every single file or document and engaged in systematic coding for each one. Writing was still the primary field of exploration, and as I came across topics while writing in and through the complexities of my settler-colonial entanglements, I encountered information that triggered my thinking in the same manner that other researchers stumble upon realizations through the research process. I took notes, revisited data, and dug deeper to find those salient details. For example, as I was writing the introduction of this dissertation, I wanted to find ways to confirm if the memory of how I felt about living "two worlds" had manifested itself in anything tangible. I began digging through my files and I found my doctoral program application cover letter. This was not only used to confirm my thinking, but a passage from it was included in the introduction. It eventually became part of the creative writing process and product. When I encounter these moments, which happens often, these are the tangible sites I explore to shed light and perspective on the narratives. If they are digital, I conduct keyword searches to interrogate the perspectives of a past me. If a reading comes to mind, I scan the file or book to read my notes and study my marginalia. As I write, if an email correspondence and its corresponding conversation comes to mind, I search my inboxes and analyze our words. This was my methodological intent, to prioritize writing as the initial site of exploration--which in and of itself is the production of my interacting lived experiences and memories--and upon interrogating myself, my words, my opinions, and the accuracy of my memories, I dug through these tangible sources for information to confirm or challenge my perceptions.

Why this autoethnography is scholarly work, not navel-gazing. As social researchers continue to push the boundaries of traditional structures of inquiry in search of solutions to the triple crisis, there is a legitimate and ongoing concern that personal navel-gazing stories created

by scholars might overshadow the need for rigorous scholarly work. I have provided some structure through Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005) standards for CAP ethnographies in qualitative research and Bhattacharya's (2009) work regarding the fluid and flexible nature of data collection sites; however, it is important to understand that these scholars demand the same rigor--the same deep, thick, rich, salient, and scholarly narratives that have been expected of social researchers for generations. Their agreement with that concern can be seen in Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005) statement: "I believe in holding CAP ethnography to high and difficult standards; *mere novelty does not suffice*" [emphasis added] (p. 964). Ultimately, I intend to keep my focus on the research purpose, research questions, and the scholarly topics inherently attached to the narratives I intend to produce. Therefore, I agree with their concerns and if this work does not advance scholarly conversations, then it should not be accepted as scholarly work.

Similar concerns about rigor and attention to rigor have been expressed by other autoethnographers and those who publish autoethnographic work. Ellis et al. (2010) chose to use a quote from a personal interview with Mitch Allen, who has worked for decades as an academic publisher, who stated that autoethnographers must:

> . . . look at experience analytically. Otherwise [you're] telling [your] story - and that's nice - but people do that on Oprah [a U.S.-based television program] every day. Why is your story more valid than anyone else's? What makes your story more valid is that you are a researcher. You have a set of theoretical and methodological tools and a research literature to use. That's your advantage. If you can't frame it around these tools and literature and just frame it as 'my story,' then why or how should I privilege your story over anyone else's I see 25 times a day on TV? (cited in Ellis et al., 2010, p. 276)

Mitch Allen highlights the much-needed distinction between navel gazing and the scholarly work of autoethnography by emphasizing the scholarly layers that are likely absent when someone is merely telling a personal story. He emphasizes the need for methodological tools and scholarly literature beyond the story, providing an emphasis on the analytical aspects that should be present in autoethnography. Using an Indigenous scholarly foundation (Dennison 2012, 2013), in the following chapters I intend to write narratives that are specifically tied to the work of scholars who focus on critical and indigenous issues (Cajete, 1994; McIntosh, 2003; Pewewardy, 2017). My aim is to build on these scholarly topics, and choose personal narratives and analysis that advance them.

In fact, those scholarly works are what drive my fragmented writing explorations, as prompts or starting points in the following chapters. The process of writing as inquiry is unstructured, messy, and unruly. The process begins with interrogative prompts guided by the research purpose and questions. On a blank page, I began the writing process knowing that the topics chosen were only the tips of icebergs--with both scholarly work and invisible/marginal/liminal lived experiences underneath that can only be seen opaquely through the surface water. Then as I write, just as a researcher in the field assesses and analyzes the data and/or the words of participants, my scholarly analytical process begins. Writing not only triggered new ideas and memories, it also prompted me to seek out and analyze new data points in and across my sites. Simultaneously, as qualitative researchers are asked to do, I am constantly urged to shift my writing and analyses to more relevant, telling, and salient details within the scholarly topic, or even to take notes and return later to these topics. These are the same processes that researchers use through the collection of field notes, interviews, data analysis, coding, and more--a constant wrestling with ideas in motion; my process just *appears*

to start with a blank page and my fingers on the keyboard, giving the false impression that the sole source of information tied into the project is my brain--my story. That is untrue. Outside of autoethnography, even when researchers are detached from their work (field notes, transcipts participants, data, writing), they continue to interact with the data by reflecting in times of silence, taking notes, initiating conversation with peers, and searching for new scholarly connections. My process is similar, just more difficult to define because much of the rigorous process cannot be detached, separated, and named. As Ellis et al. (2010) state, autoethnography is both process and product. Using writing as both method and field, applying CAP ethnography standards (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), and employing a variety of sites for data collection (Bhattacharya, 2009), my process began with scholarly work, and continues with it.

Merging data, writing, process, and product: An example. As an example, in the fifth chapter I write about my perspectives on White privilege as a real pale Indian, which I build upon again in chapter six. I had several data points interacting with one another while I wrote these narratives and analyses, and I also made some discoveries through the writing process. Specifically, the following data sources informed my writing:

- While visiting with an elder who could pass for White, he said, "we will never know what it is like to be a dark-skinned Osage...we will just never know." He reiterated this several times, along with other commentary about Whiteness and passing for White.

- While visiting with a Black peer, she asked, "What is it like? What is it like going through the world passing for White?", and we had an ongoing conversation on the topic.

- A female American Indian peer who can pass for Brown, brought up the topic of passing for White at a conference after a presentation we gave together, and we had an ongoing conversation on the topic.

- I struggled with this topic early on in my doctoral program, and often engaged in deep introspection on the topic as it related to my scholarly efforts.

- The topic has been prevalent in the news and I have followed these developments as Black Lives Matter, and related movements, gain attention.

- My adopted son is a Brown, and I wonder about the cautionary conversations I might need to have with him as he grows older as he branches out into the world. These are the same types of conversations that an elder told me his father had with him when he was young.

- I read scholarship on the topic (cited throughout), but in particular May's (2016) prompted me to reflect on the topic through exploratory writing as expressed in both chapters, and his words prompted writing on specific threads. For example, I tied some of his commentary as a Black-Indian to my version of those experiences as a White-Indian in the suburbs, with specific attention to things like walking through public, wearing hoodies, keeping hands in pockets, etc. His writing prompted specific reflections from my own memories.

- In my own classes as a doctoral student, I had used McIntosh's (2003) list to learn about White privilege as a student, and I also used it as a resource while teaching pre-service teachers at the undergraduate level, and those interactions informed my writing.

- I have been working with multiple stakeholder dialogue panels across Kansas related to American Indian mascots, my interactions with people on those panels informed my writing, and I can trace those thoughts through emails and text messages with peers.

- I had a conversation with another Osage citizen, who articulated how her mixed-blood children pass for White and/or Osage to varying degrees, and joked around about how one can pass for Indian and/or White while another can just pass for White.

- Recently the College of Education went through the accreditation processes with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and I was asked to weigh in on how Osage students in the Osage Nation Educational Leadership Academy might be represented demographically in terms of diversity and/or people of color within the college. They are all various degrees of passing for White and passing for Brown, but they are all Osage.

- I received Osage scholarships as an Osage citizen, and have documentation.

- I listened to an Osage elder talk about experiencing discrimination in school when he was young, and also refer to the way he thinks in our modern context as being a mostly White way of thinking.

- Recently, I listened in on feedback about a White male who presented on Indigenous topics at the university, and he was criticized as though his White male positionality influenced the way the material was presented.

These are just some of the data points that informed my autoethnography throughout, but specifically in these sections when I write on White privilege. Staying true to the ribbon work framework, they are woven in throughout, and while they are not all explicitly stated, they informed my narrative in similar ways that data informs condensed narratives in more traditional academic dissertations. These are real events, and data, and I was able to access some of this because of the insider-outsider dynamics of my intersectional reality.

There is also the process of discovery through writing which I wish to account for. As I used McIntosh's (2003) famous list on the topic of White privilege as an exploratory writing entry point, I also (re)discovered several new data points which I did not expect. Specifically, McIntosh has one point on her list which problematizes how curriculum in educational systems favors White positionality. When I began to write on this topic, I came upon two specific memories. First, my daughter came home from school one day discussing how they read about Osage's in *The Little House on the Prairie* (Wilder, 1953). After experiencing this memory, this prompted the recollection of a corresponding conversation that I had with my father about the potential that Laura Ingalls Wilder and her family might have been illegal squatters on the Osage reservation in Kansas. In turn, this prompted me to search the internet for more substantive conversations on that topic, which led me to several news articles and blogs, but eventually to a scholarly article on the topic (Kaye, 2000). This in turn became a part of the narrative related to Whiteness and curriculum. Second, my exploratory writing also triggered a memory of when I was in elementary school on a field trip when a White guy came out of the woods dressed like an Osage (sort of), and referring to himself as being Osage. As I wrote and cycled through drafts, this helped me (re)discover specific nuance connected to these memories that allowed me to draw connections to modern issues in White privilege topics (such as wearing Black face), to historic perspectives in Osage history (such as the story of an Osage chief I have heard since I was young). Furthermore, in the same chapter when I discuss The Weird Naked Indian from *Waynes World 2*, who was played by an Osage man, I (re)discovered this as a data point through the writing process, after I engaged in exploratory writing connected to one of McIntosh's (2003) items on her list related to White privilege and the media. Together, these data sources became

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interwoven into the writing and narrative representations of the data, and the end result was the merging of data, writing, process, and product.

Accountability, Academic Rigor, and Ethics

Being accountable and trustworthy in Indigenous work is difficult because of the reality of how academic systems operate, and the lack of specific Indigenous representations within those structures. Through autoethnography, I have been able to position myself as a younger learner in Osage culture, not an elder. Although I claim to speak only for myself, I cannot ignore the fact that I still speak as a representative of the Osage Nation. As I consider the concept of accountability as it relates to this project, I am also cognizant of how I need to consider the warnings of Smith (1999), and do my best to create knowledge that prioritizes local voices and privileges local knowledge structures. I do not want to fall into the same paradigm that Smith forewarns against--a Western researcher doing research *on* Indigenous populations. If I am attempting to disrupt the power structures, prioritize marginal perspectives, and change the way knowledge is produced regarding Indigenous populations, I must be held accountable, but to whom?

As a younger Osage academic, I have engaged in two scholarly conversations recently on this topic with K. Bhattacharya (personal interview, October 29, 2016), and W. Ruff (personal interview, November 19, 2016), and both emphasized to me that my accountability lay primarily with the Osage people. In Osage cultural matters, that often means visiting and/or discussing certain topics with elders. Also, Dr. Dennison is a member on my committee as an "outside member," which is an important accountability piece considering she has a firm grasp of the Osage cultural landscape and how it intersects with academia. I place a bulk of the cultural accountability burden on her, and this is likely unfair, for she is not an elder in the traditional

sense. However, the practicality of my academic committee construction and the reality of my academic landscape has created this situation, which is on one hand extremely helpful for someone discussing Osage-specific perspectives (especially since I am using her work), yet on the other hand, it is not entirely congruent with the traditions of our people, as academic credentials do not automatically make one an expert on Osage cultural matters. Simultaneously, it is unfair for me to go to nonacademic Osage elders with a large, professionally specific, jargon-heavy document, and ask them to read it and tell me whether what I say is acceptable. Quite simply, this is yet another example of entanglement, an example of how certain populations are afforded certain degrees of privilege in educational structures. Ultimately, from an academic standpoint and based on the reputation of her work and her acceptance among Osage leaders, Dr. Dennison's feedback helps hold me accountable to the academic respect that the Osage Nation deserves. Also, although Dr. Pewewardy (Kiowa/Comanche, whose work I also use) is not an Osage-specific elder, he is still an elder to me, with a firm grasp of the academic and Indigenous landscape specific to the field of education; he also was mentored by Osage elders and has ties to our community. Although he is not on my committee, I am accountable to him in both a cultural and academic sense; I have shown him this work and strongly considered his advice. However, even as I incorporate Osage perspectives and stitch them into academia, I must be held accountable to Osage cultural systems.

Consequently, I discussed the more salient Osage cultural elements of my writing with a handful of Osage elders and community members throughout the project, particularly elders, family, and friends in the Wah.hax.oli[n] district with whom I am more connected. While I understand that this is problematic for representing Osage perspectives as a whole, this was more fitting as I position these efforts as a form of cultural mentorship, and less as data collection. For

me to abruptly call an elder from another district to whom I am not as personally connected might produce a scenario that is more akin to an outsider mining for Indigenous information and less of the cultural mentorship dynamic I was trying to create. Unless asked, I did not formally present the materials and ask for a vote of approval on the matter as if they were a board. Instead, I found time to sit down and visit with them and simply exchange ideas while seeking advice. Furthermore, I did not intend to hand them a copy of my work and have them go over it with a red pen (while a few individuals asked to read some of it). Instead, I chose to share some of the Osage-specific topics I was writing about, and then I listened and adapted as necessary. This occurred across the writing process, with more emphasis towards the beginning and end. I originally intended to put more emphasis on visiting with elders midway through the process, but I determined that I needed to create more focus and clarity for myself through the writing process before I reconnected on certain topics.

Additionally, not all topics were discussed with everyone, as certain topics seemed to be more appropriate for different individuals. Also, not all elders I spoke with would consider themselves elders in the most traditional sense, but they were and are my elders and knowledgeable individuals who grew up connected and involved in our Osage ways, and therefore people I look to for cultural mentorship. To further emphasize that this was not data collection, but cultural mentorship, I took notes but I did not record sessions, transcribe them, code them, or send them through digital analysis. This was an opportunity for me to put my Osage-specific ideas up for discussion, and give my elders an opportunity to voice their opinion on important cultural matters, halt anything that may be incorrect, misleading, or misrepresentative, and ultimately, to offer guidance.

In general, most of the conversations with elders reflected agreeable dispositions on the Osage-specific topics in this dissertation, while their mentorship also prompted me to omit certain items as they might have been inappropriate to share. More so, they added inspiring dimensions to my writing and opened up dialogue on related topics that is currently paving the way for future research projects beyond autoethnography. Consequently, these visits not only acted as an accountability piece, but my elders became cocontributors to the material whether they were specifically quoted or not, and they opened my eyes to future research topics that were beyond the scope of this autoethnography.

Thus, as I engage in the true spirit of this Indigenous academic space, these are important measures of accountability. I am accountable to the Osage people and our traditional systems, and I am lucky enough to have people in place who can help me navigate these landscapes as they intersect with academia.

Limitations and Value

The Limitations

Generalization of this autoethnographic analysis would be an illogical use of the information, and it is not my intent for the reflections in this dissertation to be generalized. My intent is quite the opposite; this analysis is meant to challenge the reader's urge to generalize by shedding light on sociocultural lived realities of colonial entanglements in education.

During my doctoral work, I have realized that with my hyphenated identities, I have had a hard time fitting into some of the established truth silos, as evidenced by the consistency in which American Indians/Alaskan Natives are so often rolled into the "Other" category on student achievement bar charts. Also, as mentioned earlier, standardized assessments and questionnaires do not have a bubble for Osage, Reservation-to-Suburban Raised, Lower-to-Middle to Middle-

Upper Class Social studies Teacher turned Ed Leadership Doctoral Student, Indigenous-White

Male. Our current classifications are problematic (Spring, 2012), and our quest to organize the

demographics of society is highly complicated.

Ultimately, this work is not intended to feed those compartmentalized demographic silos.

It is instead intended to shift the focus to the spaces in between, and the entangled realities of

being divided between sociocultural labels. Therefore, this work should not be interpreted as

something to be generalized--it is more of an effort to interrogate those generalizations.

The Value

From an Osage perspective, the primary value of this work is that Osage educators might

have the opportunity to see Osage perspectives woven into the field of professional education.

They will have options for resources that were previously unavailable, resources that are

contextualized in the present professional landscape and more culturally synchronous, with less

of a need for adaptation to our specific Indigenous community. Potentially, these could be new

starting points for Osages to build on which were not there before--as I have been able to build

on Dennison's (2012, 2013) work. Quite simply, I want to create new spaces for Osage

educators the way that Dennison created a new space for me. Her ribbon work metaphor

provided value on multiple levels, which influenced me deeply.

The   sh   ift   ing,

the re   rrang   a   ing ...

Then the clarity.

A harmonious house for my social complexity.

While simultaneously - "beautiful and uniquely Osage." (Dennison, 2012,p. 6)

I felt that. I could see it. I could understand it.

It was both moving and motivating,

      and although I didn't have the tools to understand the academic landscape it was

      surrounded by....

        it spoke directly to me without needing much explanation.

It cut through the jargon,

      and simultaneously allowed me to better understand the jargon at the same time,

        a translator,

          a medium,

            a pedagog.

    These are the types of spaces I hope to create for Osages in general, and Osage educators specifically.

    As for the elements of this project that are my personal story, Others may take my self-drilling exercise and find portions of it that open up new interpretations of their own. Additionally, people who don't find themselves being Othered, may use this to assist in their own interpretations of what it is like to be an outlier, a hybrid, a hyphen, a nepantlera, or a

walking entanglement. However small--and sometimes undetectable--these interpretations have value to broader discussions and research on multiculturalism, especially in the context of education.

Articulating my lived experiences and perspectives through autoethnography can be of value to educators at all levels in our never-ending quest to understand the complex layers of social plurality that exists in our education systems. My lived experiences also can be of value to Osages and other Indigenous students at all levels of education as they continue to tackle the question "How do I understand my lived experiences in relation to the lived experiences of my students?" Additionally, this work also has the potential to disrupt oppressive mainstream curricula (Ladson-Billings, 2003), which continues to contribute to the erosion of Indigenous cultures and identities, and create space for Osages and other Indigenous educators to conceptualize ourselves in our modern contexts.

In a broader sense, this analysis allows people to see yet another way that people construct, deconstruct, reconstruct and negotiate their identity development. There is value in adding one more unique slice of life to the growing body of literature trying to open up how we take up the words *culture, diversity,* and *multiculturalism* in academia. These terms are embedded into the rhetoric in the field of education, and often assumed to be in practice. With the development of my critical consciousness, I am beginning to think that when these terms are used by educational leaders and decision makers, they may not be as accurate or strong enough to carry the weight of their intent in our education systems. At all levels of education, we need to keep unpacking what these words mean in their respective contexts, and continue to hone our understandings of how they play out in plural realities. This analysis helps add deep interrogation of these positionalities and cultural erasures, and sheds light on the continued

damage wrought on the Indigenous peoples through systemic oppression in education. This is not an exercise in politically correct rhetoric--this is cultural vitality and continuation, a fight against cultural genocide.

Overall, the value of this autoethnography is that it begins to open up new spaces for Osage-specific interpretations in education, and ultimately adds depth to the field of multicultural research in education. This work not only has the potential to improve our understanding of pluralism in education, and how to seek more appropriate ways to work with students as they develop their identities, it has the potential to interrupt colonial processes of deculturalization and open up space for Osage ways to move into the field of education, and into the future.

The Personal Value of Autoethnography: Acknowledging this Space to Grow

I have been inspired by my academic mentors to make my journey less about satisfying Western academic rigor, and more about healing and moving towards indigenous self-determination and place-based understanding. Their inspiration has been so profound that I hesitate to label such influential individuals as academic mentors because of the deep personal shifts they have prompted in my worldviews and understandings; I use the term *academic* to signify only the arena in which I met them or encountered their ideas.

Dr. Cornel Pewewardy has fostered my indigenous identity from my undergraduate studies through my doctoral efforts, and has done so for all of my brothers. He has always been more than just an academic mentor. He is an elder, an important Indigenous position in my life, and he has continued to have a positive influence on my Indigenous thinking and the development of my critical consciousness (Pewewardy, 2015a). Then, as I moved into doctoral-level research methods courses, Dr. Bhattacharya ignited something Dr. Pewewardy fostered and

cared for in my educational systems--my Indigeneity. She ignited the transformational learning experience that remains ablaze, and essentially is this autoethnography. She prompted, nudged, and pushed me towards a more in-depth approach to analyzing the world and my positions in that world. She made me drop my shovel, open up the garage, and gas up the industrial social digging equipment.

During that time, Dr. Dennison provided me with an Osage-specific framework from which I could sort out and understand my entanglements (Dennison, 2012, 2013). Even if it was through only a handful of readings, email exchanges, and personal conversations, those became a catalyst that had a more profound and exponential impact on my thinking than I ever could have anticipated.

Finally, as a young Indigenous scholar, even though I have not met all of them personally, I realize that scholars such as Smith (1999), Deloria and Wildcat (2001), Kovach (2010), Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird (2012), along with many other Indigenous leaders, helped lay the academic foundations for all of this to occur. I am grateful to these individuals, among others, and it is my hope that I can adequately and honorably build on their ideas, which are the foundations from which I plan to (re)construct my worldview in such a public manner. From these mentors, I have found a new position of comfort. I been inspired and encouraged to make my dissertation authentic (Jacobs, 2009) yet grounded in scholarly ideas that can be supported in the literature.

This work is not absent of therapeutic and practical qualities, even though it is not my primary intent. It is my intent to use this as a foundation to inform a future research agenda that aims to support Smith's (1999) decolonizing agenda, which emphasizes a move towards self-determination through the processes of decolonization, transformation, mobilization, and healing

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in conjunction with survival, recovery, and development. It is my intent here, to do exactly as

Bhattacharya (2015) articulates in *Diving Deep into Oppositional Beliefs: Healing the Wounded*

Transnational, De/Colonizing Warrior Within. She explains how she is compelled to "dissolve

dualities," and how "external separation of colonized and colonizer reflects the internal division

in [her] being" (p. 5). She explains:

> The de/colonization project unfolds to [her] in the form of healing and
>
> transformation. First through self-healing: an understanding of suffering of self,
>
> an understanding of what oppositional discourses reside within, how they are
>
> nurtured and sustained, and how they can be used to reflect on individual and
>
> collective pain. Transformation, then, becomes an activity that starts within, an
>
> agenda that compels a deep dive into one's own consciousness. It involves
>
> looking through various painful parts of self, the belief systems that sustain those
>
> painful parts, and the discourses that support those belief systems. It requires,
>
> finally, making peace with the pain to understand our own suffering and
>
> transformation. *Such 'home work' is critically necessary before any 'field work'*
>
> *can be accomplished for any social justice agenda; without it, we will only feed*
>
> *and amplify our pain, defeating our transformative desires.* [emphasis added] (p.
>
> 5)

Her words describe the complex layers of personal value already being uncovered in this

specific Indigenous autoethnographic project. This is the documentation of an ongoing

transformative moment in my learning--a decolonizing moment. This is a healing project, and it

clears new space for seeds of cultural vitality to receive water, sun, and nourishment. Many of

my internal discourses are no longer stuck in a state of dissonance, but are searching for

harmonies and balance. I have challenged my inner dichotomies, and begun to replace them with more complex understandings, and I document that process.

As I begin this presumably lifelong scholarly expedition, this autoethnography is my logical first step: to set the prairie on fire. I intend to do my homework, an exploration of the self, in order to better inform the future fieldwork. With the help of critical introspection, I am finding it necessary to confront my colonial entanglements and to open conversations with other Indigenous peoples about their own entanglements in our social systems, so we can continue to move towards the ultimate goal of self-determination and enhanced sovereignty.

Conclusion

Autoethnography is not a traditional method in research, but it should still be held to a scholarly standard. Born out of the triple crisis where the linear and positivist traditions of academia came into question by marginalized populations, this method began to take root in education. Then, as this method began to merge with critical and Indigenous studies, scholars began to sharpen their focus on the power this method possessed to disrupt power structures, shed light on marginalized perspectives, and influence social justice praxis. This Indigenous autoethnographic work is more than the documentation of a personal story. It is an in-depth analysis that aims to stitch Osage perspectives into scholarly discourses of professional education where they have minimal presence; it is a way to create space for Osage educators and simultaneously disrupt the power dynamics that have marginalized our voices within this field. By using writing as method and field, with a focus on key sites of data collection, I now transition to the four specific autoethnographic narratives that stitch Osage perspectives into the field of education, and into the future.

Chapter 3 - Listening to an Elder: Experiencing Transformational Indigenous Praxis

Introduction

In the Fall of 2016, I was given the opportunity to construct, coordinate, and launch the first ever Osage Nation Educational Leadership Academy (ONELA)--a graduate level partnership program between the Osage Nation and Kansas State University's (KSU) Department of Educational Leadership (RedCorn, 2016). This two-year master's academy, comprised of 10 Osage educational leadership students, is the first of its kind for both KSU and the Osage Nation. This program is constructed to deliver a master's level educational leadership degree in Osage specific education contexts, adapting the curriculum to Osage Nation educational capacity building needs. The development of ONELA is intended to create a place-based leadership learning environment which helps merge mainstream practitioner educational leadership training with Indigenous, decolonizing, and Osage knowledges by incorporating Osage specific topics, such as Dennison's (2012; 2013) ribbon work metaphor, into the training program. Aside from Osage scholarship, the curriculum also encourages ongoing critical self-reflection and engagement with the Osage community (elders, community members, cultural education topics, etc) adding specific sociocultural dimensions that mainstream educational leadership programs lack. Additionally, this program does not assume that just because someone is card carrying Osage that they are critically conscious about Osage specific sociocultural positionalities. Instead, these Osage students are asked to critically engage in Osage specific topics in order to help prepare them to be critically conscious leaders operating in an entangled settler-colonial reality. With such a unique and specific setting for Educational Leadership training, there is value in deep, honest, and critical reflection in regards to how my educational training brought me to this position of influence in my home community.

The reality is,

I was not trained for this specific position.

Not the way teachers, principals and superintendents are trained for their jobs,

and many of the strongest educational leaders in Indian country are in a

similar position.

Professional educator training

is over here,

Indigenous and

Ethnic Studies

...over here

Educator training in Indian Country needs to explore how to combine these.

With ONELA, I was not trained for this specific position,

I just looked the part on paper.

I was originally trained to be a mainstream middle/secondary social studies teacher at the

undergraduate and master's levels, and then the doctoral level of my coursework was designed

primarily for principals and superintendents for P-12 institutions. Throughout my educator training at all levels, my courses presented material which could be transferred to educational teaching and leadership positions outside the mainstream. However, modern American Indian contexts were not common in my coursework, unless I introduced them or sought them out on my own. This is important because at all levels, when American Indian educators are being trained in mainstream institutions, they are rarely being introduced to Indigenous and/or decolonizing contexts, or being prepared for the unique settings of Indigenous education, a problem that has been recognized by scholars (Lees, 2016; White, Bedonie, de Groat, Lockard, & Honani, 2007; Jacobs et al., 2001; Belgarde, Mitchell, & Arquero, 2003; Reyhner & Jacobs, 2002). Indigenous education contexts are highly unique compared to most mainstream American schools, a problem compounded by the fact that over 90% of American Indian students attend mainstream public schools, and not federal or tribal schools (TEDNA, 2011). Therefore, when talking about educational leadership contexts from the perspective of native nations, there is a need to understand overlapping jurisdictions and sovereignties, and there is a corresponding leadership skill set needed in order to weave educational programming in, out, and across tribal education departments, tribal legislative and executive politics, local education agencies, state education agencies, federal bureaucracy, and more. Ultimately, these educational departments and programs housed in the sovereign governments of native nations possess true catalytic potential for transformational praxis, cultural healing, and productive educational capacity building for enhancing self-determination (Smith, 1999). This is a primary reason I preferred to initially partner with the Osage Nation for this educational leadership academy, and not a general public school serving Osage students. Ultimately, Osages often know more about their communal and cultural needs more than non-Osages, and as a sovereign nation possess an

inherent right to be involved in the education of Osage peoples--even if most Osages are attending non-Osage institutions.

In the effort to center on Osage needs with little precedent to lean on, the creation of ONELA becomes an active ribbon work exercise--stitching together a program that is uniquely Osage with what seems to make sense--exploring different shapes, color combinations, and patterns in the process. Through my personal training as a professional educator, I have found an ongoing need to constantly seek out my Indigenous learning contexts beyond the mainstream curricula in order to widen my gaze and deepen my understandings. But this personal learning process which occurs in the exploratory margins of mainstream curricula can often be messy and confusing. In mainstream educator training, one has well established curricular trails rooted in settler-colonial knowledge systems which have been blazed by generations of Euro-American educational leadership; established learning paths to pipe new professionals into specific nichés and specialties. For example, one can be trained specifically for early childhood, elementary, secondary (plus content area), special education, counseling, principalship, superintendency, etc., but there are fewer options at universities to become a Tribal Education Department Director or an Osage (or other Indigenous) Cultural Curriculum Coordinator in a three-branch political environment. Furthermore, very few educators in these settings are actually trained for service in an entangled Indigenous reality. Thus, educational leadership within these Osage specific contexts are not well-established curricula found in mainstream education training programs. Therefore, when engaging in Osage capacity building, this professional reality prompts a need for curricular exploration--an exploration into the Osage margins of my lived experiences. Given my curricular background and professional social studies education training, when I conceptualize the notion of exploration, I consider Lewis and Clark exploring Indigenous lands

and knowledges, and utilizing the knowledges found in one space to influence the exploratory decisions moving forward. As awkward as it may be, my mainstream learning has ensured that this is my contextual foundation for what it means to search and explore a space that is not entirely understood--even if it is an entangled reference to famous American explorers who played a key role in preparing America for Osage territorial exploitation.

In mainstream education, to engage in Indigenous learning contexts, educators in training often must force themselves off of the main curricular trail and into active Indigenous spaces, which many consider to be dormant or extinct. These Indigenous spaces are areas where, if one does not know what they are doing or looking for, it is easy to get lost unless one has local experts for guidance.

I was lucky enough to find those expert guides in my learning experiences,
and I hope to bring what I learned from them to ONELA.
I did not pay them tuition,
but I do owe them blankets,
or something.

That needs to be taken care of.

So, as I reflect on my mainstream educator training which occurred mostly outside of Osage contexts, and consider how to construct a program for educational leadership training within Osage contexts, I have to explore ways to find structure for what was more or less unstructured for myself.

It is in these environments that I seek the advice of an Elder, Dr. Cornel Pewewardy, who was my first Indigenous mentor that I had in a formal learning environment. Although I have never taken a class from him and he has never officially served as my academic advisor, I still consider myself his student, especially since I have called upon him for outside advice and wisdom throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies when I could not find the answers in the mainstream. In these continued interactions, he has given me needed structure to help me understand Indigenous education transformational learning processes--or at least how to go from being an educator who is Osage to an Osage educator. His Indigenous mentorship is still valuable, even though he is not Osage.

This chapter is primarily focused on Pewewardy's (2017) Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model[3] which is currently in development as an adaptation from Banks' (2004) work on multicultural curricular reform. This model has helped me identify and map the maturation of my critical consciousness as an Indigenous educator. It has also helped me consider how this model might play a role in the structuring of curriculum for ONELA and other educational training programs designed for Indigenous contexts. Also, since Dr. Pewewardy is inextricably linked to my identity development as an Indigenous educator, in this chapter I will discuss his model and Pewewardy's influence on me as a student within the context of Transformational Indigenous Praxis.

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[3] This model is in development with publications still under review. While I often refer to this as "Pewewardy's model", this is because I have been watching this develop through multiple presentations from him over multiple conference presentations and workshops over several years. However, as this moves towards publication, it is important to acknowledge that while he is first author, he has also engaged in co-authorship with others to further develop this work into publication as it cycles through the blinded review process for publication.

Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model and the Influence of an Elder

Dr. Cornel Pewewardy was the American Indian student group faculty sponsor (First Nations Student Association) during my undergraduate studies at the University of Kansas. Prior to meeting him I had no concept of Indigenous mentoring in mainstream education, or how to think of myself as a student from Indigenous perspectives. Up to that point, American Indian, Osage, or other Indigenous perspectives were topics reserved for qualified mentors *outside* of my educational systems. Over the years, I had internalized, and justified in my mind, that is was simply not realistic to expect American Indians to be mentors within our mainstream systems-- especially in the suburbs.

Consider that.

Through Elementary school, high school, undergraduate, master's and doctoral level
graduate school...

within these institutions, I essentially had **one** American Indian mentor to foster
my identity and thinking on American Indian topics.

One.

And that influence was profound...

...life altering.

After several years of minimal contact during my professional time as a teacher (when I was out of academia), I was able to reunite and hear Dr. Pewewardy speak at a conference about topics that are relevant to the academic ribbon work in this dissertation. He stressed the need to engage in critical scholarship to enhance critical consciousness, and the importance of centering curricular content around the needs of each specific native nation, among other topics related to postcolonial and Indigenous research methodologies. These are topics that are exciting to hear, and I rarely encounter them in mainstream educational training. However, what really helped me make sense of my learning in the exploratory margins of Indigenous education was his *Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model* (2017). This is a model which can prompt educators to envision new Indigenous specific learning pathways to help them reach new levels of self-awareness and become culturally responsive agents for social justice in education.

This model in development is an adaptation from Banks (2004) model, specifically for Indigenous educators (See Figure 4). There are four stages, with each one illustrating a greater maturation of critical consciousness, multicultural awareness, and potential for Indigenous transformational praxis as an educator. Pewewardy is clear that he does not want this model to be a rigidly prescriptive way to diagnose a deficiency, but something to inspire new possibilities for learning pathways. The hope is that students and teachers can envision a more in-depth and culturally responsive social action approach to multicultural and Indigenous education, engage in transformational praxis, and promote Indigenous pathways for learning across our educational systems.

Figure 4: Transformational Indigenous Praxis

CULTURAL & SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION
Approach to Indigenous pathways and freedom; intellectual creativity & genius virtues have become second nature; teacher of teachers; protector of sacred knowledge; engages insurgent research; commitment and action (decolonization critically conscious)

STAGE 4

STAGE 3

TRANSFORMATION
Approach to liberatory pedagogy; regularly practices of decolonization, mindfulness and advances practices accordingly; begins to mentor learners also desiring to decolonize their minds; dreaming (decolonization practice)

ADDITIVE
Approach to deconstruct and change structural framework; burst of critical awareness; tries to decolonize ones' self but without regular practice; still embraces mechanical Eurocentric thinking with fixed structures that lack critical attributes of human living systems; mourning (decolonization engagement process)

STAGE 2

STAGE 1

CONTRIBUTIONS
Captive or colonized mind; unaware or unconscious of significant cultural issues in society; unreflective thinker, challenged Eurocentric thinker; assimilationist behavior; actions are ethnic cheerleading; race talk is happy talk; dysconscious racism; commodification of mindfulness; rediscovery and recovery (decolonization novice learner)

Figure 4: These are the four stages of Pewewardy's Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (2017)

When I first observed Dr. Pewewardy discussing his earlier versions of Figure 4, he described the four stages. He referred to the Contributions stage as a mode of practice and thinking where educators are mostly unaware and unconscious of Indigenous issues, and these educators struggle to think outside of a Eurocentric mindset. Also, educators at this stage might fail to recognize their own racist actions even while happily promoting diversity and multiculturalism as part of the school brand. He then described the Additive stage by explaining how educators begin to have "bursts of critical awareness", and how they start to see the value in decolonizing oneself, but simultaneously struggle to do so with any consistency. In this stage, Indigenous thinking becomes an inconsistent add on, and educators still fail to fully engage and/or embrace Indigenous topics, perspectives, and worldviews. Then, when one enters the

Transformation stage, they begin to immerse themselves into Indigenous perspectives and knowledges with more consistency, and therefore begin to transform not only themselves, but others as well. Finally, the Cultural and Social Justice Action stage is characterized by allowing oneself to fully embrace Indigenous thinking and worldviews, and create Indigenous centered educational programming for such transformation to occur for others. In this sense, Indigenous educators at this stage become a "teacher of teachers", and are therefore not only transforming themselves, but also transforming the educational systems.

As I processed these stages, I could immediately relate to each level, and tie it to key events and eras in my own life. I (re)envisioned my lived experiences of cycling back and forth between the various stages of the model. As a general pathway, it was like a mirror for my growth as an Indigenous educator as I could see myself and my lived experiences within it, complete with a whole mess of cyclical movement and transitional dissonance occurring between each gradient border crossing. What I first saw within and across these four levels were the following stages of my life, with the Social Action Approach level almost acting as a magnetic node of thinking, slowly drawing me closer throughout my studies.

1. *Contributions:* My learning from elementary school until partway through my undergraduate degree as I was learning how to think critically in the context of education (Birth-20 years old);

2. *Additive:* My undergraduate degree, early teaching career, and master's degree research as I began to think more critically about the specific field of Indigenous education in practitioner terms (20-30 years old);

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3. *Transformation:* My present doctoral program and the process of confronting Indigenous education systems as settler-colonial entanglements from a philosophical perspective, and envisioning what potential lies beyond current practice;

4. *Cultural and Social Justice Action*: The development of programs such as ONELA and where I wish to be while transitioning beyond my doctoral program, someone who can help bridge Indigenous education theory and praxis--my ultimate goal.

As I continued to listen and map my journeys in, out, and across those stages, I could immediately recall many lived experiences--my entanglements. I remember when I questioned my high school history teacher, about the grand narrative of Westward Expansion and the *progress* of my White ancestors. She responded with an unsatisfactory answer, but I was too timid to challenge her further when she told me that she could not see American *progress* happening any other way in regards to settler relationships with American Indians. In other words, my teacher was trapped in a Euro-American mindset and was uncritically regurgitating the lessons she had been taught by her teachers, and by default maintaining the status quo of our social science narratives--that settler-colonial trajectory. I also had memories of attending Kansas City Chiefs games with my father, and realizing the awkward intoxicated norms of everyone playing Indian, wearing fake feathers and all, and being submerged in a drunken sea of red during the tomahawk chop. While the beat of a drum played like I was in the scene of an old Western and everyone chanted from the depths of their beer breath, I remember looking at my father during the excitement. He locked eyes with me and just calmly shook his head as if to tell me "no, we're here to have a good time watching football, but no way in hell are we participating in this".

Message received, through the communicative gaze only a father can relay.

I contrast those memories with my experiences at our I^n.Lon.Schka and find it highly problematic; but still, I loved football and I really enjoyed those games, causing me to wrestle with my consciousness every time I watch(ed), even on TV. Then I remembered writing a paper in my Social studies teaching methods course on American Indian mascots as a hidden curriculum in schools. I felt empowered outlining how mascots might be considered an informal curriculum that teaches students about narrow minded stereotypes, but then I rarely engaged in efforts to actually generate change on that topic, at least not for another 10 years. There are far too many examples from my memories that align with Pewewardy's model to exhaustively outline here. However, each memory was accompanied with varied emotions such as confusion, doubt, apathy, anger, shame, complacency and at times liberation for having some language and a framework that prompted me to center my Indigenous experiences in a formal learning environment.

Ultimately, through continued Indigenous mentorship in mainstream education, Dr. Pewewardy provided me the encouragement, space, and opportunity to situate my thinking from an Indigenous specific orientation, which was later encouraged by others. He pushed me off the mainstream curricular trails to explore new vantage points as an Indigenous educator. These new orientations have allowed me to foster a consciousness and identity as an Osage/Indigenous educator with a focused intent on generating change for Indian Country, and not simply an educator who walks in two worlds that forever remain separate and fragmented. This reorientation, although slowly developing over my entire life, was a critical piece in preparing to lead with confidence as an Osage educational leader, and as I reflect on my journeys in the

curricular margins, it has influenced my approach to the Osage Nation Educational Leadership Academy. In the next section, I specifically discuss how I conceptualized my ongoing relationship with curriculum in and out of mainstream contexts.

A Confrontation of Curricular Realities: (Re)Mapping the Possibilities

At the doctoral level, Pewewardy's (2017) model has helped me map my experiences through each stage and acknowledge the dissonant transitional spaces in-between. Previously, I occasionally cycled between these stages--experiencing the dissonance--but then comfortably fell back into the status quo in the mainstream, which for me was often in the Additive stage. However, in the highly critical rafters of academia I began regularly prioritizing my Indigeneity, as both a student and a teacher, and I began to confront the dissonant entanglements instead of shrugging them off and returning to the status quo. Therefore, Pewewardy's model has allowed me to get some altitude and map my journey from a sky view--a new vantage point--and in the process, expose a larger critical reorientation through a collection of several more tangible educational experiences that I previously saw as individual and isolated. Below I articulate some of these experiences which contributed a larger personal reorientation. Taken as a collective, these are key experiences and realizations that guide my work with ONELA.

Acknowledging the Ease of Following, and Teaching, Mainstream Curricula

First and foremost, I realized that as an experienced Osage social studies teacher my multicultural and Indigenous awareness was simply not at the level of maturation I needed in order to be a transformational *Indigenous* or *Osage* educator. I lacked the skill set and knowledge base with Indigenous scholarship, but mainly I was approaching education primarily from a non-Indigenous orientation. I was mostly oriented to a mainstream Eurocentric mindset, and uncritically following the curricula found in and across the social sciences--the story of

American progress. Within that context, I was aware of significant and in-depth cultural issues on a global scale, and as a teacher and I had spent my career educating students about such matters in my courses. However, I was wading in shallow water and my curricular habits were preventing me from going deeper, specifically on Indigenous and Osage topics. What I realized, though, in mainstream education, I mostly followed curricular paths on status quo trails blazed by settler-colonialism, only straying off them every once in a while, for brief moments when I fully embraced my creativity, outside interests, or in this case, my Indigeneity. In the post-Civil Rights era, respect for diversity is prioritized and heavily emphasized, which is good; I taught these life skills and values in my classes, and still do. But when considering the whole picture from an American Indian perspective in the social studies, the realization that American Indians are frequently framed in problematic narrow, stereotypical, stuck-in-the-past paradigms (Brophy, 2000; Chandler, 2010; Chandler, Branscombe, & Mayshack, 2013; Journell, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Shear, 2015; Shear, Knowles, Soden, & Castro, 2015) is troubling. I had dabbled with these topics before, but never dove in. After diving in, I was able to begin sorting out why so many people think about Indigenous peoples in such overly-simplistic terms. I found that when I made time to focus on these specific threads, it was liberating.

I had never made time for these efforts on my own.

Why hasn't anyone pointed this out to me before?

Was this embedded in my mainstream learning?

Why haven't I noticed?

Maybe I just wasn't listening.

But it was sitting right in front of my face the whole time.

Yet, this literature provides me with much needed clarity. Specifically, finding out that 87% of Social studies curricular standards across the United States are asking teachers to mainly talk about Indians in Pre-1900 contexts (Shear et al., 2015), and realizing that as a teacher I only mildly disrupted that narrow frame of thinking, is difficult for me to swallow. However, as a K-12 student in predominantly White institutions, and then as a social studies teacher-in-training in predominantly White institutions, and as a teacher in these settings, these were the curricular paths I was shown...

....and those are the paths that they were shown, as well.

...and so on.

Revealing the habitual status quo trails of our

systems.

That colonial trajectory.

Therefore, I was taught to think of my own Osage existence in these narrow contexts, and even though I had the knowledge and skills to branch off every once in a while, and challenge stereotypes, the bulk of my teaching efforts were imbuing a White mainstream orientation of thinking in my students. Aside from a handful of fringe lessons and side conversations I would tack on here and there, essentially I forwarded a mostly stuck in the past pre-1900 narrative about Americans through my lessons and curricula...

I was still Killing the Indian,

and I was the man.

Exploring New Curricular Trails and Indigenous Orientations

As an educator, I have immense respect for the efforts of my teachers at all levels, and I

appreciate how they challenged my thinking with the skills sets and lived experiences they

brought to the classroom. But no matter how well meaning, my teachers had their limits based

on their own resources and lived experiences. For contrast, I consider how my mainstream

teachers asked me to insert a floppy disk into an IBM computer and purchase a digital yoke of

oxen to cross a digital prairie--the territory of the wild Indians--on the Oregon Trail, while Dr.

Pewewardy invited me to into his living room to crowd around The Drum with my American

Indian peers and sing like my Osage ancestors. Dr. Pewewardy was one of the first people with

Indigenous specific background knowledge to push me further in that context both personally

and academically. These efforts were then reignited by Dr. Bhattacharya at the doctoral level,

and then further supported through the work of Dr. Dennison.

     Three

        ...well...

        Indian

              mentors,

    Nominally linked,

      navigating their respective settler-colonial entanglements,

and meeting me on the shared marginal trails of our knowledge systems.

allowing me in,

to access to their perspectives,

their lived experiences

and sustenance.

They gave/give me the skills to understand the dissonant intersectional

experiences in and across Pewewardy's model.

They just plain got it,

me and my entangled reality

way before I did.

Together, they gave me the space, and encouragement to explore some new curricular

trails, and then to look back at the mainstream trails from those new perspectives--from critical

Indigenous perpectives. It was not until my Indigenous academic immersion efforts that I

realized I needed to confront my habits of following...

following the routines, and trails, of mainstream educational systems.

The Transformational Indigenous Praxis model helped me envision orientations where

the prairie had been set on fire,

cleared off,

    pathways exposed,

        and developing new trails became an immediate possibility.

        Pewewardy, Bhattacharya, and Dennison pushed me

                out here

        asking me to look again from

these

new

vantage

points.

    The routines of the mainstream curricula have provided me with all of the ideal promises

  of professional and financial stability,

    the American Dream--with a stunning, sharp, and witty wife,

      two beautiful kids who like to argue over nothing in the back seat of the car,

        an eco-friendly Prius that makes me feel better about myself,

          stable jobs we love, but also love to escape,

            and a split-level house with unfinished projects,

            stunted by the over-idealism of graduate school.

              and the limited resource of time.

  No matter how critical this writing might be perceived,

    I do not object to that stability and the family health and happiness that come

    with it.

But that is only a part of me,

When I saw this Transformational Indigenous Praxis model, and a respected elder imploring to think more critically, I felt the internal dissonance that was actually lurking behind my American Dream. I have known it was there for some time, but have failed to confront it.

It is a...

A confusing space of

*ality**inter**section*

Not a

disconnect, but an...

i

m

b

a

l

a

n

c

e.

It was almost as if my mental bandwidth, my mental territory, was being

O   c   c   u   p   i   e   d

by non-Indigenous orientations,

those comfortable spaces of the American Dream and Eurocentricity,

but leaving only a small space for Indigeneity if it so chose.

I was left to wonder if these are an

either/or,

a give and take,

...if more of one means less of the other.

a false dichotomy.

It felt like my Indigeneity was over there =>

Not right

here,

but

over

there.

Growing up, my Indigeneity was not neglected or abandoned. In fact, it was encouraged

and made a priority by my family. But through the systems of schooling my opportunities to

orient myself as an Osage were crowded out by mainstream curricular responsibilities and the

pursuit of that almighty American Dream--a dream built upon occupied mental territory and

knowledge systems. Yet, I was questioning the impossibility of expelling all settler-colonial presence, because of its pervasiveness. I can accept my entanglements, sort them out as best I can, and create new spaces where I might seek synergetic solutions. Mostly, I am interested in making room for co-habitation and development of new ribbon work patterns moving

>>>>forward.

In these transitional moments of dissonant intersectionality, I consider...

IF

...I choose to continue engaging my Indigeneity with passive and sporadic attention, I would be continuing to ignore this crucial imbalance and let my Indigeneity remain

an Other...

In a sense,

I would have a few handfuls of ribbon,

but I wouldn't know how to make ribbon work.

In these moments as the critical reorientation slowly evolves, I consider what Pewewardy describes as a "burst(s) of critical awareness" in the Additive stage of the model, and how those words make so much sense as I reflect. I could immediately recall several lived experiences that

fit this perfect description, and those memories are signals of passage in and out of these new

orientations--new spaces of critical and Indigenous perspectives. Additionally, as I reflected, I

felt those boundary zones, those thresholds, and the sociocultural shapeshifting that comes with

crossing them. Sometimes, that is a confusing experience. For example,

I could go from our ceremonial dances (the I^n.Lon.Schka),

to a Chiefs games at Arrowhead Stadium,

only to walk out ashamed at myself and my love for football.

To having awkward conversations with Boy Scouts

about how they received an Indian name--like a neat club to join,

and then feeling over-critical and judgmental as I felt like

the overly PC liberal attacking the innocent Boy Scouts and their

traditions...as their den leaders carry them on for them.

To attending, and hosting, traditional naming ceremonies at Wakon Iron Hall,

and doing my best,

while questioning myself, am I doing things the right way?

To teaching about vanishing American Indians in class...as an American Indian.

with the help of a textbook that neglects to acknowledge the modern me.

But still, I needed that textbook,

because I didn't know enough to do it on my own.

To listening to Christian hymns on the red velvet (ish) pews,

at the Osage Baptist Church in the Wa.hax.oli^n village,

and hearing that some elders in that church are now praying in

Wah.Zha.Zhi I.eh to talk to Wah.kon.tah.

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Yet,

the "bursts" that occur when crossing various thresholds often do not maintain,

because life happens, and the settler-colonial processes which were put in motion long ago are so

ubiquitous in everything we do, our surroundings constantly try to force us back to the

mainstream orientation--the status quo--that colonial trajectory. However, as I examine the

levels of Transformational Indigenous Praxis outlined above in the contexts of my lived

experiences as a student and teacher, I can see myself shuttling back and forth across those

levels--in and out of different orientations. But I gradually began to interact more comfortably as

an Indigenous educator operating from a critical perspective, and I have slowly begun to

concentrate my energies, and my learning pathways, around those upper two stages. These are

the experiences and realizations I bring to the Osage Educational Leadership Academy, and try

to share with others.

In this new Osage educational leadership position, my personal confrontations related to

the absence of Indigenous learning in the curricular mainstream, is a fundamental topic for me as

I construct curriculum in the Osage Nation Educational Leadership Academy. In this academy, I

make concerted efforts to draw attention to Osage specific pedagogical spaces outside of

mainstream learning contexts, (the I^n.Lon.Schka described below, hand games, visiting with

elders, traditional feasts, naming ceremonies, etc) and ask students to concentrate on the value of

those learning spaces, and then prompt exploration into how those ways might be appropriately

incorporated into educational programming.

The Arbor: My Osage School District

To map one's learning experiences within and across Pewewardy's (2017)

Transformational Indigenous Praxis model is likely more difficult if one has never been exposed

to the deep traditions of an Indigenous community, or experienced those specific learning orientations of the community. I was fortunate enough to grow up under The Arbor in the I^n.Lon.Schka, our annual ceremonies which occur throughout the month of June in the Pa.su.li^n, Zon.zo.li^n, and Wa.hax.oli^n districts of the Osage Nation. In these environments, I had a front row seat to study Osage ways. Actually, to be more accurate, sometimes that is a third or fourth row bench seat on a Saturday night dance.

But if I show up juuuuuuust at the right time as the whip man is seating people, you might get that front row bench seat and avoid the log jam of dancers eager to dance their way through Osage learning.

For some context, outside of the month of June in my home district-- the Wa.hax.oli^n village near Pawhuska--The Arbor and its surrounding accessories remain mostly dormant aside from Wakon Iron hall, the community building named after my Great Grandfather's brother. Under the Arbor, though, the family benches surrounding the compact dirt ground where we dance remains vacant, the open lawn and gravel parking lots look lonesome next to the naked camp shelters and empty fire pits which stand alone, stripped of their Osage feast accessories. They look bare without the woodpiles, fires, bulky grates to support the galvanized tubs over the fire, rows of folding banquet tables complete with wooden benches, refrigerators, freezers and ice chests packed with food, trailers acting as temporary pantries,

and Osage people.

The Drum, and the power within it, is what arouses this space from hibernation every year. During the month of June, activity begins to return to the grounds, and when The Drum returns the movement comes with it along, as shade tents and campers are erected and parked across the village. As the grounds return to vibrancy, The Arbor becomes an Osage watering hole among the prairies and cross timbers of the Osage reservation, which prompts an annual migration from Osages across the country who come for spiritual, communal, and cultural sustenance. The pace of activity is predictable only to those who are familiar with the routines and structure. Everyone has a role, and after over 125 years of doing this the consistency of the collective agenda and process is so well understood to those that grew up in this dance, there is little need for a printed handout or posted schedule. Starting on Thursday, the general routine which starts around dinner (which many refer to as lunch) is described below. In between and throughout each of the events listed below, people are visiting with one another, listening to elders and relatives share stories, helping out around camp wherever needed, prepping clothes for the next dance, and more. But the events which drive the general schedule are:

eat dinner (lunch),

dance the afternoon session,

eat supper (dinner)

dance the evening session

eat again,

then sleep,

wake up the next day and repeat until

Saturday,

the host district serves

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a dinner (lunch) to feed visiting

committees and guests from the

other districts.

Then, the host committee distributes

rations to visitors during the

afternoon dance.

Then Sunday,

where there is only one long session,

from the afternoon to the evening.

A day full of family songs,

give away,

and a day to show

honor,

gratitude,

appreciation,

and reciprocity.

On the first day of the dance, which is always a Thursday, the smell of open fire returns

to the air paired with the pork steam fry, corn soup, meat gravy, and hominy found in the metal

tubs across the district and family camps. Cars fill the lawns and gravel lots, and the energy

begins to return to this space as the Osage people return with it in their hearts.

Elders visit, share their stories, and catch up with old friends,

      but sometimes elect to safely escape the heat in an air-conditioned travel trailer.

Dancers haul their suitcases and cedar boxes out of their SUVs, trucks, and eco-ponies,

      then lug them to shade tents and shelters where they dress.

            However, some just open up the back hatch and lounge in captain's chairs,

                with a Gatorade in one hand and some silver polish in another.

Cooks crack jokes while cutting, slicing, and prepping food,

      letting out a collective "Aaaaayye!" which echoes across the camps,

         likely signaling a comedic jab at an unsuspecting bystander.

Older children explore and test the boundaries zones outlined by their parents,

      while many in the camp collectively help keep watch,

         as they chase one another around the porta-potties.

Infants and toddlers are kept cool by eagle wing and red tail hawk fans

      with beaded handles of various color and designs,

      as they get passed around the camp to be praised for their chubby cheeks

         and how keen they will someday look when they join the dance.

And then the first bell rings, signaling to the camps and village that the dance will be starting soon. As clothes are freshly unpacked in preparation for the dance, the mothball and cedar chest scent acts like an Osage cologne, soon to be paired with the aroma of body odor that comes with being cloaked in wool broadcloth and long sleeves on a hot Oklahoma June day. For me, this is what June smells like.

But as the dancers meticulously get dressed in their ribbon work suits, bells mounted on leather strips gently ring as they are strapped to the calves of men and young boys, and they continue to ring with every movement as they add each layer of clothing--colorful long sleeve ribbon shirts, fully beaded belts and buckskin mocs, hand woven yarn garters and streamers that flow down their legs alongside the ribbon work and fringed buckskin of their leggings. Otter hides mounted on broadcloth and edged with ribbon work hang down the back of each dancer decorated to their liking with a colorful array of beaded strips and medallions, a variety of feathers, and sometimes personal touches with items such as war honors, medals, beaded footballs for younger kids, and more. As the dancer's finish centering their deer tail, porcupine quill, and/or turkey beard roaches on top of their scalp, they tie it off tightly beneath their chin, they are nearly ready. Finally, they are almost complete with this meticulous process when they slide their recently polished arm bands up above their elbows, and wrap a colorful scarf around their neck. The final touch comes when the dancer or a family member places their eagle feather into the spreader of their roach on top their head, making sure it is snug. The last thing most dancers want is the embarrassment of an eagle feather coming out and dropping on the sacred ground of the arbor floor--nobody wants that spectacle of patiently waiting for the whip man to come pick it up, for all to see. This happened to me when I was young and naive, but my dad made sure to let me know just how embarrassing it was. We took care of it, though.

Well,

he did.

I was short on cash as an elementary school student.

I have taken every measure since to make sure it does not happen again, and made sure take precautions to prevent items from coming off. So, as dancers finish getting dressed, they

make sure everything is on right--tied extra tight, double-knotted, safety-pinned, or whatever it takes to make sure nothing falls off, especially that top feather.

Now ready for the dance, and hearing the final bell ring in the distance, dancers start making their way towards The Arbor. While some cover their entire body in more traditional red and blue broadcloth wearing blankets--a formal approach--most dancers tuck their colorful Pendleton blankets under their arms, grab their fans and other hand held items with which they dance, and begin walking towards The Arbor in an orderly manner with their districts and/or families. They line up rank and file by age and/or committee positions creating an eclectic line of colorful camaraderie and family lineage. This is a traditional dance, a formal ceremony Osages, and not just a powwow.

As these long lines of meticulously dressed dancers approach The Arbor from all directions, they wait to be seated by the whip man, who is responsible for helping keep order over the four days of the dance, among other responsibilities. At times the town crier, will walk over and at the top of his lungs announce the entrance of large families or visiting districts, but the whip man is the one who tells dancers where to sit. The bells ring as dancers find their seats, and by this time The Drum has likely already been brought to the center of The Arbor, surrounded by a handful of singers casually sitting on metal folding chairs while they patiently wait for the dance to start, some of them smoking cigarettes and blowing it into the air as they visit with the other singers.

Then when it is time to start, without announcement the singers all scoot closer to The Drum and casually start the opening song--which is always the same song. At this point, The Drum starts coming to life and starts moving its energy across The Arbor, and out across the camps and village. Nobody dances on the opening song, but some dancers gently tap their

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moccasins on the dirt while they wait. As the singers finish that opening song, they immediately

begin the next song.

In this moment, the dancers stand up and two steps at a time they begin straight dancing

their way into an Osage kaleidoscope, an orientation of life which the power of The Drum carries

for us, along with the Drumkeeper and his family. It is a way of thinking, living, and

understanding that was given to us long ago, which we have cared for ever since. Uncle Eddy

Red Eagle Jr., an elder and the current head committeeman for the Wa.hax.oli^n district, explained

to me how the Kaw people gave us this dance when they were unable to sustain it themselves in

the late 1800s. They asked the Wah.ha.xoli^n people to carry it on for them, and our district took

it and "paid" for it by showing our appreciation through reciprocal giving in what he called a

"monumental event" which we have been able to keep in motion for over 125 years. The Zo^{n}zoli^n

district of the Osage Nation shares similar stories about how they received their drums from the

Kaws, while the Pasuli^n districts recieved theirs from the Poncas, but each host a dance in June

following the same general processes and procedures as the Wa.hax.oli^n district. Altogether, the

I^n.Lon.Schka takes place across these three districts throughout the month of June, and while

each district approaches the dance in their own respective ways, the general process remains

consistent as each district acts as a host.

Through generations of relocation and assimilationist policy,

I feel

extremely fortunate

that I am able to have this conversation.

and I credit the wisdom of my ancestors.

My elders always told me...

"They gave us everything we needed in this dance."

To move forward>>.

Therefore, through Pewewardy's model, when I reflect on my learning and consider what is needed to move forward, I have to redefine what "education" is beyond early childhood, K-12, and higher education classrooms. I have to ask, where are the learning spaces where I learned the most about being Osage...

...from Osages?

There are many answers to this question, but there is one obvious answer to many Osages:

Under The Arbor in June.

The Arbor is a special place, and every June it comes to life. It is the place where we put on our traditional clothes and ribbon work, dance to old songs, reunite with family and friends, cook old and new recipes over open fires, and engage in a level of camaraderie and community that is uniquely Osage. There are actually three physical arbors we dance under, one in each of the Osage districts, which host hundreds of dancers throughout June. I have participated in this dance most of my life, but I still have so much to learn because there is more to it than meets the eye, even when one participates.

There are deep roots in this dance,

roots that we can't always see because they aren't specifically discussed

and younger generations, like mine, lack some of the historical context

carried by our elder relatives.

The physical structures, the arbors, serve the same simple purpose in each district, to provide shelter and protect The Drum, Singers and Dancers, families and spectators from the sun and the rain. It ensures that the annual event can proceed, and that all the planning and process that goes into it bears the cultural and communal fruit it was intended to provide. Aside from a few exceptions, these arbors only get used once a year, but they are that important because they are the sites of our most important gathering. These three arbors are so important to Osages, that

we have continually upgraded them from old ceremonial roundhouses, to the new large modern structures the Osage Nation spent millions of dollars to build.

One time, I listened to my Uncle Charles Red Corn tell a story about the communal efforts that went into building a new arbor in Pawhuska during the sixties, the one I danced under while growing up. He talked about how the community came together for its construction, in a way that reiterated the important history of The Dance and a reminder of the ongoing effort exerted to keep The Dance going through each generation. He later reiterated this in a column for the Osage News (Red Corn, 2017), where he reflected on how much The Dance has grown by telling the story from the perspective an elder who has experienced the dance under three separate physical arbors in the Wa.hax.oli^n district. He told this story with the backdrop of a brand new Pawhuska arbor in 2015, a multi-million dollar effort which is an impressive physical display of the growth for the I^n.Lon.Schka. My son, named Wy.haw.ki by Uncle Charlie, was put into The Dance during the first Thursday afternoon session that year, under that new arbor. This was an important symbol for me to recognize the continuity of my family's connection to that place, and the energy and power that resides in those learning spaces.

Ever since I was a child, though, I listened to elders talk about being "Under the Arbor," The Arbor is a reference to much more than the physical shelter. It is a reference to everything that occurs underneath it, and just outside of it. Stating that I grew up "under The Arbor", something often said, is a signal that tells people I have grown up around traditional Osage ways. It tells people I have paid attention to elders during the dance, and seen how they conduct themselves. It means that I have watched, and listened carefully, when elders speak, when new dancers are brought in, and when people do giveaways and show reciprocal appreciation to one another. It means that I have paid attention to how elders act with humility, and how they

prioritized the dance itself, its processes and traditions, over personal matters. The Dance is more important than personal attention, greed, selfish concerns, or malicious feelings. Several times, I have heard elders talk about negative or selfish attitudes under The Arbor, and they implore to people...

"don't bring that in here"

or "leave that out there."

Under The Arbor, communal continuity and belonging is the priority, not the individual. These are the lessons taught. It's supposed to be a humble place, and it is supposed to represent some of the best versions of our communal existence. It is where the leaders in our community model the principle(s) of Wash.ka^n - doing the best they can, and doing their part - among others.

With this in mind, I have come to understand The Arbor as something much more than the physical structures that protect us from the sun and rain--The Arbor protects our Osage identities and our Osage ways. The Arbor is one of the primary Osage places of learning, and those cultural lessons serve as a shelter for Osage learning orientations--something that was put here by our ancestors for that precise purpose. That protection from settler-colonial influence is not air tight, but it is one of the best shelters we have. Under The Arbor, Osage cultural leaders make the rules and curriculum, and Osages leaders choose how to process them.

The dance continues to evolve, but decision-making is strategic and carefully debated amongst the committees and cultural advisors. Any decisions that threaten to change The Dance,

would be to alter the course and trajectory of traditional Osage education as established by our ancestors. This is why I have also heard elders say:

"Don't add to it, and don't take away from it,"

Outside of the dance, the rules, processes, and power dynamics are different, and can be adapted to mainstream education contexts. Under The Arbor, and around it, process and change are taken seriously, in order to protect learning pathways to our ancestor's orientations of thinking and the lessons they prioritized for us. Furthermore, while I do not carry all of the specific ceremonial processes to everything I do outside of the I[n].Lon.Schka, I have carried core lessons of respect, order, reciprocity, humility, and more, into my life outside as a student, student-athlete, professional, and family man. In other words, while the lessons under The Arbor are framed and delivered as traditions of the past, they do not stay in the past. These lessons carry me through the present, long after I pull the eagle feather out of my roach, and put our family ribbon work back into the cedar chest.

Outside of the I[n].Lon.Schka specific context, when I consider that I have an opportunity to "mentor learners who are also trying to decolonize their minds," (Pewewardy, 2017) it feels as though I am unqualified to do so. I am not an Osage elder, and that regularly weighs into my decisions--especially with what might be considered traditional Osage contexts. But building on this notion of critical curricular awareness, from a professional educational leadership perspective, I am comfortable talking about the topic of education--the processes and the profession. Through continued mentorship and through this writing, I have come to realize how

important it is in Indigenous communities to speak about *education* in terms beyond early childhood, K-12, and higher education contexts.

In professional contexts, we have been trained to separate the terms *education* and *culture*; and in fact, the Osage Nation does exactly this through department and division titles, roles and responsibilities. The Osage Nation Department of Education is primarily responsible for executing programs that work in conjunction with early childhood, K-12, and higher education contexts--mainstream American educational system contexts. Yet, in contrast, the Osage Language Department and Osage Nation Cultural Center are tasked with disseminating and maintaining Osage culture for future generations.

I see a disconnect here, and I previously overlooked it

     ...as a trained professional in the field of education.

The disconnect, is not necessarily a product of Osage Nation incompetence, more so, it is quite possibly a product of Osage adaptation. At one time, Osage Nation education and culture worked in tandem with one another in much stronger ways. Younger generations were prepared for life in the Osage Nation through complex clan systems, roles, and responsibilities which strengthened our interconnected accountability to one another.

When I went to visit with Uncle Eddy, a man who not only grew up under The Arbor, but in and among many other cultural institutions of the Osage people, it was clear that he was used to discussing these topics with individuals. In his office, with his own brand of passion and excitement while talking about the Osage people, he flipped through a pre-made PowerPoint on his laptop, making sure that I recognized...

     that the skills and values taught through our clan system was Osage education,

       and bringing his hands together to deliver the point, he emphasized,

Wa.hoi[n] keeps this all together.

Then, after resisting Euro-American religion and settlement for a long time (Burns, 2004; Rollings, 2004), a slowly evolving transition occurred where our old Osage ways were fractured and what used to be one working system was broken apart into defined spaces with names like *education*, *culture*, and *religion*. Over time, education came to represent the institutions that prepared young people for life in a Euro-American capitalist adulthood, and culture came to represent the Other traditions and customs that make us unique as Osage people.

Now, in this new state of awareness, I consider what the Osage Nation defines as *culture*, might also be labeled *education*, because separating *culture* and *education* reinforces the Otherness that signals to our citizens that these two do not go together. So, I consider the value in looking into our ever-evolving Osage traditions and *culture(s)* as pedagogical and andragogic spaces, and in doing so explore how to prompt Osage educational leaders to reconsider what *education* is, or can be, in the context of the Osage Nation. This does not mean that we should inappropriately and haphazardly remove these teachings from traditional learning contexts, but we at least need to acknowledge that Osage education is much more than a collection of bureaucratic programs.

In this effort, it is important to listen to our elders,

And as I have said before, they tell us

"they gave us everything we needed in the dance"

"That Dance," the I^n.Lon.Schka, is not the only Osage place of learning or the only continuation of Osage traditions, but it is the most visible. It is the primary annual gathering of our Nation.   But in my own reflection, my ongoing participation in this ceremony has generated, and protected, essential learning pathways that are typically not labeled as *education*--because it is not in a classroom or school. But when I was introduced to the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model, I was able to regenerate those pathways and consider different orientations from a professional educator's perspective. This is important because as I consider working with Indigenous educators who did not grow up with access to traditional spaces, I realize they may find it more difficult to engage in this re-orientation due to lack of learning in traditional contexts.

But I was fortunate. I have experienced the power of these traditions--and education--from an early age.   As a pale skinned, blue eyed, blond headed Osage fully engaged

I watched,

I listened,

and I learned

under The Arbor.

The Drum Carries Me

Although I spent the much of my life in Kansas away from the reservation and many Osage cultural learning environments, I was able to spend considerable amounts of time in, around, and under The Arbor. I listened, watched, and mimicked what I saw in that cultural classroom, but more importantly, it engaged me. I am still engaged, and I am still learning to this day. Every teacher knows that lessons will go nowhere if students are not engaged; this was not a problem for me underneath The Arbor. I was fully attentive the majority of the time, and

even more than that, I was downright enamored with everything about it, and giddy with anticipation every year as we approach(ed) the month of June. Since I was in elementary school, when the dance came near and we began opening up the cedar chests and pulling our wool broadcloth and ribbon work out of the dry-cleaning plastic from the previous year, we unleashed the Osage mothball-cedar air freshener into the room and my brain responded. This ignited a fire of anticipation for me, and still does, all triggered by the senses.

Smells like June.

Still as an adult, sometimes the hair on the back my neck tingles and a smirk comes across my face when nobody is in the room. Memories come back, like walking behind Papa in line with my brothers on our way to The Arbor from the modest house with the green roof just down the road in the village. I watched the eagle talons dangle from the handle of his golden eagle wing fan while I periodically looked down at the gravel road in order to strategically avoid the large rocks so they did not jab the bottom of my foot through the leather soles of my mocs. As we walked across the village road we passed more Red Corn family houses and as the bells on our legs rang with every step, my excitement grew. I was, and still am, eager to dance in the kaleidoscope of the senses with my extended family, my brothers, my district, and all my relatives.

Under The Arbor, with the consistent beat of The Drum, we circle around counter clockwise two steps at a time. Ribbonwork, yarnwork, and beadwork of all colors move with each pulse, bells ring in my ears, friends and relatives nod and smile at one another while shaking hands, and the smell of Osage mothball-cedar cologne begins to merge with the body

odor of the young and old dancing around me. As the sweat drips down my nose, in a good way, that feeling begins to swell inside of me. While each afternoon and evening session has energetic ebbs and flows, when dancing on a hot June day near the point of exhaustion, there are certain moments when the energy under The Arbor becomes something ineffable. As the songs continue to escalate in intensity, or when the head tail dancer circles his beaded dancing stick in the air to bring the dancers back out for another couple rounds, The Drum demands everyone's undivided attention. During this time, the mind takes over and the physical limitations of fatigue become secondary to the more important energies circulating under The Arbor. The Drum begins to tell me how to move, how to turn, how to step and how to bend at the waist, and most everyone around me seems to be in a similar state of mind, body, and soul. As The Dancers bells ring with each thundering strike of The Drum, and as everyone continues to bend, move, and turn, their ribbon work tail pieces and otter hides swing around and glide through the air. As each dancer continues dancing two steps at a time as if they are not carrying the weight of their own body, the energy transfers from the toes through the body until the tall black porcupine, deer tail, and turkey beard hair roach on top of everyone's head moves with each beat like the tallgrass prairie moves in the wind.   During these intense moments of the dance, when the consistent beat of The Drum seems to swell with power and singers hit that upper register, the euphoria becomes a beautiful juxtaposition of intensity, serenity, grace, and camaraderie, and it is like a new dimension is added to your life that was missing before. It is as if the creator cleared a new space in that moment for everyone to enjoy.

     ...and I don't usually talk like that.

        saying things like "The Creator,"

but it doesn't mean that I don't think like that at times,

or feel like that.

You have to be there to understand it. You have to

live it,

breath it.

see it,

and feel it.

And learn from it.

This is why the hair stands up on the back of my neck when I smell that Osage cologne.

The Drum,

the spirit within it,

and the power it carries.

It keeps my attention,

the dancing student.

The Drum is the center of the I^n.Lon.Schka, the focal point. Everything revolves around

it. The Drumkeeper takes care of it and helps organize the dance around it with the help of their

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committee. The singers sit around it, the dancers move around it, the families and spectators watch all of this unfold, and the cooks prepare food between sessions so that the singers and dancers can do it all again; so everyone continues to repeat the cook-eat-dance process over throughout the four days. In many ways, The Drum serves as the beating heart of the Osage people, and as Uncle Eddy Red Eagle Jr. explained to me with his animated hands, there is a power from Wah.Kon.Tah that comes through those singer's hands and through their voices, which is felt by all. That feeling is real.

This was reiterated by Uncle Henry Ben Harrison, my elder who used to tease me and call me *dimples* to get a rise out of me as a young boy running amuck around the village with my brothers. While visiting in his self-described modest living room and on his front porch, in what is one the most honest and gratifying conversations I had had in a long time, he smoked a cigarette and respectfully blew the smoke away from me, then implored to me while pointing to his chest, "you understand *that feeling* that comes with that dance, and not everyone gets that."

I felt the power of The Drum since I was a child. That was what drew me in and engaged me, called me to pay attention.

To watch.

To listen.

I listened to elders talk about how

The Drum will "carry you,"

and it does.

As an adult, however, I see a bigger picture. The Drum carried me not only through The Dances, but it has carried my Indigeneity through my mainstream education systems and helped keep clear curricular paths open for me in this slowly evolving critical Indigenous re-orientation. The Drum--and all of learning that surrounds it--has always been a well-established curricular trail in my life, a robust and dynamic pedagogical and andragogic space created by my ancestors to make sure I always knew how to get back to our Osage specific orientations. The Drum is what engaged me, and The Arbor and everything surrounding it was my classroom, which not only protected me from the sun and rain during The Dance, it protected my Indigeneity from complete submersion and assimilation into Eurocentric mindsets--those mainstream orientations. As we moved off the reservation in a search for educational and financial opportunity in pursuit of the American Dream, my family and community ensured that the trail was maintained, so I always knew how to get back. We physically drove the highways across our ancestral lands, gazing out the windows of our sub-mediocre automobiles while we watched the prairies and cross-timbers pass. With our dance clothes tucked away in old boot boxes in the back, we made our way back to the reservation to reconnect with the power and place (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) found within our Osage communities and under The Arbor.

The Drum, and the space it creates, allowed me to see non-Eurocentric orientations even before I was introduced to Dr. Pewewardy. It gave me substance and a spirituality so that I always understood that being Osage was much more than citing blood quantum pedigrees, but it is also much more than just showing up in June. No matter how much I shuttled between dissonant boundaries of Whiteness, Osageness, and more, The Drum carried my Indigeneity through the cul-de-sacs of the suburbs, through the mostly White hallways and campuses of high school and college, and its power never let me go. Throughout that process, I picked up on the

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emphasis and realities of capitalism, individualism and competition, but The Drum ensured that it was not my only learning orientation, and that there were more dimensions to life than the suburban American dream.

When living in Kansas City, we returned to the reservation frequently, and always attended the I^n.Lon.Schka--repetitiously commuting across those curricular trails. When we went to the suburbs for opportunity and stability, we got exactly that in the Eurocentric sense of jobs and high-quality college and career ready education; but geographically speaking, we also distanced ourselves from our Osage community making it difficult to maintain consistent ties to Osage worldviews. The I^n.Lon.Schka and our annual return to visit The Drum and dance through class under The Arbor, ensured that we did not lose those ways and we did not get absolutely submerged in a Eurocentric mindset. As my brothers and I got older, we started attending more of the I^n.Lon.Schka sessions in more of the districts, so we could continue to re-engage with those lessons before we returned to our world that was more focused on preparing for the work force, maintaining grades and jobs, and studying Eurocentric curricula.

When we hit college and young adulthood, the choice became ours as individuals and not just something that our family did together. We were all on different schedules, and drove down to the reservation when we could, and for the most part we maintained that strong link. Making sure to reconnect with the Osage community was not always convenient, but it was important. Mainstream life was rolling along and new opportunities were around every corner. I played in metal bands and coached wrestling on the side before I became a teacher. My brothers stayed busy as well. Ryan joined me in some of my bands as the lead singer/screamer, while he also started his own graphics and t-shirt business before establishing himself as a bonafide Indian-famous comedian in the 1491s, a sketch comedy troupe. Jon began his career as an architect and

community designer while also coaching youth wrestling, and Studie was heavily involved in student politics and then started a career as a Civil Engineer before moving on to graduate school in the field of bio-chemical engineering. Life just simply gets busy for us all. Easily, at any point, we could have stopped attending and fallen into the status quo of mainstream America. But re-engaging with The Drum, and listening to the lessons under The Arbor remained a priority. The Drum did not let go--its power remained--it kept us engaged and brought us back to our elders and community

However, while we were undergrads, Dr. Pewewardy invited us over to his house to teach us how to sing around The Drum. My brothers and I, along with several other young men in the area crossed the railroad tracks into North Lawrence and crammed into his modest living room. Crowding around his yellow drum between his TV and couch, we shook hands and acknowledged one another, and after a little bit of visiting we slowly started with an opening song. We listened to Dr. Pewewardy lead, and then we did our best to follow...

We were terrible, but it was gratifying.

At no fault to Dr. Pewewardy,

the beat was sporadic and clumsy.

We semi-gloriously, and somewhat tragically

mumbled our way through the entire thing.

As I am sure some early listeners - maybe even his neighbors -

may have thought we were being so spiritual about it that

we were sporadically wailing, maybe crying,

But we were just singing...ish.

...and learning.

With Dr. Pewewardy leading,

    We would listen to some other songs on a cassette tape for a couple of rounds,

        and then give a try.

        Then practice, and repeat.

After several songs, we took a break and ate some homemade chili from a crock-pot, and laughed with each other at the dining room table about our superbly novice skill set. We then would crowd back into his living room, pass around a bag of Hall's mentho-lyptus cough drops to keep our throats wet, and then we start the process over again.

But we repeated this process for a couple years, and although we never rolled into a Powwow and acted like we knew what we were doing, we got better, and we learned. Some of us eventually acquired our own Drums, and starting meeting up with one another even if Dr. Pewewardy was not available. We even set up in the middle of the Kansas University campus one time and sang in protest of Columbus Day, letting our songs echo across the stone buildings in the heart of campus, at least before the unappreciative professors trying to conduct class put an end to it. Although we were proud of our protest efforts, we were not insurgent enough to push

back too hard, we wanted to stay in good academic standing...and graduate. Regardless, this instilled a level of pride--and comfort in that pride --that nobody else had provided for me within my schools. But Dr. Pewewardy's initial invitation kicked that off, and brought me back to the Drum in non-Osage specific contexts. This type of education, and these learning orientations, are often something that the majority of mainstream educators cannot provide. But...

As usual, The Drum kept my attention in this new context

and it found it's way into my car stereos and CD players,

and later in my Pandora stations.

The Drum had found me (or us) in new ways, in a new learning context. We had gone to powwows and other social events throughout life, but my primary connection to The Drum was through the I^n.Lon.Schka. I really enjoyed this time around The Drum during college because I have never been a singer at the I^n.Lon.Schka.

My father, who is actually a good singer and grew up heavily involved in music and theater, is not a singer at the I^n.Lon.Schka. He is a cook, and that is his specific job and role in during the dances.

Our elders always tell us, and what I interpret to be one of the primary lessons:

Everyone has a role,

Everyone does their part.

I can learn old recipes from Dad, even though he will likely refer me to another elder for confirmation, and I can ask questions about how to do things around those fires while cooking old recipes in our old kettles; but he is not someone I would ask to teach me old songs, or teach me about The Drum. Our family has a history of being committee members to help organize the dance, and although I have family members who sing and know many of the songs, they do not necessarily serve in the formal position of being a Singer. If I did ask, my father would likely have referred me to someone else, a different teacher--an elder.

But being so far away, our opportunities to be mentored around The Drum were fewer and further between. That's where Dr. Pewewardy came in. I did not have to ask, he invited my brothers and some other students and young men in the community over to his house to teach us. He is not Osage, but he actually spent some time learning from an Osage singer. Dr. Pewewardy taught us songs that were old, songs that were new, some that were light hearted, and more. We were all, for the most part, novice singers in this context (even though I had spent six years in choir), and he made us feel comfortable as we learned from him--and practiced.

It is important to understand that as a real pale Indian I carried a strong fear of criticism in intertribal contexts outside of the I^n.Lon.Schka, whether it was warranted or not, and The Drum in this phase of my life helped alleviate some of this. I felt increasingly comfortable engaging in my Indigeneity in ways that I wanted, especially outside of our dance and other Osage contexts. I was well aware that Indian country has to deal with so many cultural imposters, like hobbyists who love Indians so much they like to pretend to be Indian, and Boy Scout Mic-o-says who claim to have received their Indian identity from the problematic Order of the Arrow. Cultural inauthenticity can be spotted from a mile away in these social circles, especially around something so culturally central as The Drum, and as a pale skinned Osage, I

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knew that I had to be prepared to pass through that filter of analysis when meeting strangers in intertribal contexts. From my experience, people who have grown up in and around Indigenous communities recognize the awkwardness of an imposter in the room rather quickly, and for me, this created insecurity. I never want(ed) to be the one in the room that does or says something wrong about an Indigenous cultural context. Growing up under The Arbor comes with significant pressure to do things the *right way*, and in a way, I realize that I am one of the many carrying these ways into the future, and I do not want to be the one to mess up Osage traditions. At least that is how I processed it. So, the social pressure to do things the *right way* has a ripple effect, and as a young person I just tried to do as told and not mess it up. It is unlikely I would have invited myself to sing around the drum with peers. As with most things in Osage and other Indigenous cultures, it is often more appropriate to be invited.

I have always been a fairly confident person in my non-Indigenous social circles. I was captain of the Wrestling team, I played in bands where I would regularly get on stage and confidently engage in an un-orchestrated and less than majestic collection of dance moves and over the top neck calisthenics, and I had no issues speaking up in class. However, as a young adult, if I walked into an inter-tribal social context (non-Osage) my outgoing personality did not match how I acted in my mainstream American social circles.

But maybe it's not lack of confidence,

maybe its sociocultural shapeshifting.

Since, through the I$^{\text{n}}$.Lon.Schka, I often learned to prioritize

listening,

observation,

and waiting...

until I was invited, or called upon.

Those opportunities are fewer and further between when in the suburbs, and in

predominantly White educational environments.

The probability of exposure to these contexts are minimal.

But Dr. Pewewardy was a welcome

outlier.

Within mainstream learning contexts,

he cleared off those curricular learning pathways that led to The Drum,

mowing through the tallgrass the way I mow my overgrown suburban

lawn.

so he could carry me, or at least let The Drum do so,

outside of I^n.Lon.Schka contexts,

outside of The Arbor.

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This allowed me to live comfortably as an Indigenous person in mainstream education,

     and it felt good.

As I graduated with a bachelor's, and started my teaching job, our Drum group fizzled

out as we all moved on with our lives. But, it was great learning experience that helped foster

my Indigenous identity through my early 20s. But then, American Dream life continued to

happen, and I began my professional and family life throughout the rest of my twenties, and even

though I was not sitting around that Drum like I did with Dr. Pewewardy, it continued to find its

way into my stereos and playlists. Still, my early professional teaching life entered a state of

status quo preservation for several years. Of course, every June, I continued to attend class

underneath and around The Arbor with my family, and now, I was bringing my daughter and son

with me. This was a plateau in my life as far as growth in my Indigenous identity. At least until I

entered my doctoral work in my early thirties.

But The Drum was still there, carrying me. It is what pulls our people, and families,

together. It protected and fostered my Indigeneity up to this moment of critical reorientation,

and allowed me to better understand that process, as it had already blazed several well-

established learning pathways. It engaged me in lessons under The Arbor, and kept my attention

better than any teacher I have ever had. Without it, I am not sure I would have made it to this

moment where I am now allowing these lessons to expand to other fields found in and around

my identity, where Indigeneity becomes more than just a reservation tucked away in the

periphery.

A new version of balance has found its way into my thinking.

And in turn,

The power of the Drum,

and all of the lessons under The Arbor,

continue to be a primary influence on my curricular

and interpersonal,

approach to ONELA.

Critically Analyzing the Separation of Education and Culture

Reflecting on my own transformational processes as exposed through the lens of

Pewewardy's model, I find there is a need for Osage educational leaders to develop a critical

awareness of the influence that mainstream education systems and curricula have on us.

Embedded in this, is a need to keenly recognize when Osage programs are being copied from

non-Osage institutions without critically analyzing how it may be reinforcing an entirely

Westernized identity, instead of Indigenizing the program with Osage specific qualities. For

example, if the Osage Nation were to open up a chapter for 4-H or Future Farmers of America,

and execute these curricula without modifying it to fit Osage specific contexts, this would only

serve to further foster student identities mostly around settler-colonial contexts, and would

ultimately serve as a missed opportunity for the developing Osage specific place-based identities

through educational programming. These programs can be beneficial for Osage children in our

modern entangled contexts, but they also must be filtered through a critical lens and

subsequently modified to Osage specific sociocultural needs. Congruently, it is imperative that Osage educational leaders be aware that as long as the Osage Nation relies on non-Osage institutions to educate their citizens, there will continue to be a slow erosion of collective Osage identity as generations pass and settler-colonial visions of education continue to unfold. For example, the Osage Nation scholarship program dedicates massive resources for Osages to attend school in non-Osage institutions across the United States. This can be good for growth and development in a capitalist settler-colonial context--a context in which Osage people must regularly operate--but if scholarship recipients are not also asked to engage in Osage specific curricula to foster an Osage specific identity, this might serve to weaken Osage communal identity over the long term and ultimately fulfill the original settler-colonial goals of assimilation.

In and across these learning contexts, when exploring how to construct educational leadership curricula for the ONELA, foundational to this effort is the reality that students not only need to develop a degree of critical consciousness to inform their leadership efforts, but they must also be exploring their formal and informal Osage learning environments which often lie in the peripheries of their "education". The above narratives about The Arbor and The Drum exemplify this type of reflection, and just as my reflections inform part of the curricular construction during the academy, the emerging educational leaders in the academy must build from their own lived experiences as well. Therefore, curricula and corresponding assignments in the academy often prompt these emerging leaders to interact with relatives, elders and culturally knowledgeable community members, and then reflect on the educational value of many "cultural" events and Osage learning spaces (I^n.lon.schka, hand games, naming ceremonies, feasts, etc). Furthermore, students must also be asked to explore appropriate ways to incorporate

these knowledges into community education development, with an emphasis on making sure that these efforts are culturally appropriate. For example, using technology in education can be a tricky topic when considering that audio and visual recording devices are restricted in some Osage cultural settings; therefore, as we began our coursework emphasizing digital leadership in education, we started with a discussion about culturally relevant protocols and ethics while using technology in Osage education. Collectively, as I reflect on the intersection of Transformational Indigenous Praxis, my personal reflections in and out of Osage and non-Osage learning environments, and my work with ONELA, these are some of the specific considerations related to curriculum construction in Osage education that I find pertinent to capacity building efforts.

In more general terms, my efforts to remap my learning as inspired by Pewewardy's Model, have also prompted me to critically analyze the nominal gap used in the Osage Nation bureaucracy between the terms "education" and "culture". Subsequently, I have tried to bring this critical awareness to ONELA, and prompt Osage educational leaders in training to re-map their thinking about these two terms through my curricular decisions. I'm always cognizant of Deloria and Wildcat's (2001) words when they discuss how professional education prompts some to, "leave their Indian heritage behind and adopt the vocabulary and concepts of non-Indian educators and bureacrats, following along like so many sheep" (p. 153). In many ways, I resemble this comment. Adapting away from this notion is much harder than it looks, which is why the use of the term *entanglement* in Osage contexts (Dennison, 2012) has been so productive for me. But it also does not mean that we cannot pick away at the knot and undo as much as we can.

So, more than ever before, when I began to reflect on Pewewardy's model, it reignited traditional learning pathways and forced me to think of traditional spaces across the community

as *education*, not just *culture.* Often, in the Osage Nation, many talk about these concepts as separate entities.

Education   and   Culture

This gap appears to be closing in some Osage Nation programs in both big and small ways. The recent development of an Osage language immersion school and the Wah.Zha.Zhi Early Learning Academies are a good examples of this happening in a larger program development context, as these programs have merged the structures, curricula, policies, and systems of early childhood education while incorporating Osage specific components to foster Osage specific identities and skill sets for students. On a smaller scale, in educational programs that are not framed as having an Osage specific qualities (aside from the Osage Nation being the administrative body), there are also small Osage cultural additions being made. For example, recently the Osage Nation Education Department hosted their first ever science fair, and decided to incorporate use of Osage language as a one of many requirements in the judging criteria. As a judge for the event, I noticed that some students haphazardly and sometimes awkwardly added Osage text and language to their science project display boards, but when asked, they also told stories of going to people in their respective environments and asking questions about the Osage language--something they likely wouldn't have done unless the educational leaders creating the program included these language requirements in the judging criteria. Over time, these seeds can grow into something more as the students get older. Overall, Osage leaders are beginning to build a stronger bridge between education and culture in exciting ways.

However, on a fundamental level, Osage Education and Culture are separated by name throughout the bureaucracy, where *education* efforts are often linked up with federal, state, and local school systems, while *cultural preservation* efforts are most often associated with the knowledges and language found in traditional spaces. Consider the notion that mainstream American culture and education are entirely intertwined, and how Osage students attending mainstream institutions are exposed to these American cultural curriculum trails while having less exposure to Osage learning pathways. At this point of our Osage entanglements, cultural vitality and education efforts demand a need to merge Osage cultural learning pathways with the larger systems

This prompts important questions that Osage education leaders must ask:

How can we appropriately merge education and culture?

Can we use Dennison's ribbon work metaphor to help assist in this effort?

Can this be an educational leadership vision for Osage Education moving forward?

These questions are easier to ask than answer, because although Osage Nation educators are quickly adding new programs in education, there are capacity issues leftover from generations of settler-colonial influence. At the core, there is not only a shortage of Osage educators (in the sense of being trained and credentialed for service in the mainstream system), but most of them are trained through mainstream institutions where they are rarely prompted to critically analyze settler-colonialism, study Indigenous education contexts, or study Osage specific topics. Since teaching and learning is the technical core of any educational system (Hoy

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& Miskel, 2013), this is fundamental hindrance to providing quick solutions to the above problem. If one is to merge education and culture, it needs to happen at the educational leadership levels, AND at the technical teaching and learning core of the system. That, demands a unique and highly focused approach to training for educational leaders and teachers.

Thus, to move forward within this reality, Dennison's (2012; 2013) ribbon work metaphor is once again productive. Educational leaders will have to continue exploring ways to merge people and programs with professional, technical, and pedagogical knowledge in education systems with learning spaces which are rich with traditional cultural knowledges. Of particular importance, are the professional development mechanisms for educational training. Since the teaching and learning component is the technical core of educational organizations, if Osage educational leaders generate programming which leverage accredited educator training programs for the pedagogical and professional knowledge, and simultaneously inject curricula that fosters an Osage specific teaching identity and skill set, this has the potential to generate exponential results. If a small handful of these educators start working in the local schools, they might more appropriately foster Osage specific identities in their students, who then grow up and become knowledgeable Osage professionals--possibly teachers--and continue to contribute in their own respective ways. Beyond a professional development context, this same approach can be made at all levels of school. If these qualities are woven together in an appropriate manner, then there is higher likelihood that the Osage Nation will be generating educational programming that is more appropriate for satisfying the critical questions above.

Therefore, with limited human and professional capacities to merge these programs in one space of praxis, Osage educational leaders must be able to 1) critically analyze the curricula and professional skills found in existing Osage programs, 2) continue developing our own

programs and curricula with an education-culture praxis merger as part of the vision, and 3) critically analyze the curricula and professional skills of educational institutions which influence Osage students (i.e. non-Osage schools where Osage students are taught).

Often, as Osage leaders work with non-Osage institutions, these outside institutions are generally not always opposed to, or entirely resistant to, doing whatever they can to help. However, resources are limited, and often the teachers and leaders in these institutions lack the skill set or basic Osage understandings to generate culturally responsive curricula specific to the needs of the Osage Nation. Therefore, Osage educational leaders will have to generate conditions for interest convergence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012)--or find ways to align non-Osage interests with Osage interests--in order to ignite the fire needed to generate meaningful change within these educational systems. The Osage Nation has already taken such steps across various systems, such as paying for employees to work in the local public schools in both language and education advocate contexts, but there are many more angles to consider, and they are not just financial. For example, from a public relations standpoint, a poor school report card from the state department of education showing demographic discrepancies for student success can generate a negative image of the school brand, which in turn might prompt action. Additionally, from political standpoint, federal grant mechanisms for American Indian education have increasing accountability measures which require the creation of parent and community oversight committees who might be able to influence the process. While this is inherently tied to the financial piece, these committees can hold political influence, as well. This need for interest convergence in Osage education contexts is an intriguing topic for future study in Osage specific contexts moving forward.

In general, if Osage educational leaders continue process *education* and *culture* as separate bureaucratic and sociocultural entities, we will struggle to make space for Osage ways to move and adapt into the future. This work must be approached in a delicate manner, and leaders should always consider when it might be inappropriate to take Osage cultural lessons out of their traditional learning contexts, but this is some of the work which needs to be done in order to move forward. Like ribbon work, this requires an eye on keeping these efforts balanced. Moving forward, these are motivating factors for myself as I practice the art of academic ribbon work with ONELA, and work with the emerging educational leaders in the Osage Nation. In this sense, we are growing together.

Conclusion

In my new position of influence in Osage education, Pewewardy's Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model has allowed me to map my own learning pathways in and out of traditional environments and mainstream institutions while I am simultaneously working to generate Osage specific educational leadership curricula. Through this effort, I have come to recognize that our cultural and educational systems, at least the ones controlled by the Osage Nation, should not always be processed as two entirely separate terms, and as educational leaders develop new visions for educational programming, our traditional cultural spaces and the knowledges associated with them might also be labeled as "education" in the most normalized manner possible. This does not mean that we, by default, haphazardly roll Osage cultural knowledges into the mainstream educational systems, because this potentially decontextualizes important learning pathways and erodes some of meaning in the translation. However, this does prompt a need to consider appropriate ways to generate academic ribbon work amongst our traditional and mainstream education options. In turn, these efforts will decrease the Otherness of

our cultural institutions and learning spaces, and help re-center our educational systems and the

minds of our citizens in a more appropriate manner, while accommodating our complex

modernity.

And each new program should reflect a balanced ribbon work pattern with

unique Osage qualities,

that move us into the future.

Chapter 4 - American Indian Mascots: Shapeshifting between Educational Leadership and Critical Paradigms

Introduction

The difficult part about dramatically shifting my orientation of thinking towards critical Indigenous perspectives is that I still need to revert back to my orientations as a student and teacher practitioner to better understand the big picture of our educational systems. These are the thinking spaces where I considered these critical social topics for the first time--critical consciousness entry points--and there is value in following that trail of lived experiences in order to explore the construction of a more productive bridge between literature and praxis in social justice efforts. Additionally, this also serves to demonstrate how a linear path to enlightenment, a very Western approach to education, does not always work. Rather, this exercise demonstrates the value in cycling back through our lived experiences to consider a multiplicity of past and present sociocultural positionalities, instead of framing our learning as a linear trajectory towards enlightenment, or a path to knowledge superiority in a hierarchy of knowledge attainment through academia.

Thus, here I engage in professional educator shapeshifting while cycling back from a highly critical academic position to a practitioner tone more suited for conversations with mainstream educational leaders, teachers, and school-community stakeholders. My aim is to model the language needed for entry point conversations suited for educational leadership classrooms, and conference rooms found in schools, not in the critical rafters of academia. In doing so, I hope this educational leadership code-shifting exercise back into practitioner language and orientations will help generate change in our educational systems.

Furthermore, this chapter is also specifically intended to be a starting point for educational leaders who are facing the issue of American Indian themed mascots and are looking for baseline perspectives that are lacking in their own lived experiences and formal learning. To this aim, I frame the mascot conversation in practitioner educational leadership contexts to better synchronize the issue with the paradigms of people making the decisions. Informed by my own lived experiences in and across my ethnographic ribbons, I specifically position this dialogue around the language of the School Improvement Standard (#10) in the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leadership (PSEL, formerly ISLLC, 2008) as written by National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015), while also incorporating some of the McREL 21 leadership responsibilities (Waters & Cameron, 2007) so commonly known across the field of educational leadership. Founded in research, these are the premiere standards that inform educational leadership programming and practice across the nation, and therefore an appropriate context to bring American Indian mascot conversations from the margins--critical and Indigenous academia--and force it into the mainstream.

I remember stepping out of the mainstream and out into the critical fields of academia,

I remember...

    being urged to look at Critical Race Theory for the first time

        ...and thinking

I don't want to get caught up in all this,

      I just want to study Indian education and   move forward>

I

    dislike

        the

           downward

        spiral of

     criticizing,

overanalyzing,

     blaming,

        deconstructing,

           and finger pointing.

             and help rethink how to move forward >.

          something to stop the bleeding,

       something new,

    construct

   need to

  we

It gets to a point where

No matter how critical my writing gets, this is my own trail to follow back.

   I find,

      this is easier said than done.

But if I fail to acknowledge the need to re-orient myself to the education

practitioner world,

I am choosing to ignore the most logical space for changing praxis,

even if it is not always a fertile area conducive to new growth.

Code shifting back, might be way to burn off some of the entangled overgrowth,

to make way for new growth to find the sun.

American Indian mascots have provided me with some of those critical entry points and a clear trail of confrontations I have made over the years. For me, mascots have always been a never-ending entanglement--always lurking--forcing me to look in the mirror and ask hard questions. Only recently, have I been able to sort out my thoughts in a way that I am confident in publicly confronting the awkward mess that American Indian themed mascots create. However, I now see a disconnect, where educational practitioners encounter research on mascots, with an abyss of practical lived experience with American Indians between them and the findings.

Indigenous minded

academics are

over here.

Well-meaning

educational practitioners are

over here.

With a whole lot of

critical jargon

and lived experiences

in between.

This is a disconnect I am struggling with.

The bridge building used to be easier before I tapped into the critical,

but it was also less impactful.

Now I am more disruptive,

and I am not used to that.

I now notice stakeholders in boardrooms looking at me as if I am

angry

confrontational

and abrasive.

I'm not used to that.

And now that I have finally dove into the literature as a graduate student,

I am more confident in my vision for change,

and I have chosen to speak up in places

where actual power is brokered,

only to find that some think that the literature is mostly

burdensome to their efforts.

A nuisance.

This is agitating.

Imagine that,

American Indians as a nuisance to settler-colonial systems.

Sounds familiar.

Nonetheless, this is still the reality of the power structures, which makes code-shifting an important tool for negotiation, because when it comes to American Indian themed mascots in schools, my experience has taught me that even though the literature and research is clear in stating that imagery and learning environments that mascots generate are harmful and problematic in a variety of ways (American Psychological Association, 2005; Costagno & Lee, 2007; Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008; Kim-Prieto, Goldstein, Okazaki, & Kirschner, 2010; Pewewardy, 1999, 2000, 2004; Stegman & Phillips, 2014; U.S. Department of Education and White House Initiative on American Indian Alaskan Native Education, 2015), there is a wide disconnect between critical academia and the practical realities administrators face. Educational leaders are taught to consider respect for diversity and make ethical decisions with social justice in mind, which is good. However, when it comes to mascots, educational leaders and community members tend to respond with disbelief when hearing such accusations of dysconcious White racism (Pewewardy, 2000), and concerns about having a hostile learning environment (Baca, 2004). As evident by the continued prevalence of mascots, it is clear that educational leaders are willing to overlook, ignore, or cast doubt upon this research and literature when making decisions.

Why?

While intriguing, I actually do not intend to address this question here at this time, but I do intend to help build a bridge across it. In reality, many of these leaders are in predominantly non-Indigenous communities, with minimal exposure to Indigenous populations, where they are wrestling with complex questions about modern American Indian realities which they have likely

never been asked to confront. In general, Indigenous peoples are largely represented in marginalized and narrow pre-1900 contexts to the mainstream world through educational curricula (Journell, 2009; Shear, 2015; Shear, et al., 2015), leaving cultural fairs and the mainstream media--including mascots--to help fill in these gaps of ignorance in narrow, caricatured, and incomplete ways (Hoffman, 2012). Simultaneously, educational leaders are processing the practical considerations which ripple through their systems--financial costs to rebrand, considering phases of institutional change, practical issues with management and operations, a shift in school culture and challenges to school "traditions," public relations, collecting data, democratic processes, collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, and more. These pressures are real, and no matter what the research and literature says, for educational practitioners, research is only one piece of a highly complex leadership reality.

Focusing on School Improvement: Positioning Mascots in Educational Leadership Standards

This section offers practical considerations for educational leaders encountering American Indian mascot issues by focusing on school improvement with emphasis on systems thinking and informed decision making. Each discussion is framed with the following in mind: First, each consideration correlates specifically with one or more indicators from the PSEL (2015) School Improvement standard (#10), with the most relevant indicators placed at the top of the section. Even if is not discussed specifically, the corresponding dialogue is intended to position the mascot issue in that specific context and be interpreted as such. Second, educational leaders often begin to engage in this topic as response to a potential, or already developing, public relations crisis in which their American Indian mascot is being challenged; in turn, this is often followed by an effort to generate internal and external stakeholder dialogue through the

formation of committees or outreach programs. I have recently been invited to participate with three such district level stakeholder dialogue panels across the state of Kansas, and the practical considerations outlined below are written as if an educational leader is also in the process of constructing a these committees and platforms for internal and external stakeholders to dialogue on the topic. Together, these two components inform the content of these practical considerations.

For context, The Professional Standards for Educational Leadership (National Policy Board for Educational Adminstration, 2015), by design, are intended to forward a "theory-of-action" (p. 6) approach which influences various components of our system such as policy, higher education, professional associations, public expectations, and leadership practice. Furthermore, these new standards are intentionally framed as guiding best practice in the profession in a future-oriented context, one that is more adaptive to ongoing changes in our society and systems. This dynamic is fertile ground for American Indian mascot change considering any leadership conversations on the topic have a corresponding conversation about change and school improvement. Specifically, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) states that:

> The 2015 Standards adopt a future-oriented perspective. While they are grounded in the present, they are aspirational, recognizing that the changing world in which educational leaders work today will continue to transform—and the demands and expectations for educational leaders along with it. The 2015 Standards envision those future challenges and opportunities so educational leaders can succeed in the future. (p. 3)

To reinforce this point, the NPBEA describes ideal leaders as future-oriented thinkers focused on improved student learning in the technical core our systems. Furthermore, they implore that good leaders "subject every realm of the school to improvement, including themselves and their own work"(p. 4), and they go even further to describe them as "tenacious change agents who are creative, inspirational and willing to weather the potential risks, uncertainties and political fall-out to make their schools places where each student thrives" (p. 4). These are not only ideal leadership dispositions in general, but these are the brave and forward-thinking leadership qualities needed to tackle the issue of American Indian mascots.

Finally, to further emphasize this forward-thinking vision, this set of leadership standards were revised to add a new emphasis on school improvement that was not previously highlighted in the 2008 version (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). Specifically, this new School Improvement standard states that "effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (p. 18), and this standard is further articulated by ten indicators which illustrate with specificity what effective school improvement leadership looks like under this standard. Additionally, a common response to American Indian mascots is "why is this such a problem now" or "why hasn't this been an issue in the past," and this frame of forward thinking vision of continuous school improvement allows leaders to look past these unproductive and reactionary comments, and do what is best for the school and their students in the long term. This standard, and these indicators, are a primary influence for the practical considerations outlined below.

Practical Consideration 1: Adopting a Systems Perspective

The following indicators from the National Policy Board for Educational Administrators (2015) are relevant to the topics discussed in this section, as they state under their School Improvement standard (#10) that effective leaders:

b) Use methods of continuous improvement to achieve the vision, fulfill the mission, and promote the core values of the school...

h) Adopt a systems perspective and promote coherence among improvement efforts and all aspects of school organization, programs, and services. (p. 18)

Developing systems thinking is one of the primary goals of educational leadership training, and mascot controversies are no different. If an internal or external stakeholder is new to this conversation, it is likely that they have never dug deep enough to get to the core of this issue. Not because they are unintelligent, outwardly racist, or knowingly hostile to American Indians as a person; but because they have had minimal exposure to American Indians throughout their lifetime, and if they have, they likely only studied American Indians as intriguing and exotic feather wearing people of the past--not adaptable people in the present. This is because educational institutions often have multiple curricular weaknesses related to American Indian perspectives, at all levels, and often do not do an adequate job of preparing our students and teachers to understand modern Indian Country. This is true for K-12 (Shear et al., 2015), as well as professional educator training programs (Lees, 2016; Reyhner & Jacobs, 2002), and there is evidence that there are clear disconnects between American Indian cultures, school curricula, curricular resources, and teacher skills sets (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Therefore, mascots are a multi-layered education systems issue that is entangled into

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many other American Indian issues in education, and it is not an isolated public relations topic, as it is often treated.

When this systems lens is used, it generates a need to reassess curriculum, professional development, educator training programs, school traditions and culture, school branding, and more. In turn, this generates a need for a multi-faceted school improvement program, or alignment with and/or modification of one that already exists. Due to the system-wide implications for change, this is a daunting task for educational leaders, which is likely why change is so slow even after research continues to prove that mascots and stereotypical American Indian branding are harmful. But as leaders confront American Indian mascots issues by forming committees to generate dialogue among internal and external stakeholders, it is accurate to frame mascot conversations as such--a systems issue.

However, because this is a systems issue and there are many layers and angles to consider for school improvement--it is rather unrealistic for school administrators, teachers, and community members to thoroughly sort through it all in what might be considered an acceptable time period. It took me the better part of 5-10 years to begin truly understanding the role American Indian mascots play in schools--and I am an American Indian educator. So, for an educational leader to be encountering the American Indian mascot issue in their system, the leadership has a responsibility to generate a vision and focus when considering the initiation of second-order change to the system (Waters & Cameron, 2007). To do so, the following three items should be considered early and often in the deliberation process.

Products of the system: Most stakeholders are unaware and unprepared. In general, most of mainstream society (community members, students, teachers, and educational leaders) endured the limited curriculum mentioned above, and consequently know little about American

Indians, especially in modern contexts. Aside from programs which emphasize anthropology, ethnic studies, or Indigenous studies, few degree programs go in depth on topics which would help people understand the complex modern existence of American Indians and our respective entanglements. It is also important to recognize that these specific social science courses are often not offered in middle/secondary school environments, and if so, they are likely an elective and not a required course. Coming out of college with a comprehensive social studies teaching certificate, I remember noticing that I was qualified to teach high school anthropology in the state of Kansas, but felt entirely unprepared to do so. I was immensely uncomfortable with the thought that I might be asked to teach it, but also felt rather confident that it would not be offered at any school I might apply. In other words, as leaders solicit stakeholder's input, most of the individuals invited to the table likely have minimal exposure to the critical conversations surrounding American Indian issues in education, including mascots. They likely come to the table with the limited stereotypical knowledge that the mascot itself reproduces. This does not mean that community stakeholders lack the ability to engage in these critical thought processes, it is just less likely that they have been prompted to do so through our educational systems, or by knowledgeable individuals within those systems.

Additionally, after generations of U.S. Government and religious missionary efforts to assimilate American Indians into mainstream society, there are many American Indians who are detached from their local cultures and traditions, and these individuals also learn about Indigenous peoples through the same educational systems. Consequently, just because people can claim affiliation with a native nation, automatically interpreting that they are knowledgeable representatives for all 560 plus native nations across the United States is problematic. Even

American Indians who grow up close to their cultures can have minimal exposure to the critical dialogue, research, and literature on the topic.

Ultimately, as leaders consider generating stakeholder dialogue and input, they might also consider the possible systemic ignorance on American Indian topics throughout their decision-making process. This is also why it is important to seek input from *knowledgeable, informed, and critically conscious* American Indian educators who have experience engaging in these topics. In doing so, though, it is important to be cognizant that the power dynamics often in play, and how these knowledgeable individuals are essentially being asked to speak for all American Indians. Furthermore, this invitation to speak can at times be used as over-simplistic justification that robust dialogue occurred, only to turn around and allow a non-Indian majority state that they sought American Indian input on the topic, before democratically casting their majority votes on decisions that implicates American Indians. This will be discussed in more detail in below in *Practical Consideration 2: Making Informed Decisions and Maintaining Focus on Student Learning*. But as leaders look to find input from knowledgeable and critically conscious American Indian leaders, they might also seek out public statements from professional organizations such as the National Indian Education Association and Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (and many more) since they have more experience engaging in these topics through scholarship and research--not simply personal reflection, or time spent reading opinion columns in the local newspaper which tend to carry less substance and more generic rhetoric.

Considering influence from outside the system: Limited real-world experience and exposure. While it is productive to focus on the educational systems in dialogue, it is also important to acknowledge how informal student and staff learning, or lack thereof, occurring

outside the system might influence the formal teaching and learning environment occurring within the system. Specifically, American Indian mascots and the accompanying team imagery, traditions, and rituals teach mainstream society to construct a limited and often inaccurate picture of what it means to be an American Indian in today's world. This is further exacerbated by the media's limited representations of Indigenous peoples (Hoffman, 2012), and the reality that as such a small minority in the population, most people rarely interact with American Indians outside of cultural festivals and powwows.

The mainstream media most often perpetuates American Indians in these stuck-in-the-past, stoic, warrior, chief, or feather and drum stereotypes, and they rarely publish work and imagery of modern American Indians--as everyday professionals, parents, children, students, etc. Yes, many American Indians have proud histories with stories of brave chiefs and warriors, but this is an extremely narrow, limited piece of a much larger reality. But still, this narrow picture is what most people are exposed to and it informs how they process what it means to be an American Indian, and consequently it occupies the background knowledge of what people know about American Indians.

Additionally, in mainstream life people most often do not need to interact with Indians or engage with us in meaningful ways, and they are rarely prompted or compelled to do so outside of feather and drum contexts. Consequently, when stakeholders are asked to reflect on American Indian topics, most of mainstream U.S. relies on their personal learning through limited curricula, a few (if any) personal experiences with American Indians, and the narrow exposure they have had through the media. While some of this learning occurs outside the system, this lack of understanding and exposure often informs the dialogue occurring within the education system.

The American Psychological Association (2005) addresses the danger of minimal exposure, among others, in their recommendation to immediately retire mascots when they state:

Continued use of American Indian mascots, symbols, images, and personalities undermines the educational experiences of members of all communities-*especially those who have had little or no contact with Indigenous peoples.* [emphasis added] (Connolly, 2000; Society of American Indian Psychologists, 1999; US Commission on Civil Rights, 2001; Webester, Loudbear, Corn, & Vigue, 1971)

Thus, educational leaders might consider this reality and how it affects stakeholder dialogue on such a controversial topic, and how this might hinder the possibility of making an informed decision as group. These limitations are real, and these narrow understandings and lived experiences are often the reality of the majority of stakeholders at the table, prompting the important question--are the stakeholders informed enough as a group to make decisions about American Indian mascots, even if a majority decision is reached? Again, this prompts a need to look outside the system for experienced and critically conscious Indigenous education leaders and professional organizations, and find a way to appropriately include them in the dialogue without tokenizing them or using them for political purposes.

Mascots as an institutionalized cultural appropriation curriculum in the system. Cultural appropriation presents itself in schools in a variety of ways, and as educational leaders consider the habits of our systems and how they can improve our institutions to be more culturally responsive, identifying and uprooting practices of appropriation are vital to this effort. However, cultural appropriation is a term that many educational leaders know about, but at the same time many have not committed themselves to critically reflecting on the concept in various

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cultural contexts--this is a vital step in making informed decisions related to American Indian

mascots. Mascarenaz (2017) explains the term when discussing the issue of celebrating Cinco de

Mayo in schools, when she implores educators to:

> Teach them the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural
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> appreciation. They need to know where the line is. Cultural appropriation occurs
>
> when a person or other entity—a sports franchise, for example—claims as their
>
> own an aspect of a culture that does not belong to them. Doing so can, knowingly
>
> or unknowingly, deny the authenticity of that culture, particularly if it belongs to a
>
> marginalized group, and it can send harmful messages rooted in misinformation,
>
> prejudice and stereotypes. (para. 8)

This is not only a well stated explanation of cultural appropriation, it is a succinct way of

explaining some of the core issues related to American Indian mascots and branding in schools.

These mascots and brands are an institutionalized and ongoing systemic execution of cultural

appropriation disguised as an intent to honor an ethnic group. Furthermore, student and staff's

ongoing interaction with the school's brand acts as hidden or non-formal curriculum in the

school that teaches a limited view of what Indians are, how one can "be Indian," and all the

rituals and customs that go with it. This intended honor often allows people to comfortably brush

it off as somehow different from other blatant and offensive displays of appropriation (black

face, ethnic themed parties at school, wearing sombreros and mustaches to celebrate Mexican

themed holidays, etc). These cultural appropriation practices are often shut down rather abruptly

by teachers and leaders, prompting the question: Why are American Indians exempt? The clear

answer is, they should not be exempt, and these should be seen as parallel issues to bring

attention to the mascot issue and eradicate these practices from popular cultural.

One issue contributing to this disconnect between identifying cultural appropriation of larger ethnic groups and those of American Indians, is that appropriation of American Indian cultures through mascots is sometimes harder to see when schools attempt to scale back their fake Indian ceremonies, dress, and "traditions" with hopes of keeping their names and being able to justify it. But at its core, when the education system (mostly led by non-Indians) encourages students to "be Indian," or part of a "tribe" in any manner, when one is not actually a citizen of a native nation, it erodes what it means to be an actual citizen of a federally recognized native nation (or a citizen of currently unrecognized nations). This is why people label mascots as cultural appropriation, even if the school or team minimizes the pomp and circumstance at school events. When a school uses American Indians as a brand, and through their efforts to build school culture say things like "WE are the Indians (or other similar term)," when they are generally not American Indians, schools are not only carrying out cultural appropriation, they have systematized the process and are teaching cultural appropriation as an informal curriculum.

As non-Indians attempt to define what it means to be an American Indian, *for* American Indians, actual Indigenous identities rooted in a variety of complex local histories are eroded, made generic, made to be objects, and commodified--including the name. Most of mainstream American often agrees that American Indian land dispossession in history is a dark part of the American story, but this is a continued version of that same dispossession process; only this time it is a dispossession of the name along with the identities, histories, and traditions that go with it. Furthermore, this limits American Indian's ability to conceptualize and identify what an American Indian is in more appropriate and accurate ways. Just as this practice implicates American Indian mascots, it also implicates boy scouts, people wearing headdresses at music festivals, corporate branding, and other areas where it is acceptable to "be Indian" in some

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way, shape, or form. These are all problematic practices, as it would be problematic for an educational leader to allow a group of White students to create a Black student group. Imagine if an educational leader allowed, and encouraged, White students to "be Black," call each other stereotyped and highly inappropriate labels like "thugs," "bros," or "homies," throw parties with fried chicken, kool-aid, and watermelon, and then encourage them to identify as Black throughout the school day--*even if Black students and families objected to the practice*. Most educational leaders would likely recognize this as highly inappropriate, and put an immediate halt to it, but American Indian mascot "traditions" are a long-standing institutionalized version of this very thing--a systems problem.

The primary point, no matter what the details of each school with an American Indian brand, name, or image, is that being an American Indian is not a club that one can join or a brand to commodify, it is a way of life complete with unique histories, traditions, languages, and recognition of political sovereignty. In order to understand how this is an institutionalized form of cultural appropriation, there is a need for stakeholders and decision makers to commit to understanding what cultural appropriation is, have critical dialogue in this context, and consider how their respective schools have made cultural appropriation part of the teaching and learning processes within their system--even when it is not in the formal curricula.

A critical thinking exercise on mascots as institutionalized curriculum. As discussed previously, American Indian mascots can be seen as a systematized and institutionalized process of teaching students cultural appropriation through an orchestrated curriculum, even if disguised as a school branding. Viewing this discussion through a curricular lens is important, because educators are primarily in the business of constructing, executing, and assessing formal curricular objectives. To further this emphasis on curriculum, this section is intended to serve as

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a critical thinking exercise for educational leaders to consider, or employ, as they engage with stakeholders and critically reflect on their own situation.

When framing mascot practices, traditions, and branding as curriculum, consider the mission statement of educational institutions as a primary learning objective or benchmark for cultural responsiveness and preparing students for a diverse and changing world. The following mission statement comes from a district I have recently worked with on the topic of mascots, and it matches the type of language found in many institutions of education; so consider this mission statement as a primary standard that guides curricula across the institution:

Our mission is to educate each student to be a contributing citizen in a changing,

diverse society. We are committed to providing the best educational experience

for our students.

Now, from this context, I have generated the following curricular performance indicators to help bring some perspective to this dialogue. These indicators are rooted in actual observations and experiences, and are meant to spark new thinking. They are obviously problematic, and some are even from the position of opposing schools, but these are rooted in real world lived experiences and are intended to help educators consider what they might be unintentionally teaching students from a perspective they might not have considered. Therefore, consider these as school sanctioned performance indicators when framing mascots as a curriculum in schools:

- Students will demonstrate how to appropriately and respectfully act like an American Indian stereotype at sporting events, while simultaneously refraining from stereotyping other ethnic groups in classrooms and hallways (which may result in suspension).

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- Students from opposing teams will demonstrate proficiency in school spirit by creating signs, props, and homecoming floats that promote ethnic violence against American Indians.

- Students will demonstrate understanding that wearing fake Indian clothes in the gymnasium during sporting events is a respectful tradition, and that asking American Indian students to remove eagle feathers during cap and gown graduation ceremonies in the same gymnasium also demonstrates a respect for tradition. School administrators will model the use of fake Indian clothes in the gymnasium while dancing, and they will also enforce the restrictions on eagle feathers during graduations.

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of how becoming Indian is something that anyone can be, regardless of their actual ethnic family histories.

- Students will demonstrate how to appropriately greet and converse with an American Indian by properly using the terms redskin, chief, brave, savage, warrior and/or red man.

- Students will demonstrate proficiency in replacing authentic American Indian traditions by prioritizing preference for new Indian traditions developed by non-Indians. Students will also model the ability to carry on those inauthentic traditions for American Indians, and in their name.

- Students will demonstrate a commitment to values found in the school's tribal policies and codes, as stated in the handbook. (Lessons on actual federal tribal sovereignty and legal codes will not be taught.)

- Students will demonstrate a commitment to the notion that American Indians are mostly proud, warring, violent people who always wear feathers and live in tipis.

- Students will demonstrate proficiency in ethnic role-playing, and mastery in skills needed to engage in cultural appropriation.

- During scheduled "Tribe Time," students will demonstrate a lack of proficiency in the languages, histories, and/or diversity found across native nations.

- Students will demonstrate respect for their booster club "Tribal Elders," as if they were members of a real native nation.

- Students will model the respectful way to take care of fake Indian clothes and feathers because it is against the law for non-Indians to possess real Indian items, and then they will demonstrate how to claim them as real and authentic by certifying them by an Indian who might not have any cultural lineage with the fake Indian items. For example, having a non-plains Indian certify a plains Indian feather headdress, complete with goose feathers dipped in ink, and then putting a tag on it to authenticate it.

- Non-Indian upperclassmen and women will teach and mentor younger students on how to mature from a "papoose" to an "Indian."

- Students and community members will demonstrate how to become Indian through the quantity and level of their booster club donations.

- Students, teachers, and educational leaders will demonstrate an understanding of how to continue traditions of racism found in educational systems, and will demonstrate the skills necessary to ignore empirical research that prove the harmful effects of these traditions.

Clearly, these are not learning outcomes that one would find in any formal curriculum, and they may sound hyperbolic for people new to this critical dialogue. Yet these are the lessons that are taught through mascots in informal and unintended ways, and I have witnessed a version

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of each one of these. Also, I have found that some non-Indian and even Indian educational leaders tend to proceed in disbelief with an, "I don't see this in my school" attitude, but it is important to acknowledge that these things often go unnoticed without a critical eye. Therefore, the following questions can be used to help educators cut to the core issues in understanding whether or not their institution is engaging in practices that generate a systematized cultural appropriation curriculum in their schools:

- As an institution (run mostly by non-Indians), do we claim to be Indians (by any name) and/or belong to a tribe? If so, do we ask our non-Indian students to do the same? How do we reinforce this through our efforts to brand our institution and generate a school culture around that brand? What kind of resources do we dedicate to these efforts? Do these efforts align with our school or district mission statement?

- What traditions in our institution encourage students and staff to be, or act like, Indians (by any name)? How might these practices inhibit our non-Indian students' ability to appropriately interact with American Indian communities once they leave the school? What might be a more appropriate way to prepare them for future interactions with modern American Indians? How might this be problematic for the identity development of actual American Indians in our school?

- Do we display American Indian clothing and cultural tokens as "ours"? (Keep in mind, if your school possesses "authentic" American Indian feathers from certain birds, this is likely illegal. Most American Indian clothing found in schools are fake feathers dipped in dye of some sort, even if it was made or authenticated by someone who claims American Indian ancestry).

- How might our school name and/or brand normalize ethnic violence and stereotyping throughout the community, especially in the context of school spirit in opposing schools (i.e. signs that say "send 'em back on the Trail of Tears!", "scalp the Indians!," homecoming floats, etc)?

Moving forward, these questions can help identify some of the practices of cultural appropriation that have been institutionalized as part of the school system. They can also be used to help generate dialogue on the topic, and root out problematic practices that are out in the open, but often go unnoticed in every day practice. This critical thinking is necessary to understand how mascots are a systematized version of cultural appropriation.

As this section emphasizes, there is an ongoing need to re-evaluate all of our educational institutions from a systems perspective, and make brave decisions that change our school systems for the better. Ultimately, confronting the issue of American Indian mascots demands forward thinking leadership across district, building, and classroom levels, while also implicating the teacher and leadership training programs in our universities. There is a need to critically revisit institutional mission statements, and ask tough questions as to whether or not the practice of American Indian mascots are aligned with them. Additionally, there is a need to confront the invisibility of American Indians in and across curricula, and consider how the school brand acts as an informal curricular mechanism exacerbating an already narrow understanding of American Indians while also allowing people to "be Indian," when they are not. These institutional dynamics expose professional development needs for practicing teachers and leaders, and simultaneously generates a need for universities to adjust accordingly in their educator training programs. With this horizontal and vertical understanding of how American Indians are represented in and across our educational systems, it becomes easier to understand how we are

still experiencing the assimilationist educational processes of American Indian cultural erasure and erosion--processes put in motion long ago. The issue of mascots is tied to these larger erasure processes in our systems, and leaders are the ones who can change it.

Practical Consideration 2: Making Informed Decisions and Maintaining Focus on Student Learning

The following indicators from the National Policy Board for Educational Administrators (2015) are relevant to the topics discussed in this section, as they state under their School Improvement standard (#10) that effective leaders:

a) Seek to make school more effective for each student, teachers and staff, families, and the community.

b) Use methods of continuous improvement to achieve the vision, fulfill the mission, and promote the core values of the school...

d) Engage others in an ongoing process of evidence-based inquiry, learning, strategic goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation for continuous school and classroom improvement. (p. 18)

As demonstrated by the above language, in order to continually work towards school improvement in ways that benefit the building and classroom environment, there is a continual need to engage in various forms of inquiry which work to advance our understandings of cultural responsive education. This not only ensures that educational leaders are making fully informed decisions, it also sparks needed intellectual stimulation (Waters & Cameron, 2007) across the institution and improves the general knowledge base and cultural proficiency of the faculty and staff. In practical contexts making informed decisions for culturally responsive leadership means

gathering evidence in more ways than traditional research design, such as formally and informally reaching out to stakeholders, soliciting feedback through surveys, and more. These efforts are logical, but based on the systemic issues regarding American Indian understanding discussed in the previous section, there is a need to generate focused dialogue around research and scholarship on mascots, which is now plenty. Of importance, is that this research can point out specific issues and concerns with American Indian mascots that are extremely hard to detect through casual observation, and this research should inform dialogue, decision-making, and strategic planning moving forward. Below, I highlight key research and literature on American Indian mascots, while also providing a few cautionary perspectives related to soliciting stakeholder input for making informed decisions.

Summarizing the research into two manageable talking points. The research on American Indian mascots can be intimidating for educational leaders, and it can also be difficult to access without the library resources of a university. This hindrance can be also exacerbated when one does not know where to look, or is unfamiliar with the keyword nichés where some of this literature is found. Furthermore, the job of the educational leader is demanding, as principals and superintendents often work well beyond 40 hours a week and spend every day putting out fires big and small, and adapting to whatever new developments the day has to offer. They attend IEP meetings, conduct classroom observations, manage bus duty, stand on the sidelines at the football games, and answer the phone when an irate parent, teacher, community member calls, among many other responsibilities. In short, it is difficult for an educational leader to conduct a full review of literature, and with so many sports teams and schools circling around this lightning rod of a topic, is also difficult to sort through the opinions and editorials that tend to dominate the dialogue found through generic online queries.

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With the understanding that this is the reality for many educational leaders, here I filter the research down to two specific empirical studies published in peer reviewed journals that cut to the core of what the educational leadership standards prioritize the most--student learning. There is far more literature out there than what I list here, but these specific summaries (the abstracts of each publication) can be used to enhance stakeholder learning and understanding, while generating informed dialogue. Simultaneously, these two specific studies help leaders generate focus, while allowing optimization of people's time, an important concern for leaders (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

Study 1:

Four studies examined the consequences of American Indian mascots and other prevalent representations of American Indians on aspects of the self-concept for American Indian students. When exposed to Chief Wahoo, Chief Illinwek, Pocahontas, or other common American Indian images, American Indian students generated positive associations (Study 1, high school) but reported depressed state self-esteem (Study 2, high school), and community worth (Study 3, high school), and fewer achievement-related possible selves (Study 4, college). *We suggest that American Indian mascots are harmful because they remind American Indians of the limited ways others see them and, in this way, constrain how they can see themselves* [emphasis added] (Fryberg et al., 2008)

Study 2:

Numerous findings have documented the adverse effects of stereotypes on those negatively portrayed by the stereotypes. Less is known about the ramifications of stereotype exposure on those who are not the objects of the stereotypic depictions.

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Two studies examined the effect of exposure to an American Indian sports mascot

on the stereotype endorsement of a different minority group. Study 1 used an

unobtrusive prime, while Study 2 used a more engaged prime. Study 2 also

investigated the effect among those unfamiliar with the controversy regarding

American Indian sports mascots. *Results from both studies show that participants*

primed with an American Indian sports mascot increased their stereotyping of a

different ethnic minority group. [emphasis added] (Kim-Prieto, Goldstein,

Okazaki, & Kirschner, 2010, p. 534)

Together these two studies provide empirical evidence that 1) American Indian themed

mascots are harmful to American Indians and limit the way they can see themselves, and 2)

American Indian mascots enhance the likelihood that *all* students will stereotype other ethnic

groups. Together these two studies confirm that American Indian mascots are detrimental to

student learning environments for *all* students, regardless of the students' ethnic background.

Therefore, these studies expose the reality that any public declaration in the school's mission

statement that makes statements about "respecting diversity," "multicultural respect," "inclusive

learning," or "preparing students for an evolving and diverse world," becomes incompatible with

the practice and known consequences of American Indian mascots.

Moving forward, educational leaders might focus on specific conversations around these

two studies, and ask hard questions about whether or not the practice of using American Indian

mascots and branding are in fact congruent with the mission statement and core values of the

school. Based on this empirical evidence, these mission statements are likely not aligned and

require a strategic vision of change which informs the public, and lays a path forward.

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Becoming informed: Considering the voices of American Indian stakeholders.

While undergoing efforts to make informed decisions on American Indian topics, I have witnessed educational leaders often reaching out to local American Indian students and families in order to gain perspective and try to understand if the mascot or branding affects them in any negative manner. Although logical and still worthwhile, this might be misleading since there are important power dynamics to consider, along with nuanced understandings amongst American Indian communities related to belongingness which brings difficult questions about American Indian representation amongst stakeholders. In this section I discuss some of these nuances, and lay out concerns that educational leaders might consider when soliciting stakeholder input. Specifically, I discuss various issues related to representation, concerns regarding power dynamics when American Indian voices are an extreme minority, and point to organizations that should be given heavier consideration as broadly representing American Indian interests.

As mentioned in the *Practical Consideration 1* section when discussing systems, the majority of stakeholders are often uninformed on American Indian topics because educational systems, the media, and lack of exposure to American Indians have left many with a generally narrow understanding. It is also legitimate to ask the blunt question: *should non-American Indians even have much of a say in how American Indians are represented*? Much of the current scholarship in Indigenous studies focuses on the need for self-representation and self-determination, as Indigenous peoples have a long history of non-Indigenous people telling them what is best for them and/or misrepresenting them (Mihesuah, 1998; Smith, 1999). Quite frankly, critical Indigenous scholars can come across as aggressive in their language because more and more Indigenous academics are getting tired of non-Indigenous people deciding what is best for Indigenous people.

In educational leadership contexts where internal and external stakeholder dialogue surrounds mascot controversies, there is often a power imbalance as non-American Indians make decisions that implicate American Indians. In the past six months, I have worked with three public school stakeholder committees established to discuss this issue and/or related topics. On all three occasions, there was an extreme minority of American Indian voices at the table (American Indians ranged from 1 to 4 people out of approximately 15 participants on each panel). This presents a problem in the fact that no matter how the dialogue unfolds, non-Indians still possess the power to maintain the status quo and use American Indian cultures and identities as a brand, and then publicly claim to have reached out and listen to American Indian voices in a fair and democratic manner. In this context, the American Indian stakeholders at the table run the risk of being tokenized and/or used for political maneuvering as they are problematically asked to speak for all American Indians, and then their presence allows non-American Indian decision makers to create a veneer of justice and fairness. In other words, American Indians should be invited to the table, but even if they voice concerns about the practices and traditions of mascots, the power often still lies with the non-American Indian majority to maintain the status quo.

Also of note, across the three panels on which I participated, only *one* other American Indian appeared to be familiar with the critical research and scholarship on the issue, meaning the other American Indians were not necessarily coming from an informed position where they could represent substantive scholarly Indigenous perspectives. In the context of this practical consideration, I reiterate the previous point that just because someone carries an American Indian enrollment card does not mean that they: 1) have critically engaged in dialogue, Indigenous scholarship, and/or the research on the topic, or 2) are substantively connected to the

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communities from which they are citizens. Furthermore, since over 90 percent of American Indians attend general public schools (TEDNA, 2011) where they learn about American Indians in limited and narrow ways through Eurocentric curricula, many of these people with Indigenous ancestry have internalized those ways of thinking to a point where seeking their input only perpetuates the oppressive system status quo. While highlighting these concerns, I am not trying to discredit someone's Indian-ness, I am merely highlighting how the oppressive policies of the past continue to maintain themselves through our educational systems. This also makes it problematic for some individuals to speak as "certified" card carrying representatives for over 560 federally recognized native nations, especially when they lack substantive cultural connections with any of those communities. While discussing the complex nuances of belongingness, membership, and citizenship (Dennison, 2012; TallBear, 2013) with American Indian communities is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to understand that they exist when engaging American Indian stakeholders in dialogue. In other words, it is not as simple as asking one of the few American Indian community members, "you are an American Indian, what do you think?" Not all American Indians are the same, and it is therefore problematic when one American Indian community member who carries an enrollment card is given the power to speak for all Indians. What I have witnessed, is that once a "certified" American Indian goes on the record and speaks up in favor of keeping an American Indian mascot, influential leaders and stakeholders who agree with this sentiment parade these statements as justification for their cause. In contrast, a handful of American Indians speaking out against a mascot with the backing of scholarly research can be easily over-ridden or over-shadowed by the voting power, public complaints, and local editorial columns from a non-Indian majority claiming that people are being "too politically correct". These are common

manifestations of these problematic issues regarding representation and power dynamics, and they generate a need to broaden the scope of how educational leaders should solicit American Indian input, and how it should be interpreted.

Furthermore, as educational leaders look beyond their institutions and communities for input, sometimes they reach out to local or regional native nations, their governments, or leaders within their governments, to weigh in on the topic as American Indian representatives. This is also logical and it has merit, but again, just because one is an official from a federally recognized native nation does not mean that individual has ever been asked to study this topic or think critically about it. Often, school leaders hope to obtain formal written approval from a local American Indian leader as a political maneuver to avoid the trouble of changing the name. This is also problematic because schools often have generic names that are not specific to a particular native nation, therefore asking one of them to represent over 560 nations is problematic. But more importantly, if the focus is on...

      school improvement,

           and the student learning environment,

                  then these approaches are more about

                        putting out a fire,

      without concern for actually improving the

teaching and learning environment,

the technical core of the school.

Moving forward, with the reality that there are several nuanced considerations when engaging in stakeholder dialogue, there is a real question of, "Well, who are the most logical authorities on these matters?"   With the complicated nature of American Indian representation problematized above, some of the most logical and reliable representatives to inform decision making are the professional organizations that are knowledgeable on current best practices and research, and issue public statements on the matter, often in a democratically agreed upon manner where American Indians are primarily the ones casting the votes. Specifically, groups such as the National Indian Education Association (2013), National Congress of American Indians (2013), American Indian Movement, American Indian Higher Education Consortium, Native American Rights Fund, and National Indian Youth Council, have all passed resolutions or statements against the use of American Indian mascots and imagery. On top of this, many state and/or regional organizations publicly joined the cause, along with statements and resolutions from several sovereign governments of various native nations ("SupportersofChange", n.d.). Additionally, even though they are not an American Indian specific organization, the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association, 2005) also passed a resolution as a leading organization on professional scholarship in their own field, which is still highly relevant to this conversation. Regardless, since mascots and branding most often implicate more

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than just American Indians in the local or regional community, it is important to consider these wider representative organizations taken as a collective, and prioritize their voices, especially when it is clear that the majority of the stakeholders making the decisions locally are not representatives with strong links to American Indian communities.

In conclusion, as educational leaders organize discussions with internal and external stakeholders on the topic of American Indian mascots, there are several important perspectives to consider when soliciting input. By forwarding these considerations, I do not intend to discourage efforts to reach out to American Indian voices in the community for input; rather, I hope to provide critical nuance that is often overlooked during the process. Mainly, educational leaders should not only consider the power dynamics related to tokenizing American Indians amongst a non-American Indian majority, but also recognize the diversity across American Indian perspectives, and resist the urge to over-generalize statements from one or two American Indians. In this same effort to resist over-generalization, educational leaders should give credence to the statements and resolutions passed by regional and national professional organizations, as they often draft these from an informed position with broad representation from many different American Indian leaders. Giving weight to these collective voices helps pull American Indians out of the extreme minority status, and balance out the power dynamics of the dialogue. All the while, the focus of the dialogue should remain on what is best for all students in the technical core of the school--the teaching and learning environment. Therefore, while mascots often generate emotional public outcry against any change, putting out a public relations fire is not the priority. Instead, maintaining a focus on imporoving the teaching and learning environment and initiating long term strategic change for the sake bettering the educational system for all students is the focus.

Setting strategic goals that dig deeper than the name, its origins, and the intent to honor. Setting strategic and focused goals as leaders engage stakeholders in dialogue is important, especially when trying to keep student learning as the primary focus for school improvement. However, because of the highly complex nature of mascot dialogue, there are many distracting hurdles that diverge the conversation from a focus on student learning. Specifically, there appear to be three common entry points which educational practitioners and community members often struggle with, which are: 1) pondering the origins of the specific mascot name and the original intent behind choosing the name, 2) comparing and contrasting which American Indian mascot names are more offensive and which are less, and 3) how the mascot names and school traditions are intended to honor American Indians. Although there are more obstacles, I consider these three specific topics to be the largest obstacles hindering educational stakeholders from getting to the core of the issue. If an educational leader can find a way to create focused dialogue that helps quickly move past these topics, then they may be better prepared to optimize stakeholders' time if they are to act as a productive change agent (Waters & Cameron, 2007) for their school or district. However, given the reality that these are such prevalent entry points, they must be addressed. Below are some facilitator talking points for this portion of the argument.

First, researching the origins of the name may provide some answers as to how the institution began their traditions and identities with American Indian mascots, but it keeps the focus on the past and overlooks the current context in which American Indian mascots reside-- which is far different. In this effort to keep the focus on modern contexts and help push through the "why is this just now, all of a sudden, a problem!" commentary from the public, consider the

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following before spending unnecessary energy on the dialogue about the origins and history of the school's name:

- In the past 10-20 years, substantial amounts of research and literature have been generated on this specific topic which confirm the harmful impact of American Indian mascots (Baca, 2004; Fryberg et al., 2008; Kim-Prieto et al., 2010; Pewewardy, 1999; Pewewardy, 2000; Stegman & Phillips, 2014; U.S. Department of Education and White House Initiative on American Indian Alaskan Native Education, 2015).

- As discussed previously, many well respected national organizations have passed resolutions requesting the retirement of American Indian themed mascots and imagery, most notably the American Psychological Association (2005), The National Indian Education Association (2013), and the National Congress of American Indians (2013). There are many more respectable organization at the national and state level that can be added to this list (Stegman & Phillips, 2014).

- Many American Indian mascot names were established before the passage of school diversity initiatives such as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Brown v. Topeka Board of Education, The Civil Rights Act, various iterations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and all of its title programs, school lunch programs, and more. We now lead schools in a context which goes greater lengths to respect diversity than we did when many American Indian mascots names were first voted on in board rooms.

- Schools often have swift reactions for people who engage in offensive ethnic role playing, such as black face, ethnic stereotype themed parties, and more. Racially charged offenses often result in negative publicity and swift suspensions or expulsions. All the while, school traditions themed around American Indian mascots continue.

- Schools now go to great lengths to put forward an image of cultural respect for diversity, as evident by their mission statements which often emphasize creating positive learning environments for all students, and preparing them for the increasingly complex, diverse, and globalizing world.

- In general, society is becoming increasingly aware of the concept of cultural appropriation, and the negative impact it can have on youth.

- Overall, reports indicate that there was once over 3000 such mascot names, and over two thirds of them have changed (Stegman & Phillips, 2014).

Thus, researching the origins and intent of the name is an exercise that attempts to override, and possibly ignore the current reality of the situation, and all of the history which has occured since most schools decided to brand their institutions around American Indian cultures. Therefore, putting too much weight on the history and original intent of the mascot name is ultimately an exercise in ignoring the current context, and overlooking the fact that this issue has dramatically changed over time.

Second, cross referencing names and comparing them to see which one is worst is akin to digging a hole in the ground with one's hands when it might be more productive to use a shovel, or similar to making a statements such as, "well, our school's cultural appropriation curriculum is less racist than theirs." The specific mascot name is one of the more visible components of the American Indian mascot conversation, yet if one swaps out the names the cultural appropriation curriculum likely remains, as students are consistently encouraged to "be Indian/Warriors/Chiefs/etc.", belong to a "tribe" in some manner, and buy into the school brand. Additionally, the research backed issues related to negatively effecting American Indian self-esteem, limiting the ways that American Indians see themselves (Fryberg, et. al, 2008), and the

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brand imagery enhancing the likelihood that students will stereotype other ethnic groups (Kim-Prieto, et. al, 2010), all remain. So for schools with "not as offensive" names, it might lead to a premature conclusion that the school does not have the same problematic orientation to American Indian cultural representation that another school has, when in fact they likely do, but perhaps in less obvious ways. Consequently, using the degree of offense as a way to excuse a school's culpability towards American Indians is still irresponsible and evokes violence, oppression, and erasure in subtle and overt ways. These names do matter, and many people recognize that there is a continuum of names for American Indians which span from more acceptable to less acceptable, with names such as Chiefs and Braves on the "good" end and Redskins and Savages on the "bad" end. This conversation is worth having to a certain degree, but this issue is less about the specific name and more about the systemic cultural appropriation of American Indian cultures, and how this practice contributes to an ongoing erasure and erosion of our existence in modern contexts. This is why spending so much time debating the nuances of the name becomes a distraction from the focus on student learning.

Third, often stakeholders get stuck focusing on how mascots are intended to honor American Indians as brave, proud people. This focus on the intent to honor should also be given less emphasis during dialogue than it often is, and it should be set aside early on in the dialogue because it is a distraction to what is actually happening--regardless of well-meaning intent. In order to understand this complicated dynamic of "but I thought I was honoring you," it is important to gain a more complete understanding of the unique position of American Indians in our country's modern cultural landscape. Although American Indians overlap with the plights of other ethnic groups, we are not operating in the exact same multiculturalism and discrimination playing field as African-Americans, Latinas/Latinos, Asian-Americans, and other traditionally

marginalized demographics. To draw these generic oppressed minority comparisons across ethnic groups without a critical and nuanced eye would be an erroneous effort. As a brief example, while the media has largely trained the general public to fear African American males (Trawalter, Todd, Baird, & Richeson, 2008), the media has generally made American Indian males to be primarily exotic feather wearing people of the past from a narrowly represented cultural group (emphasis on the singular) (Hoffman, 2012). There is a substantial number of people who are infatuated with American Indians in ways that do not cross over to other ethnic groups and stereotypes. This mode of thinking is addressed in the Fryberg et. al (2008) study mentioned previously, which identified that students maintained positive associations with key American Indian images in pop-culture, but still experienced depressed self-esteem, community worth, and fewer achievement related possible selves. In other words, this study specifically addressed the notion that just because an image is seen as representing positive emotions of pride and honor, does not mean that it does not limit the way that American Indians might envision their future selves--and who they might become. This positive and honorable stereotype phenomenon can be tied to romanticized Western movies, and the rather consistent role of Indians as a narrowly represented stereotype in the media for the greater part of the 1900s[4]. American Indians even have terms to describe well-meaning non-Indigenous folks who engage in American Indian fetishism--hobbyists--which are people who enjoy making Indigenous clothing, singing Indigenous songs, and hosting questionable ceremonies and powwows. Hobbyists can at times produce awkward interactions with Indigenous people, without ever

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[4] The documentary *Reel Injuns* is a practical resource for engaging in this topic.

understanding how they are engaging in the same sort of harmful cultural appropriation that mascots reinforce.

As mentioned previously, no matter how well-meaning these folks are, these efforts are problematic because "being Indian" becomes more akin to a club that anyone can join, and not a citizen of a native nation and/or a specific community that one is born into--one with unique and specific histories, languages, traditional ceremonies, rites of passage, clan systems, naming ceremonies, and more. Although this is a controversial topic on its own which implicates boy scouts, craft fairs, and more, the primary point is that Indigenous peoples are growing increasingly intolerant of non-Indians playing Indian in any type of manner because it becomes an identity for consumption by non-Indians, not a way of life tied to a unique and specific history and place. This is true, even when an enthusiast is a really nice non-Indian who is enamored with, and genuinely appreciates our cultures and histories. Thus, the sooner educational leaders can get beyond these three topics, the sooner the dialogue will reach the place it needs to be where one can truly address the issues surrounding American Indian mascots in schools, which is focused on student learning in the current context, and what is best for all students in the long term.

In conclusion, American Indian mascots are not simply a public relations topic for school leaders, it is a school improvement topic which requires key baseline understandings, systems thinking, informed decision-making, and a focus on what matters the most--the student learning environment. Even if it is a longstanding tradition of the community, leaders must honestly consider the realities of the institutionalized cultural appropriation systems they are maintaining, and how traditions and identities of American Indians go back much further into history. Furthermore, leaders must ask themselves if it is appropriate to replace those traditions with new

ones made by non-American Indians that teach narrow-minded understandings of what it means to be an American Indian. The research is clear, American Indian mascots, branding, and imagery is harmful, and it contributes to a larger erasure and erosion of American Indian cultures that are deeply engrained in our educational systems, and they have been for a long time. Now it is up to educational leaders to develop multi-tiered school improvement plans which address weaknesses in curriculum, school branding, public relations, professional development, and more--all in order to move this generation past these outdated and culturally unresponsive habits in our educational systems.

Living the Intersection of Real Indians and Fake Indigeneity as a Student and Teacher

Now, as I shapeshift back from an educational leadership practitioner positionality, I express my personal experiences with American Indian mascots as an Indigenous-White educator living in these problematic zones of intersectionality. This is the nuance of shuttling in and across these intersectional spaces, and trying to make sense of it all.

This has been a place of struggle for me--all my life.

Often when I meet someone new in non-Indigenous social contexts and these individuals discover my Osage identity through inquiry about my name, it is quite common for him or her to get a puzzled look in their eye. Judging from the questions, "What are you? How much Indian are you?", I gather that they are experiencing an internal wrestling match: A match between the

stereotypical chiefy[5] historic image of an American Indian and my White skin, blond hair, and

blue eyes. Obviously, not all American Indians carry my physical features, but the core principle

of people relying on limited images and background knowledge to process modern American

Indian existence is still the same. In general, people have a difficult time imagining American

Indians outside of these common, historic, stoic, feathered, and chiefy contexts. Even when they

do look the Brown skinned, long haired part. It is also important to understand that growing up I

had to consider that same juxtaposition of images as I consider questions related to "who am I?"

and...

"Am I a real Indian?

　　　Or am I just playing Indian?

　　　　　I am only 1/8th, and I don't look like that.

　　　　　　　Is that enough?"

　　　　　Kids would joke:

　　　　　　　　"if you cut your arm off, you would no longer be Indian"

　　　I have been lucky enough to be around people like Dr. Pewewardy who help foster

confidence in my Indigenous identity development. I have become conscious of issues that feed

the tensions that reside in and across my Indigenous-White hyphen, and the invasive thoughts

encroaching on my confidence. I recently heard a story from a friend about being in Washington

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[5] This is an informal word used in Indian country. Used in a sentence, people might jokingly say, ""He is acting all
chiefy."

DC, and having strangers want to take pictures of them because they were a *"real Indian"*

family, or rather, they represented the exotic remnants of the mystical Indians people narrowly

learned about through romanticized Westerns and the media. This ignorance is pervasive,

but the erasure and erosion of our existence is a by-product of the master narrative,

and it's scantron, No. 2 pencil, and point-and-click

testing appendages.

The great story of American progress...

that settler-colonial trajectory

has had time to establish deep roots (Shear et al., 2015)

and take over our systems and thinking.

A breeding ground for the Eurocentric status quo

and advancement.

Successfully omitting my ancestors in the present.

leaving a wide curricular gap.

Filled by mascots, media, fetishism, and pop-culture,

and the narrow-minded ignorance that comes with it.

That is the narrative we must fight through in our daily lives and social encounters.

I have never scalped anyone, but I write and speak about critical topics.

I don't carry a hatchet to work. I carry a laptop.

     I have no notches etched into the side to mark my kills,

          Just a scratch from a stray binder clip in my backpack.

I don't fight all the time. I read, write, and discuss....

I don't say "how"...ever. Even if a lady greeted my brother that way

     outside of Olan Mills,

          when he was dressed in his Osage clothes for a cheesy family picture,

             ...when we were children.

I've never ridden a horse, but my brother Ryan nicknamed cars after ponies.

     The Sky Pony (Blue Nissan Sentra from the 80s),

     The War Pony (Toyota 4x4 from the 90s)

          and I followed with my Eco-Pony (2012 Toyota Prius)

     Mostly channeling *Powwow Highway,*

          a rare media outlier.

I have absolutely never danced to a song at a ceremony that sounds like the tomahawk

     chop.

          That chant.

          People may think it sounds the same, because they just hear drumming

             that familiar sound of Indians "just playing their tom-toms"

                 as Uncle Mog told me.

             but our songs possess...

authenticity, and sometimes honor for specific people and families

tradition (which easily precedes school and team traditions)

history with the Kaws and Poncas

communal belonging across our three districts

spirituality and a relationship with The Drum,

...and Osage ways.

But people say things to me--exposing that gap.

A curious and innocent 2nd grader asked about

my brother dressed in his Osage clothes,

"is he...

wild?"

A state representative knocked on my door looking for my vote...

then made a joke about "going on the warpath."

From a landlady inquiring about my name, "I thought the Osages were extinct?"

From a new colleague at an institution of higher education

"Oh, I'm an Irish-Indian too!"...and she did the tomahawk chop...

and laughed...

...hilarious.

From a school administrator, right before I'm going to coach a wrestling dual,

"Let's scalp those redskins!" ... and the school name was actually

the "Indians."

From a Boy Scout,

"I'm Indian, too,"

...referencing induction ceremonies through Boy Scouts

"Order of the Arrow."

Awkward.

Not an honor.

In fact, if someone showed up at the I^n.Lon.Schka dressed the way they show up some

of these games...

the whip man would ask 'em to leave...

Because it's disrespectful.

This becomes problematic for all American Indian themed mascots, even the ones trying

to contain the racism and prop up the "honor," because we are still dehumanized and taught that

we are exotic Others, stuck

in the past.

Especially schools,

Classrooms with desks...and bleachers.

Whiteboards, projectors,

football fields and basketball courts.

Signs with "scalp the Indians," "send 'em back on the trail of tears!"

Passing signs in the hallway with an Indian head on it that says "head hunters"

On my way to teach the kids about Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks.

Homecoming floats, themed with stereotypes and ethnic violence.

Paired with Positive Behavior Intervention Support systems,

and anti-bullying programs.

Learning that same narrative.

Incomplete.

Limited.

Narrow.

In class and on the field,

where teachers and coaches follow the curriculum, and encourage the brand.

Where most everyone learns from, and leans on the text book,

or repeat

what they learned when in school...

which was very little

about

American Indians.

As Ladson-Billings (2003) sums up:

> We see them as welcoming European settlers, joining them in a Thanksgiving celebration, guiding them as they explore the west, being massacred as settler's push westward, and finally being removed and subdued by Andrew Jackson. After the "Trail of Tears," American Indians disappear from the pages of our textbooks and the curriculum. For our students, American Indians are museum exhibits. (p. 3)

Yes. We have a history.

Yes. We would like to preserve it and honor it, along with our diversity.

But we are not a generic brand,

or a commodity.

The cycle of learning has to be interrupted, for the teachers and the students,

     through school improvement,

          and forward thinking educational leadership,

               and American Indian mascots are part of that conversation.

The problems are exposed in the literature,

          but the solutions mostly rest on the shoulders of educational leadership:

     professional development,

          diversity training,

               curricular reform,

                    ethics,

                         school-community relations,

                              analysis of school culture,

                                  and school change theories.

          And with brave forward thinking educational leaders who are willing to consider

               the need for continuous school improvement,

               and generate action to move their institutions

                                      >>>forward.

In conclusion, conversations about changing American Indian mascots are not just reserved for a multiculturalism course in educational training, or the editorial columns of newspapers. Rather, this controversial topic is a multidimensional school improvement conversation for educational leaders, aligned with research driven national educational leadership standards. Tackling this complex issue requires systems thinking and social justice mindset, one that commits to understanding the power dynamics in play, the harm of cultural appropriation, and the erasure and erosion of American Indian existence in and across our educational systems. Leaders must be able to see all of the moving parts, and critically reflect on the big picture of how mascots are more than a public relations topic or a fire to put out. Mostly, educational leaders must see that American Indian mascots act as a culturally destructive educator in the teaching and learning environment of their schools, and they warrant attention in school improvement plans.

Chapter 5 - Am I a Person of Color? Interrogating Privilege as a Real Pale Indian

Introduction

Am I a person of color? My Whiteness is obvious to me every time I look at my hands on the keyboard, or at my face in the mirror. Let's be honest--my skin is only red when I forget to wear sunscreen. The reality is, I am White, even if I hear my real pale Indian family members talk about "White people" as the Other while I learned a lot about life from my White elders, and my White family. I love my White family, and the White family I married into, as much as I do my Osage family.

I once heard one of my White uncles tell a story about my Osage grandfather.

They were traveling and they stopped in a cafe.

(in Oklahoma, it's pronounced kuh-fay).

The waitress came up to the booth and saw my Brown grandfather, sitting with my White uncle, his brother-in-law.

She said:

"I'm sorry, we don't serve foreigners here."

Foreigners?

My uncle was not happy. My grandfather calmed

him down and they left.

A peacekeeper - Tsi.zhu.wah.shta.geh.

Granted, this was long ago, a different time.

But still.

Since my grandfather married an incredible White woman,

and my father married an incredible White woman,

And I became a real pale Indian

with real Brown cousins.

On the surface, it seems I don't have to worry about these

things

if I don't want to.

But I do.

I have married an incredible White woman,

and adopted

two children.

One Pale. One Brown.

Both beautiful.

I acknowledge our reality--and here I interrogate the concept of privilege

Because,

While I may pass for White and receive the associated privileges,

I worry about the realities faced by real Brown relatives,

and my real Brown friends.

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But more than that,

  I am in a unique position to address this topic,

    this entanglement.

I am White,

  and that affects my sociocultural positionality

    It affects how I am interpreted, and how I interpret.

    and there are a whoooole lot of real pale Indians,

      who occupy unique spaces of intersectionality

        in our own unique environments.

      So I'm just gonna talk about that.

 This is not an apology for the skin I carry,

  it's an acknowledgement of the role it plays.

So here I interrogate my complicated relationship with White privilege, and how as a real pale Indian, I don't quite fit the typical White privilege narrative. But in some ways, I do - yet another entanglement.

White privilege as explained by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), "refers to the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race" (p. 87). I acknowledge that I am the beneficiary of some of these advantages, while from an Osage perspective this is not always the case. Additionally, since American Indian citizenship is often correlated to blood quantum, which can be problematic (Dennison, 2012; TallBear, 2013), there are many American Indians who pass for White but can still prove blood lineage and citizenship. Articulating the nuances of this complex sociocultural position of belonging is beyond the scope of this chapter; however, due to this unique context of political affiliation--which is specific to American Indian contexts--there are many American Indians who pass for White on daily basis and can legitimately claim citizenship with a native nation. Furthermore, as Dennison (2012) describes how the "indigenous body has become the site of contestation and consequence" (p. 51), it is important to acknowledge that using blood as a marker for American Indian citizenship has long been used as a tool for erasure by settler-colonialism, as it represents an ongoing process of racialization that has been used to delegitimize belonging and alter political power dynamics. Therefore, as I approach this topic with an honest attempt to add nuance to the intersectional existence of pale skinned American Indians, who I term as real pale Indians, it is important to acknowledge the problematic foundation on which this conversation rests. Furthermore, articulating my position with Whiteness and White privilege in this entangled settler-colonial reality should not be used as: 1) a tool for neo-colonialists to further delegitimize American Indian existence and rights to political status, even if they pass for White after enduring several generations worth of state sponsored assimilationist policies in education and attempts at erasure through problematic blood quantum policies, or 2) serve as a free pass for White people with vague communal ties to Indigenous populations to claim insider status and

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belonging with native nations. That being said, I aim to provide sociocultural nuance to the intersections which I occupy, but I also caution overgeneralization of these perspectives and simultaneously argue that a claim to Whiteness does not automatically negate my claims to Osage citizenship and belonging--this would be an assumption based on a false dichotomy rooted in ongoing racial categorization in the United States. That being said, this is a unique context for White privilege, and one that does not easily transfer to other Black and/or Brown ethnicities. For example, one is more likely to meet a pale skinned person who entirely passes for White and identifies as an American Indian, than they are to come across a person who passes for White but identifies as, say, Black. But this unique zone of privilege is not always discussed out in the open. Scholars such as (Mays, 2016) have brought this topic to the surface, and challenged Indigenous people who pass for White to acknowledge their privileges. He states:

> Can we talk about what it means to be a White-Indian in the United States? It's funny, using that phrase "White-Indian;" though I hear it every so often, it is barely used in academic circles, or not in the same frequency or manner as Black-Indians...A major issue for me, which I haven't heard you speak on, even in private, is your own white skin privilege. Before you stop reading, please hear me out. You see, I'm often read as only Black, unless someone knows me as Black, simply because of my skin color. I'm cool with that. Like your Indigenous ancestry, mine, too, is invisible. But because I'm read as a Black male, the animalistic threat to society, I can't hide. I can't hide my blackness, no matter how white I sound. And I ain [sic] planning to. I can't sweep it under rug if I put on white people's moccasins. Society reads me as Black (para. 4-6).

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As a real pale Indian reading these words, Mays has a point. As a critically conscious scholar, I am aware of the marginalizing power of the Whiteness through mainstream education, and I have to acknowledge that I am simultaneously entangled in this dynamic as White male agent. While I occupy a space in the dialogue that is a little trickier to define, it does not mean that I do not reap the daily benefits of my White skin camouflage. I can talk about it, and even as I write about it and cycle through drafts of this manuscript with my Brown female professor, some of my White male blind spots awkwardly reveal themselves. But if I cannot acknowledge the realities of this unique space, then my scholarly claims to critical consciousness are problematically naive.

As a scholarly entry point to interrogating my White privilege, I will start with a source that many use when learning about privilege, and use Peggy McIntosh's (2003) essay in which she unpacks her invisible knapsack and admittedly outlines several versions of White privilege to which she is privy. Using various items on her famous list, which I place at the top of each section, I will compare my own invisible knapsack and critically consider how her specific reflections coincide with my lived experiences. Through this process, I highlight examples which illustrate the intersectional entanglements of life and privileges as a real pale Indian.

Being Normal: Who Let the White Osage Cherokee Princess Guy in the Room?

This section is a critical reflection tied directly to the following items from McIntosh's (2003) knapsack:

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time. (p. 192)

As a White person, I am most often surrounded by people who look like me and I can easily blend in with the larger social group. For the majority of my life, that is normal for me. On a surface level, I frequently look, behave, and sound like the majority of people in the room.

In mainstream institutional contexts, I can only think of a handful of situations where I was clearly one of only a few White people in the room. While in these specific social settings, I did not shed my privilege as I walked through the door, but I did pick up a tiny and incomplete glimpse of perspective. Specifically, I noticed that I was one of very few light skinned people in the room 1) when I was invited to the university Black Faculty Staff Alliance meeting, and 2) when I recently attended a breakfast at a conference, which discussed graduate school mentorship for people of color.

Admittedly, in these settings, I was fully aware of my White positionality.

    I was still comfortable for the most part,

        I did not enter these spaces mentally preparing for this social dynamic,

        In fact, in both cases I became aware only partway through the event.

    I enjoyed the dialogue and casual conversations,

        and appreciated the invites,

        and as a critically conscious scholar,

           when I suddenly noticed

                the social skin dynamics of my setting,

                I became intrigued.

                I entered a mode of self-analysis,

and I became a participant

in my own study.

My thoughts became my data.

I could sense it.

judgmental eyes on me.

"Who is this guy?"

"What is he doing here?"

"Can someone tell me who let the White guy in the room?"

Echoing through my head.

Even if not true.

Even if no one said anything.

As I reflect on how I left these spaces and immediately had the privilege of transitioning back to predominantly White settings, I considered how these experiences might have served as a small and extremely temporary glimpse of a daily reality for people of color--a glimpse of something I will never fully understand.

From a general American Indian perspective, outside of Osage specific contexts, as a younger person there were times when I felt similar dissonance in American Indian social settings--times when the insider-outsider dynamics across my Osage-White hyphen played out. For example, when Mays (2016) talks about the "saturated" and "predictable" conversations about "pretindians" (para. 5), and the White folks with long lost mysterious American Indian ancestry, I have often been in the room when jokes about White imposters are volleyed around for sport at the expense of the perceived outsiders. As a young person I internalized these conversations, and assumed that I was likely the target for them at some point out of my purview

even if nobody ever actually said anything to me. So, as I entered a new American Indian social space that was not specific to Osages, places where I knew few people, I always assumed I was passing through the pale skinned American Indian imposter filter. As I entered the room one of my primary goals was to make it out of the room, and not be the brunt of a joke...

"I bet that guy's great-grandmother was a Cherokee Princess. Ayyye!"

As an adult, this discomfort has subsided. I am much more confident in who I am as a real pale Indian, but I still know that I have to pass through some people's White person imposter filter.

But this statement from McIntosh about being able to be around people of my own kind, still does not ring entirely true from my perspective as an American Indian living and working in predominantly White communities. While I am constantly around White people at the university, I had to strategically seek out American Indian peers on campus and collaboratively organize the Kansas State University Indigenous Alliance so that we could create a space for American Indian community building among faculty and staff at the university. Since then, I have found American Indian camaraderie in our campus community, and generated these opportunities, but it is a little more complicated than that: Being around American Indians is not the same as being around Osages.

To carry this focus forward, as an Osage I rarely get to interact with other Osages while off the reservation, aside from talking to my own family. I am unaware of any Osages who live

in the city where I currently reside, and I was recently intrigued when I noticed an Osage Nation license plate near the university. Most often, I have to drive 3-4 hours back to the reservation in order to interact with other Osages. These interactions are important to me, so I do it often. Furthermore, the growth of social media has allowed me to stay connected in ways that were previously unavailable, which I discuss in more detail later, but this has helped bridge some of these gaps. But in regards to face to face daily interactions--Osages are few and far between in the White communities where I live and work.

However, on a daily basis as a White person, I am surrounded by people who look and talk like me. I am comfortable there, mostly unjudged, just one of the crowd. Consequently, in everyday interactions I have the privilege of being entirely comfortable in and across those settings.

Rockin' the Suburbs

This section is a critical reflection tied directly to the following items from McIntosh's (2003) knapsack:

3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors...will be neutral or pleasant to me.

4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed...

10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability...

19. If a traffic cop pulls me over...I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race. (pp. 192-193)

Together, these statements in McIntosh's knapsack are mostly true for me. The suburbs

are mostly full of more than just middle and upper class White people, and I cannot make blanket

statements or speak for all people in the suburbs, but I am a White man from the suburbs. In that

context, on a daily basis I can...

speak suburban,

walk suburban,

      wear a hoodie without fear of being shot,

mow my lawn and wave to the neighbors,

conveniently drive a sport utility vehicle and eco-friendly hybrid,

      to soccer practice, baseball practice, and my kids' drama class,

I can talk to my neighbors over the fence without concern for judgement,

         like a true Ned Flanders

         or Wilson from Home Improvement,

           the same normal I see on TV.

      except for the fact that I don't always keep my lawn up to their standards.

         I'm a threat to my neighbors' property values,

           and I'm not even that bad at it.

I can walk into the bank lobby and ask for a loan--no worries.

I never have to think about if my hands are in my pockets,

      If it's cold, I put them in--no worries.

I can get pulled over by the cops,

      knowing that my skin color will play less of a role in his or her analysis,

if they can get passed the strange "Arabic" looking Osage text on my brother's

license plate,

there is no need to call back up.

In fact, I get lots of warnings, but few tickets.

I assume my skin color helps.

I will have to discuss this with my Brown son as he gets older.

I have always gone shopping--unnoticed and without fear of being followed

I am one of the crowd, blending in with my White skin camouflage.

Except, of course

when I was fashionably rockin' the suburbs (Folds, 2001)

as a sub-mediocre

skate or die,

punk rockin',

metal lovin'

guitar playing,

baggy jean no-belt wearin'

teenager.

But still, I was never that worried.

I don't have to be.

I am White.

It doesn't guarantee everything will be perfect,

but it's pretty easy to rock the suburbs

if you are a polite White person.

Polite people of color don't always get that benefit of the doubt.

Carrying a sociocultural predisposition,

diagnosed through mainstream interpretations.

Manipulating lived experiences.

I

will

never

fully

understand

that

tion.

The Media and Me: Social Media does What Mainstream Cannot

This section is a critical reflection tied directly to the following items from McIntosh's

(2003) knapsack:

5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people

of my race widely represented. (p. 192)

As a White person, this statement from McIntosh is absolutely true. I can turn on the TV

and see White people in different roles. They are newscasters, politicians, actors, CEOs,

scientists, musicians, comedians, servicemen and women, religious leaders and much more. I

grew up exposed to plenty of examples of what it means to be White in both modern and

historical contexts. I was exposed to enough examples on a daily basis that, with confidence, I understood from an early age what it meant to be White.

I watched Full House and The Wonder Years on a fake wood paneled console TV,

garage sale quality,

making sure that antenna was juuuuust right.

I listened to Nirvana and Pearl Jam cassette tapes blaring out of our family stereo.

I learned about home repair from Bob Vila,

and happy trees from Bob Ross.

I imitated and idolized Kurt Cobain,

and was sad when he died.

But I still rocked my blue flannel shirt as often as possible.

like most of my White friends at school.

As an American Indian,

I was not mature enough to critically critique the role of White people getting the

lead roles in Indian films,

but I watched Dances with Wolves enough times to make jokes about...

"Tatanka......Bufff.....Buffff...."

and "put that in your book!"

I also played the classical music soundtrack from Last of the Mohicans,

while rolling across the prairies of Kansas and Oklahoma.

Indians in the media were mostly framed as

playing out the same stuck-in-the-past narrative

reinforced by the curriculum (Shear, et al., 2016) and mascots.

Smoke Signals and *Powwow Highway*

were a great change of pace,

although I didn't know that when I watched it for

the first time.

I wasn't a critical consumer,

it was just a good movie.

"Hey Victor!"

made it's way into the family vocabulary

As for Osages in the media,

the only Osage I remember seeing on TV was The Weird Naked Indian

in Wayne's World.

Excellent.

He greeted Wayne in a dream,

then mysteriously led him across the desert to Jim Morrison,

who told Wayne to throw a concert.

I danced next to Mr. Larry Sellers, The Weird Naked Indian,

during the I^n.Lon.Schka, although he wore more clothes.

Larry also had a role in Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman,

but I never really watched that--that show wasn't really my thing.

Wayne's World on the other hand, was.

My family thought this was hilarious--and I kinda still do.

Although not a criticism to Mr. Sellers, just a reflective observation...

my critical consciousness starts to raise an eyebrow.

My only exposure to an Osage in the movies is...

The Weird Naked Indian?

As discussed in the previous chapter, American Indians have extremely marginal and problematic representation in the media and pop culture (Hoffman, 2012), and are often reduced to feathered exotic stuck-in-the-past stereotypes. Growing up, especially prior to social media, this interaction with mainstream pop culture and media acted as a barrier to my understanding of what it means to be a modern Indigenous person. This influence carried through all the way to the beginning of my doctoral process as described in the first chapter of this dissertation. It definitely contributed to my all too simplistic "I walk in two worlds" mentality which I described in my doctoral program cover letter. In fact, I have much more exposure to a variety of modern Black, Latinx, and Asian (all regions included) people through the media than I do of American Indians. Even if each of these groups battle their own stereotypes in the media, in general, their actual presence as modern people is far greater than American Indians. As a consumer I am one of the naive middle class suburban White folks who watch the show *Blackish* which showed an almost 80% non African-American viewership (Nielsen, 2017). While I process the show as a critical consumer, I am not in the appropriate position to critique the show and its role in pop culture. However, the fact that I stumbled upon *Blackish* as the best viewing option during a long flight across the ocean offers exposure to modern interpretations of African American life--

something that is not really an option for American Indians. On TV and throughout the media, I can frequently see various people of color as everyday individuals in modern contexts, which is more than I can say about American Indians in the media, and specifically Osages.

Of course, except for The Weird Naked Indian,

although he was not presented as Osage in the movie.

On a more positive note, the rise of social media and interconnectivity via the web has allowed me more access to American Indians and Osage specific sources, such as the Osage News, YouTube videos featuring Osage elders and news from other American Indian communities, satire from the 1491s comedy sketch troupe, protest movements, powwow videos, everyday posts from friends and relatives, and more. Without social media and the worldwide web, however, I would have extremely minimal exposure to American Indian and Osage people via the media on a daily, monthly, or yearly basis. Major networks do little outside of forwarding the old stuck-in-the-past narrative and/or poverty porn for the masses--the exotic and sad portions of our narratives which tend to dominate the airwaves.

I recently listened to my father speak at an event,

and someone asked him, "what

misconceptions about Osages

would you like to dispel if you could?"

Pushing back against the serious and stoic Indian stereotype, he said:

"We smile,

a lot."

Our historic and social hardship narratives are relevant, but they dominate airwaves and therefore play a lead role in the construction of our story, making it hard for off-reservation people such as myself to paint an accurate and appropriate picture of Indigenous peoples in modern contexts. I rarely got to see American Indians represented as comedians, teachers, nurses, architects, engineers, electricians, or any other profession, which over a long period of time frames being Osage as something that does not exist in everyday life--it was something I had to go back to the reservation to experience. Frequent travel back to the reservation helped expose me to other versions of being Osage in modern contexts, but since I lived away from the reservation this disconnect with the media was an issue for me until the rise of social media while I was in college, allowing me to better connect with my community on a frequent basis. In general, this leaves a significant period of my life as unexposed to Osage media, and this affected how I viewed and understood what it meant to be Osage and/or American Indian in modern contexts. I was stuck on that narrow-minded narrative, at times I felt like I was not Indian enough, and likely never would be.

Lets face it. I would never be casted as The Weird Naked Indian.

If I had any acting skills,

maybe a Weird Naked White Dude...

or just a "normal" guy in some manner, an extra blending with the crowd,

but not a Weird Naked Indian.

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To summarize, privilege in the context of the media allowed me to have exposure to many versions of Whiteness, but it hindered my exposure to the nuanced and everyday understandings of life as an Osage, which was severely limited. However, as social media started to become the norm while I was an undergraduate, this helped bridge that gap in productive ways. Prior to social media, one of the only places I would get exposure to "being Osage" was if I traveled back to the reservation.

Colonizer/ed: Confronting Curriculum as Real Pale Indian

This section is a critical reflection tied directly to the following items from McIntosh's (2003) knapsack:

6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown
   that people of my color made it what it is.

7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to
   the existence of their race. (p. 192)

As an Indigenous-White Social studies teacher, McIntosh's statements here could not be a more paradoxical split in the context of privilege. I learned, and taught, about how my White and Indigenous ancestors were both the colonizer and the colonized, the civilized and the savage, the pioneers of manifest destiny, and the people who stubbornly got in the way.

Even saying it like that....

"OUR national heritage"

is problematic for me.

I have many "ours",

but two "ours" are specific to this situation.

Entangled, but still distinct enough to

separate.

Our = Osage

Our = American

But I have always been told I am also Irish.

One of my favorite images of my Irish Catholic Grandmother is when I used my iPhone to snap a picture of her sitting across the table in a cheap green plastic hat with long fake green braids coming down the side--with a smile on her face. I posted it on Instagram and Facebook, and since she passed the picture still annually shows up on my Facebook feed as a memory, reminding me of the love she provided me for all those years. Grandma had more grandkids and great-grandkids than anyone could calculate on an abacus, and clamoring kids contributed to the background noise of many of the interactions and conversations I had with her; but she always made me feel like a special person, even if it was sometimes in her own stubborn sort of way. Our regular commute across Osage ancestral lands from the suburbs back to the reservation were often paired with a corresponding one hour trip from Pawhuska to Tulsa to be with our Irish-Catholic family, in the old money neighborhoods near Utica Square where my mother was raised. Some of the houses in the neighborhood looked like stone castles, and the name brand luxury cars in the drive were their accessories. The hard work of my Irish ancestors who moved to Oklahoma, formerly Indian Territory, from the east coast to start a pipeline company is a primary reason why this branch of my family tree has roots in these upper-class neighborhoods. It is quite the contrast from the Wa.ha.xoli^n village outside of Pawhuska, where some folks have

abandoned their malfunctioning houses, only to park a new trailer home right next to it on the lot. Regardless, we just moved between these two settings as part of our normal routines. But all my life, as we clearly expressed pride for our Osage upbringing, Grandma Corcoran always insisted my brothers and I were Irish, too, and we definitely are...

by blood.

But as an Osage, while blood lines allow for a degree of political status as an insider, I learned that blood was not necessarily what makes someone an insider in a sociocultural sense. While there are many manifestations of Osage cultures, the I^n.Lon.Schka is the largest gathering of our people, and it is rich with history, belonging, camaraderie, and community, while also being tied to specific Osage places (i.e. Osage districts). On the other hand, my White Irish-Catholic family got together at all major holidays, but in a larger communal sense, I never had much in my Irish-Catholic upbringing that paralleled our annual Osage dances. The Catholic Church just did not do it for me in that way, not that it was bad, it just did not grab me and hold my attention the way The Drum did under The Arbor. I looked forward to getting way overdressed in my Osage dance clothes to sit on the rudimentary wooden benches that surround the sacred ground under The Arbor, much more than I looked forward to putting on slacks and a collared shirt to sit in the air conditioning on carefully-crafted, milled, sanded, stained and polyurethaned pews of ornate churches. While in the suburbs, my mom made us occasionally attend Sunday Mass, and classes during the week where we learned to take communion, but this is still far from me being able to claim Irish insider identity. Also, while Irish culture can be tied to the Catholic church, from my own position I do not make Irish and Catholic out to be entirely

synonymous, not the way Osage and I^n.Lon.Schka are partnered together. Consequently, I feel slightly disconnected to the Irish of Ireland, and I don't feel comfortable claiming Irish=Our, especially to an individual who is from Ireland. Maybe that will change at some point, but as of now this is my positionality.

I'm just not comfortable claiming Irish insider status relying solely on citing my bloodlines.

Going back to McIntosh's references to curriculum and national heritage at the top of the section, as White person in America I mainly studied and taught about "our" White national heritage and the master narrative of settler-colonialism. This is part of my privilege, I learned about American Whiteness, and how to center my thinking from that position as a White person. However, as an Irish descendant I learned little about Irish history outside of the generalization that a bunch of Irish made their way through east coast during the potato famine in the 1800s, and then immigration continued into the 1900s. Even the details of Irish existence in the U.S. got melted into the curricula of the larger American story of progress, as Irish immigrants became rolled into the White-Black power dichotomies of 19th century America, and by following capitalist labor interests they eventually found themselves in the more generic White fabric of America (Ignatiev, 2009). As Ignatiev (2009) states, "the Irish faded from Green to White" (p. 38), and I am a living example of that statement. Now, If I told someone from Ireland that I have Irish heritage (among other Europeans), I consider how that parallels to a White person with mysterious American Indian ancestry telling me that their great-grandmother was a Cherokee princess (Daniels, 2013; Mays, 2016). Discussing my Irish ancestry is more a conversation about blood, and not culture, and just as I have internalized the notion that I pass through a

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pretIndian filter in American Indian social circles, I assume there is an American-Irish filter used by people who are more connected to Ireland in a more modern context.

As stated earlier, my grandmother was proud of our Irish heritage and lineage, and at no fault to her and her efforts, I have always lacked the strong personal and cultural connections to the land and people of Ireland. As an adult in my 30's, engaging in American pop culture celebrations of St. Patrick's Day, complete with cheap green plastic cultural tokens to wear and a dyed green beer in my hand prompts me to consider how these practices parallel with cultural appropriation of American Indians through mascots, headdresses at music festivals, and more. Furthermore, I consider how Deloria and Wildcat's (2001) Indigenous philosophy of how power and place come together to create personality, and reflect on how the Irish in Ireland are still better connected to the power, place, and personality connected to that land. Then, I consider my connection to the Osage community in Oklahoma, and reflect on my experiences there as I discuss throughout this dissertation, and how it contributed to the development of my identity in the context of learning. I lack that parallel connection to the power, place, and personality of Ireland, at least at this point in my life. In other words, when I say I am White, I am referring to the generalized American version of being White, and throughout my education I had the privilege of learning about that version of Whiteness and the story of mainstream American history and national heritage, but less about the Irish specific threads of that story.

But in predominantly White education contexts, as an Osage student, I was not entirely complacent and passive while learning about the White master narrative of national heritage. One time, I challenged my US History teacher about the great American story of progress and manifest destiny, specifically problematizing the settler's attitudes toward American Indians, and

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I specifically asked her to weigh in from our modern perspective. With the class of high school students watching intently, she collected her thoughts for moment, and then responded:

"I don't think it could have happened any other way...

      ...we were too advanced and the progress of civilization was too much"

        I did not like that response.

          I was actually pretty perturbed,

            letting the silence hang after the comment,

            I think even raised my brow at the response.

            Stewing in my mind,

              a bit conflicted and confused.

              I did not doubt my conviction that her comment was...

              racist.

Framing White settler intellect as some

uncontrollable, glorious, higher power.

I wasn't asking for an apology,

just a modern, post-Civil Rights era

perspective.

but who was I to challenge the teacher,

the expert,

who knew more about the topic than I did.

As the bell rang,

I walked out the door,

found my White friends in the hallway,

and moved on with my day.

storing the memory.

Throughout my education, I engaged in American Indian topics when given the chance.

In third grade, I chose Chief Joseph for my hero biography project, and in the same US History

class described above, I chose to do my research paper on the problematic leadership choices of

Andrew Jackson and his Indian removal policies. By the way, the same teacher who believed

that the story of American progress could not have happened any other way gave me a 100% on that paper, and 10 years later brought it up at a wedding reception where we crossed paths...

"I remember when you wrote your research paper on Andrew Jackson and Indian Removal"

I was floored.

However, the critical Indigenous reader may note that these American Indian learning experiences--Chief Joseph and Andrew Jackson's Indian removal policies--while still relevant and somewhat connected to the Osage, they are not Osage specific. They are part of the larger well-known pan-Indian narratives, or at least the handful that made it into the Westward Expansion chapters of the textbooks. Those stories helped me understand a few parts of the larger picture of American Indian history, which is good in a baseline understanding kind of way, but they did little to help me understand Osage specific versions of these same stories.

To narrow the focus into Osage specific curricular interactions, as a student I was minimally exposed to Osage historical contexts, leaving most of my learning to generic pan-Indian understandings, or through what I informally learned in and around the Osage community. My parents and grandparents were frequently guest speakers in our schools, dressing us up in our Osage clothes to teach our classmates about our exotic Other existence, but other than there were only a few curricular interactions specific to Osages from sources other than my family.

In one instance, my daughter came home talking about how Osages made an appearance in *The Little House on the Prairie* - the quintessential story representing the master narrative of American progress.

She was excited, in an innocent way.

"Dad, we read about Osages in school today!"

"Really?!, what did you read"

"Little House on the Prairie!"

Oh lord.

I hadn't read it in years.

Opening the book by Wilder (1953) and thumbing through,

it does not take long to find

the scary description of "red-brown" (p. 138)

"naked wild men," (p. 137)

with "snake's-eyes" (p. 134)

walking into their little house,

unwelcome

wearing smelly skunk skins and scaring the

innocent settler family.

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A few years later, in a similar scenario on the same general topic of settler life in Kansas, without my prompting, my elementary school daughter actually pointed out to the teacher that settlers who were casting judgement on people based on their skin color, were being "prejudiced" towards them; "prejudiced" being a word she recently acquired in a social studies Civil Rights unit. In a parent teacher conference a few weeks later, while sitting on colorful undersized elementary classroom chairs, the teacher tried to explain to my wife that my daughter was having trouble understanding that the settlers were not prejudiced, they were simply scared of the Indians because they looked different than them (i.e. Reddish Brown, Exotic, and not White). What the teacher might not understand, is that although my daughter is a real pale Indian, our family has lots of cousins that are real Brown Indians that do not look like her--including her brother. As the teacher said the words out loud to my wife, she seemed to gather how it was coming across, and how she might be normalizing the notion that Indians are scary people, and it is acceptable to be scared of people of color, especially if someone is a White person taking over the Indian land. She started back pedaling, while my wife tried half-heartedly to conceal the smirk on her face.

My daughter was developing a critical consciousness,

I was rather proud of her.

I, too, read those stories as do many elementary students across the State of Kansas and beyond. Buried beneath that story, though, is a different perspective about how Wilder's family were likely squatters on Osage land. In Kaye's (2000) article *Little Squatter on the Osage Diminished Reserve: Reading Laura Ingalls Wilder's Kansas Indians,* she states, "Wilder,

writing as honestly as she knew how, spun a tale that, because of her very decency, makes

'ethnic cleansing' appear palatable" (p. 126). In a highly perverse way, Osages reading Little

House on the Prairie in schools are reading a glorified version of their final removal from

Kansas--from the settler's perspective, complete with racist representations, even if presented in

an innocent frame of representing a different time. I was no exception. I passively read the story

as an uncritical elementary school student.

Just another assignment I was supposed to do. My daughter, too.

Aside from Little House on the Prairie, and the times when my father and grandparents

came to school to talk about being Osage, one of my few Osage specific learning contexts in a

school environment was during an elementary school field trip when we went to a camp of some

sort and...

we all sat on the ground as a class,

on the edge of some woods,

and some White guy (I assume)

dressed as an Indian

sloooowly

came out of the woods.

He was dressed as a stuck in the past stereotype,

the casual version,

No blanket or scarf,

just a ribbon shirt(ish), buckskin leggings, and mocs.

He was obviously not I^n.Lon.Schka ready.

He came out and stoically announced that he was "Wah.Zha.Zhi,"

which is what we Osages call ourselves.

I was excited.

I looked around for confirmation of excitement

from my mostly White peers,

nothing.

He wore his hair in a traditional Osage manner, mostly bald with a

small strip of hair left further back on the scalp.

Very authentic...

However,

It was bald cap,

blended with his copper toned face make up--red face.

trying to blend the color of the cap with his skin tone

I could easily see the quasi-loose edge of the cap by his ear.

Dead giveaway.

Imposter.

I remember thinking--that's funny,

so fake.

meh

whatever

What did I know?

Now--as an adult--I think about the story of White Hair (Bpah.hu.ska), and the story of his

name, scalping a general back in the day,

White wig and all,

and what he might have thought if he came across this guy.

Dang.

Looking back, this is my exposure to Osage National heritage.

and my White-settler heritage peers have awkwardly hijacked the Osage

narrative.

...and these are my privileges related to learning about

our

heritage(s).

Whiteness and Power: One of the Guys Coming on Too Strong?

This section is a critical reflection tied directly to the following items from McIntosh's

(2003) knapsack:

13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on

trial.

14. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and

behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.

18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the "person in charge," I will be

facing a person of my race. (pp. 192-193)

As a collection, these four items on McIntosh's list are inherently tied to the White

hetero-patriarchical power dynamics in our institutions. The reality that our institutions are

predominantly run by White men has given me advantages throughout my life--advantages that I

may at times be blind to--but in my unique context, these advantages also coincide with alternative interpretations.

As a White male, I can easily be one of the guys, and play that status quo part on que, just as many White men are socialized to do. I can just go about my daily business and capitalize on these privileges without a second thought, even if unaware.

To a degree,

I can drink cocktails, talk shop and sports, and network accordingly,

as a "normal" person in the group,

one of the guys.

I never have the responsibility of speaking for all other White people.

Ever.

I can ask for the manager, and likely see someone who looks like me.

My bosses have most often looked like me,

conversed like me,

generically experienced the daily world through

White male positionality

and constructed

worldviews.

like me

...ish.

I have recently started encountering a threshold where my Osage and Indigenous priorities as an educator encounter the power center of Whiteness, changing the way people respond to me. Mostly, the settings where I talk about these topics have changed, as I have moved from hallway and lunch room chit chat among teachers, to educational leadership contexts in conference rooms where decisions carry more weight and power is more concentrated. While I have not been a principal or superintendent, my doctoral studies have opened up paths for me to have a seat, and a voice, in these settings. When I cross this threshold, and began to find myself in educational leadership contexts, the same conversations I had with peers in casual settings around the school as a teacher, started to be received differently by some educational leaders.

While my White privilege may have played a role helping get a seat in the

nice, cushy, rolly chairs surrounding a large conference room tables,

When I problematize over-simplistic interpretations of "being Indian"

I am met with eye rolls that do not make it into the secretary's minutes.

Then, when I ask to bring scholarship and research to the conversation,

I am told "you seem like you are coming on a little strong right now,"

and that there is not enough time to learn about the topic.

When I explain to a large group of non-Indians how a school administrator

offended me in their institution by saying "Let's scalp those redskins!"

or how another administrator pranced around the

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homecoming pep assembly dressed as an Indian

fake clothes and all.

A White woman tells me,

"I think at some point we need to just agree to disagree on this topic".

because when she walks out of the room,

her normal gets to stay normal

and "let's scalp those redskins!" gets to stay normal, too.

Now, I see that I am no longer casually talking to teachers in the hallway,

while students pass by and lockers clang in the background.

I am talking to leaders about changing their entire systems.

and going on the record,

while we rock back and forth in our nice rolly chairs.

This dynamic has modified how people respond to me.

The reality is,

in front of my White peers (some, not all) I shapeshift from being

a White guy with some really interesting exotic Other perspectives,

to a threat...a change agent.

and an overly dramatic minority,

speaking in exaggerated liberal hyperbole.

I am accused of being too politically correct,

a public relations liability.

I become someone to get around,

someone to silence,

not listen to.

Simultaneously, it would also be naive of me to state that over the course of my lifetime my White male status did not play a role in helping me get to this leadership context in the first place...

to have a seat at the big shiny table, in the comfortable reclining rolly chairs.

positions where I can have these conversations about institutional change.

I credit my hard work,

but my White skin camouflage and privilege surely didn't hurt.

in K-12 classrooms,

in undergraduate settings,

going about life in and around the community,

as a young professional,

in graduate school,

and more.

As I traverse institutional settings, though, the cultures of each local setting are relevant, for there is experiential variance worth mentioning. For some of the power brokers, I am received with open arms, as someone who is engaging in meaningful work that matches their larger social justice agenda, and I am grateful for their open mindedness, forward thinking approach, and support. This is the most fitting description of my current work environment as a student and employee. However, I consider how this might have fostered an optimistic naivety for what lie outside of my local situation. Eventually, as I began branching out with my critical Indigenous ideas, I began to notice that for some I am a resource for American Indian representation, and good person to have around so they can nominally say they are doing great things for diversity. Then, there are many others who perceive my ideas as dramatically couched in some politically correct, over-idealistic liberal agenda, and as someone creating unnecessary work for them--a nuisance that makes things harder, even when carrying a quiver full of scholarly citations which some choose to ignore. In this context, I am someone to keep at bay, someone venting, and someone to appease. The more I branch out from my local environment, and the more I become the latter.

Additionally, as I branch out into more predominantly White educational leadership situations, I never have to speak for White people but I do have to take on the role of being a knowledgeable representative for all American Indians. When I do, I wonder if I am seen less as a White person, or I consider how people begin to process my mainstream White tone, demeanor, and skin. As an American Indian representative at these tables, this comes with a burden of pressure and obligation that I do not always enjoy. I feel the pressure to get things right and try to answer questions with precision, because I am confident that most of the people

at the table will likely have few opportunities to hear informed Indigenous perspectives on the topic before they return to their predominantly White peers to continue the dialogue.

This is new for me.

Hallway small talk with teachers and students,

being a discussion leader with a class full of students,

and sitting on diversity panels to talk to people

who mostly want to be there,

is easy.

I am just a White guy with exotic Other perspectives.

But board room dialogue,

is different.

There is a concentration of power

and disrupting a power center

to make room for Brown people perspectives,

even when carrying White skin camouflage.

is difficult.

My frustration, as I try to adapt, likely lies with the

reality that.....

My White skin existence in educational systems has allowed me to

naively prance around the playful peripheries of the power center

without confronting it

experiencing it

and consequently

learning how to adapt when that occurs.

This ribbon work pattern will take more time for me to clean up.

I have work to do.

I need practice in these transitional spaces.

How can I be a peacekeeper?

Tsi.zhu.wah.shta.geh.

when social justice requires so much disruption?

Wah.shka^{n}?

Intersecting Privileges and Rights: I Get Those Free Indian Scholarships, and the White Privilege Ones, Too.

This section is a critical reflection tied directly to the following items from McIntosh's (2003) knapsack:

22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of race. (p. 193)

Here McIntosh is eluding to the programs which are intended to funnel resources to historically marginalized groups, such as affirmative action, and how people of color are often assumed to be getting an unfair advantage over White people. While I do not intend to address affirmative action specifically, here I discuss a broader perspective about how being a card carrying American Indian who passes for White is a unique zone of intersectional privileges and political rights that allow me to have access to a collection of opportunities only available to people like me. Furthermore, these privileges and rights deserve nuanced articulation because often educators over-generalize the position of American Indians into an oversimplified social justice and equity framework, which sometimes fails to recognize the unique and specific circumstances of American Indians belonging to federally recognized native nations.

At this intersection of privileges and rights, I specifically have access to 1) the previously discussed privileges of having White skin and easily blending in to the daily "normal" experiences of mainstream America; 2) I have a certified affiliation to a native nation, with sovereign political power, and as a citizen of that nation I have access to specific social programming; and 3) as a demographic minority, even though I am also a member of the majority, I have access to unique opportunities that are designed to help people from historically marginalized groups. In other words, no matter my skin color, on paper I am a minority and therefore I can satisfy institutional initiatives aimed at increasing diversity. I can check the box that says American Indian/Alaskan Native, and therefore my affiliated institutions can mark me down as such. This allows me to become evidence of a person of color, which is something that accreditation officials are looking for when they assess institutions. Collectively, this makes for a unique zone of intersectional privilege and/or political rights, at least when compared to my

peers who are only White, my peers who are physically a person "of color," and my Brown

American Indian peers who are enrolled in federally recognized nations.

       Often, I end up in the following conversation in the hallways of our institutions as a

student, peer, and colleague. I do not always vocalize all of the dialogue on my end, but it still

exists, even if it is not said out loud.

         "Oh cool!

            You're an Indian!?

            Well, you don't look like one."

Yes. I am aware of that.

            Wait, does that mean you get one of those *free*

            Indian scholarships?!"

Well....uh......*free?*

         "I checked into it

            to see if I had American Indian blood,

            so I could see if I might

               qualify for one of those too."

Well, I do receive a scholarship but it is a little more complicated than that.

"Dang, you're lucky!

Do you get pay outs from the casinos, too?"

Um, no.

But some Osages have inherited shares in the minerals estate

and get quarterly headright payments from

the oil and gas extracted from under the reservation.

Those payments had a role in widespread corruption and murder scandals

in the 1920s, but that's a long story.

"Oh wow, that sounds interesting,

maybe I will check that out when they make

a movie about it someday...."

Setting aside the Osage and White skin twist on this dialogue, many American Indians are familiar with some version of this conversation, and the ongoing misconception about all the "free" stuff that we have access to. Tying back to McIntosh's statement at the beginning of this section, this specific conversation is an American Indian spin off dialogue about people of color having privileged and unfair advantages through programs such as affirmative action. Furthermore, when people are able to get beyond the stuck-in-the-past stereotypes of American Indians, they immediately revert to modern stereotypes founded on the causal and narrow perception of economic advantages (casinos, scholarships, per-capita pay outs, etc). The sample dialogue above represents how American Indians must fight through these stereotypes regularly, and these ongoing conversations have to do with the reality that many people rarely learn much about American Indian political sovereignty through mainstream education systems.

Although the entry point of this chapter is centered around the notion of White privilege, some of what I discuss in this section should not remain couched in that term. With White privilege being the starting point, the conversation is automatically positioned in a variety of generic multiculturalism, social justice, and equity agenda frameworks, and from those vantage points, the topic of American Indians having access to certain resources might be interpreted as privilege--or something that I am privy to but others are not. However, when one re-centers their orientation to an American Indian perspective, some of what might be considered a privilege or advantage, is actually a right couched in the politicized histories of native nations and the United States of America. For example, in the title and sample dialogue above, I play with the stereotype of the ever present "free" American Indian scholarship. Stereotype aside, yes, I do have access to financial aid that others do not have. But there are a few important details that need to be flushed out behind this generic conversation. First, not every American Indian has access to the magic pot of "free" Indian financial aid, it is more complicated than that. Second, this is a bizarre way to start a conversation with someone you barely know, but it happens often. Third, the word "free" is highly problematic in the first place.

The term "free" is problematic because it rests on the assumption that American Indians are the same as all ethnic minorities, and that they magically have special privileges that few people connect to political decisions made long ago. Again, the problem of narrow curriculum feeds this notion:

Real Indians are

in the past,

                                                    Modern remnants of those real Indians

                                                              are generically rolled into

                                                                   ethnic minority lessons,

                                                                        people of color

                                                                   ...with special casino rights.

                                        It is not that simple.

                                        Modern American Indians

                                  have political power and sovereignty

                            fought for and negotiated by those real Indians of the past,

                                  and maintained through the present.

   Brayboy (2006) emphasizes this distinction in forwarding a Tribal Critical Race Theory

(TribalCrit) for education, as he emphasizes the politicized nature of our identities, and the need

to consider how American Indians operate in a unique racialized and legal/political environment,

and how sovereignty and self-determination separate American Indians from the Black-White

dichotomies from which Critical Race Theory was born. When people stereotypically discuss

the "free" scholarships that American Indians possess, they are ignoring the plain and simple

reality that the forfeiture of the land across the United States of America came with legally

binding negotiated agreements (not always kept by the U.S.)--many of which had a promise to

American Indian nations that the federal government would be responsible for providing

educational services to their citizens among other items perceived to be "free". Therefore, American Indian financial aid tied to the federal government is far from "free," and if a student chooses to attend a school such as Haskell Indian Nations University, it is not "free," and it never was. Even though many educators choose to roll American Indians into the larger demographic of being an ethnic minority, the federal government is still responsible to these real Indians in the present, even the real pale ones.

Continuing this line of thought, the sovereign status of native nations allows them the choice to build their own governments, enroll citizens, and funnel resources toward the education of their people if they so choose. The State of Kansas, and every other state in the Union, has those same rights to support education for their citizens. So, if the Osage Nation democratically chooses to offer financial aid to their citizens in higher education, which they do, that is a fundamental right rooted in our legal frameworks as a sovereign nation.

Thus, if someone might perceive me to have some special advantage as a card carrying American Indian, drawing a parallel from affirmative action style programs to scholarships couched in political rights is problematic. I am not arguing with McIntosh's assertion, the item listed above was simply an entry point for writing exploration. I am merely reframing the core principals of what she eludes to, and clarifying how one might process and interpret my own unique positionality in this conversation. Therefore, what some might interpret to be a privilege, something that American Indians have access to but others do not, is actually a legal right; and with over 560 federally recognized native nations across the United States, the decision making and resources associated with each community makes it impossible--and irresponsible--to generalize a scholarship stereotype to all Indigenous populations. For me, however, as a member

of the Osage Nation, I am fortunate that my elected leaders have chosen to support our citizens with financial aid in higher education, and that we have the resources to do so.

So yes, I am the recipient of Osage financial aid, but that should not be generalized to all American Indians, and it should be interpreted more as a right--paid for through the land upon which many universities rest, and founded on the decisions of a specific sovereign government.

Moving forward, as a person of color *on paper*, I also have access to opportunities that are intended to open up space for diverse perspectives in educational systems. At this point in our post-civil rights era, educational leaders have growing interest in looking for larger minority representation in their institutions, as evident by mission statements emphasizing respect for diversity, the growth of diversity coordinator positions, the development of multicultural centers, the rise of student groups representing specific sociocultural demographics, and more. In many ways, supporting diversity is important enough that it is being branded across institutions, and a quick look at school websites reveal decisions to make sure people of color are represented through branding and advertising. Furthermore, in the specific context of the field of education, many of these efforts might be seen as a trickle-down effect, considering the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2008) explicitly emphasizes the role and need for increased diversity in their Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Preparation Institutions. While there are still issues of disproportionate White presence in our educational institutions (Ahmad & Boser; AASA, 2013) it is worth noting that these institutions have an interest in diversifying their faculty and staff, and also go greater lengths than in the past to accommodate diversity in and across their institutions. Often, these efforts can be watered down to what Pewewardy might refer to as "race talk is happy talk" or "ethnic cheerleading" (2017) as educational leaders prop up a facade of diversity without actually changing much for the

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betterment of marginalized groups. Regardless, more positions and programs are being

generated to accommodate and/or support people of color.

      As a person of color on paper, I fit that bill.

            I do not have to pass a skin color exam

                  to declare myself as an American Indian/Alaskan Native

                                (Even though I am not an Alaskan Native)

Therefore, as real pale Indian, I have access to these programs and the resources

associated with being a minority amongst the majority, even if I can walk amongst the halls of a

predominantly White institution as one of the crowd. This is different than my political rights

associated with Osage sovereignty and past government to government, nation to nation

agreements. These programs are focused efforts designed to open up access to predominantly

White institutions of education, to generate more culturally responsive learning environments for

the benefit of all, and to acknowledge that historically under-represented groups have been--and

continue to be--marginalized in our educational systems. In other words, these programs are

designed to disrupt the status quo of Whiteness, and make way for diverse perspectives.   As

evident by this dissertation and the creation of the Osage Nation Educational Leadership

Academy discussed in previous chapters, while I may not technically be of color, my efforts still

match the overarching goals of adding diverse perspectives into our institutions of education.

Conclusion

So, coming back to the question at the beginning of the chapter,

Am I a person of color?

No.

But, yes.

as evident by my political status,

and the identification cards in my wallet

issued by the federal government and the Osage Nation

but confirmed in my mind,

as a citizen of the Osage Nation

and a member of the Osage community,

named,

launched,

and active amongst peers.

But I urge you,

Do not generalize my perspective to Other card carrying

real pale pretIndians, as Mays (2016) acknowledges.

For there is a dynamic...

that is problematic (TallBear, 2013),

and hard to define.

...and there are many White folks,

some with a card in hand, and some not,

looking for a scholarship,

and some "free" money.

or a cheaper tag for their car.

Some folks are ready to join,

like a neat club,

and then seek confirmation.

Folks who are...

dis   conne

cted.

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by the machinery of settler-colonialism.

their own respective entanglements.

But who has the power to cast judgement?

Case by case, I consider,

is it ever my place to determine

Who is a real pale pretIndian.

and

Who is a real pale Indian

As I visited with an elected official in the Osage Nation, they told me,

"My job is not to determine who is more Osage than someone else,

But I have a responsibility to advocate for

the descendants of all Osages,

on those 1906 rolls."

This seems to be one of the only,

ways forward.

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Just

something to

deal with.

But,

can Osage education change that?

or at least help?

      I have heard disconnected,

           enrolled,

                Osage citizens,

           enthusiastically talk about their children and grandchildren

                enrolling in the new Osage language immersion school,

                    because their children will have an opportunity to learn about,

                those ways,

                    ...what they know, or at least think,

                  they missed out on.

Chapter 6 - Setting the Prairie on Fire and Discovering the Blackjacks

Introduction

Indigenous ways of knowing are often deeply rooted in ecological thinking, with an emphasis on relationships, reciprocity, and interconnectedness with all things, including the land. This chapter is an exploration of returning to the land through philosophical introspection using Cajete's (1994) work, and my infatuation with the prairie and prairie fire as an entry point. The goal, is to explore how I might re-conceptualize identity and settler-colonial entanglements in the context of education systems (formal, informal, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous) acting as competing knowledge ecosystems within what I refer to as an identity biome. I also consider how this ecological thinking might be a useful bridge between hard and soft science thinking, or rather, a way to connect the way educators think about ecological and biological systems with how we tend to process topics related to sociocultural diversity. Specifically, in this chapter, I use the prairie and Cajete's (1994) notion of ecologically informed consciousness as an entry point for introspection, and then I outline how components of the prairie and its correlated ecosystems--including the role of fire--might be applied to educational analyses of settler-colonial entanglements. Then, using this new lens, I return back to previous sections of this dissertation to re-consider how this ecological thinking might be applied to some of the more salient discussions.

Introducing Ecologically Informed Consciousness

Cajete (1994) explains that Indigenous traditions strive to, "think the highest thought" (p. 46), which is the process of engaging in a, "sophisticated epistemology of community based ecological education" (p. 46). Simultaneously, he implores that this requires a "quality of thinking that embodies an ecologically-informed consciousness" (p. 46), what I interpret as

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looking to the natural world around us to inform how we might process our complicated existence on this planet, and considering how that might be useful throughout our educational efforts. Like ribbon work, biomes and ecosystems possesses diversity, but have a unique oneness to it, with many parts working together as a whole. In this effort to deepen my thinking, though, these ecosystems also offer built-in elements of life, movement, detailed interconnectedness, and interdependency which I regard as possessing strong potential for theoretical, methodological, or even pedagogical value in education. Here, I begin with an exploration of these potential eco-understandings, and then re-apply those knowledges to topics addressed in previous chapters.

The Prairie: My Entry Point

I have been infatuated with the prairie for a long time. It is hard not to be when I have spent 30 plus years rolling across Kansas and Northern Oklahoma watching the seasons impose their cycle on the earth and sky. As if I was playing out some deep and reflective movie scene complete with somber background music, I often gazed out the windows of our industrial ponies where I watched the prairie fires glow in the distance, and the sunset paint the backdrop behind the tallgrass and cross timbers. Sometimes the prairie goes for miles and plays the lead role, but other times the oak cross timbers break up the scene and vie for the spotlight, but my attention has often gravitated back to the prairie--and especially the prairie fire. Sometimes, I would manually roll down the window when the air-conditioning was broken, and the aroma of distant smoke would flow through the car; but if the fire was near and the smoke was thick, I would roll it up until the dense smoke was in the rearview mirror. I still do this same thing as I drive across the prairie to work with Osage Educational Leadership Academy...and try to take one handed pictures with my iPhone while driving.

But in spring, after the prairie fires go to sleep, I eventually have the privilege of watching the rolling green grass return to the delight of the cattle, as it did for the bison in centuries past. In these weeks, the grass and rolling hills hypnotize me, making me a threat to other drivers on the road. Eventually the scorching summers return, and as sun intensifies, it steals some of the green back from the bluestem and begins to weave a mixture of light brown into the fabric of the landscape--for miles. All the while, car dashboards begin to dry out and crack under the pressure of the heat, reminding me to appreciate the true power of my air conditioner, even as it disconnects me from fulfilling the stereotype of always being one with nature, even as I look to nature for insightful knowledges. As transition to fall comes, the cross timbers and their leaves begin to play the lead role as they turn from green to oranges, reds, and browns, joining the dry tallgrass in preparing for dormancy. As the winter comes, some of the cross timbers try to desperately hang on to their dangling brown leaves, while the cold winds and occasional snow try to grab them off the branches and relocate them. All the while, the prairie seems to be enduring the elements,

<p style="text-align:center">patiently waiting for the spring fires to destroy each blade of grass</p>

<p style="text-align:center">only to awaken each plant from a long and deep slumber.</p>

From Pawhuska and the Wa.hax.oli^n village, two stretches of paved and gravel road are my favorites: The county backroads[6] to the Pa.su.li^n village (Grayhorse), and then the short drive

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[6] I have been told by an elder that some people call this the "back way" to Grayhorse, but that it is not the "back way" it is just "the way to Grayhorse."

to Lookout Hill[7] just east of town. On these roads, Nanny and Papa would sometimes let my brothers and I practice our underage driving skills while sitting on their laps as we made our way to and from various locations across the reservation, such as their favorite fishing spots, church in various small towns, or to Lookout Hill where we would pray.

The route to Grayhorse makes me feel good inside every time I see it, and since they often host the first dance in June, this drive also represents the beginning of the I^n.Lon.Schka. As an adult, I play my dad card and make sure that my children--whether they like it or not--put down their tablets and books to look out the window and recognize the beauty of the rolling hills of the prairie on our way to the Grayhorse Arbor. During my commutes across Kansas, it is nice to see a similar view on the Konza Prairie and Flint Hills while driving on I-70 in my eco-pony between Salina, Manhattan, Lawrence, and Kansas City. As I traverse these roads in proximity to the historical boundary zones between the Kaw and Osage Nations, I cannot help but consider them a stunning sequel to the open prairies of Osage County--particularly the route from Pawhuska to Grayhorse.

On top of Lookout Hill, with the rolling hills of the prairie patched with cross-timber's making a 360-degree live panoramic, I learned the spiritual significance of that place and its power. As Deloria and Wildcat (2001) suggest, the living energy that inhabits and/or composes the universe (power), plus the relationship of things to each other (place), form "a simple equation: Power and place produce personality" (p. 23). For me, this logic is undeniable when I consider the power, place, and personality of Lookout Hill, and my memories and connections to that specific location. My grandfather occasionally took my brothers and me out to the hill at

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[7] Some refer to this same location as Lookout Mountain

sunrise where we verbally prayed to a Christian concept of God with the King James Bible in Papa's old worn hands, while we were also connecting to the spirit and power of Wah.Kon.Tah and our Osage ancestors buried on the east side of the hill--where the sun rises every day. While we often went to pray on Lookout Hill when my grandfather prompted us, we have also witnessed several Osage burials occur at this same location, where families and friends follow specific Osage protocols and processes before the community collectively lowers our loved ones into the ground. Through these experiences, I learned to recognize the power of this specific place, among others, across the reservation.

> Now, when I am in Pawhuska and have a free moment,
>> I find myself driving to this special place.
>>> Driving my eco-pony up the steep gravel hill,

> > > Just because.

Throughout my life, the prairie was a scenic backdrop in my Kansas suburbs to Osage Reservation commuter life. Now, after engaging in Indigenous and introspective scholarship with the hope of (re)generating stronger connections with the land and natural world as Cajete (2012) urges, I am compelled to look at the prairie as more than a beautiful landscape that connects me across my homes in Kansas and Oklahoma.

Looking back at Osage history (Burns, 2004; Rollings, 2004), I consider how my ancestors historically relied on the prairie for seasonal buffalo hunts for essential sustenance...

...for food...

    ...for survival.

    I taught U.S. history lessons about the destruction of the buffalo, and how that hindered the strength of native nations across the plains, and how the lack of buffalo in turn made space for the continuation of the settler-colonial grand narrative, manifest destiny, and westward expansion. Although I never taught about the Osages specifically in this context, or learned about it through our systems, the Osages made their last hunts around 1876 (Rollings, 2004), signaling an end to the seasonal routines of the buffalo hunts and their corresponding sustenance. I often heard my elders talk about the transitions of our people around the latter part of the 1800s and into the early 1900s, and how we had to adjust our entire lifestyles. Specifically, when I hear our elders talk about how our ancestors made decisions to move on from our old sociocultural systems, adapt as best we can, and move forward, contextualizing this as a learner becomes easier when I am able to see specifically that our last buffalo hunts, our final move from the Kansas reservation to our current location, and the creation of our I^n.Lon.Schka all occurred around the same era--a period of imbalance amongst our people. When my elders say, "they gave us everything we needed and put it in that dance", this particular background knowledge about the last Osage buffalo hunts helps me make more sense of the transition my elders are referencing.   However, as these nuanced details are buried into the larger discourse of westward expansion in U.S. history courses, they are effectively erased for our Osage students and teachers. But as Osages in our modern contexts, we are still continuing our specific versions of this ongoing narrative--adaptation, and moving forward--so with this I consider my relationship to the prairie and its ecosystems, and the search for sustenance in our modern reality.

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As discussed previously, when I was in elementary school our family moved from the reservation to the suburbs of Kansas City in search of capital in the form of quality schools and financial security. As an adult with my own family, my wife and I made a similar decision to move further out onto the plains to Salina with the same considerations--a job for financial security and associated educational opportunities. As Cajete (2012) emphasizes, "the educational system teaches Indigenous people to be consumers in the tradition of the 'American dream' and all that it entails" (p. 145). In many ways, this is what my family pursued as we moved from the reservation to the suburbs.

However, we were not disconnected from our Osage community and landscapes. We stayed attached to the Osage people and ways, as I describe in the poem below which reconsiders my family's connection to the prairie in a similar context as the Osage buffalo hunts of the past. I am cognizant that this poem combines Eurocentric capitalism with Indigenous perspectives on land and interconnectedness, and how this might be problematic for some. However, in staying true to the ribbon work framework of this autoethnography, this is a product of my entanglements. Additionally, the Osages have long engaged in manipulating the economies of the southern plains and woodland areas around Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Arkansas to serve their interests, as they maintained economic hegemony and trade in the region for centuries through strategic decision making (Burns, 2004). In a way, this poem is a continuation of that narrative, pulling it out of historical contexts and revealing its continuation in a modern setting.

Here, I use this poem to introduce the prairie and prairie fire as a way to conceptualize colonial entanglements and the need for balance in and across our learning systems, as I simultaneously position this effort in modern context of my life between the suburbs of Kansas and the reservation in Oklahoma. After the poem, I unpack a few key ideas and educational

applications for the prairie and prairie fire in the context of settler-colonial entanglements in education.

The Hunt for Capital

Where are you from?

For me, I always feel compelled to explain...

I was born in Oklahoma, and I lived on the Osage reservation until elementary school when Dad
      got a job in Kansas City and we moved to the burbs.

Elementary school,
      middle school,
            high school,
                  college,
                        marriage,
                              first teaching job...all in the burbs. The American Dream.

We were White,
      so we fit right in
      ...ish.

We were also the pale ones who brought exotic Brown people items for show and tell.

Staying connected was a must. We drove...

       back,

            and forth,

  and back,

                  and forth

     and back

                    and forth

...across   The   Prairie.

We would go home for the I^{n}.Lon.Schka. We would dance under The Arbor, and study our

elders and those ways.

        But then we would go home so we could make sure I made it back

           to my baseball games...I didn't want to let the team down,

              They were depending on me.

Back to home, where we were taught to pray on top of Lookout Hill...with the sunrise.

Home, where I was taught English, U.S. History, and Calculus.

Home, where I could hear elders use Wah.Zha.Zhi I.eh before our meals,

while we could still smell the open fire,

and the kettles full of red corn hominy

and pork steam fry.

While the Blue Spode dishes awaited.

Home, where I learned to shoot a double leg...2 points.

and jump rope in a sauna

to get my weight down.

Home, where the smell of prairie fire was comforting.

Home, where the buffalo roam(ed).

Home, where I could actually see buffalo on the prairie.

Home, where I sang in the choir.

Home, where I wasn't a Singer, I was just a dancer.

Home, where I studied to teach and coach.

Home where I returned to study.

Where am I from? Where is my home?

I am not lost. I am, however, entangled.

My family has traversed the prairies in our industrial ponies to hunt for capital.

Not just financial,

Not just industrial,

but also...

human capital,

cultural capital,

spiritual capital.

To be spent on ourselves, on our people, and on our

relatives.

Re-manufactured...

Digging into the cultural portfolios of ancestors

and elders,

exploring how to reinvest the dividends through

our interconnected human ecosystems,

in the present.

The Prairie is my home,

The same prairie that held the trails and hunting grounds of Osages past,

and is entangled in the politics of Osage present.

The same prairie that was burned and managed for generations,

and continues to be, but for different reasons and different motives.

The same prairie that was used to sustain those old ways

and maintain balance.

The same prairie that generated, produced, and cultivated my name.

It connects me back to my relatives;

past,

present,

immediate,

distant,

White,

Red,

            Black,

                                                      Latino/a

                  mixed,

                                          elder,

            younger,

      ...across   The   Prairie.

      Now settled in and among Eurocentric ways

                  with K-12 classrooms and land grant universities

            with previous balances interrupted,

                  off kilter,

                        but still managed as best as we can.

                                          Moving into the future.

Still our home,

      my home.

Still an ecosystem. So many species within,

      some Indigenous,

some not,

some were always there,

but kept at bay with fire,

managed.

Some fighting for sunlight and water in the ecotones of my identity

but actively managed with care.

Maintaining that balance.

Still regularly burned.

Burn. The deep roots refresh. New growth, some change, but connected to the same system.   Burn. The deep roots refresh. New growth, some change, but connected to the same system.   Burn. The deep roots refresh. New growth, some change, but connected to the same system.   Burn. The deep roots refresh. New growth, some change, but connected to the same system.   Burn. The deep roots refresh. New growth, some change, but connected to the same system.   Burn. The deep roots refresh. New growth, some change, but connected to the same system.   Burn. The deep roots refresh. New growth, some change,

but still connected.

Still managing,

still burning,

still hunting,

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still maintaining,

                        still growing,

                        my home.

Reterritorializing Home: Unpacking the Potential of the Prairie

Using this poem and the prairie as a frame, I now outline three specific areas of the poem which possess pedagogical, theoretical, and methodological potential in the fields in and across education. Together, the components of this eco-analysis help to conceptualize settler-colonial entanglements in education as a series of competing knowledge systems. While the choice of ecosystem can vary from person to person depending on their connections to land, I have chosen to specifically use the prairie as a pedagogical medium to consider 1) the multidimensional and spatial thinking associated with using an ecosystem as a metaphor and the value of merging these hard science knowledge systems with sociocultural conversations, 2) the ecological boundary zones where species battle for sunlight and soil (the ecotones), and 3) fire as a tool for maintenance for Indigenous knowledge systems. While there are potentially many more dimensions to consider, these three offer a solid entry point for discussing the value of ecological thinking in education. Furthermore, as I have spent my life commuting between Kansas and Oklahoma, together these efforts are way for me to reterritorialize the prairie in new and exciting ways, and in turn re-conceptualize my definitions and contextualization of the term home.

Thinking Eco: My Identity Biome

Ecological thinking allows for added dimensions and spatial thinking in ways that can encourage more complex understandings and visualization of my settler-colonial entanglements.

Specifically, using the prairie as a metaphor helps me process terms like *culture* and *identity* in non-static ways, in a web of interconnected dependency that occupies a multi-dimensional spatial existence. I find ecological thinking far more productive than the Certified Degree of Indian Blood and Osage Nation membership cards in my wallet and over-generalizing the White skin I carry daily. Ecological thinking helps me conceptualize my intersectional identities as a dynamic, living, breathing, and continually-evolving system.

To illustrate this eco-context, I consider my mind as a living biome of interacting lived experiences, composed of various knowledge ecosystems which influence my thinking and sociocultural positionalities. In this context, my mainstream schooling acts as a knowledge ecosystem within my identity biome, as do my learning experiences under The Arbor and around The Drum, among others. While I do not highlight them as much in this chapter, I have several other specific knowledge systems in my biome such as: studying qualitative academia, time spent around the sport of wrestling as an athlete and coach, my time as a musician in several bands, spending time on Catholic and Southern Baptist church pews, and time spent as a son, father, husband, brother, and more. These experiential learning contexts come with specific learned knowledges and skill sets which interact with one another to make me who I am. Furthermore, I can traverse in, out, and across them, and mentally position myself accordingly. Some of these knowledge systems might occupy more space and energy in my mind than others, but they are all there, influencing the larger biome--me.

Most of these lived experiences are mine, but these knowledge systems sometimes carry lessons and information which is shared with others through direct and indirect interactions. For example, my parents (AKA: Santa Claus), bought me my first guitar which peaked my interest in music, but that decision was likely influenced by my father's experiences growing up around his

father who played the piano, who was likely influenced by someone in his lived experiences. In other words, my ancestors still influence the way I interpret, process, and interact with the world, as does everyone I am connected with throughout my various learning systems. Together, these ecosystems operate with, and against, one another to make up what is me; my personalities, dispositions, knowledges, behaviors, reflections, and ideas.

To draw a parallel to an actual ecosystem, I specifically use the tallgrass prairie in the poem to illustrate this thinking. If one were to imagine that every blade of grass, root, oxygen molecule, bird, bison, insect, drop of water, and earth worm buried in the soil were a lived experience of my own, or a collection of lived experiences working together, they create a knowledge ecosystem of interconnectivity within my larger biome. Therefore, when I choose to specifically connect my biome to the prairie, I am choosing to tie into its ecological functions and knowledges.

I enjoy the non-static evolving flexibility when thinking eco, because it allows me to have an already organized and comprehensive set of multi-dimensional interconnectivity that is hard to replicate with just words. There is a natural accommodation of the complex, and an opportunity to learn from those built in systems that we understand so well in the hard sciences. Thus, with this hard science visualization, the knowledge systems across my identity biome

    move,

        change,

            adapt,

live,

and work to survive.

But just like every biome and/or ecosystem,

balance is necessary,

and certain species can threaten that balance if the system is

disrupted.

Why can't this thinking be applied to our internal conceptualizations of sociocultural...

diversity,

lived experience,

learning,

education

and identity?

In the above poem, for example, I consider how I am connected to the roots of the

tallgrass prairie's system, roots that are strikingly deep, as prairie grass plants can stretch

"anywhere from eight to fourteen feet underground" (Harlan, 2015, para. 3). The tallgrass plants

on the surface are not nearly the whole story, and deep root system portions of the system are

mostly unseen from the perspective of the surface or sky; but what occurs under the soil still

feeds and influences the system nonetheless.

In my biome,

I consider these tallgrass roots as parallel to the influence of my ancestors,

as their lived experiences are part of me.

Decisions they made long ago, still influence my behaviors and attitudes

generated across my interacting and competing

knowledges systems.

Therefore, in this context any ecosystem might become a productive pedagogical tool for analyzing oneself in ways that accommodate sociocultural complexity and might better match lived realities. Applying hard science ecological thinking to identity development and knowledge systems can help educators conceptualize lived intersectional identities beyond a collection of static and oversimplified demographic categories with corresponding stereotypes. For example, as a real pale Indian in someone's classroom, if the teacher discovers that I am Osage, this eco-framework might allow them to more productively process who I am beyond the limited binary, dichotomous, and either/or stereotypes they likely carry with them. Instead of getting caught up on what they think a *real* Indian is supposed to look like, they might be able to conceptualize my entangled existence in more complex and accurate ways. Also, framing our students as living identity biomes, might help educators understand their roles as one of many agents in and across the student's knowledge systems, and try to conceptualize their influence from various positions within that dynamic as they conceptualize the entire identity biome of the student. Furthermore, as educators consider how they bring their own respective knowledge systems to student-teacher interactions, and forward their specific lessons and curricula through various pedagogical media, they are introducing those knowledge systems into the students' identity biomes. When one considers the reality that mainstream Eurocentric knowledge

systems--and the teachers and leaders that carry them--occupy a huge and powerful space within and across our identity biomes, one must also recognize that this very real power dynamic has the potential to generate an ecological imbalance across the students learning systems. This imbalance is a situation where one system or specific species across the biome, threatens many Other less visible and marginalized systems in potentially destructive ways. As an example, if students are required to speak English and learn U.S. history instead of learning Osage and Osage history, these knowledges have the potential to take root and create a long-term power imbalance across student's identity biomes. Thus, thinking eco not only adds complexity to the way we think about identity development in relationship to knowledge systems, it also helps us conceptualize the power dynamics of learning in and across diverse contexts, and the balance needed to keep the overall biome stable.

For my own context, thinking in this manner accommodates an Indigenous lived existence that is better connected to the land and its knowledges. In turn, this framework helps me make better sense of my perceived existence, and the more I consider other dimensions of this eco-lens, the more I find it to be a productive visual for my entangled realties.

The Ecotones: Sites of Tension between Settler-Colonial and Indigenous Entanglements

As I consider myself as a biome of lived experiences composed of, and influenced by, competing knowledge systems, I also find value in the ecotones, or the ecological boundary zones of each respective system. These are the boundary zones where two ecological systems interact (Ecological Society of America, 2017) and different plant species are competing for sunlight, water, soil and nutrients; an ongoing competition I reference in the poem above. I place emphasis on the tallgrass prairie as a connection to Indigenous learning systems, but this might not be the case for others who might choose to reconfigure this framework in their personal

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ecological contexts. Additionally, as Osages, as we have history as both woodland and prairie people, and it would improper for me to generalize other Osages into my specific landscape interpretations, anyway. Thus, my choice to specifically reference the prairie should be interpreted as my personal preference, while the interpretive value of this dialogue is more about conceptualizing the power dynamics of various learning systems. In other words, the prairie is the pedagogical medium I choose to employ, but my primary points are more about the dynamics of ecological thinking, and specifically the power and balance in and across our knowledge systems. With this focus, the ecotones are an important site for inquiry.

Using the tallgrass prairie as a medium to explore these power dynamics across knowledge systems, the ecotones possess value because they are an ongoing tension between the grassland systems and woody species that are in constant tension with tallgrass existence. For example, if a seed from a particular tree or shrub on the ecotones surrounding the prairie finds space to germinate and take root in the grassland portions of the prairie, it is not a massive threat to the prairie. However, when that new tree or shrub has the chance to mature and create seeds of its own, which in turn grow new plants that make seeds of their own, the woody plants begin to multiply and make space to harbor and protect other non-grassland species. As this process continues to unfold, the exponential nature of each generational stage starts to bring ecological imbalance to the prairie. Particularly, as the original tree or shrub begins to mature while its roots grow deeper, it starts to become a more permanent part of the landscape, and take its share of sunlight, water and nutrients. But furthermore, as this mature tree or shrub begins to continuously drop its own seeds in hopes of starting new generations, the ecological imbalance begins to grow in magnitude.

As this ecological process unfolds at the ecotones, one might also consider how this power dynamic might parallel the tensions and power dynamics between mainstream Eurocentric knowledge systems (as particular wooded species) and Indigenous knowledge systems (as tallgrass prairie), and how this dynamic mirrors that of settler-colonialism's ongoing relationship with Indigenous peoples in education. Starting with the fact that religious missionaries were allowed into Indian territories, which Osages allowed to happen at times in order to gain economic and political favor (Rollings, 2004), consider how this dynamic might be equivalent the seed from woody species finding its way on to the prairie and finding a space in the soil to germinate or take root. In this stage, the power dynamics were still rather balanced; as in the case of the Osage, only some elders sent their children to these schools, if they chose to do so. Fast forward through several generations, and the power dynamics across learning systems began to change when the U.S. government built "kill the Indian, save the man" boarding schools, and these institutions served as the primary tool for education and assimilation (Churchill, 2004) of Indigenous peoples. In this context, Indigenous peoples were required to abandon their own language, learn English, and become indoctrinated with Euro-American worldviews, while disallowed to speak their own language and/or position their thinking from the worldviews of their elders. This era of Indian education represents a time when the power balance across the knowledge systems dramatically changed, and as American Indians continued to search for ways to adapt to this new dynamic, the power of Euro-centric education systems began to multiply and reproduce with each new generation. Now, as Indigenous people continue to explore ways to restore the balance across our learning systems, we are faced with the reality that over 90 percent of American Indian students attend mainstream institutions (TEDNA, 2011). In these institutions, American Indian knowledge systems are not necessarily a priority.

As a pale skinned English-speaking Osage U.S history and government teacher writing

this dissertation at a land grant university, I carry this power dynamic with me daily. Eurocentric

knowledge systems are powerful, and at this point deeply rooted, and they have the power to

disrupt the balance of entire identity biomes if not maintained.

So, the question then becomes,

if these ecotones are the primary sites of tension,

and expose an imbalanced power dynamic

how do we use education to restore

Balance?

The Prairie Fire as Pedagogy

In the *The Hunt for Capital,* I also referenced the role of fire in my learning processes,

which is an important element to consider in educational contexts, because it has the ability to

destroy, replenish, and simultaneously protect certain ecosystems from expansion of outside

species. Furthermore, fire is important because it has the ability to help maintain balance across

the ecotones. This is what I consider one of the primary purposes of Indigenous education, to

restore balance to the ecotones between our competing knowledge systems. Or in my case,

to set the prairie on fire.

To set the prairie on fire does not destroy the prairie's ecosystem, or neighboring woody

specie systems across the ecotones. While fire can be equated with destruction, in this context it

is more about refreshment and maintenance, as it returns nutrients to the soil for those deeply rooted knowledge systems to continue. This cyclical process of starting again, contributes to an overall balanced and healthy system. Before Euro-American settlement, fire was a natural occurrence on the prairie, and at times was strategically used by Indigenous populations to influence the migration of big game and manage the land to meet their needs (Williams, 2003); but westward expansion by settlers and their corresponding land use practices disrupted this consistent ecological maintenance, and therefore disrupted the balance of the entire ecosystem, which I discuss throughout this section.

As an example of prairie fire pedagogy in action, Dennison's ribbon work metaphor played this role in my own learning, as it reoriented my thinking to an Osage specific perspective which accommodated complexity in ways that I had never considered. After encountering the metaphor, I was able to conceptualize what being Osage and White might be beyond the "I walk in two worlds" mentality and more appropriately conceptualize my Osage existence outside of oversimplified narratives learned in the mainstream. In other words, reading about the metaphor allowed me to regenerate a more balanced conceptualization of my Osage-White existence. It was as if she lit a match, reached into the Indigenous knowledge systems in my lived experience biome, and set the prairie on fire.

Aside from and handful of areas, maintained by the I^n.Lon.Schka and my family,

  many of the Indigenous knowledge systems in and across my biome

    were terribly overgrown.

                        and unmaintained.

    The fire cleared out some overgrowth

      and allowed for new clarity.

I began to consider what being Osage was

in more robust, dynamic, and exciting ways.

Replenished.

Balanced.

As a doctoral student, the prairie fire continued to burn--escalating into a wildfire--and I continued to read more Indigenous scholars who brought winds to the fire on a very dry prairie. Reading Smith (1999), Kovach (2010), Pewewardy (2015a, 2017), Deloria and Wildcat (2001), Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird (2012), Cajete (1994, 2012), Bhattacharya (2015), Bruyneel (2007), and many more, just continued to fan the flames.   Ultimately, as the prairie fire died down, I settled in for an era of regrowth. The Indigenous parts of me were refreshed and reinvigorated, allowing me to engage with my Osage community as an educator in ways that I never have before--as a professional contributor, and not just a dancer under The Arbor. While The Drum carried my Indigeneity to this point, and I still carry the lessons I learned in that arena to my new endeavors, in my own mind I have been able to expand what it means to be Osage. This dissertation, along with the development of the Osage Educational Leadership Academy are manifestations of this new mode of being. Through this, I am now able to visualize and map my relationship with settler-colonialism through various curricula, while I (re)prioritized and (re)generated learning pathways across the Osage community that had been mostly overgrown and unmanaged through mainstream educational systems. Furthermore, I was able to refresh Indigenous knowledge systems that already existed in my learning--and expand on them--but also reposition my thinking in and across the various systems in a more balanced manner, including those of settler-colonialism. In other words, the prairie fire not only helped me better understand my positionality within my Indigenous knowledge systems, but my positions in and

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across my non-Indigenous knowledge systems, as well. Additionally, this refresh-and-protect

mechanism clears space for slight change, mild adaptations, and new growth, while still

maintaining ties to the same roots--the knowledge systems of ancestors. This visualization

allows me to place myself in the natural, ongoing, ever-evolving, lifelong learning and

adaptation that characterizes our education, while cultivating conditions for me to reconsider

what education is outside of brick and mortar institutions. Additionally, this also takes learning

out of a linear and hierarchical context of finishing a program, getting a degree, and getting a

corresponding promotion to help climb the ladder, and instead places it in natural and cyclical

environmental processes.

       As I elude to in *The Hunt for Capital*, for every prairie fire there is a cycle that repeats,

and the fresh regrowth that occurs is still connected to those same systems, yet, it may

experience slight change. To set the prairie on fire, therefore means to

      burn off

             the entangled and suffocating overgrowth,

                    making way for new rhizomatic growth and understandings,

                and for new learning to occur and

                  replenish the system.

                        But although there is an appearance of destruction,

                the same roots feed the system.

           It is cyclical,

       not linear.

         and all the lived experiences of my ancestors,

      are feeding the roots,

and influencing the system.

This dissertation,

    is one

        large

            prairie fire.

                Started by mentors and scholars,

                    Indigenous and non-Indigenous,

                    Protecting my indigeneity

                        and the knowledge systems of my ancestors.

                      At least what is left.

                But also of importance,

                the prairie fire,

            or learning in Indigenous knowledge systems

                helps maintain

                balance.

                Because,

            when it comes to competing systems,

             fire is one of nature's equalizers.

                A moderator.

With prairie fire as a pedagogical tool, *Indigenous educators must explore how they might restore balance across Indigenous identity biomes by routinely setting the prairie on fire within themselves and their students* as they find ways to prioritize engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems across various learning environments--all while operating within the power dynamics of settler-colonialism. Prairie fire pedagogies aim to protect and replenish Indigenous knowledge systems (and their deep roots) for future generations in an ongoing cycle of critical destruction and subsequent regeneration and regrowth, creating an environment of ongoing and cyclical vitality and adaptation. Simultaneously, prairie fire pedagogies aim to maintain a sense of balance across student and educator identity ecotones, as there are many more knowledge systems in play which Indigenous peoples must learn to understand, and negotiate. The responsibilities of educational leaders then become to not only set the prairie on fire, but to cultivate conditions for prairie fire pedagogies to occur within their respective systems. This can be done through critical analysis of curricula, hiring or training teachers with appropriate background knowledge, reaching out to knowledgeable stakeholders, exploring or developing curricular materials at all levels that reflect critical awareness, and creating professional development opportunities that give educators the skills to set the prairie on fire, and maintain the cyclical process of knowledge making and unmaking.

Additionally, prairie fire pedagogies emphasize the value of place-based and local knowledges, in an effort to helps ground students in the specific worldviews and personality of their local environments, a product of power and place as described by Deloria and Wildcat (2001). This grounding can be done by engaging local elders in dialogue, reading local histories, learning about local ceremonies and traditions (when appropriate), and more. But beyond the

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emphasis on what might be termed as "traditional" or "ceremonial", students and educators must be asked to engage in the modern intellectualism of their communities by also emphasizing curricula which incorporates contemporary art and literature, the ongoing political contexts of native nations, and more. If educators do not have the skills or background knowledge to engage with and/or seek out these Indigenous learning contexts, they must at minimum be able to tap into the local place-based personalities of the community by developing an awareness of how they might locate where they might be found in and across the community. Then, educators can explore appropriate ways to connect students to those Indigenous systems and/or make space for them to do so in their own appropriate ways.

Furthermore, setting the prairie on fire is not just the process connecting students with certain Indigenous knowledge systems. Learning about one's own people and participating in key ceremonies do act as prairie fire learning experiences, but it does not necessarily give the student and or teacher the power to light their own fires. Developing a critical consciousness and learning how to use it is where that power lies, as I found while exploring Pewewardy's Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (2017). If students are given the skills to be cognizant of their entangled realities, and map them with critical sociocultural thinking, they can better learn to understand, and therefore manage, the tensions within and across their own internal identity biomes by igniting their own prairie fires in themselves and in others. On a fundamental level, if students and teachers are not regularly asked to *critically* engage in Indigenous specific topics, these systems will be left mostly unmanaged and imbalanced power dynamics will continue to disrupt the balance found across the ecotones of Indigenous identity biomes in and across our educational systems. In other words, learning to set prairie fires in educational contexts not only requires tapping into certain knowledge systems, but it also

requires a critical thinking skill set that enables students to think beyond "I walk in two world" dichotomies--as I did before I encountered Dennison's ribbon work metaphor.

To move forward with the prairie fire as an educational tool, in the following section I set my own prairie on fires--again--by reconsidering what new understandings and learning pathways might be developed as I revisit the content of my previous chapters.

Setting the Prairie Fire: Reconsidering my Own Autoethnographic Analyses

After the Prairie Fire: Revisiting Transformational Indigenous Praxis

Looking back at Pewewardy's (2017) model for Transformational Indigenous Praxis, I have been inspired to think in new ways and consider the core principals of this model outside of hierarchical frameworks, and explore ways to apply ecological frameworks to this structure. In this section I explain how the model might be taken out of its hierarchical pyramid structure, and reconstructed as a geographic and topographic map of competing knowledge systems and orientations of thinking. This allows me to map portions of my own identity biome within the stages of Pewewardy's structure. I also carry forward the prairie as a pedagogical medium and I place both Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledge systems as parallel to certain stages of Pewewardy's model, as show in Figure 5.

Figure 5: My Identity Biome: Merging Pewewardy's Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model and Ecological Frameworks
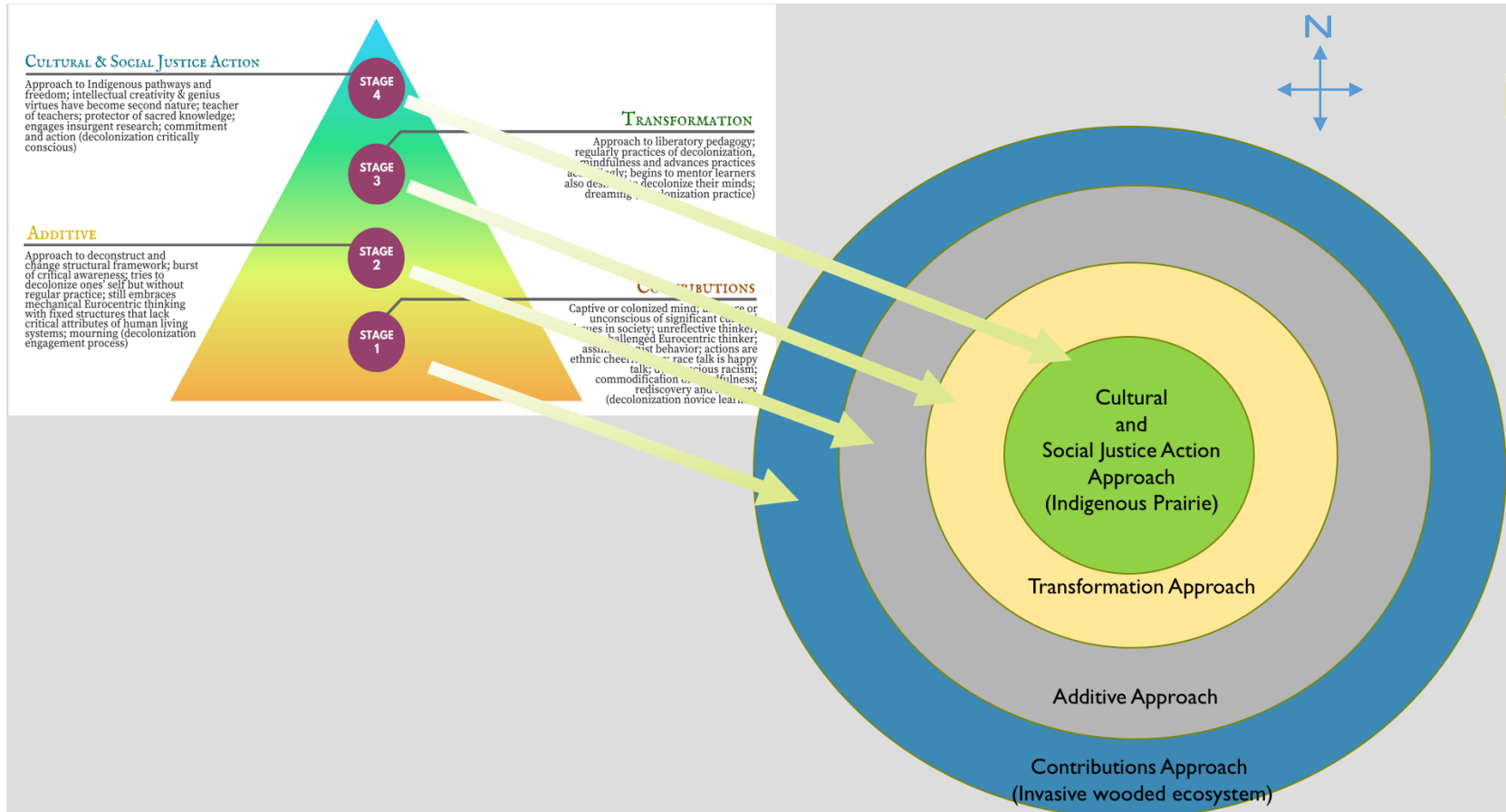

Figure 5: This a visual representation of how I merge Pewewardy's Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (2017) with knowledge systems within my identity biome.

In this visualization, the Cultural and Social Justice Action stage of the model becomes a representative of Indigenous and decolonized knowledge systems, and the Contributions stage becomes a representative of Eurocentric knowledge systems. This leaves the Transformation and Additive stages as an ecotone, which are transitional ways of thinking as one crosses between the two knowledge systems within the identity biome. This visualization is more akin to a geographic layout (birds eye view) of competing ecosystems than a hierarchical visual with a peak. Furthermore, the Additive and Transformation stage ecotones are places of tension which require some sociocultural shapeshifting and repositioning when crossing them, tensions I have described throughout this dissertation.

Throughout my time in mainstream schools in the suburbs, I was surrounded by, interdependent of, and connected to Contributions and Additive stage knowledge systems. I learned to pull sustenance from various lived experiences across those systems and conceptualize my Osage existence from that positionality while I sat in U.S. history and government classes, studied the philosophies of John Locke and Adam Smith, read about Greek and Roman mythology along with *The Little House on the Prairie*, and more. However, I also followed my familiar learning pathways across the ecotones as we commuted back to The Arbor and around The Drum--learning in systems which emphasized Osage philosophies, worldviews, positionalities, histories, and a unique brand of spirituality and communal belonging focused on respect and reciprocity. These are sometimes at tension with what I learned in Eurocentric systems. At the same time, it provided me an educational environment and background understanding to help me understand what is needed for the Cultural and Social Justice Action and Transformation systems of thinking--places where educators find a way to center their

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thinking around Indigenous worldviews, and therefore better understand how to center their educational systems around the similar orientations.

I have always known how to commute back and forth between these orientations, but I never knew how to describe it with much detail, aside from the dichotomous approach of talking about walking in two worlds. In my doctoral journey, I began to spend more time pulling sustenance from Indigenous knowledge systems though learning experiences beyond the Osage Arbor, and I also started making time to explore new learning pathways in those specific systems. Thus, as I prioritized Indigenous knowledge exploration, and spent more time commuting across the ecotones of the Contributions and Transformation Stages of Pewewardy's model, I became more comfortable with Indigenous orientations of thinking.

After a while,

      I learned how to shift my entire orientation,

          and make

Osage

Cultural and Social Justice Action

my central node

and orientation.

A focal point on my identity biome map.

I was reading more Osage literature,

making more time to talk with elders, and

while coordinating The Osage Educational Leadership Academy

I explored new curricular options.

And while I practice this academic ribbon work, errors and all,

I use Wash.ka^{n} as guiding principle.

Being an Osage,

became a focal point to rally around,

and not something on a reservation in the

periphery.

It is not always at the center,

but I now feel more comfortable making it the center.

Even when I am not around The Drum,

or under The Arbor.

But when I am reading,

studying,

teaching,

building curriculum,

and more.

Where The Drum still carries me,

and the lessons under The Arbor still provide sustenance.

Additionally, while the circles are laid out in concentric ways to show the clean parallels between the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model, it should not be interpreted in this strict visual sense, just as any natural ecosystem would not possess these perfect shapes and layouts.

This reinterpretation should be viewed as a flexible concept that can adapt to the uniqueness of each individual and the boundaries are much porous than what they appear in the visual.

To accommodate my entangled realities, however, I should also acknowledge that Pewewardy's model prompts me to center the focus on Indigenous learning and knowledges; yet, it is still possible to center on a non-Indigenous ecosystem. So, while I make the central node Indigeneity, others might choose to make their own respective knowledge systems as the central node of activity, with Indigenous systems on the periphery. For this translation of Pewewardy's model, though, the central node and focus is on Indigenous perspectives in education, a repositioning effort that I have not always practiced.

Additionally,

the Indigenous knowledge systems at the peak of Pewewardy's model,

or at the center of my reinterpreted map,

is where one learns to set the prairie on fire.

After the Prairie Fire: Stumbling into Whiteness as Insurgency

In chapters 5 and 6, there were two key topics I address--American Indian mascots in educational leadership frameworks and my interrogation of White privilege as a real pale Indian. Here I combine those topics and reconsider the role of Whiteness in educational leadership settings through the lens of Gaudry's (2011) insurgent research.

Insurgent.

Such a strong word.

    One I would use for my brave,

        stereotypical,

            stuck in the past ancestors,

                        but not me.

    Like the story of my hatchet carrying great-great grandfather getting his

        horses back from those Pawnees.

            Wy.in.gla.in.ka

    Not the real

            pale,

            backpack toting,

                laptop carrying,

                        Blazer+Jeans+Chuck Taylors

                            me.

    It made me feel uncomfortable at first.

        To be an insurgent,

        so militant.

        Angry.

But what is insurgent research beyond the name?

Gaudry (2011) positions insurgent research in sharp contrast with the extraction research methodologies of academia which have long done work *on* Indigenous peoples, instead of *with* us. These methods have been strongly criticized in and across Indigenous academia (Mihesuah, 1998; Smith, 1999) and as Indigenous scholars brought this to attention, it opened up a space for new generations to reposition priorities and methodologies among Indigenous peoples both in and out of the academy. Gaudry's insurgent research represents some of this reprioritization as he calls for Indigenous research that 1) prioritizes Indigenous worldviews, 2) orients knowledge production towards and with Indigenous communities, while also 3) emphasizing the researcher responsibilities to the communities we represent. As he states, these three arguments are in line with many current Indigenous research methodologies; but he also emphasizes *action*. To separate insurgent research from other Indigenous methodologies, he states that 4) insurgent research is also about "promoting community-based action that targets the demise of colonial interference within our lives and communities" (p. 114). In other words, insurgent research places emphasis on actually creating change, and not just talking about it. He also implores that "insurgent researchers intend their research to yield practical results inside and outside of the academy...[and]...it is this fourth principle--action--that puts the insurgency in insurgent research" (p. 125).

This forces me to think critically about how

insurgency does not have to be

militant

or angry.

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It can be intellectual, a well-timed essay in a public relations campaign,

Or calculated and strategic, like a school improvement plan.

Or word processed from my Kan.zeh in a particular nuanced manner,

written like a White male educational leader might say it.

As Gaudry (2011) states:

Research and writing by itself will not change the world, *but it can motivate*

people to do so. That is what insurgent research is about: creating the conditions

for social change, showing that it is possible, and dissecting the colonialist

conditions that marginalize us all, both materially and intellectually. (p. 134)

Insurgent research is about setting the prairie on fire, and pushing back at the ecotones,

while looking for ways to creatively (re)generate Indigenous spaces

and/or

protect from imposters...

like mascots.

Therefore, using this lens of insurgent research, I revisit how my code-shifting efforts

with mascots in educational leadership contexts, paired with my White skin privileges, can

collectively generate a unique perspective in the context of insurgent research--especially as it

relates to Gaudry's fourth emphasis on action.

Getting to positions of power in the first place. I begin by reiterating the reality that Whiteness has played a role in helping me get a seat in the comfy chairs at the conference room tables in educational leadership contexts. Whiteness helped me pass through the daily filters in and out of institutions, as my Black and Brown counterparts were subjected to a much more stringent daily social vetting process packed with stereotyped predispostions--even if I was often unaware. The system was made for the White parts of me, and allowed my whiteness to be *normalized* even if that normal was at tension with the ecotones of my Indigeneity.

Tatum (1997), emphasizing the systemic nature of racism and privilege, posits that "all White people, intentionally or unintentionally, do benefit from racism" (p. 130). She further discusses how "understanding racism as a system of advantage based on race is antithetical to traditional notions of an American meritocracy. For those who have internalized this myth, this definition generates considerable discomfort" (p. 129). Admittedly, it does make me uncomfortable--to think that my daily existence as a White person in the world inherently links me to racism so embedded into our lives that I do not always see it, even as I occupy a unique zone of dissonant-privilege. But racism is more than an effort in active and conscious hatred, it is in the subtleties and the everyday realities that inform us who belongs where, whose interests are preserved, who can cross which borders effortlessly, and who should be suspected as evil, without ever engaging in anything nefarious.

As Tatum (1997) further articulates the differences between "active racism" and "passive racism" (p. 130), I am forced to critically reflect and ask myself if I have been passively allowing the racist habits of our systems continue. While I know as an educator I have been trying to disrupt these forces as best I know how, I also must acknowledge that I have the privilege of passively going about my day as White person. Therefore, as I walk through the world passing

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for White, I inherit some of the blinders that come with it even when I have a better understanding of certain sociocultural Brown people positionalities.

With the reality of the sociocultural landscape, and the history of race in this country, I find it hard to deny that systemic racism and White privilege exist in and across our institutions. As Delgado and Stefancic (2012) outline, the reality is people of color are more likely than their White counterparts to get passed over for a loan or job, or attract unwarranted suspicion in daily routines. They also implore how people in power are mostly White, while "people of color lead shorter lives, receive worse medical care, complete fewer years of school, and occupy more menial jobs than do Whites" (p. 12). I cannot ignore that even though from a demographic standpoint I might be a White-AI/AN (American Indian/Alaskan Native) outlier for generalization purposes, the core of the matter remains--being White statistically helps people like me navigate our daily lives and institutions more easily.

    Therefore,

            being White likely increased the odds of me getting the opportunities to operate in
                        educational leadership contexts
                                                ...at all.
As I filtered through predominantly white classroom, hallways, and historic campuses across...
            K-12,
                    my undergraduate degree,
                    my jobs,
                            graduate school,

and more.

I often carried my benefit of the doubt White privilege camouflage. Which helped me get

well

here.

Can Whiteness be insurgency?   Now that I am in a position to act, aided by my

Whiteness, I return to Gaudry's (2011) notion of insurgent research. I recognize that I am

equipped to utilize my White male reality to take action in meaningful ways--even if I am

unaware how that always occurs. In a way, I just need to be me.

Pass for White,

be White,

be Osage,

and clear spaces for Osage and Indigenous ways of knowi....

wait...

no...

just

...ways.

I use the phrase "stumbling into Whiteness as Insurgency" in the title of this section

because this is less about the specific articulation of well manufactured insurgent plan, and more

about a sudden realization that the blinders and privileges of Whiteness have cleared a path for

my Osage priorities to a position of Indigenous insurgency. In other words, just as I am blind to some of my privileges, I am also blind to some of the specific nuances of my potential insurgency. In this space, where I have access to educational leadership knowledges and networks, I am in a more powerful position to take action and bring dialogue and perspective to the White power center--perspectives that are often absent. But as I find myself in this new position, I recognize a few key characteristics in my current reality related to soliciting support from White peers across educational institutions--people who can help generate real and authentic spaces for Indigenous ways. While I believe interest convergence is still a player in these arenas, I have seen first-hand how critically conscious White men and women can not only be supportive of Indigenous people and their agendas, but actively protect them when the White power center is disrupted and reverts to status quo maintenance. Therefore, my approach acknowledges the current realities of the system and considers the power of support building as a way to create openings for Indigenous knowledges within our educational systems. Then, as I have witnessed, the system can in fact be modified to make space for Indigenous perspectives. In fact, the Osage Nation Educational Leadership Academy discussed in Chapter 3 is one such example. Change can happen, and support from those in power can help that change occur. Below is the current logic of my White male insurgency.

First, many of my White peers are taught to "help all children learn," "generate a culturally responsive learning environment," and "respect diversity," and all of the generic tag lines found in and across school mission statements. For most educators, these intentions exist, even if they fall short of seeing or acknowledging how our systems are geared towards White people as the status quo--or "normal." Therefore, in a glass is half full kind of way, the growth that can occur from these intentions becomes more of a matter of bridging an ignorance gap, than

building something from scratch. Or rather, there is a need to set the prairie on fire, and fostering a new critical awareness in the subsequent regrowth. Regardless, educator training programs have primed people for social justice work, but it often takes more time to cycle through the learning processes in order to gather a more robust understanding and develop a more dynamic awareness and critical consciousness.

Second, educational leaders are the ones who have the most power to make decisions regarding meaningful change in our institutions, therefore if we are to generate more action, there is value in framing insurgent work to match the mindset and scholarship of educational leaders, and bridge the previous gap. As Gaudry (2011) states, "if the goal is to reach the people, to participate in a grassroots movement, then research should speak to those same people, should use language they can understand and relate to, and should reinforce common Indigenous values" (pp. 133-134). Although my code-shifting approach in Chapter 4 does not speak directly to Indigenous peoples, it does speak to the people who have the power to make decisions in and across educational institutions. Therefore, I consider the insurgent value in using the language of educational leadership to generate and motivate leaders for action, as I did in Chapter 4.

Third, since about six percent of school superintendents are people of color (AASA, 2013), and men still dominate the field (Kelsey, Allen, Coke, & Ballard, 2014), action can be amplified if appealing to a White male educational leadership audience. Therefore, being able to speak to the White male educational leader possesses potential to develop allies who can help manipulate the system to create positive change for Indigenous peoples. Even Gaudry emphasizes the need to use institutions such as the academy to generate change, therefore, it is important to consider this reality of White male leadership when trying to generate action.

This brings me to my final observation of my lived reality: although I am also Indigenous, I am a White man trained in doctoral level educational leadership frameworks. Therefore, as real pale Indian I am likely afforded opportunities to take action and generate space for Indigenous ways of knowing in educational systems. While I do not pretend that I can magically break through to every White male educational leader and convince them to change, I do consider the reality that I likely possess a White privilege advantage that might allow me to reach and connect with more White male leaders. If the existence of White privilege is real, then I also possess an edge not afforded to my Black and Brown peers.

Within this reality, I am not suggesting that non-Whites should bow to the needs of White people's fragility, and go out of their way to accommodate a White-centered positionality as they navigate their social justice agendas. I am simply saying that I stumbled into a curious position, where I find myself cloaked in White privilege camouflage with some sensibilities that overlap with those of other disenfranchised groups. Therefore,

I

     and Others like me

         are in a position of privilege

             the privilege of passing for White,

               and simultaneously

                  executing an insurgent social justice agenda.

I didn't ask for this position,

     but I am now conscious of it,

and as an insurgent, I am just going to keep moving forward.

and make some space for Indigenous perspectives.

But wait, there is a catch: Brown person on paper. There is an intersectional reality in play when considering my Whiteness as a mode of insurgency. Although I have inherited many privileges and blinders while passing for White, I also have a distinct American Indian name. While I consider how my name has provided intrigue throughout my life on a regular basis, if I am to engage in insurgent research as a White male,

on paper,

I am,

a Red Corn (or RedCorn...it just depends...long story)

Therefore, my White male positionality has its limits when on paper. While I carry my privilege in face-to-face contexts, when I am only represented by my name in academic writing on Indigenous topics, I am likely interpreted to be a Brown body, complete with all the American Indian Brown person presumptions. Granted, the exoticism of American Indian names sometimes carry a different form of intrigue than the stereotypical negative baggage as other ethnic names, but there is still the reality that on paper alone I am likely not to be perceived as White. I currently do not know how this plays out as my words on paper are processed, filtered, and interpreted by readers, but if people who commonly have Brown people names are discriminated against and passed over for jobs, leases, and loans more than White people names, it is logical to assume that my Brown person name likely plays into the context of how my words are received on paper.

In conclusion, insurgent research methodologies emphasize the need for action, and my

While male privileged reality puts me in a unique position to generate action and create space for

the Others in our educational systems. Specifically, in educational leadership contexts, there is

value in speaking directly to the primary demographic that make decisions in our systems, the

White male educational leader, and framing my social justice work and space making for other

change agents and educational leaders in those specific contexts. While at times I might be naive

to my privilege, and I may not know exactly how to use it, I recognize that my specific context

of intersectionality has taught me to engage in sociocultural shapeshifting in and across these

contexts. Therefore, I can use this skill set to generate action in Indigenous education contexts.

After the Prairie Fire: Revisiting Methodologies and Intellectual Frameworks

 As I describe in the first chapter, Dennison's (2012; 2013) work had a big influence on

my thinking. Starting with the word entanglement, which I found fitting as it pushed me out of

over-simplistic dichotomies. I also found value in the Osage specific quality of her work, and

her ribbon work metaphor obviously affected the way I conceptualize my Osage-White

existence. The metaphor was, and is, exciting and productive. However, I also recognize

>...if my dad didn't buy *Colonial Entanglement*

>>and give it to me (and copies to my brothers),

>>>I am not sure if that book--with the blue cover and yellow text

>>>>would have ended up on my overstuffed book shelf...

>>readily available

>>>to read for my assigned book review in

>>>>EDLEA 838: Introduction to Qualitative Methods.

It was an easy choice.

A choice that

drastically

shifted

the course

of my studies.

However, the educational choice was made possible by several important realities. First, I possessed the book because of my father bought it for my brothers and I as an intellectual nudge. We have always been around Osage books, but it does not mean we have always read them, or acquired the knowledge within them through osmosis when near the book shelf. If the book was not in my possession, I would not have had ease of access allowing for ease of choice. Second, I was given the opportunity in my qualitative methods class to do a book report of my choosing, opening up the possibility for reading Dennison's book for credit. This was an opening created by my professor, Dr. Bhattacharya, as the power was in her hands to prescribe a different learning context to acquire the necessary credit. But this opening was important. Most of my learning as an Osage was never for credit, as it was most always an endeavor for outside of our educational systems. This was a unique opportunity to learn Osage perspectives, within our educational systems, so I went for it. Lastly, I was just plain interested, and my new full-time student status has opened up the time and energy to give it the attention it deserved. I had wanted to read it for a long time, but just failed to find the time. As with many people, I had long structured my time commitments around daily obligations as a family man, a working professional, and a student.

The reality is, daily life as an American dreamer gave me tunnel vision in my learning. As a mainstream American I have the privilege of learning in, and about, Euro-American cultural contexts at every layer of the curriculum from early childhood to graduate school. As an Osage, though, the majority of those learning contexts fall outside of the educational system, relying heavily on family habits and learning contexts at traditional ceremonies. Books are around, but it does not mean that they automatically get read, and oral traditions can become fragmented as students spend more time in mainstream schools and less time around their elders asking questions. In other words, even when Osages come from communally connected families, such as myself, it does not mean that we are fully aware of the variety and diversity of Osage knowledges across the community and across the literature. I have never been asked to read an Osage book by a teacher, and my family habits may have given me access and made me aware of certain texts, but it does not mean that I was compelled to read them--at least not the way I systematically read books within an orchestrated curriculum in mainstream systems.

Therefore, as I explain in the third chapter of this dissertation, my academic Osage learning contexts were exploratory, unorganized, and hectic. I had no curriculum to follow, and I simply bought all of the Osage books I could find and tried to prioritize them in some relevant manner as I trudged through my doctoral work. It was not as though no Osages had influence on my choices and thinking, that was an ongoing process, but I was doing a whole lot of

exploring.

As best

I knew how.

All the while, I was exploring the citation trails of various non-Osage academics, leading me to the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Bhabha (2004), and Freire (2000) among other larger Indigenous scholarship such as Smith (1999), Kovach (2010), Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird (2012), Pewewardy (1999, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2015a), Cajete (1994, 2012), Deloria and Wildcat (2001), Bhattacharya (2009, 2015), Bruyneel (2007), Grande (2004, 2008), and many more. Additionally, seeking to better understand autoethnography as method I read Whitinui (2014), Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010), Boylorn and Orbe (2013), Anzaldúa (2015), Wall (2006, 2008), Bhattacharya and Payne (2016), Chang (2009), Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), among others. Although some books were suggested, none of the above were required readings in my coursework. Throughout this long process I found time to continue reading Osage specific texts off and on, as a way to inform my autoethnographic writing exploration, and as I neared the end of this dissertation...

I opened up a book I should have read early on,

alongside Dennison's work (2012; 2013).

The book, *Tribal secrets: Recovering American Indian intellectual traditions*, by Osage scholar Robert Allen Warrior (1995) filled a void I did not know I had. It is a comparative interpretation of two American Indian intellectuals: the well-known activist, author, and scholar Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), and novelist and historian John Joseph Mathews (Osage). I had known of Warrior, Deloria Jr., and Mathews, and the general scope of their work;

but much of my doctoral de-prioritization decision making process revolved around the simple

reality that I primarily viewed Mathews, a mixed-blood Osage Rhodes Scholar, as a *novelist*.

Although I had read sections of his voluminous non-fiction work on the history of the Osages

(Mathews, 1961) and even used it early in this dissertation, I deprioritized Mathews novels

because I interpreted most of his work as "fiction", or so I classified it, and that label lacks the

prestige of weighty scholarly citations

     ...even as some of them sat on my shelf

            ...waiting.

For me I was still stuck,

novels and creativity are
over here,

           while academia,

            knowledge,

           and "truth",

           are over here.

I had been relying too heavily on the notion that historical and anthropological analysis were the primary and core pieces of what was citable Osage literature. I had overlooked *Tribal Secrets* somehow, and I now see this as regrettable. By the time I burrowed into Autoethnography my curricular path was being dictated for me through the exploration of non-Osage citation trails.

Reading Warrior's analysis, I was actually embarrassed.

I was ashamed,

how did I not see this sooner?

As Warrior (1995) details, Mathews was "exercising intellectual sovereignty" (p. 122) through his creative historical, quasi-auto biographical, and intellectual work.   As I read Warriors' analysis of Mathews, there are two primary pieces that struck me as relevant to the highly specific academic space I am beginning to occupy. Aside from the fact that Mathews comes from a mixed Osage-White position and creatively problematizes the overly-simplification of Osage existence, there are two specific methodological considerations I find highly relevant to this dissertation. First, Mathews works is clearly grounded in the Osage landscape, and draws connections with Osage ways of knowing and the land. Second, Mathews work is strikingly autoethnographic, even if it was not called that by name. These qualities, and how they relate to my work in this dissertation, are illustrated by Warrior (1995).

Warrior describes Mathews' connections to the land as exercising *intellectual sovereignty* through a "biological framework"(p. 100), and "Mathews saw...adaptation as part of the biological process in which the rest of the landscape also participated" (p. 100). Although I have emphasized the prairie, as Mathews also does, he also emphasizes his life in "The Blackjacks," a reference to the Blackjack Oaks also found across the Osage reservation alongside the prairie. Mathews often wrote about the Blackjacks, as both the actual setting of his writing and also often included them in his writing. Warrior (1995) specifically channels this paragraph from Mathew's discussing Osages in *Talking to the Moon*:

> Their religion, their concept of God, came out of my blackjacks, out of the fear inspired by the elements, and it was colored just as the animals were colored for perfect adjustment. Of course, it was the result of [human] imagination and [their] dreams and fears. Even though primitive [people] had the distinction among the animals of being able to think, [they] were not by reason of their mental powers the "insurgents[s]" which some anthropologist choose to call [them]. *[Their] mental processes were still under the influence of the natural back-ground, and the Osage religion of Wah.Kon.Tah was as much a product of the blackjacks and the prairie as the physical [human].* [emphasis added] (p. 62)

As one can see, as I engage with the prairie as a metaphor for entanglement and a pedagogical tool, I clearly missed Mathews' intellectual work. Not only does he consider the influence of the prairie on Osage thinking, he also considers the influence of the Blackjacks from an Osage perspective.

These words were already here.

I missed them.

Warrior continues to describe how Mathews "makes the land itself an agent in the process," (p. 62) and how Mathews "developed his organic methodological perspective" (p. 64).

Lord.

This makes way too much sense for this work.

Thinking eco?

What the...

Then, as I read further I realized the critical autoethnographic connections, even if it was not called that by name. This becomes strikingly clear as Warrior (1995) further channels Mathews:

In *Talking to the Moon*, Mathews is obsessed with self-critical reflection on what he was doing in his life of writing at the Blackjacks. He presents a vision of how the act of writing functions in the struggle for self-determination and is continuous with both tradition and survival. Mathews' life at the Blackjacks, in this reading, becomes a long critical reflection on the meaning of freedom through the practice of intellectual sovereignty. (p. 101)

Here, after reading these words,

it becomes absolutely clear.

They are not just *novels*.

What the hell was I thinking?

They are creative works intended to

critically analyze,

interrogate,

unpack,

and reveal

the entangled realities and frustrations

at the intersections of

Osage transitional

lived experiences

and adaptations.

I now realize,

Mathews was a critical Indigenous Osage-White autoethnographer

He was confronting colonial entanglements,

and writing about it,

long before this dissertation.

Which brings me back to my methods section.

I now see that most of the academic sustenance--and citations--I need for this work can be obtained from primarily Osage intellectuals who have already laid a foundation of intellectual sovereignty for the specific niché I find myself occupying academically. Mathews, Warrior, and Dennison laid all the groundwork I needed to write this autoethnography. I just had to find them on the prairie

...and in the blackjacks.

I had located Dennison's work, and tapped into the knowledge systems she regenerated after the prairie fire-- along with her Osage and non-Osage family ancestors, teachers, and mentors. However, to this point, I had only located Warrior and Mathews, but failed to immerse myself, and connect to their knowledge systems.

The Blackjacks and

Intellectual sovereignty?

In the long term, I can choose to continue citing non-Osage scholars, and I will definitely need to, as most Osages find value in learning from non-Osages just as much as vice versa. But as I immerse myself into more Osage specific knowledge systems and cite them accordingly, this practice not only initiates new prairie fires in my own learning, but those prairie fires protect the continuation of those systems. Furthermore, this practice contributes to OUR continuation and adaptation as an Osage collective. In essence, we share some--but not all--of the same knowledge ecosystems within our respective biomes; I like to imagine that we meet in specific spaces among our shared systems which are opened up through writing, conversation, and shared lived experiences through events such as our dance, The I^n.Lon.Schka, or even through shared emails, feedback on manuscripts, or reading their books. I am appreciative that I have been able to have insight into their reflections, interact and feed off of their respective roots, and the lived experiences of, and with, their elders and others who informed their work.

However,

the blackjacks.

I picture them in my mind,

all the cross timbers of Osage County.

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Those thick, green, glossy, oak

                                                          leaves.

                                          with the rolling hills of the

                                                             prairie

                                                    as a backdrop.

      I cannot ignore their relevance to the ecological frameworks outlined above, and their

significance to Mathews work, and documented Osage existence. While I chose to use the

prairie as my pedagogical medium, Mathews may have preferred The Blackjacks. They add

another dimension I was overlooking, and opportunities to highlight diversity, flexibility, and

new positionalities within the ecological frame.

      The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at University of Texas at Austin (2015)

describes Blackjacks as a "species and Post Oak...[which] form the Cross Timbers in Texas and

Oklahoma, the forest border of small trees and transition zone to prairie grassland" (para. 3).

Additionally, this species of oak is native to not only the current reservation, but also the

ancestral lands of the Osage dating back to our migrations from the Ohio River Valley (Hunter,

Munkres, & Fariss, 2013; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017)

This academic ribbon work isn't quite there.

This sample strip,

this trial run,

this design,

It's just not good work, yet.

It is still a little bit out of balance, and the corners are not very tight.

I would hesitate to wear this on a Saturday night or Sunday dance.

Maybe a Thursday afternoon.

...maybe.

Plus, I am missing some ribbons,

or I at least now have some other choices that might

...make it better.

But I am getting there, as the cross timbers (and Blackjacks) are also threatened "by the suppression of natural fire and the spread of highly invasive eastern red cedars" (The Nature Conservancy, n.d., para. 4), as they too, are experiencing imbalance across the ecotones. While I am personally preferential to the prairie, the old growth cross timbers do not pose the same threat with the tallgrass systems, as they prefer a particular sub-soil make up that differs from the prairie, and fire also helps with their maintenance as a system.

If I had to do it over, my new intellectual and methodological positioning would be:

As a continuation of the creative and intellectual traditions of

Mathews (1945)

who positioned his work within the

blackjacks and prairies

of

The Osage,

this critical Indigenous autoethnography is an Osage-White exercise in

intellectual sovereignty (Warrior, 1995),

and a confrontation of colonial entanglements framed through the lens of

Osage ribbon work (Dennison, 2012; 2013).

This would have simplified my positionality, rooted myself in Osage specific clarity, and given me more confidence in my path forward. I do not wish to say that I cannot learn from non-Osages, but I could have positioned myself and this work in Osage intellectualism from the beginning,

if I only knew how.

Which brings me to my final piece.

Why?

Why was I oblivious to this connection?

From my vantage point, the answer lies in a collection of educational systems that prime

someone like me, from an early age,

    to be White,

        to think Eurocentrically

          to follow a master narrative

                and to learn everything else

                    on your own.

I read...

    Lord of the Flies

    Catcher in the Rye

    The Great Gatsby

    The Hobbit

        ...and the Lord of the Rings

    To Kill a Mockingbird

    The Scarlet Letter

    Of Mice and Men

    Frankenstein

The Wizard of Oz

Adventures of Huck Finn

Shakespeare

Beowulf

A Clockwork Orange

All the Dan Brown books

...and more.

I had never been asked to read a book by John Joseph Mathews, or any other Osage.

I was reading the *classics* instead.

It reminds me of the description on privilege and racism by Tatum (1997), when she states:

I sometimes visualize the ongoing cycle of racism as a moving walkway at the airport. Active racist behavior is equivalent to walking fast on the conveyor belt. The person engaged in active racist behavior has identified with the ideology of White supremacy and is moving with it. Passive racist behavior is equivalent to standing still on the walkway. No overt effort is being made, but the conveyor belt moves the bystanders along to the same destination as those who are actively walking. (p. 130)

While this quote highlights active racism, my attention is drawn to the passive racism description--standing on the moving sidewalk--and the power of status quo system maintenance. Our educational systems are pushing that moving sidewalk, and the White parts of me were just

passively moving along with the influence of the status quo--learning, watching, listening, and following. All the while, those systemic mechanisms of privilege simultaneously work to keep my attention away from Osage specific learning environments. So easily and so often, the default learning options in my path were non-Osage. I was grabbing onto what was presented in the path, absorbing it, internalizing it, and even building on it.

I was just lucky enough to have Dennison's book waiting in my path.

It is easy to stay on that moving sidewalk,

capitalizing on the privilege,

and missing what is in the peripheries.

Quite fittingly, Mathews has a parallel quote about himself. While I might disagree with his use of the term "civilization," since I would hesitate to draw a sharp contrast between Western Euro-American cultures as civilization and Osage or Indigenous cultures as antithetical to civilization, the spirit of his statement still contains the essence of Tatum's description, and my interpretation. Quoted through Warrior (1995) as he discusses Mathews turning to "organic methodological perspective" (p. 64) rooted in natural laws and biological processes, he presents the following quote from Mathew's in *Talking to the Moon*:

I came to the blackjacks as a man who had pulled himself out of the roaring river

of civilization to rest for a while; out of the flood where formerly only his head

had been above the surface. Stopping for a time and looking back, he could better

appreciate the sweep of the river and the spectrum in the mist above the falls

which had battered him. (p. 64)

At this point. I can feel the prairie fire smoldering.

Again.

I felt a little bit ashamed that I would overlook something so big, right in front of my

nose, so easily.   But I also know that I am likely not the only Osage to see Mathews', Warriors',

and/or Dennison's books on the shelves (among many others), and fail to properly engage in

them. I had opened some, just never found the time to dive in. It was never in my curricular

pathways, highways, rivers, trails, or moving sidewalks. I could have read them in high school,

but that just did not happen. In the above quote, though, Mathews made a decision. We do not

have to stay in the river, or on the moving sidewalk. As Warrior (1995) might suggest, in

exercising intellectual sovereignty:

> we must in effect withdraw to the Blackjacks and engage in the same kind of
>
> reflection that Mathews did. If our struggle is anything, it is the struggle for
>
> sovereignty, and if sovereignty is anything, it is a way of life...*It is a decision - a*
>
> *decision we make in our minds, in our hearts, and in our bodies - to be sovereign*
>
> *and to find out what that means in the process.* [emphasis added] (p. 123)

My decision(s)--this dissertation--is the process of yanking myself out of the river, off the

moving sidewalk, and wandering out onto the prairie where I could see from new vantage points,

only to be confronted with The Blackjacks of The Osage when I felt like gazing at the rolling

hills of the tallgrass. But the intimate internal process of confronting colonial entanglements,

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and attempting to enact intellectual sovereignty, is still an important process to unveil.

Sometimes it is just awkward, to admit,

    that as an Osage,

        sometimes I just don't know what I don't know,

            because I never learned it,

                it was not part of the orchestrated curricula of my education.

So, as I read Warriors (1995) words, and his emphasis on making decisions "to be sovereign and to find out what that means in the process" (p. 123), it was like he took a big eagle wing fan to the embers of another prairie fire and reignited the process all over again. This signaled the beginning of another cycle of learning, and enacting the power to protect the knowledge systems where he, and Mathews, resided. The dissertation is not a one way linear path to an apex. It is a series of cycles and journeys in and across various knowledge systems and identity biomes--including my own. In this mode of self-inquiry, I am now able to name, map, and identify areas of imbalance across our learning systems in my own Osage-White contexts. This has in turn allowed me to generate a forward-thinking focus for inquiry that centers on the need for Osage educational leaders, teachers, and students to interact with curriculum that not only exposes them to Osage knowledges, but also engages them in learning that enhances their self-awareness and positionalities across systems. This is especially true for Osage educational leaders, and if they are critically aware of the power imbalances, tensions, and entanglements across our education systems, then they will be better prepared to generate new Osage centric programs in the ongoing efforts to restore balance across the ecotones.

Simultaneously, if it is time to move forward with my methodological frameworks, and protect the Osage intellectual sovereignty of my ancestors, elders, mentors, and scholars. Then, I need to then find ways to structure and encourage that intellectualism in the minds of Osage teachers and students through curriculum building, so that Osage students do not have to wander around in the

margins

                                        and peripheries.

They can find it

right here

in the center.

Then simultaneously stitch it together

with non-Osage educational systems.

My Osage academic ribbon work is not quite there yet, it is time to start over.

It is time to cycle back through and embrace this prairie fire,

      Soon, new growth will occur,

            The roots will continue to feed the system,

                  Whether they are the tallgrasses that fed the buffalo,

                                  or the Blackjacks that fed Mathews and Warrior.

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