Examining the Indigenous Relationship Between Education and the United States' Military from 2001-2009

Leola Tsinnajinnie

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Examining the Indigenous Relationship Between Education and the United States’ Military from 2001-2009

By
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B.A., Sociology, University of Arizona, 2000
M.A., American Indian Studies, University of Arizona, 2003

Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies
The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico
December, 2011
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the veterans and students who shared their stories with me.
These participants represent the spirit of our Indigenous ancestors who remain strong in the hearts of our communities.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have endured many tears and challenges over the course of my studies and my research. Dr. Glenabah Martinez has stood by me, pushed me to great limits, and protected me as an Advisor, Chair, and nurturer every step of the way. I thank her for always expecting the best and for giving it at all times. I would also thank Dr. Tiffany Lee for her friendship and mentorship in Native American Studies and in the Indigenous Education Research Group. Completing my dissertation would not have been possible without her guidance. Additionally, her mentorship and friendship would not have been the same without Dr. Lloyd Lee and Ms. Mary Bowannie who also helped with incredible support. Furthermore, I will be forever grateful to Dr. Gregory Cajete for the direction he provided me as a mentor in the LLSS and NAS Departments. I met Dr. Michael Yellow Bird at a meeting in Haskell to address the issues related to Native American participation in the military. His words and his actions provided the spark I needed to begin my dissertation proposal. Finally, if there were a professor that I majored in at UNM, he would be Dr. Ricky Allen. The courses I took with him challenged everything that I thought I knew and made me a better theoretical scholar because of it. I must also thank and ask forgiveness of my family members and closest friends for their assistance and patience with me over the final months of my writing. I could not have completed my work without their unconditional love or financial support.
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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study examines the relationship between education and Native American participation in the military from 2001-2009. The study is based on both phenomenological and Indigenous methodology. The theoretical framework is structured by primarily by Tribal Critical Race Theory and Decolonization. Eighteen participants were interviewed, one participant engaged in a presentation on the topic, and three participants contributed surveys alone. There were twenty-two participants overall and ten were identified as primary participants who experienced the phenomenon of entering or re-enlisting in the military since September 11, 2009. The majority of the participants represented Native tribes of the southwest.
The major finding was that education, inside and outside of schooling, was a motivating force for Native veterans in all aspects of their experience. They either considered military service as a component of their education and/or utilized the benefits earned in the military to complete college degrees. Most of the participants recommended higher education as a first option after high school completion and entrance as an officer if the military was a desired destination.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

“The true meaning of sovereignty is that we still carry the spirit of our ancestors in our hearts.”


The main singer she made a big deal about the war and she talked against the war and she put down the President. Even though maybe, bless his heart, maybe the President was a jerk for sending us there but regardless you couldn’t help the situation. Because it goes by a chain of command so. Even though he’s not directly into the military, he’s in charge of the United States government so there’s a hierarchy there that you have to respect. And then when someone tarnishes the reputation of the country by their liberalism. You know it’s very offensive, especially someone that doesn’t even know what she’s talking about. … But at the same time you do understand that there’s a protocol of freedom of speech. You know she can practice that if she wants. But…there’s a certain time to say things. … You respect what people are going through. But then just her, as an individual, she didn’t respect the country’s space. And she didn’t think about the young men and women that were fighting over there for her trench coats and her microphones.

– Darren (Diné), United States’ Marine Corps 2001-2005 & University Graduate 2011
I think there’s people that have the warrior spirit in them. And I think that should be in them and I think they were born with that gift. And I think they were born with it as a blessing. But I don’t think you use that to go make war on people. And I don’t think you use that gift to go to another country and abuse it. I think you use that gift to learn the most you can out of it. And when people really do need defending or people really do need you to step up like in communities where you have meth going on or you have these little Native American gangs thinking they’re all tough or stupid shit like that. Yeah like put your warrior spirit into action and do something about it. Like don’t go to Afghanistan and try solving the U.S. problem about oil… and so to me it’s like I don’t have nothing against the warrior spirit. I don’t have nothing against a person that wants to use that but I wish someone would put more thought into how they do it. Or not do it just because it pays money. And do it for a moral or a just reason.”

– Jayson (Diné /Pueblo), United States’ Army 2003-2009 & University Graduate 2010

“I chose not to take the ASVAB… I didn’t want them to know what I knew.”

- Vicente (Diné), University Graduate 2010 & Former Potential Enlistee

As the daughter to my late mother Myrna Tsinnajinnie (Filipino), my maternal grandmother Leonore Manuel, my father Robert Tsinnajinnie (Tachiinii), shinali Iola Tsinnajinnie, my maternal grandfather Godofredo Manuel (Filipino), shinali Leonard Tsinnajinnie (Tsi na jinni), my community (Na Neelzhiiin), Native elders, and Indigenous
ancestors: I welcome all advocates of Indigenous education into the hearts and minds of the incredible men and women I came to know over the course of this exploration. This journey awakened me to the rich thoughts of individuals such as Darren, Jayson, and Vicente.

Darren explains the contempt he has for the Dixie Chicks, which stems from the comments made by lead singer Natalie Maines at a 2003 concert in London. Maines proclaimed the group was against the impending invasion of Iraq and were ashamed President George W. Bush was from Texas. Darren felt that to criticize the Commander-in-Chief was to criticize the military as a whole. Respect was a life lesson that Darren sought to live by. Jayson’s quote is an example of his views on what it means to be Native versus being a soldier. He does not see the military as an outlet for the warrior spirit. Jayson early on in our communication told me that the military was no place for a Native. Vicente reveals the depth of understanding he has for social systems and how they operate over people. As a high school student, he had the consciousness to refrain from taking the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test so that he would not be on the map of the U.S. military. He knew his knowledge was something to be kept in private and revealed only at his will.

In the opening of this story, these men represent the beauty, pain, conflict, and hope of Native communities. My intention in beginning with their array of voices is to demonstrate their diversity and that the spirit of our ancestors certainly does live in our hearts. Cochiti scholar Dr. Joseph Suina clearly reminds us that sovereignty is simply a sacred act that takes place within ourselves. While each individual participant found both common and unique interpretations of their lived experiences, their realities, I would like
to make it known that every single person shown the spirit of their ancestors in their hearts. This phenomenological study on the relationship between education and Indigenous participation in the military from 2001-2009 is really a story of this spirit.

The cost of recent Indigenous participation in the military became immediately apparent to Indian country in 2003 when news spread that Lori Piestewa was killed in Iraq. As a Master’s student in American Indian Studies, I remember sitting in the office of the professor I was a graduate assistant for while he told me how heartbreaking this loss was to him. As a close family friend, he had seen Lori grow up throughout her childhood. In 2005, I taught a Native American Studies course and met a student who would later become a friend and research participant in this study. He was a relative of Ms. Piestewa. There is always a connection to every person, every loss.

In June 2011, I sat in the home of Celeste who began her service in the Army Reserves in 2007 and had just earned her Master’s degree the month prior to our meeting. In response to a question on veterans that she admires, she had this to say:

Well of course Lori Piestewa. … Like I read a book called I’m Still Standing by Shoshanna Johnson and she tells that story from a different perspective. … I read it and kind of passed it around my unit so they could read it. But just reading that story and not really knowing, cause if you don’t know about the military it’s difficult to understand like what really happened. And then studying public administration and tribal administration and studying about politics and I did a couple of research papers on the invasion of Iraq. So just learning all of that and knowing what they were put through and… just the danger they were in... I don’t know. I’m trying to find a nice way to put this but kind of the things like it was
almost like they were sacrificed you know what I mean? And when I think about her being the first Native American female killed in combat, I mean yeah that’s great but she didn’t have to be there. She had two kids and you know every time I think about it, it just makes me like really emotional because like they…

At this point, Celeste’s emotion begins to surface as tears run down her face and her voice strains to continue her storytelling. Tears well in my eyes as well and I am reminded of my role as a Tribal Critical Race theorist/researcher and that I am in the right place. I understand the depth of connection that Celeste has to what happened to Lori. I personally was motivated in to engage in this research once I realized that lives were being lost to unanswered questions. Brayboy (2005) states that being able to not only listen to stories but to hear them is central to TribalCrit. He shares:

> Stories often are the guardians of cumulative knowledges that hold a place in the psyches of the group members, memories of tradition, and reflections of power. Hearers ultimately understand the nuances in stories and recognize that the onus for hearing is placed on the hearer rather than the speaker for delivering a clearly articulated message. Additionally, one must be able to feel the stories. You tell them, hear them, and feel them—establishing a strong place for empathy and for “getting it.”

Celeste relates to Lori as a Native, a mother, a fellow servicewoman, and someone who also experienced deployment in the same conflict in Iraq. As a survivor, Celeste has been able to continue her education and her analysis of the situation she and those around her have come to be in. Celeste, as well as two other mothers in this study, have had to weigh their roles in relation to the benefits and risks of re-enlistment versus
the absence of military compensation and livelihood in civilian life. For Lori Piestewa, the choice to re-enlist or exit was taken with her life. She may have chosen to continue her service or she may have chosen to find an alternative path once her service was complete. In any case, Celeste continued to reflect on the incident:

   It’s stupid mistakes… people made and that’s the part that really bothers me. …
   Yeah it’s sad because you know… She was active duty. She was a driver. She was driving. It was just a wrong turn. You know and leaving behind her two kids. … I can’t imagine. And although she’s a hero, like I really admire her. Like I just felt so bad. I’m like that would be awful. That would be so scary. And then to think that she could have possibly been saved or been alive you know and still have been injured. And they don’t know the story and the government is covering up all these stories and not telling the truth. I’m like okay you’ve already done this enough to our people. Like at least be straight up and honest and tell, for her parents’ sake her kids’ sake like exactly what happened. Because they do that a lot. I mean even in, I experience it all the time. Like I see things like that, yeah. … So just thinking, just from what I studied like from the invasion is that the military really didn’t have a plan. Like they didn’t have a sure plan and they had no idea what they were getting into. So they sent all these young men and women to a foreign country with not even some of the proper equipment to go there and fight this war. And a lot of people lost their lives for what cause? … And so I have a lot of mixed emotions about this war. But on the other hand, I have an obligation to my country because that’s the decision I made.
Native America still mourns the loss of Lori Piestewa. For a young mother to decide the best way to help her children is to leave the reservation, risk her life, and serve in the military begs the obvious question of: how voluntary is this institution? Phillip, another research participant, served in the Army for five years while taking a break from an elite private college where he could no longer afford to pay his tuition. He narrowly avoided the same fate as Lori. He was on the same path on the same mission as Lori on the day her envoy took the wrong turn that eventually led to an ambush and her death. He lives with this connection to her while he ponders the racism that erupted in the movement to rename “Squaw Peak” in Phoenix, Arizona to Piestewa Peak.

Santa Ana Pueblo’s Emilian Sanchez was killed in the same war four years later in January of 2007. He followed the tradition of thousands of Natives before him and entered the U.S. military. The death of Emilian was widely covered by the local media in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Male tribal members, with Marine officials, escorted his body from the airport to the home of his family in Santa Ana Pueblo. As an eyewitness, I clearly saw how the event was filled with tears and heartache. At the same time, the Native community demonstrated great pride in what their Lance Corporal stood for. This pride is what eventually confirmed the decision of Faren, who was one of the younger participants in the study, to enlist. When asked, in addition to his family legacy, what helped him make his decision to enlist, he shared:

“Actually Emil…really sealed the deal for me. You know when he got killed? … That very next year that day of my 17th birthday I signed up.”

Faren is also from a Pueblo nation. He now serves the Marines overseas but is not currently deployed in a country with combative action. While many of the
participants were hesitant in accepting compensation for their time or travel to meet with me, Faren outright refused. I explained that he could use it to give to someone else, like perhaps his family or his mother. He then said, “well I’m giving it to you.” I was profoundly touched and accepted his gift with sincere gratitude. My interpretation of the situation was that he was so driven by his ideals and what he represented, that he could not accept money for something he felt was of service to another person. Furthermore, he could not pass on that money to his family because he was already able to give to them what he wished to provide. There was definitely a sense of honor from Faren and each person that I met as I made my way around homes, schools, meetings, pow wows, electronic networking, friendships, and communities. The many amazing colors of honor, along with many other incredible themes, will be explored in the final chapters of this work. However, I wanted to ensure that the power of the participants’ experiences was something that could be felt early on by those who have chosen to open their selves up to this piece.

While working as an assistant to a Native language center this summer, I had the privilege of meeting a Kewa man who wanted to know about my dissertation. I simply told him that I was looking at the relationship between education and current Native participation in the military. He quickly responded, “Oh, so it’s like artwork huh? You have to try to find something that hasn’t been done before.” I told him yes that is exactly it. For me, like many others, my work is a ceremony, an offering, and a prayer.

I never took the time to learn to weave from my grandmother when she was living a hundred feet from our trailer on the reservation. However, as I sat alone each day trying to push myself to finish this transcript or that page of notes, I could gently feel her
spirit teaching me where to place my fingers and how to feel the creation in my heart.
The questions are the warp of the loom. The warp beam is my framework and literature review that honors the scholarship of academics who have built a great pool of intellect to draw from. The participants’ voices are my yarn. Finally, my brother explained to me that the coding process is the dying of the yarn and the design I weave is the analysis.
What follows now will be the telling of the story and the weaving of the loom.

**Gathering Materials**

Why do our families, communities, and Nations have to give up our youth so that they can follow dreams of military service? How can we address the structures that prevent us from recreating our own institutions of warriorhood? How can we provide the means for our youth to protect the Native homeland through our own terms? How can we take the power to make the decision of a *just* war and what is really worth the lives of our sons and daughters?

There are countless stories to be told of family and friends that joined the military because of the educational opportunities either provided or promised. The politically and financially elite, such as the daughters of former United States’ President Bush (2000-2008), do not have to join the military in order to have college prospects. Educational rewards are only available providing service men and women survive the war and meet all the requirements of the GI Bill.

Many Native American veterans are proud of their service in the U.S. military and are thankful for the opportunities that service has afforded them. Yet, I wonder, how can we begin to create a transition? How can Native Nations provide training, education, career opportunities, unity, and brotherhood/sisterhood to their youth that is grounded in
Indigenous thought? As Native Nations, could Indigenous peoples require the United States to honor our history, our treaties, and our sovereignty through ensuring that all Native recruits and veterans are provided exceptional career and educational counseling by Native leaders in the military? Could our Native Nations also demand that our tribal members only serve in wars that are considered *just wars* as has been established by each respective tribe? (Yellow Bird, 2011).

I view the work in this dissertation to be my responsibility to examine the role education plays in the lives of Native Americans who may consider military entrance. In doing so, my ideal is to assist Native Nations in returning the honor that Native Warriors have brought to our communities by: 1) making certain all potential recruits, enlistees, and veterans are provided the services/benefits they have earned; 2) promoting the reserved right to fight only in wars which protect Indigenous lands, liberties, and interests; 3) calling for a society which respectfully recognizes Native American military contributions; 4) and informing a schooling system in both high school and higher education which affords all Native students options that reflect their special talents and exercises the energy in their hearts.

**Introduction to the remainder of the chapter**

This chapter will serve as an introduction to looking at the relationship between education and the United States’ military from 2001-2009 for Native Americans. I focus on this time frame because it is the period of white wealthy republican George W. Bush’s time in the President’s office of the United States from September 11, 2001 to the end of his second term in January 2009. This is the period in which the *War on Terror* was implemented by way of U.S. invasions into Iraq and Afghanistan. The following sections
in this chapter will provide a background of the study, the problem statement, professional significance of the study, delimitations, definitions, and a conclusion that reminds us of the connection between everything discussed.

**Background of the Study**

In order to understand the politics of schooling in the last 10 years for Native American youth, it is necessary to investigate the political era that formulates educational policy. In so doing, it assists in identifying the various hegemonic experiences of students. The political period of 2001-2009 in the United States was chiefly shaped by: the fear of terrorism as a result of the September 11, 2001 attacks within U.S. designated borders, U.S. engagement in a war opposed by the United Nations, the Patriot Act, deregulation of the economy, deregulation of environmental protection, and promotion of national benchmarks based on standardized tests in schools through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. These policies are reflective of the agenda of George W. Bush who took presidential power of the United States and, in tandem, the country’s global position of dominance from January 2001 to January 2009. Concurrently, and more key, is the effort of Native educators, students, communities, and nations who have exerted a will to maintain Indigeneity in a world undergoing yet another wave of strategic U.S. colonization of thought, resources, and political power: now guised as democracy. The following section will focus on the two factors that, in my determination, constitute the most significant background of the study. First, I will provide a closer examination of the conflicts in which the U.S. has been engaged during the 2001-2009 period of interest. Specifically, I will provide a brief analysis of the occupation in Iraq and the impact on Indigenous people. Secondly, I will probe the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and its
correlation to the history of American Indian Education as well as its conflict with Indigenous education. While this analysis appears only briefly in this chapter, deeper consideration will be given in the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical sections of the literature review.

Essentially, I examine the dynamics between Indigenous self-determination and how Native values of *Warriorhood* may be borrowed and/or redefined by the powers of the United States’ military to recruit Native students within the educational system of schooling in the U.S. Thus my research question is: is there a relationship between education and participation in the United States’ military by Indigenous people during the period of 2001-present? Specifically, this study considers the relationship between schooling and Native American enlistment in the military as it has been influenced by *Operation Enduring Freedom* and *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, termed by the George W. Bush U.S. Administration of 2001-2009 (Fischer, Klarman, & Oboroceanu, 2008).

**Decolonizing U.S. conflicts in the 21st century.**

As demonstrated by the names given to the wars by the former commander in chief’s administration, *freedom* has been the rhetoric used to justify the military efforts of the U.S. On September 20, 2001, George W. Bush planted the conceptual seed of fighting for freedom by stating: “Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done” CNN U.S., 2001). While the societal cost of the war to U.S. citizens along with the 4,237 U.S. military lives (January 2009) has been an immeasurable catastrophe, even greater numbers lie in the losses for Iraq. Their estimated total deaths (January 2009 by media
reports) are 8,890 to Iraqi Security Forces and over 44,434 to Iraqi civilians (icasualties.org, 2009)! These numbers are great underestimates and do not speak to the trauma of the invasion or the destruction of land and daily ways of life. According to Iraq Body Count, a human security project, the documented civilian death count from violence was 103,158-112,724 as of October 2011 (iraqbodycount.org, 2011). In contrast Halliburton, the largest profiteering corporation in Iraq, has pocketed over 17 billion dollars from 2003-2006 (Brush, 2007). Based on these figures, Operation Iraqi Freedom has clearly been a monetary win for United States of America corporations and devastation for many Iraqis that lost life, resources, and ways of being. In essence, this war has not focused on battles for freedom but battles for the maintenance of global economic, political, and social supremacy owned by the few with access to power and wealth.

Due to these costs, I have become increasingly oppositional to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Additionally, I have engaged in many critical discussions with colleagues and community members on the topic of the relationship between colonization, decolonization, and the activity of the U.S. government. Furthermore, these discussions have resulted in my multifaceted consideration of the participation of youth who are members of Native Nations who have served or are currently on the side of U.S. armed forces in the war on Iraq. These facets include queries on: access to quality schooling that rewards and supports students’ lived experiences and history as Indigenous people; access to counseling that ensures Native students are presented with post-secondary options that reflect their interests, talents, imagination, and beliefs; access to culturally aware Native military recruiters and leaders who are effective in securing life-long high
level benefits and placement/advancement of Natives in the system; protection from military recruiters who recruit Native American students based on standardized test scores, socioeconomic status, racial appearance, and the co-option of the military tradition in Native families; the assertion of cultural sovereignty as Indigenous Nations in demanding that tribal members who enlist in the military are recognized as citizens of their respective Native Nations and are afforded certain reserved rights as such.

Before I extend my discussion to the reality of those Native veterans and their families who consider their military service an honor and an active decision to protect the ancestral homeland, I would like to begin to contextualize my position as a researcher by highlighting the stances of two Native scholar-activists who have voiced positions which support my critique of the Iraq war from a perspective of decolonization.

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (2007) argues that the 20th century wars in Iraq have paralleled the history of White-Indian conflict. She writes:

Colonial tactics have remained fairly constant throughout history and they should be recognized today as strategies to diminish freedom for innocent and sovereign peoples. One of the aspects of this history that makes it crucial for all Americans to ponder is that certain political assumptions on the part of the United States reflected during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are with us today. The foremost of these assumptions on the part of the United States are racial superiority felt by whites, the innocence of colonization felt by all capitalists, and the righteousness felt by all Christians—all assumptions that allow and encourage the United States to use its power to enforce its vision of itself as the indispensable democracy. (p. 86)
I agree with Cook-Lynn’s assertion that assumptions pave the way for U.S. aggression throughout the world and are classic examples of colonialism. While the United States touts itself as a nation of freedom in which any person of any race or ethnicity may succeed, white dominant society continues to prevail as indicated by economic and education stratification reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2006). American Indians and Alaska Natives were reported to have more than twice the ratio of people living below the poverty line than that of all people combined. In terms of bachelor’s degree attainment, 24% of all people combined had college degrees while the number for Alaska Natives and American Indians was 11%. Capitalism is celebrated in the United States for its propensity to promote individual freedom to succeed in the marketplace. This ideal counters the Indigenous value of community well being. As such, individual wealth is continuously rewarded and applauded while millions of people who live in poverty are shamed for what is perceived as their dependency on government support. In essence, wealthy capitalists are in the position of power to name themselves both the moral and economic victors while the cycle of racial, economic, and colonial oppression continues the destruction of communities of color. Finally, the ultimate excuse for U.S. aggression and occupation has been Christianity. From the European colonization of the Americas, to Manifest Destiny, to the current invasion/occupation of Iraq, Christianity has prevailed as the green light for the murder of Indigenous populations and the rape of their land. In a country that supposedly honors freedom of religion, the United States has a poor record of supporting this human right both inside and outside its borders. Presidents and presidential candidates endlessly conclude their speeches with the phrase “God Bless America.” Christianity is so dominant that Barrack
Obama was accused of being Muslim in mass email circulation as a tactic to dissuade voters from voting for a non-Christian candidate in 2008. Further evidence of Christian domination can be found in federal Indian law from the Johnson v. M’Intosh decision (Newcomb, 2008) to the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978. For instance, according to Newcomb, the Christine Doctrine of Discovery was adopted into U.S. law in the Johnson v. M’Intosh case which granted the power of dominion to the U.S. government over Indians. While it is true that many Native Americans have embraced various forms of Christianity, this fact does not legitimize the abusiveness powerful nations have exercised in their invasions of the land of sovereign peoples. So why is it that Native Americans continue to serve in a military that engages in wars which do not appear to clearly serve the interests of Indigenous peoples or their lands? Could it be that Native enlistees are participating in the military in order to gain social and/or cultural status among the communities in which they engage?

Again, in observing the revered treatment of veterans, there is a connection between warriorhood and service in U.S. military operations. The Navajo Nation utilizes a billboard near Window Rock, AZ with an image of what can be perceived as a traditional warrior turning into a police officer to recruit young Navajos into service. Native American communities have long honored our warriors for their commitment to protecting our life ways and our homelands. I can understand this sense of pride as I remember feeling so proud to discover that servicemen from my nation, the Diné, played a critical role as code talkers in World War II. When I first heard a classmate say that the U.S. won World War II because of Navajos who spoke a code, I thought it was absurd. When our social studies teacher explained that it was true I began to realize that I had
been taught to believe Native Americans could never contribute anything of worth to society. Unfortunately, in addition to the lack of recognition of Native contributions to U.S. history, schools also fail to provide a critical analysis of that same history. These men, as well as the men and women who have served in the military since then, are regarded as heroes in Native society. As will be further discussed, a lot of veterans have argued that Native American service in the military has become the new institution for protecting our homeland and practicing warriorhood. Unfortunately, due to the realities of who has benefited in the past and who is benefiting from the war now, Native service in the military is in need of serious reconsideration.

However, the spirit of Native Warriors does not have to be extinguished and regarded as a colonized concept in order to create change for our peoples. Rather, the idea of Native Warrior should be reclaimed through contemporary Indigenous lenses. As discussed by Tiana Bighorse in *Bighorse the Warrior* (1990), traditionally in the Diné way, being a warrior meant fulfilling your responsibilities to your family and your people in whatever way you are needed. Since the onslaught of colonization, the concept of warrior seems to have taken on different meanings depending on the context. On a national level in the U.S., it has been directly linked to service in the military by the U.S. military itself. On a pan-Indian level, it has been also been linked to U.S. military service as the word is often used to describe veterans at pow-wows, memorials, and even graduation ceremonies. Globally, Indigenous societies such as Canadian First Nations, Hawaiians, and Maoris also recognize a warriorhood tradition. Yet, how much of the warriorhood concept precedes 1492? How can we tell? Is it evident in the fact that the word itself is in English? I believe a dissertation can be written of how warriorhood is
defined for each Indigenous nation and community, in the past, present and future. For the purpose of my work, I will simply let the participants speak for themselves in if they recognize warriorhood as an appropriate concept of discussion and in how they define it. Chris Hedges (2003) argues that war is a means for individuals to find acceptance and comfort in through unified bonds with neighbors whom they might otherwise be alienated from. He contends that war allows for participants to gain a sense of purpose fighting for a noble cause. For now, I will remember that it is a concept that Indigenous peoples find comfort and empowerment in. Whatever the term has become, it likely has some form of Indigenous roots.

In his argument for resisting the participation in the Iraq war on the part of Native Americans and the call to protest, Michael Yellow Bird (2006) suggests that Native Nations think critically about how our culture informs our decisions regarding participation or refusal of war:

Maybe, just maybe, if we act using our traditional Indigenous forms of morality that value truth, intelligence, honesty, life, and dignity—and refuse to be a enabler to the U.S. addiction to greed, war, power, and colonization—we can help it overcome its unhealthy, destructive obsession for war, conquest, and killing of others. (p. 6-7)

Yellow Bird provides a clear distinction between Indigenous values and the values that have driven the U.S. to war. In marking this distinction, he opens a dialogue which focuses on the reconsideration of Indigenous militarization. What does Indigenous warriorhood truly mean to our communities in this day? Given the extremely sensitive nature of questioning the relationships between U.S. greed, the U.S. military, U.S.
conflicts, Indigenous morality, the tradition of Indigenous warriorhood, the sacrifice of life for honor, and the depth of Native commitment to the military tradition, I have sought the guidance of friends, colleagues, and elders. Most poignantly, I have found that many of us envision warriorhood as a spirit in an intellectual battlefield where Indigenous men and women become warriors of education. In essence, I believe that the Indigenization of educational pathways through curriculum, pedagogy, community empowerment, and leadership is absolutely necessary if we are to resist, prevent, and overcome colonization and counter further global oppression by the U.S.

Further articulating the need to view *Operation Iraqi Freedom* from a critical Indigenous perspective, Yellow Bird (2006) describes the relationship between U.S. war efforts and Native American involvement. He writes:

> We must no longer allow our nations to remain in the fog of war, participating in the U.S. continued colonization and destruction of the world. What this country has done—and continues to do—to the Iraqi people is unconscionable and must stop. The U.S.-led war in Iraq is wrong, immoral, illegal, unjust, a lie; it is about profiteering for a very small, corrupt, elite sector of the U.S. population. Our people, many of whom occupy some of the lowest levels of decision-making in the U.S. military are considered expendable and are being used for cannon fodder so that the rich, especially in the United States, can become richer. (p. 6)

Michael Yellow Bird’s call to action in 2006 and other efforts to mobilize a non-violent intellectual path for Native warriorhood are significant signs that the spirit of decolonization is growing a dialogue at the intersection of education and the U.S. armed forces. While Yellow Bird’s critique of the military clearly states his individual
opposition to the war, this discussion repeatedly becomes clouded when examining Native Americans in the military from a broader perspective. In other words, individuals have spoken to need to reconsider Native American participation in the military but there has yet to be a majority collective voice that has discouraged enlistment. Social, cultural, and neurological paradigms could hold the answer.

The Native American population at large is portrayed in the media as being patriotic and supportive of the military due to both the opportunities the system offers and to what has been coined the warrior tradition in Native society. An article from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch by Phillip O’Connor and Kevin Crowe appeared in the Santa Fe New Mexican on July 6, 2008 and described a scene in which Native American veterans were honored at a powwow:

Two dozen military veterans enter the powwow grounds to the sound of a drum’s rhythmic thump and the chants of songs passed down from their ancestors.

They dance clockwise, a slow stutter step on lush grass, as sunlight dapples through the surrounding forest. Several are squeezed into old dress uniforms or camouflage fatigues. Many sport caps from which an eagle feather dangles; graying ponytails spill out the backs. A few wear traditional headdresses, breechcloths and leggings.

Above them, suspended from two soaring pines, a large American flag ripples in the breeze. (p. A-1)

The mainstream newspaper continues to paint the image of the honorable warrior tradition by quoting seventeen-year-old Vince Crow. “‘It’s a way to show pride.’ Vince says. ‘Pride for your family. Pride for your heritage. Pride for your nation. It just kind
of goes along with our ancestry. Instead of protecting a village, you’re protecting a
country.”” (p. A-6)

He is quoted again later in the article, “Vince, his hair shaved close, wears a
colorful beaded choker. A medicine pouch filled with tobacco dangles from his neck.
He says he grew up listening to the tales of forefathers who found honor in battle. ‘It
goes with our heritage,’ he says. ‘Warriors, you know?’” (p. A-6)

While the article does centralize the idea of the warrior tradition as being a major
factor why Native Americans serve in the military with the highest per capita record, the
newspaper does not include poverty and lack of opportunity in hometowns in the authors’
analysis. Although this is only one example of how Native American military service is
portrayed and/or understood, I believe it is most likely representative of the general
perception that Native American communities have of veterans. As indicated in the
article, the status of Native veterans is especially visible when they are recognized in the
grand entry at pow wows. According to the Native owned website powwows.com
(2009):

During the Grand Entry, everyone is asked to stand as the flags are brought into
the arena. The flags carried generally include the US flag, tribal flags, POW flag,
and eagle staffs of various tribes present. These are usually carried by veterans.
Native Americans hold the United States flag in an honored position despite the
horrible treatment received from this country. The flag has a dual meaning. First it
is a way to remember all of the ancestors that fought against this country. It is also
the symbol of the United States which Native Americans are now a part. The flag
here also reminds people of those people who have fought for this country.
Not only are Native American veterans revered at pow wow events, they are widely recognized in many other facets of societal life. Veteran names are recognized through display in spaces such as Navajo Chapter Houses. Native veteran organizations/conferences are supported by the community and tribes through monetary contributions and high rates of attendance. In celebrations or other events, Navajo Code Talkers are often invited as special guests of honor. Furthermore, while attending the 2008 Santa Fe Indian School Senior Honors Project Symposium, I observed the audience reaction to the student presentations on recruitment and participation in the U.S. military in which two young men announced their enlistment. Audience members, especially veterans, repeatedly commended these students for their decision. Concurrently, the non-enlisted research partners of these students were not asked any questions about their future.

The following statistics provide numerical data on the current population of Native American war veterans in the year 2008 according to demographic reports from the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. The terminology used to describe the conflicts is that of the Center. These numbers provide a quick look on the presence of Native American veterans living. The following numerical values represent the Native American veteran population in September 2008. The numbers were not broken down by tribe and represent self-reports of Native identification.

- 6,463 veterans of World War II
- 10,586 veterans of the Korean War
- 59,871 veterans of the Vietnam war
- 28,002 veterans of the Gulf War before 9/30/01
56,094 veterans of the Gulf War after 9/30/01

The following list of data provides a sampling of the loss of life since the events of September 11, 2001. This information was derived from a Congressional Research Service Report for Congress updated on May 14, 2008.

- Of 3,866 *Operation Iraqi Freedom* deaths from May 1, 2003 to April 5, 2008: 38 are American Indian or Alaska Native.
- Of 29,676 *Operation Iraqi Freedom* casualties from March 19, 2003 to April 5, 2008: 302 are American Indian or Alaska Native.
- Of 487 *Operation Enduring Freedom* deaths from October 7, 2001 to April 5, 2008: 7 are American Indian or Alaska Native
- Of 1,914 *Operation Enduring Freedom* military wounded in action (no dates specified): 23 are American Indian or Alaska Native

Clearly, along with the United States’, Native Nations are sacrificing the health and welfare of their youth, their future, to war. Given the great amount of Native service to the U.S. military and in consideration of the consequences of a controversial war, the following question emerges: are Native Americans tied to warfare through the perpetuation that these are traditional concepts that can be carried out through contemporary U.S. military service? If so, who is making this connection? Is it Native peoples, combat veterans, non-combat veterans, military recruitment efforts, or multiple combinations? Is it all a stereotype made in the interest of the United States? The Department of the Navy (1996), in a report for the Department of Defense, describes Native American participation as being a form of 20th century warriorhood. They unmistakably name this relationship in their report:
As the 20th century comes to a close, there are nearly 190,000 Native American military veterans. It is well recognized that, historically, Native Americans have the highest record of service per capita when compared to other ethnic groups. The reasons behind this disproportionate contribution are complex and deeply rooted in traditional American Indian culture. In many respects, Native Americans are no different from others who volunteer for military service. They do, however, have distinctive cultural values which drive them to serve their country. One such value is their proud warrior tradition.

In part, the warrior tradition is a willingness to engage the enemy in battle. This characteristic has been clearly demonstrated by the courageous deeds of Native Americans in combat. However, the warrior tradition is best exemplified by the following qualities said to be inherent to most of not all Native American societies: strength, honor, pride, devotion, and wisdom. The qualities make a perfect fit with military tradition. (Native Americans as Warriors section)

Does Apache Vietnam veteran Sam Ybarra, who became infamous for atrocious war crimes as a private in the Tiger Force commando unit and later died depressed on his reservation, embody this relationship (Sallah, M. & Weiss, M., 2006)? Do the Native American cultural values the Navy refers to include killing, invasion, and a lack of critical thinking? By allowing the United States’ Department of Defense to make blanket connections between Native culture and service to the U.S. military is to allow the colonizer to further attack our sovereignty.

Ironically, in his farewell address as president, George W. Bush states: “Murdering the innocent to advance an ideology is wrong every time, everywhere.
Freeing people from oppression and despair is eternally right” (CBS News, 2009).

Clearly, former president Bush has missed the point of those who oppose his war in Iraq as he does not realize the argument he uses has been the same argument used against his policies and against the history of the United States Indian affairs. This history includes the captivity of Native children in boarding schools for the purpose of erasing any sense of Indigeneity from their identity. Presently, Native students are forced to succumb to U.S. education through a less identifiably harsh means but with a similarly racist narrow-minded objective.

No Child Left Behind and Indigenous education.

This second section of the background will now provide a snapshot of how the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 is the modern era in the ongoing legacy of colonial American Indian education. Zeus Leonardo (2007) argues that this is a policy which privileges Whiteness in the sense that it avoids addressing race as an explanation for causing educational disparities. The policy seeks to promote color-blindness in order to perpetuate the innocence of the Whiteness system of privilege. He further argues that NCLB is used to explain disparities between races as a matter of common sense and those disparities are attributed to group competition, uneven social development, or even the inferiority of people of color by means of their culture. In terms of Native American education, the policy is one of the most detrimental educational reforms in United States history as it forces a pedagogy of and teaching to the test and standardization which has proven to be very problematic to Indigenous learners (McCarty, 2009). As such, it conflicts with Indigenous education in the sense that purpose of NCLB disregards the
metaphor of heart, face, and foundation of Native students as described by Gregory Cajete (2000):

There is a shared body of understanding among many Indigenous peoples that education is really about helping an individual find his or her face, which means finding out who you are, where you come from, and your unique character. That education should also help you find your heart, which is that passionate sense of self that motivates you and moves you along in life. In addition, education should help you find a foundation on which you may most completely develop and express both your heart and your face. That foundation is your vocation, the work that you do, whether it be as an artist, lawyer, or teacher. This, then, is the intent of Indigenous education. It is finding that special kind of work that most fully allows you to express your true self – “Your heart and your face.” (p. 183)

Indigenous education, in this sense, counters the history of militarization in schools. Boarding schools in the United States from the late 1800’s to the early 1900’s were largely modeled after Carlisle Indian School. This school was militaristic in design, as the operator of the school was Colonel Richard Pratt whose goal was reportedly to “kill the Indian and save the man” (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Throughout the height of the boarding school era, Native children were in many instances: forcefully removed from their homes; forced to live in harsh and cramped conditions; forced to work hard labor in the upkeep of schools; forced to march militaristically in lines; forbidden from speaking their Native languages; stripped of their names, clothing, and hairstyle; and made to suffer or die from disease, malnourishment, and homesickness (Adams, 1995).

Essentially, this was the origin of militarization in schools for Native Americans. These
methods of schooling were rooted in the belief that Indigenous peoples were savages who lacked civilization. Furthermore, during the early formative years of the U.S. in which the country was pushing for further expansion and reduced conflict with Native Nations, many treaties were made in which education was made a responsibility of the U.S. to tribes (Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

While these dark periods in the history of American Indian education formalized the relationship between the U.S. and Natives in schooling, the philosophy behind this tradition of schooling was born even earlier. Tsianina Lomawaima (1999) identifies four colonial tenets in the unnatural history of American Indian education:

The phrase colonial education refers to the reculturing and reeducation of American Indians by the secular and religious institutions of colonizing nations—Spain, Great Britain, France, and the United States of America. Deep seated ideas and practices that were accepted as natural by past colonizers continue to undergird contemporary stereotypes about American Indians.

In truth, there was nothing natural or true about the tenets of colonial education: (1) that Native Americans were savages who had to be civilized; (2) that civilization required Christian conversion; (3) that civilization required subordination of Native communities, frequently achieved through resettlement efforts; and (4) that Native people have mental, moral, physical, or cultural deficiencies that made certain pedagogical methods necessary for their education. These tenets were not based on natural truths but were culturally constructed and served specific agendas of colonizing nations… (p. 3)
These tenets form a foundational lesson in the history of American Indian education. As such, I include them as a backdrop to frame this study. From the early stages of European incursion, Indian education was established to serve the interests of White individuals/populations in power or in desperation for it. Hundreds of years later, Native American adolescents are still subjected to the roots of colonial education alongside the repercussions of genocide, disease, broken treaties, abusive boarding schools, environmental destruction, disastrous health policy, and corrupt federal/state decisions. The tenets are reflected in contemporary schooling experiences as Native children in many public or government funded schools are tested upon their ability to navigate a racist system in which non-White cultures are treated as secondary at best; the Christian influence remains ingrained (i.e. school calendars and the pledge of allegiance to a nation under God); and a curriculum in which Western epistemology is prioritized (Leonardo, 2007).

In contrast to the colonial tenets of American Indian education, scholars have made much progress in promoting self-determination and cultural awareness in schooling (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 2004; Lomawaima, K.T. & McCarty, T.L. 2006). Unfortunately, the federal government continues to interfere by imposing ethnocentric policies. For instance, the current attack on tribal sovereignty comes in the form of No Child Left Behind and creates an even tighter relationship between Native American education and military participation. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 counters the visions of Indigenous education as the act focuses on standardization which works in opposition to achieving finding heart, finding face, and finding foundation (Cajete, 2000).
Essentially, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provides a striking example of the intersection between hegemonic education and the continued colonial oppression of Native Americans. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the four pillars of NCLB are: stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents (Ed.gov, 2004). While these pillars sound positive, the problems lie in who gets to determine accountability, by what standards, by whose methods, and by who is hurt by the denial of funding. Furthermore, NCLB fails to recognize the systemic and structural problems of inequality in schools. In essence, the act does not address the underlying oppressive reasons that students do not reach mainstream benchmarks. The act punishes schools for not having the resources or the freedom to teach their students what is appropriate to their population. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 fits perfectly into a 21st century scheme of American Indian Education. This federal act is actually another act in the tradition of American Indian education that violates Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty through a white dominant centered curriculum and system for the true purpose of maintaining the status quo. The school in my community now has grant status meaning the school is not run by the BIE but is run by our local school board and executive director. Nonetheless, the teachers and students are still subjected to NCLB standards and tests.

In connecting NCLB to the background of this study, Section 9528 is a provision that gives armed forces recruiters access to students and student recruiting information. The provision (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) states in part:

ACCESS TO STUDENT RECRUITING INFORMATION- Notwithstanding section 444(a)(5)(B) of the General Education Provisions Act and except as
provided in paragraph (2), each local educational agency receiving assistance
under this Act shall provide, on a request made by military recruiters or an
institution of higher education, access to secondary school students names,
addresses, and telephone listings. (p. 1)

While military recruiters have always had methods of accessing student data from high
schools, this provision is especially alarming when considering the issues surrounding
NCLB for Native American youth. I argue that NCLB might place an even larger target
on Native girls and boys in high schools that are not performing up to federal and state
standards. This NCLB provision demonstrates that the existence of educational
disparities is plainly a factor in the recruitment and enlistment of Indigenous youth.
While the presence of military recruiters can be protested to school boards, it takes an
Opt Out form signed by parents to keep personal information from being provided to
military recruiters. This is a good option but realistically, how many parents have this
information immediately available to them?

The background of this study can be summarized in two points. The first one
being that the occupation in Iraq has been controversial due to the causalities on all sides
of the war versus the monetary wealth obtained by the profiteers of the war. Given these
circumstances, and the history of invasion on the part of the U.S. and its colonizing
history, Native American participation in the military needs to be reconsidered in light of
Indigenous nationhood. The second point is that the history of American Indian
education continues to impose western interests in its service to Native youth. This
history is rooted in a racist paradigm of boarding schools, underfunding, and standardized
testing. The education of Native youth needs to be reclaimed by Indigenous educators.
No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is the modern tool of maintaining colonizing interests. At the same time, we must also recognize that Indigenous peoples are not the only people being oppressed. Colonization has been the method of implementing racist beliefs on Indigenous peoples for the purpose of gaining Indigenous resources. However, other people of color suffer under racism in other ways. Those in power continue to be dominantly those who are white, male, and with monetary wealth. There are many structures at work in the oppression of people of color, women, and the working class. While decolonization of our minds, our bodies, and our institutions are a necessary first step, we must also look to ways in which social justice can be achieved. It is not enough to heal the suffering of our souls and to reject the ideology of the colonizer. In order to move away from symptoms of oppression such as poverty, chemical dependency, domestic violence, and toxic environments, the other step is to join forces with others who engage in anti-racist, anti-colonial, and decolonizing objectives. While some may argue that this is an unnecessary step, I point to the difference of Native American society pre-George W. Bush and post-George W. Bush: lives lost, jobs lost, policies passed, investments lost, schools in crisis, and so on. It is difficult for structural change to occur without coalition building. The problem is not someone like George W. Bush. The problem is the history of figures he represents. Andrew Jackson, Kit Carson, George Armstrong Custer, and the like may have died in shame or in glory. The truth is: they have not gone anywhere. Warriors or not, we need to remove the disguises of racist ideological and structural power.
The Problem Statement

The issues of decolonization, racism, social well-being, and global justice are central. Essentially, the goal of this study through the lens of Indigenous Studies is to defy hegemonic notions that it is culturally valued for Native Americans to serve in the U.S. military and that any resistance to this service is unpatriotic. Therefore, the overall purpose of the study is to examine Native American service in the U.S. military since September 11, 2001 in order to decolonize educational practices that maintain the U.S. social hierarchy domestically and globally through warfare.

The umbrella research question for the study is: Is there a relationship between education and participation in the United States’ military by Indigenous people during the period of 2001-present? The sub questions are as follows:

1. What are the factors and conditions that shape the decision of Indigenous individuals to enlist?

2. How did the educational experiences of veterans inform their ideologies and decisions to enter the military? Are hegemony and education in this context linked?

3. What are the positive and negative outcomes of participation in the military? What are the challenges? What are the links to education?

4. What is the educational, inside and outside of schooling, relationship between veterans and the conception of Native warrior in both traditional and western lenses?

5. What alliances/support groups/organizations exist for Native American veterans or potential enlistees and how are they linked to education?
6. What alternatives to the military exist for Native youth?

The research questions have been rearticulated to better represent the Indigenous research concept of doing research *with* Indigenous people(s) as opposed to doing research *on* them (Wilson, 2008). I found early on that some of my focus questions were based on assumptions I had made prior to getting to know the real stories of veterans. Engaging in emergent design, adjusting my inquiry plans and strategies, became essential in this study in order to attain fidelity to the phenomenon I was studying (Schwandt, 2000).

**Professional Significance of the Study**

How can schools better protect Indigenous youth? How can tribal nations re-center education to provide our youth with clear options for post-secondary pursuits? As an Indigenous teacher, researcher and scholar, the professional is personal. My objective in the professional significance of the study is to ensure that Indigenous high school students are led to finding heart, face, and foundation (Cajete, 2000).

This dissertation was designed to inform students, parents, and educators on how high schools are used as a mechanism for recruitment into the military and what the downsides are. Furthermore, the study will demonstrate that struggles and conflicts with schooling continue on at the level of higher education for Native students. By understanding the way Native Americans enter into military careers and their relationship to education, educators and family members can better assess how to make sure that students are aware of all options following high school graduation and throughout college. One goal of this study is to design a course/workshop/booklet for each level of secondary education in regards to post-secondary choices for Native Americans. Another
goals is to make my dissertation available to high schools in a simple form that would allow counselors, teachers, and students to re-examine military entrance and to keep higher education for all students as an option throughout all four years of secondary schooling. I do not believe college is for everyone but I do want to make sure that high schools become aware of their tracking systems no matter how apparent or transparent they may be.

**Delimitations**

According to Glatthorn and Joyner (2005), the term delimitations refers to the boundaries of the study and ways in which the study may not have generalizability. These are not weaknesses of the study but details that make the study unique in respect to details such as time period, sample size, the setting, and other such factors.

The most significant delimitation of the study is that the participants primarily represent tribes from the southwest region of the United States. The reason for this sample was the location in which the researcher was based and the allowance of resources available to travel. A major positive aspect in this delimitation was the familiarity I had with the tribes and communities the participants were representing.

This study gives great consideration to the history of American Indian education as well as the history of Native American service in the U.S. military. However, the research will focus on the period of U.S. international conflict between 2001 and 2009 as this reflects a period of specific post-9/11 political rhetoric and governmental policy in schools. Furthermore, this study aims to identify the hegemony experienced by Native students in schools during this decade and to juxtapose it with the Indigenous education
movement spearheaded by scholars like Gregory Cajete, Graham Smith, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith.

While all experiences of individuals in Native society are applicable to answering the research question, this study will centralize the narratives of veterans who have served or enlisted in the military during the period of interest. Supporting data will be gathered from students who considered enlistment but did not join; veterans of other wars; and information gathered through Native veteran and educational communities. Attention to the quality, richness, respect of participants, and analysis of data in the qualitative research process will be the goal of the methodology. Thus, the number of participants will be limited.

**Definition of Key Terms**

This section provides an overview of key terms that have been used in the introduction or will be used throughout the remaining chapters. These terms have been chosen due to the need to specify the interpretation I am utilizing in each concept. This is especially relevant as this is an education study that is situated closely with interdisciplinary Indigenous studies. Defining these key terms also serve as a preview to the following chapter in which I will review theoretical, empirical, conceptual literature, databases, and newspaper articles.

**American Indian education**: As Pewewardy (2005) states, “It is important to understand that the term ‘Indian education’ is an externally imposed concept that was created and sustained by white architects of Indigenous education. This refers to the dominant society’s educational system as applied to Indigenous Peoples rather than the Indigenous forms of education existent in Indigenous societies prior to colonization” (p.
In my own words, *American Indian education* refers to the history of schooling imposed on Indigenous society, community, and family as it has been practiced by early colonists, missionaries, and the United States’ government which utilizes White western models of education for the purpose of cultural genocide, obtainment of Indigenous resources, promotion of Christian religions, or to secure monetary funds under the guise of schools for Indians. Furthermore, *American Indian education* refers to contemporary schooling structures and policy makers who continue to privilege these models, conscious or not, in this legacy and at the cost of genuine Indigenous education.

**Colonization**: Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird (2005) define this term as, “both the formal and informal methods (behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economies) that maintain the subjugation or exploitation of Indigenous Peoples, lands, and resources” (p. 2). These scholar-activists go on to explain that colonization is purposeful in that, “colonizers engage in this process because it allows them to maintain and/or expand their social, political, and economic power” (p. 2). Finally, understanding the continuing impact of colonization is important because, “the colonizers’ power comes at the expense of Indigenous lands, resources, lives, and self-determination” (p. 2).

Within the context of this study, as has been discussed, this term is especially critical to summon as both the education of Indigenous youth and the operations of the United States’ military are deeply entrenched in behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economies of dominant white society.

**Cultural Sovereignty**: The most powerful interpretation of sovereignty I have ever heard came from Joseph Suina, speaking in a seminar for Indigenous teachers in training. He stated “The true meaning of sovereignty is that we still carry the spirit of our
ancestors in our hearts.” His words opened the chapter, as they are the foundation of this study and all work in Indigenous studies and education to which I engage. Wallace Coffey (2001) gives the concept a term and defines it beautifully. He writes, “Cultural sovereignty is the heart and soul that you have, and no one has jurisdiction over that but God” (p. 191).

**Decolonization:** Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird (2005) further their dissection of colonization in their definition of decolonization as the “intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands, and it is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation” (p. 5).

**Education:** everything that is learned by a group or an individual constitutes their education whether it is in schools, within community life, with family, with peers, or in popular culture. It is essentially based on what one gains from life experience.

**Educational pathways:** recognizing the journey that one takes in pursuing education whether it is an active decision to reach a goal or in fulfillment of expectations/requirements.

**Indigenous People:** are those people who Marie Battiste describes as those who “have survived European colonization and cognitive imperialism…the people of the Earth whom Europeans have characterized as primitive, backward, and inferior – the colonized and dominated people of the last five centuries” (2000, p. xvi). Furthermore, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2006) states:
Considering the diversity of indigenous peoples, an official definition of “indigenous” has not been adopted by any UN-system body. Instead the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following:

- Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
- Distinct social, economic or political systems
- Distinct language, culture and beliefs
- Form non-dominant groups of society
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities. (p.1)

**Indigenous education**: education for Indigenous students stemming from Indigenous educators who call upon Indigenous knowledge in finding heart, finding face, and finding foundation as it is described by Gregory Cajete (2000): “finding that special kind of work that most fully allows you to express your true self – ‘Your heart and your face’ (p. 183).”

**Native**: This term is used interchangeably with Native American but is my preferred term, as a statement of self-identity, as it avoids including the name of a colonizing country.

**Native American or Native**: This study will recognize a Native American or Native as a descendant of the Indigenous peoples who inhabited some part of the newly designated United States’ boundaries prior to European invasion. Furthermore, this
descendant also self-identifies himself/herself as belonging to an Indigenous nation or community and is also recognized by the Native nation through tribal membership or community belonging as demonstrated by family history in the community.

**Native Nation:** An Indigenous nation or people who lived collectively and occupied some part of the newly designated United States’ boundaries prior to European invasion who now identify themselves as a sovereign entity regardless of U.S. recognition.

**Schooling:** The formal Western style of education in which learning takes place between teachers and students in an institutional setting for the majority of meeting times. Depending on the structure of the school and the stakeholders, the pedagogy may or may not be conducive to contributing to Indigenous education.

**Sovereignty:** This is the term traditionally used in Native American or American Indian studies programs, which has often referred to the self-governance of Native tribal peoples both before and after European invasion and colonization. However, self-governance is actually much different than sovereignty because of the notion that tribes are still being directed by the federal government even though they are allowed to carry out their governance. Taiake Alfred (1999) states that the concept of Native sovereignty along with other related terms “is founded on an ideology of Native nationalism and a rejection of models of government rooted in European cultural values. It is an uneven process of re-establishing systems that promote the goals and reinforce the values of indigenous cultures…” (p. 2).
Authorial Representation

The first step in phenomenological analysis begins with a full description of the researcher’s experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Setting aside prejudgements is called epoche (Moustakas, 1994). I express my experience intermittently throughout the chapters leading up to the presentation of the data where my experiences, biases, and personal judgments will be bracketed off from the phenomenological analysis of my interviews. In order to achieve epoche, I will be clear about the essence of my experience with the phenomenon. For me, it is the intersection between my schooling, the people I love, the development of my critical consciousness, and the desire to become a part of healthy culturally sovereign Native communities where youth are not in danger of symptoms of White supremacy.

Conclusion

In the first chapter of this story, I began to introduce the readers to the assortment of expression stemming from the participants. The Native veterans gave hours of their personal time to share their perspectives. I ended the introductory chapter with the meaning I have developed towards my experience in an Indian boarding school. Although the school was modeled after western and even colonialist agendas, I still feel thankfulness for the experience that I had. Even more so, I am locked into a lifelong bond with other alumni of the school. This thankfulness and bond helped me as I often wondered after I secured a meeting with an interview participant, what their motivation was behind their willingness to talk to me about the military and education. After spending so many collective hours speaking with Native veterans, I believe that whether critical of the United States or not, they all felt that the Native participation phenomenon
was important to look at. Being Indigenous, and non-veteran, positions me as both an insider and an outsider. On the one hand, I think that this provides for an incomplete understanding of what my participants are voicing. On the other, it could be a strength that I see through a lens that is sharpened by my life experiences being raised in Native communities and attending schools with Native populations while having the ability to look into military life from the outside. The purpose of the following chapter is to review the empirical data, the theory, and the other work that has shaped the research design of my project. The literature review that I will now present is the warp beam of what will become a complete woven piece. The participants offered so many gifts with their narratives that it is only fair that I make clear how my own academic and theoretical preparations for this work contour how I interpret and analyze their contributions.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Is there a relationship between education and participation in the United States’ military by Indigenous people during the period of 2001-present? I have found that the best approach to answering this question, based on the literature available, is to present my findings of empirical literature conceptually in two parts: 1) a review of the longstanding relationship between American Indian education and militarization and 2) an examination of reasons for Native American enlistment throughout United States’ history. The first portion of this chapter will focus on a discussion of the literature directly related to the two aforementioned areas of review. The second section of the chapter will provide a theoretical analysis of the research question. A diagram of how theory has informed my approach to the research will also be provided in order to clarify the place and need for each theory that is being called upon. The third section of the chapter will allow for a presentation of academic based and popular literature, that applies theory to the connection between the military and Indigenous peoples.

The Relationship Between American Indian Education and Militarization

The legacy of Indian boarding schools.

American Indian education primed many Native people to follow a militaristic course in the process of schooling. Reviewing the legacy of Indian boarding schools is to begin to tell what is known of the story of the relationship between current issues in Indigenous education and the military tradition amongst Native Americans in the United States. Essentially, this legacy has continued to strike the heart of Native America. David Wallace Adams (1995) tells of these origins, “The white threat to Indians came in
many forms: smallpox, missionaries, Contestoga wagons, barbed wire, and smoking locomotives. And in the end, it came in the form of schools” (p. 5). Adams argues that the schooling provided in boarding schools were the final means in the attempt to extinguish Indians.

In examining American Indian education approximately a century after the height of the federal boarding school system of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, scholars still recognize the legacy of devaluation of Indian ways of life. Speaking to the consequences of a long history of conflict between Indigenous rooted education and U.S. schooling initiatives, Butterfield (1994) notes that Native students are subject to assumptions that they are destined to fail and are given lower expectations by others as well as remedial classification. On the other hand, Shutiva (2001) claims there is a dire need for teachers and counselors to provide career and academic guidance that is shaped by concern and understanding. Futhermore, John W. Tippeconnic III (2000) identifies four areas critical to American Indian education: tribal control of education; focus and priority; language and culture; and research. It is important that Natives administer education on their own terms. The largely federally controlled past has taught that when non-Native Americans directed the education, school became a place to institutionalize the ideals of White society while eliminating or minimizing the value of Native thought. Assimilationist policies were especially striking in the boarding school era. Looking at the Native experience in this era, the concept of schooling as a means to provide formal institutional education to youth was foreign. For example, the Diné educated their young by having the family serve as teachers of how to live a proper life as Navajo (Thompson, 1975). Boarding school students were forced to learn and follow Western culture. Indigenous
cultural knowledge was devalued. The conflict between assimilation and Native identity had entered the school system.

Adams (1995) observes that by 1880 the changing political climate in the United States was changing in regards to Indians being at the center in public discourse. The future was directed to the theme that: “Indians not only needed to be saved from the white man, they needed to be saved from themselves” (p. 8). While this discussion may have been interpreted as progressive policy at the time, the idea that Indians needed to be saved was still an indication of the paternalistic mindset that mandated Indian affairs. Additionally, and even more tragically, greed and racism continued to dominate the goals of the government in guises such as allotment in efforts to gain Indian land and extinguish Indian traditional society (Prucha, 1975).

Most Indian boarding schools were initially opened by missionaries. The United States’ government began a contract school system in 1869 with various missionary groups (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Missionary schools worked on behalf of the government to remove Indian students from their culture and to educate them in white institutional settings. In addition to the monetary support the missionaries received from the government, schooling Native American children provided each respective denomination the opportunity to convert students religiously. The battle in the American political system between Catholicism and Protestants often resulted in dispossession of Indian lands as well as the funding of religious based Indian boarding schools in the late 1800’s to early 1900’s (Prucha, 1980).

Eventually, the government initiated their own boarding school system. Government boarding schools were instituted for the purpose of civilizing Native
Americans beginning with Native children. As the founder of the first off-reservation government-run boarding school, Richard Henry Pratt eventually opened Carlisle Indian School in 1879. Pratt’s military background was evident in how he structured the school schedule, uniform, behavior codes, and discipline. Grasping this control spoke to his intentions to “break down the students’ fear through love and second to ‘long’ for civilization through, among other things, having the experience of joining the white community at its fairs, festivals, and picnics” (Reyhner & Eder, 2004, p. 143). Carlisle was seen as a success in the eyes of the government and so began the trend of government funded boarding schools in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s.

Generally speaking, U.S. policy makers turned to education as the ultimate solution to the Indian problem (Adams, 1995). Adams outlines the priorities of policy makers in four aims of education. The first aim was “to provide the Indian child with the rudiments of an academic education, including the ability to read, write, and speak the English language” (p. 21). The second was: “Indians needed to be individualized” (p. 22). The third aim was Christianization. The fourth was citizenship training. Essentially, Indians were to be transformed from having tribal identities to becoming abiding citizens of white ruling society.

Shortly after being removed from their homes, Indian students were physically made over to epitomize white culture while denouncing their Native heritage. Several schools—including Haskell, Carlisle, and Phoenix—were renowned for the dressy appearance of their students (Adams, 1995). The stripping of the traditional name and appearance is an indication of the racism that was the basis of extinguishing Indian
children and in turn Indian society. This assault resembles the renaming by rank, shaving of hair, and uniform rituals of the U.S. military.

Another resemblance is in the control of student diets. However, this became extreme in many schools where students suffered from malnourishment. At the same time, students were forced to learn: the dining skills of the white middle-class and avoid corporal punishment should they break any mannerisms or militaristic rules of the school (Adams, 1995). The attack on the identities of students resulted in heartbreaking letters written by students to their families back at home. The students wrote letter after letter about their struggles in boarding school and their desire to return home. The letters spoke to the resilience of the children and their families but are also evidence of the trauma the schools have brought to Native nations (Child, 1998).

Students were either discouraged or forbidden to speak their Native languages. Learning to speak, write, and read in English was the first order of business in the boarding school curriculum. Methods included being introduced to objects, learning how to pronounce English words for objects, and reading/writing drills (Adams, 1995). In the case of Carlisle, the school newspaper was established as an instrument to promote English only to their students (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Following English, the standard curriculum generally consisted of arithmetic, geography, nature study, physiology, and United States history. Through learning the knowledge of western style civilization as well as the prescribed curriculum, students were being trained for United States’ citizenship (Adams, 1995). Again, this idea of training resembles military objectives.

In essence, the social being of boarding school students was attacked. Not only were students removed from their homes, physically altered, given new names, and
ordered to follow foreign routines but in most cases they were also denied the right to their Native tongue. David Wallace Adams (1995) powerfully describes what he calls the final analysis of the boarding school story:

For tribal elders who had witnessed the catastrophic developments of the nineteenth century—the bloody warfare, the near-extinction of the bison, the scourge of disease and starvation, the shrinking of the tribal land base, the indignities of reservation life, the invasion of missionaries and white settlers—there seemed to be no end to the cruelties perpetrated by whites. And after all this, the schools. After all this, the white man had concluded that the only way to save Indians was to destroy them, that the last great Indian war should be waged against children. They were coming for the children. (p. 336-337)

Although, most boarding schools have closed their doors and most of the horrific boarding school policies have been decried, the legacy continues to haunt Native America in the consequences of the past and in the transformations of overt racism to covert attacks. At the same time the triumph of survival and unity can be celebrated. As Child (1998) notes, while the legacy of federal boarding schools is still being sorted out, the survival of bonds and culture are evidence of the strength of Indian family values.

Over 100 years after the opening of Carlisle, many scholars have now stated the essentiality of affirming the Native student’s culture as positive and useful as well as making curriculum culturally appropriate (Butterfield, 1994; Reyhner, 1992; Shutiva, 2001). Scholars have stated that being strong in culture is extremely relevant to being strong in school for Diné students in particular (Deyhle, 1995; McCarty, 2002; Vadas,
Culturally enriching relationships that support and encourage school achievement are essential (Deyhle, 1995; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Rindone, 1988). While these recommendations have been made and to a lesser extent implemented, Native American children are still subjected to the political climate of the United States and are thus targets of both educational and public policy which often times conflict with their individual and community welfare. Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) examined the relationship that has developed between American Indian education and Native peoples over the course of a century. From the boarding school era to the Meriam report to the pendulum of federal Indian policy, the two scholars review the consequences of federal education on Native communities. However, the central story of the last century was not the ill advised and practiced policies of the United States in Indian education but the resiliency of Native people in overcoming their political status as wards of the federal government and their continued strive to practice Indigenous knowledge and values on their terms.

As demonstrated by the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), the modern public schooling system has turned its focus to creating high stakes accountability based on standards set forth by those in institutions of power. Theoretically speaking, those in these positions are likely white, rich, and male. Changes to this structure of power are crucial when considering low high school diploma and college achievement rates for Indigenous people as measured by the U.S. Census of 2000. Compared to 80% of the total U.S. population, 71% of American Indians and Alaska Natives over the age of 25 attained high school diplomas. In terms of holding at least bachelor degrees, the percentage was 24% of the U.S. population versus 11% of American Indians and Alaska Natives (Ogunwole, 2006).
Current oppression of Native students comes in a multitude of forms. Researchers have addressed several debilitation factors affecting Native education including financial hardship, inappropriate curriculum, poor motivation, and testing bias (Gilbert, 2000). These factors clearly serve as barriers to Native Americans potentially seeking college degrees. A 1998 Indian Report documented alcohol abuse and addiction, dysfunctional communities and families, gangs, violence, drug abuse, and rising crime. The report directly linked these tragedies to the 19th century devastation of the traditional forms of government and society. These symptoms are evidence of the depth of damage of the policies instituted by the United State’s government on Native society.

**Reasons for Native American military enlistment.**

This portion of the review will be limited to academic literature focusing on enlistment in the military written by Native scholars or scholars focusing on current Native American enlistment in the military. The main purpose of this focus is to examine studies that are academic research based 1) from researchers who identify themselves as Indigenous in order to privilege Native scholarship over outsider interpretations and/or 2) focuses exclusively on the time period of interest in my study.

Cherokee veteran Tom Holm’s study on Vietnam veterans resulted in the book *Strong Hearts, Wounded Knees* (1996). He found that Vietnam veterans entered military service for various reasons. While financial reasons were seen as somewhat or very important to half of his 170 (20 percent drafted) sample of veterans completing his survey, he also notes that over 60% did not feel the possible respect gained from non-Natives for their service was an important factor in their enlistment. He instead found that the reasons included duty, honor, country, and family and tribal traditions by over
three-fourths of participants in the survey portion of his study. Holm elaborates on these reasons as he found similar responses in his interviews. On the one hand, veterans stated that they were honoring treaty obligations to the United States. The honor was not toward the U.S. but for the character of loyalty long exhibited by tribal nations. Holm noted that an older tradition was warriorhood, to follow in a path of warriors of old-time, “to gain respect from their own people for having done what young men have always done in times of conflict and by taking part in the traditional ceremonies of warfare reaffirming the tribal identity and special relationship with the spirit world” (p. 119). Interviewees also affirmed the finding that kinship and family tradition was important in their decision to enter the military. Kinship is and continues to be an essential dynamic in Native society. Thus, following in the footsteps of fathers and grandfathers was to honor their kinship ties. In regards to uncovering reasons for entrance during Vietnam, Holm writes: “In short, warriors were more important than the politics of the war” (p. 122).

In a history book on World War II, *Code Talkers and Warriors*, Holm (2007) posits that despite the efforts of U.S. enemies to recruit American racial minorities, Native Americans supported the war and demonstrated their enthusiasm through enlistment. He gave two probable reasons for Native American support for the war: 1) economic and 2) allegiance to the United States for treaty protection.

Rita Ledesma (2006) found four major reasons that Native Americans have enlisted or re-enlisted in the military since World War II. One factor is to honor a warrior tradition. Another is to honor the memory of family and friends. A third is to seek opportunities such as economic or education benefits. To a lesser extent, a fourth factor
is to avoid the criminal justice system. While this study focused on a period of conflict different than World War II and Vietnam, Ledesma’s findings enlarge Holm’s reasons in why Native Americans enlist in the military from war to war.

Menominee veteran J. Boyd MorningStorm (2004) produced a book focusing on the stories of seven veterans, spanning from World War II to Desert Storm, and their journey to warriorhood. He made it clear in his afterword that the reason Natives fight in the military is to serve “this greater nation called America” (p. 119) as well as for tribal nations and the freedoms tribal people enjoy. He represents the perspective of veterans who have embraced American patriotism along with fighting for the land of tribal peoples. In terms of reasons for participation the military, Boyd briefly mentioned various reasons for each participant in their respective narratives. The Navajo Code Talker volunteered for the Marines to serve his country and his people. The sole Korean War veteran was drafted into the Army but upon the encouragement of this father and brother, enlisted into the Air Force instead. The Vietnam veterans volunteered because: one saw an image of a marine in front of the Eiffel Tower and was intrigued; another decided to enlist after struggling with drinking while attending Arizona State University; another wanted excitement in his life after deciding to leave junior college and hearing about the war; and the final subject opted to enter a draft deferment program while in college which also allowed him to attend Officer Candidate School. There was one female participant and veteran of Desert Storm. She first became interested in the Army while looking through the job section of a phone book. She went to Arizona State University after high school and then returned home after a rough freshman year. After she was unable to find a job, she decided to join the Army. The reasons for enlistment
may have been more complex than what was shared, as Boyd’s major purpose was to tell the story of the warrior journey.

Veteran and historian Al Carroll (2007) examines American Indian veterans from colonial times to the second Iraq war in his book *Medicine Bags and Dog Tags*. He makes the argument that Native Americans chose to be in the military based on cultural values and these decisions are rational choices that reflect their perception of the protection of Native sacred land in wars. He writes, “American Indians used military institutions to preserve, protect, defend, and revive Native cultures, institutions, and spiritual and cultural practices. Natives took advantage of stereotypes of ‘the Indian’ in the white American cultural landscape and use those odious labels for their own benefit” (p. 2). His argument throughout the book, based on the narratives of his participants, is that Native Americans are powerful agents of their own destiny and they are not being manipulated by the United States into joining the military. Their decisions to enter are culturally based and represent critical thought in regards to U.S. conflicts. Conversely, he cites evidence throughout Indian country of the opposition many Natives have taken against the wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan. He notes that while Native American interest in the military may have increased since September 11, 2001, actual enlistment has not. His point is that if there were more Native support for the current conflicts, Native enlistment would have increased. Like Holm, he argues that Native loyalty lies with the homeland and the veterans, not the U.S. government alone. Having observed the strong Native opposition to the war and the lack of increased enlistment, he poses the question of what the warriorhood tradition should now become. He proposes the idea of activism.
According to Holm and Carroll, the phenomenon of strong participation is perhaps a decolonization project that has already been enacted to various extents. Natives have defined for themselves their presence in the military from the very beginning. Paul C. Rosier (2009) offers a detailed history of Native Americans who have fought wars in the twentieth century. The complexities between U.S. relationships abroad and domestically are explored. All the while, Native veterans make meaning of their participation in the military. He finds the recurring theme of patriotism not towards what the United States is in practice but patriotism towards the ideals of freedom, liberty, equality, and treaty obligations.

In summary, all the research acknowledges the honor of Native American veterans and the thoughtfulness in which they served in the United States military. The theoretical reasons given for participating in the military ranged from the simple desire to practice a warriorhood tradition to the complex notion that Natives are serving for the ideals that the United States strives to obtain and not so much for the ideals that are actually practiced. MorningStorm argued that Native American warriors who serve in the military are proud Americans protecting American freedom and Native American treaties. Rossier, Holm, Carroll, and Ledesma offered more multi-faceted ideological motives veterans had for participation in the military.

Theoretical Framework

Indigenous frameworks.

Indigenous education.

As Gregory Cajete (2000) has shared, Indigenous education is and should be beautiful. A strong connection and belief in story, family, community, teaching, and
mentoring is a connection that encourages the individual spirit. “Ultimately, the goal of Indigenous education is to perpetuate a way of life through the generations and through time. The purpose of all education is to instruct the next generation about what is valued and important to a society” (p. 184). As Cajete (1994) writes, “The network and full expression of the extended family and clan within Indigenous community provided a web of relationships that profoundly affected the perception of children” (p. 172).

Furthermore, “Indian community is the primary context for traditional education. Community is the context in which the affective dimension of education unfolds. It is the place where one comes to know what it is to be related” (Cajete, 1994, p. 164). Hence, Native education takes place in many contexts. It is not limited to what is learned in a classroom. Students must realize that everything they see and do is part of the learning process. They must learn to see the interconnectedness of different aspects of life.

Teachers do more than deliver material for students to learn. “Teaching is a way of healing and a way of life” (Cajete, 2000, p. 187). The act of teaching is a very engaging process. What they do has immense effect.

There are many ways to define community, especially in consideration of the many academic disciplines found in higher education. This study will refer to a Native community as one that constitutes the members of a village, reservation, urban area, school, or any population that recognizes itself as being culturally distinct as Natives who navigate the contemporary systems of the world while purposefully retaining Indigenous collective identity. I am selecting Gregory Cajete’s (2005) work on Indigenous epistemologies to help further delineate the term and to contextualize it within the concept of education and of Indigenous peoples. In his work, he identifies seven
foundations of tribal education as being Environmental, Mythic, Visionary, Artistic, Affective, Communal, and Spiritual. In discussing the Communal foundation, he writes:

The Communal experience and the inherent process for teaching and learning in tribal cultures are tied through history and tradition to some of the oldest and most instinctually human-contexted mediums of education. The structure, process, and content of teaching and learning resulting from traditional American Indian tribal and communal experience were and continue to be inherently human, highly contexted, situational highly flexible, and informal. Learning and teaching are going on at all times, at all levels, and in a variety of situations. For American Indian tribal education, the community was and continues to be a schoolhouse! (p. 76)

This traditional Indigenous conception of learning has been largely displaced in schooling by western colonial pedagogy. Critical theorists have made great strides in illuminating the relationship between education and oppression.

**Critical thinking and Critical Pedagogy in Indigenous contexts.**

Paulo Freire popularized the term *critical thinking* in his life’s work and as the author of the classic book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). In this work, Freire examined the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. He identified the teaching relationship as being one that is symbolized by the banking model of teaching in which the teacher deposits knowledge and the student is the obedient recipient. He calls for a more balanced approach to pedagogy in which student and teacher are co-creators of knowledge. Freire’s work laid down much of the foundation for what is now know as critical pedagogy.
Indigenous scholars have incorporated critical pedagogy concepts into their work and expanded upon them to make them more relevant to Indigenous peoples. Michael Yellow Bird (2005) stresses the importance of Indigenous critical thinking and envisions tribal critical thinking centers for the purpose of decolonization. He defines critical thinking as: “the application of ‘objective’ logic to any process or content to reveal and assess accurate and inaccurate statements, beliefs, and generalizations” (p. 29). In studying and applying the term, he has observed four stages of critical thinking and notes that he has been influenced by Paolo Freire (1970). The first stage is banking which is understood as the method in which the teacher is the ultimate expert with full authority to select and deposit information. The second stage is analytical independence in which the student is able to develop critiques and observe consistencies or inconsistencies between assumptions as well as conclusions. Stage three is deconstruction where students are able to more precisely demonstrate analytical ability and to identify what information is being filtered. This stage is limited in that there may be the propensity of the student to try to out-argue others as opposed to remaining humble. Thus the fourth stage is conscientization, otherwise known as critical consciousness as discussed by Friere. In this stage the student reaches a collected state of understanding that includes critical observation, predicting, feeling, thinking, and open engagement with new ideas.

Tiffany Lee (2006) argues that critical pedagogy and Indigenous educational philosophy parallel one another in many respects. However, the emphasis on service to community is the ultimate goal of Indigenous educational philosophy, which diverts from the individual liberation principle of critical pedagogy. Thus, she distinguishes the critical pedagogical term *critical consciousness* as “a critical awareness and knowledge
of one’s self and the nature and causes of one’s social and political conditions” (p. 7) and builds upon it from an Indigenous perspective. Critical Indigenous consciousness “emphasizes the notion that one’s own worth is tied to their connection and service to their community” (p. 7). Essentially, this key term refers to individual critical awareness, transformation for social justice, and service to the Indigenous community.

Another term utilized by scholars of critical studies is hegemony. This term was popularized by Antonio Gramsci (1971). The term is especially relevant to the research as it is incorporated into the research question on how veterans formulated their ideologies in schooling. Hegemony is defined as “a process of social control that is carried out through the moral and intellectual leadership of a dominant sociocultural class over subordinate groups” (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003, p. 13). In critical pedagogy, Peter McLaren (2003) argues that hegemony is produced in sites such as schools, the state, and mass media, which shape social practices, social forms, and social structures. Essentially, hegemony normalizes dominant power so invasively upon those that it oppresses that it becomes invisible.

One of the most compelling writers in applying Indigenous education to critical pedagogy is Sandy Grande. Sandy Grande offers seven precepts in the effort to articulate a means for decolonizing pedagogies in the 21st century given the context of American education. She calls this endeavor Red Pedagogy (2004, 2008). In summary, the precepts are:

1. Red pedagogy is primarily a pedagogical project.
2. Red pedagogy is fundamentally rooted in indigenous knowledge and praxis.
3. Red pedagogy is informed by critical theories of education.
4. Red pedagogy promotes an education for decolonization.

5. Red pedagogy actively cultivates praxis of collective agency.

6. Red pedagogy is grounded in hope.

In effect, Grande calls for community-based power for the sake of reclaiming sovereignty in both mind and body. Hence, Grande clearly delineates the importance of education in the social well being of Native peoples. In order to create change through education, Red Pedagogy must be instituted. This is a decolonization project.

**Decolonization.**

The oppression of Native Americans is not a clear-cut social reproduction cycle of poverty based on class. It is also a manifestation of racism through which colonization was born. Wilson and Yellow Bird recognize: “The current institutions and systems are designed to maintain the privilege of the colonizer and the subjugation of the colonized, and to produce generations of people who will never question their position within this relationship” (2005, p. 1). Clearly, Native scholars already recognize how the dominant system functions in order to keep the power stratified. In order to defy colonization, we must actively engage in decolonization. For instance, Wilson and Yellow Bird write:

> Decolonization is the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonization that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands, and it is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation (2005, p.5).

Thus, as Native scholars, we must not only acknowledge the lessons learned by those who have studied class and education but we must employ methods of
decolonization. In understanding how colonization has taken effect, it is essential that the racist thought behind this oppression be examined. Legal scholar Robert A. Williams, Jr. reminds us: “Indians get treated legally by our ‘present day’ justices just as Indians were treated by the justices in the nineteenth century: as savages whose rights are defined according to a European colonial-era legal doctrine of white racial superiority over the entire North American continent” (2005, p. xxv). In order to challenge the colonial class and racial oppression of Native Americans, we are obliged to privilege the voices of Native educators such as Wilson, Yellow Bird, and Williams, Jr. as well as those who hold Native knowledge in other forms. An integral facet of decolonization and Native American Studies in general is to utilize Native thought first and foremost. That being acknowledged, the power of the colonizer is confronted with stronger force by creating alliances with non-Natives who engage in social justice.

**Indigenization.**

Practicing decolonization is actually a process of Indigenization. This concept of Indigenization recognizes that the power of Indigenous peoples is inherent. Larry Emerson (2005) provides a four-page working definition of this term. His thoughtful discussion includes nine assumptions regarding Indigenization. In his opening paragraph, he begins to delineate the term. He writes,

Indigenization is concerned with the centering of Indigenous politics and cultural action. It is a grounding in alternative worldview and values that counters negative representations and discourse evolved by settler peoples. It can borrow freely from feminist research or critical research methodology but it privileges the Indigenous voice (Smith 1999). To Indigenize is to invest in a process of
Indigenous self-determination because the historical relationship between original inhabitants and settlers has been marked by colonization. Indigenization reflects a critique process and lens that engages modern, western, or Indigenous knowledge production. (p.1)

**Self-determination.**

Oftentimes self-determination is thought of as the political era in American Indian federal policy following the passing of the American Indian Self-Determination and Assistance Act of 1975. The purpose of the act was to allow greater autonomy to tribal nations in how they operated their programs that received contracted funding from the federal government (O’Brien, 1993). This perspective recognizes the colonizing government as having the power to grant autonomy. A more appropriate approach is to view self-determination from a traditional Indigenous conceptualization, Taiaiake Alfred (1999) states:

…the idea of self-determination truly starts with the self; political identity—with its inherent freedoms, powers, and responsibilities—is not surrendered to any external entity. Individuals alone determine their interests and destinies. There is no coercion: only the compelling forces of conscience based on those inherited and collectively refined principles that structure the society. With the collective inheritance of a cohesive spiritual universe and traditional culture, profound dissent is rare… (p. 25-26)

This conception again centers the power of Indigenous peoples as being inherent and is less defined by the relationship to the colonizer.
In sum, Indigenous scholars are calling for a framework that not only critiques the colonial structure but also identifies that critique as being secondary to recognizing the power that has always been inherent in self-determination.

**Critical Race Theory and Native America.**

The relationship between critical pedagogy and Indigenous scholars is both strong and diverging. This is also the case between Indigenous scholars and race theorists. The following discussion will review critical race theory and then examine an Indigenous application of the theory to Native peoples in the United States.

Critical Race Theory places race and racism at the forefront while acknowledging its connection to gender and class oppression. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) name five elements that form the basic insights, perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of Critical Race Theory: “(1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (2) the challenge to dominant ideology, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the importance of experiential knowledge, and (5) the use of an interdisciplinary perspective” (213).

Critical Race Theory exposes the normality with which racism is applied, uses storytelling to demonstrate the experiences of oppression, expresses the need for dramatic changes, and demonstrates that white people have received the most of benefits deriving from civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Critical race theorist Ricky Allen (2002) identifies five theses on white supremacy: the white race was and is a global opportunity structure for European ethnics; global white identity was founded on false images of the “civilized” white self and the “uncivilized” person of color; the world system of nation-states territorialized and continues to re-territorialize global white supremacy; global white supremacy is the
structural mainstream of the more localized practice of white territoriality; and white group membership is based on a shared cognition that actively and necessarily constructs blindness to global white supremacy. Essentially, Allen’s theses provide an excellent means for questioning United States’ motives behind current and future international conflicts. One of the reasons given by the United States for war in Iraq centered upon establishing democracy (civilization). Essentially, the notion that Iraq needed democracy to save itself from what had already been established was to assume that democracy was the only system of government suitable to a modern civilized society. In actuality, in terms of Allen’s five theses on white supremacy, it could be argued that instigating war in Iraq was an act of white supremacy for the sake of securing global opportunity structure and power over global territory.

Another strong voice in critical race theory is that of Bonilla-Silva who argues that white supremacy is maintained by the false pretense of a colorblind society. Furthermore, as a strategy to maintain their power and privilege, whites have extended membership and honorary membership to additionally groups of people and created the emergence of a tri-racial system (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). As opposed to buying into this process of whitening and allowing the dominant whites to further colonization by dividing people of color, Bonilla-Silva suggests that we reject the solution of near-whiteness as a means to alleviate status differences. He asserts that the more effective solution is to create a coalition of white allies and people of color.

Critical race theory speaks on behalf of those oppressed by race, class, and gender. Thus, theorist activists can provide an alliance for the oppressed. In order to induce great change in this hegemonic society, many voices must be heard. As has been
discussed, change is desperately needed. Stories of the oppressed have to be told. The
emotional variable is essential to bringing racism into reality for those who refuse to
believe that society is unjust. Critical Race Theory has the capacity to positively alter the
institutions that Native students attend or seek to attend. While critical race theory is
recognized as having its roots in critical legal studies and critiques of Black-White
relations, the theory has grown to encompass interpretations of education as well as
spawned offsets of the theory for other racialized groups.

This theory is an asset to Native America because it recognizes the extent of
racism present in the institutions of the United States. The largest example is in the legal
system where countless court decisions were made in favor of a state or the federal
government over a tribe or tribal member. The language used to justify these decisions is
wrought with racist conceptualizations.

In response to the growing tide of Critical Race Theory application across
disciplines, Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy (2005) offered a Tribal Critical Race Theory
in Education to address the political/legal relationship that American Indians have with
the United States federal government. Brayboy explains that Critical Race Theory aligns
with a tribal perspective in valuing narratives and stories. Furthermore, the theory serves
as a framework for addressing endemic racism in society and education. Additionally,
Critical Race Theory is a catalyst for activism in social justice. Brayboy asserts that
TribalCrit is needed to incorporate a discourse for the American Indian experience, which
encompasses colonization and a legal/political relationship with the United States. He
offers nine tenets of TribalCrit:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.

3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.

4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.

5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.

6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.

7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.

8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.

9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change. (p. 429-430)

The tenets of TribalCrit as offered by Brayboy, speak well to the American Indian experience. The tenets represent the global Indigenous experience to a lesser extent but overall the theory does identify colonization as the basic tenet. Having established TribalCrit as the most appropriate starting point from which to contextualize both racism and colonization, I will now move into further discussion of Critical Race Theory and the implications of global white supremacy.
Having studied various voices in Critical Race Theory and having especially considered Tribal CRIT, I feel the best connection this study makes with CRT is through the Racial Contract theory of Charles Mills (1997). This contract rests on three claims:

The existential claim—white supremacy, both local and global, exists and has existed for many years; the conceptual claim—white supremacy should be thought of as itself a political system; the methodological claim—as a political system, white supremacy can illuminatingly be theorized as based on a ‘contract’ between whites, a Racial Contract. (p. 7)

From this perspective, the connection between colonization and racism is made clearly and on a global historical level. Furthermore, this articulation of how racism maintains global white supremacy does not limit itself to the Native American relationship to the United States.

In relationship to the current study, the Racial Contract is evident in how the costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have only been weighed in terms of the money and lives it has cost the American people. The deaths of non-Americans and the destruction of infrastructure in Iraq and Afghanistan remain a minor story, if told at all, in the eyes of dominant white society. Mills writes:

For these and many other horrors too numerous to list, the ideal Kantian (social contract) norm of the infinite value of all human life thus has to be rewritten to reflect the actual (Racial Contract) norm of the far greater value of white life, and the corresponding crystallization of feelings of vastly differential outrage over white and nonwhite death, white and nonwhite suffering. (p. 101)
Red Warriors, White Oil: Voices from Indigenous Scholars

The late Vine Deloria, Jr. published one of his most popular books, *Red Earth, White Lies* in 1997 to debunk scientific theory as the ultimate truth and to remind Native people that we must view the world using our Indigenous versions of truth based on our conceptualization of the world. He specifically challenged the western narrative of the origins of Native peoples to North America. In this tradition, I would like to present the challenge of the dominant United States’ narrative of why Native Americans should participate in the current conflicts (Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom) by Indigenous scholars who have chosen to speak against this assertion of authority.

In an interview with Vine Deloria, Jr. on March 28, 2003, Diné scholar Jennifer Nez Denetdale (2004) took the opportunity to discuss the significance of Vine’s work throughout the last few decades and how it now informs the future of Indigenous academia as well as disciplines traditionally held in power by Euro-Americans. Deloria (1988; 1997; 2003) has a strong history of taking anthropologists, archaeologists, scientists, and the practice of Christianity to task in how these fields of study and/or worship have promoted Anglo superiority under the guise of objectivity or God’s will. This promotion of superiority has come at the cost of how educators and students are taught to teach the history of Native peoples of North America. The greatest example likely being that the theory that these peoples actually migrated from Asia across the Bering Strait on a land bridge that connected to North America. This theory was and is recognized as fact rather than an idea surfacing from non-Native researchers (1997). Deloria asserts, and continues to assert in this interview, that Native writers should
debunk negative propaganda written about Native Americans or at the cost of Native Americans.

Fortunately, Denetdale took this chance to obtain his input on the most recent invasion on Iraq. She drew the connection between his work on how Christianity remains so influential in the realm of Western history, philosophy, science, and social sciences. She cited the constant references to God that were made by the government in entering this war as well as the cover of the March 2003 issue of Newsweek in which Bush’s head is bowed in prayer. Deloria’s thoughts on the references to Christianity on this war were in part:

It’s always been an imperial religion. It’s always been extremely aggressive. It’s always been very stubborn and intolerant. “We’re right and no one else is”. Using Christianity as a justification for attacking a nation is a well-known phenomenon. It’s very sad because people claiming to be Christian do not act in accordance with their beliefs. … Even if you take the worse of the Old Testament, it doesn’t justify killing your enemies. There is this other admonition, don’t do this on the basis of revenge. It’s a major catastrophe for humankind. (p. 143)

Cleary, Deloria felt that once again, Christianity was being used in the name of justifying violence on another people. With Christianity being so ingrained in the United States Government’s past and present military expeditions, it would be difficult for youth growing up in this era of news media and information sharing to not learn western ideals of religion and it’s connection to righteousness. What does this mean for Native Americans? As Deloria notes, the religion has been utilized to uphold an imperial
regime. This imperialism takes place first domestically within the boundaries of the United States.

In regards to the enlistment and deployment of thousands of Native men and women as well as the display of patriotism to the United States, Denetdale notes the contradiction between this loyalty and the brutal history of this relationship. Deloria responded:

It certainly goes very deep; it’s almost hazardous to try and explain it. You take the First World War, a lot of Sioux volunteered. It was only 20 years after Wounded Knee, so that was unique. I think among Indians there’s always been a very benign, very humane expectation that there will be justice. We’re always so trusting of everybody. Put in this context: someone has attacked the USA – we volunteer. And after the war we want just treatment for ourselves so that we don’t have to fight tooth and nail for it. We are always willing to go one more mile than the Christian. We are more Christian than the Christians. And when we ask for justice or the simple fulfillment of legal obligations, then we realize once again that these people can’t be trusted. It’s up and down. People support the USA with the hope that they are creating better lives. It never happens. (p.143-144)

Deloria’s thoughts on current Native participation in the military and the conflict in Iraq echo some of the sentiments expressed in the empirical review that Native veterans fight on behalf of treaty agreements and the American ideal of equality and democracy. However, he concludes with the evidence for the theory that Indigenous people are to remain at the bottom of the racial and status quo in colonizing governments. Even after
wars are fought and Native service has been demonstrated, treaties remain broken and communities continue to be impoverished. In essence, the consequences of the formation of the United States government over the land and genocide of Native populations endure.

Denetdale and Deloria, Jr. both argue that the legacy of Americans and war is not wrought with heroism as we are led to believe. Deloria articulates the truth: “America has won a lot of wars by simply overwhelming their opponents. That’s not being heroic. … Look at Iraq and the use of every possible weapon in the world against them. That’s not heroic.” (p. 144). While the weapons market has exploded due to the demand for destructive materials to be used in the overpowering of Iraq, the cost of war has hit Native communities at it’s core with the lives lost overseas.

Six years after her dialogue with Vine Deloria, Jr., Jennifer Denetdale (2009) returned to her analysis of the war with an essay on American and Navajo nationalisms and how they are conflated in views of war, gender, and Diné tradition, which leads to the absent critique of the U.S. Imperialism that still invades the tribe’s communities. What is critical to her work is her usage of an Indigenous feminist analysis that allows her to make scrutiny of the intersections between the issues. Her essay reviews the atrocious history between the Navajo people and the United States government while spotlighting the indications that American values of war and patriarchy have seeped into Diné nationhood.

Jennifer Nez Denetdale surveys the landscape of Native America within Diné country and finds many representations of American patriotism combined with applications of Navajo traditions in the context of the events of September 11, 2001 and
the wars that followed. She argues that by integrating Diné culture and traditional values into notions of what it means to serve in the United States military, or to mirror dominant American ideals of marriage, is to relieve the colonizing country of its injustices past and present. It is to proclaim the United States as a country of multiculturalism and a true representation of its notion of freedom.

She focuses on two elements: 1) the link drawn between Navajo warriorship roles and Diné service in the military and 2) the reflection of family values as deemed appropriate by American culture in Navajo legislation, specifically the Diné Marriage Act of 2005 which was essentially a same-sex marriage ban. The goal in her analysis is decolonization and a reminder to the Diné people to recover the pre-1863 principles of governance prior to the Long Walk to Bosque Redondo and four year imprisonment by the United States military. By digging deeper into the conflations between the U.S. American and Diné governments, Denetdale exposes the true lack of historical or contemporary moral authority of the United States. Furthermore, she makes clear that it is of dire importance that the Diné people do not depict traditional values as in congruence with American acts of war or patriarchy so seamlessly or hurriedly.

In regards to Native participation in the military for the purpose of supporting the United States and for treaty protection, she writes:

Navajo patriotism is but one manifestation of a sanitized past, for, like other Americans, we wear ideological blinders and imbibe information filtered and fed to us by the media, politicians, scholars, and educators who sustain American imperialism. For Native peoples, the history of federal Indian policies, which have been largely assimilationalist, has included the sanitation of our histories and has
had far-reaching consequences, including an ignorance of American imperialism. History sanitized has kept most Americans ignorant of one American core value—violence—and of the fact that, in the eighteenth century, English settlers and their descendants claimed their freedom from their mother country, England, and then used violence to divest Indigenous peoples of their freedoms and lands. (p. 134)

Nonetheless, this telling of history remains dormant while the celebrating of multiculturalism in the United States grew strong in the wake of September 11, 2001. Denetdale provides a synthesis of Navajo patriotism since then as it has been covered by the Navajo Times through the reporting on the deployment of Diné soldiers to Iraq as well as their returns in various capacities. She notes the relationship drawn between military service and the traditional stories of the Hero Twins who expelled monsters and became warriors. She sums up the narratives of Navajo men and women and describing their enlistment as: 1) to carry on cultural and family traditions; 2) hold a sense of pride and status among their families and communities; 3) perpetuate the role of the warrior which is seen as an indication of traditional manhood; 4) and for the confidence that educational opportunities will become available upon completion of service. While these reasons for enlistment do not specifically reflect American patriotism, the sentiment is apparent when death reaches home. This is exemplified in the comment made by the mother of a lost soldier who proclaims her son’s belief in fighting on behalf of freedom. Denetdale cites the words of the mother: “[Iraqi people] didn’t have freedom and that hurt him the most.” (p. 29)

Undoubtedly, it is a sensitive issue to state that Native men and women who serve in the military and lost their lives are serving an unjust cause for an Imperialist nation.
Perhaps it is even conceivably paternalistic to argue that our brothers and sisters are blind to the realities of the United States government and its intentions. However, the words expressed by Indigenous scholars are done so out of love and concern for their people. It is too dangerous to not speak the truth and remind Native Nations of the undeniable history and present. Without this truth, our youth will continue to participate in wars that are unsanctioned by the United Nations and bring profit to weapons and oil corporations.

Perhaps, it is more meaningful to state that a Native soldier lost their life in a wake up call for decolonization to Native America than to proclaim their death as an honor to freedom. Whose freedom? As Denetdale writes:

In interrogating the intersection among war, patriotism, and traditional cultures and concepts, we can better understand the consequences of the imposition of Western democracy and how we as Native peoples have internalized American ideology, so that many of us exhibit amnesia about our history under colonization. (p. 138)

In regards to our Native traditions she argues:

Our traditional stories and practices have shown a remarkable resiliency under hundreds of years of invasions and oppressions. However, we must be willing to raise questions and interrogate those beliefs and practices that are presented as tradition but, in truth, are meant to uphold American imperialism. (p. 142)

In essence, Denetdale asks us to rethink what we believe to be traditional values and recognize who is truly benefitting from Native patriotism to the American government. In her analysis, she asks readers to consider the bigger intersections between nationhood, colonial rule, and gender oppression for these are not solely intersections but integrated
conflations utilized to uphold American domination upon Native communities and their women.

Much of Denetdale’s analysis in the emerging scholarship founded in Indigenous feminist thought stems from activists and scholars such as Andrea Smith. Smith (2005) offered a compelling articulation of the sexual violence and genocide experienced by Indigenous women in the ongoing assault of colonization throughout the world in her book, *Conquest*. She reveals the atrocities that have taken place in the United States detailing the catastrophes of boarding schools; weapons testing on Native lands and resulting birth defects; medical experimentations; the raping of the land; and a summary of how the U.S. empire has maintained its war against Native sovereignty. The work of Indigenous feminism is important to recognize in this study, as many Native women are now serving in the military. Their stories may not be linked to warriorhood traditions as tightly as for males but the history of sexual violence, exploitation, and dehumanization sheds light on what women bring with them into their enlistments. Furthermore, as Denetdale discussed, the concept of patriarchy is one symptom of colonization that has plagued our communities. To be extremely specific in the role that this conversation plays in the research, White Mountain Apache woman Jessica graduated with her bachelor’s degree in 2003 and shortly thereafter enlisted in the Army for three years in order to escape a physically and emotionally abusive relationship with her then-husband. Finding a way out of the relationship was a pivotal turning point in the story of Jessica. She stated that she did not have the strength to leave her husband on her own so she did it through joining the military. Thus, while Indigenous feminist theory is not reviewed as a component of my framework, it is an essential piece that fits into all aspects of the
butterfly diagram. Their critique of the modern U.S. engagements of war and its impact on Native society is vital.

The final chapter of Smith’s *Conquest* is entitled, “U.S. Empire and the War Against Native Sovereignty.” She deconstructs the United States’ war against Native sovereignty in two parts. The first is the U.S. empire within itself. The idea is that in order to spread the empire of the United States outside its boundaries, it must first ensure complete domination within its borders domestically. This means that Native sovereignty is threatened, as the U.S./Mexican border is militarized. The American government is being clear that they themselves, not Native people, are the authority on who can be on these lands. Another threat to Native sovereignty is the Bush endorsement of overconsumption of energy and the expedition of domestic natural resources. For Natives, this means more harm to Indigenous land. Furthermore, in building the empire at home, military nuclear weapons to be used against other countries are first tested domestically on Indigenous land. The effects and potential effects of this testing on humans are disregarded when it comes to Natives for they are considered subhuman as evidenced by the treatment of Gwich’in, Pacific, Shoshone, and Inuit peoples. In sum, the spreading of U.S. dominance across the globe begins with the attack on Native sovereignty at home. Tribal support for what is known as the war on terror is indication that the consolidation of the U.S. empire within the U.S. has occurred.

The second argument Smith presents on displaying the U.S. war on sovereignty is United States’ exceptionalism. Bush has used his war on terror to claim military and economic power across the globe utilizing unilateralism and disregarding the United Nations’ processes. The undermining of the United Nations prevents Indigenous peoples
from making progress on gaining sovereign nation status through international law. Furthermore, the more money that is spent on the war on terror, the less money is spent on important social services to Native communities. Specifically, tribally based domestic violence programs have been affected by budget cuts. This cuts deep into the homes of Native Americans who suffer from increased rates of domestic abuse, even more so during times of war as Smith cites. She also points the contradiction between promoting abuse prevention at home but bombing Iraqi civilians abroad. Thus, the United States government is not the answer to ending domestic violence or any other symptom of oppression resulting in hardship to Indigenous peoples. Smith repeatedly argues that there are just too many contradictions inherent in the constitution of the United States and its actions toward people of color. In essence, she analyzes that U.S. democratic ideals are linked to capitalism and racial exclusion. Therefore, it is necessary to not only question the legitimacy of the United States but to move into a new definitive ideal of sovereignty and global well-being. Smith asserts that Native sovereignty activists move beyond ideas of separatism to pushing for actual change to U.S. imperialism. She cites numerous Native women’s definitions of sovereignty to make clear what she is calling for. This quote is from Ingrid Washinawtok: “While sovereignty is alive and invested in the reality of every living thing for Native folks, Europeans relegated sovereignty to only one realm of life and existence: authority, supremacy and dominion. In the Indigenous realm, sovereignty encompasses responsibility, reciprocity, the land, life and much more” (p. 186). Smith further describes this sovereignty as being so encompassing that it would not necessarily mean that non-Indians would be expelled if Natives were to regain their landbases.
Essentially, Andrea Smith is professing for a sovereignty that takes an allied approach to creating social justice throughout the world. This type of sovereignty would not allow empires such as the United States the ability or the power cause such destruction to Indigenous people through its terrorism within or outside its borders. Its borders would not exist.

Winona LaDuke (2011) recently added a new book, *The Militarization of Indian Country*, to the arsenal of words written to bring change to how Native communities are linked to military operations. She offers four chapters, which exhibit the militarization of Indian country. She explains that she is not anti-military but is anti-militarization for what it has brought to innocent people and the land. She writes: “I despise militarization because those who are most likely to be impacted or killed by the military are civilian non-combatants. Since the Second World War, more than four fifths of the people killed in war have been civilians. Globally there are some 16 million refugees from war” (p. xv). LaDuke makes clear that she is respective of veterans and that they should be treated honorably. The purpose of the book is to bring to light the pervasiveness and detriment of militarization in Native communities and lands.

The military and Native people have a long history. Since the inception of the United States, Native people have participate in the military in every war in astounding numbers and percentages of representation compared to non-Natives. LaDuke reviews this history and notes the trends of Natives going into the military due to forces of economic hardship, domination, and racism. At the same time, Native communities take great pride in caring for veterans by means of restoring the entire well-being of soldiers once they return to their homes. Traditionally and even into the modern era, tribes have
had warrior societies for the protection of land, people, and tradition. The military has become a unit where Natives become soldiers equal in racial status to others. However, it has become apparent that this acceptance is only temporary and does not exist once a soldier exist the institution. All in all, Natives who participate in the military during war return with much trauma or in death. The cost to Native communities is high. Nonetheless, numerous communities will continue to take care of their veterans.

LaDuke then discusses the economic domination that is directly tied to military activities around the world. She notes that there are over 700 U.S. military bases and that the operation of these bases require massive amounts of wealth for the purpose of maintaining hegemony worldwide. The budget of the United States’ military dwarfs the budget of China, the UK, France, and Russia. Furthermore, the U.S. is the largest distributor and producer of weapons. All of the money spent on militarization is directly linked to poverty. She also points to the moral questions raised in the area of Native military contractors such as Blackwater which is now XE the largest private security firm the world. Blackwater is a subcontractor for Chenega Native Corporation.

A third component of LaDuke’s book focuses on the military and the land. She writes, “The U.S. military is the largest polluter in the world. If one begins to consider the whole of the impact of the U.S. military on the planet, historically and in the present, it is, in fact, damning” (p. 31). The pollution of the planet affects all human beings regardless of nationality or locale. LaDuke reminds readers that since the 1940’s, thousands of nuclear weapons tests have been enacted in the Pacific which has obliterated atolls and spread radioactive contamination. The use of napalm and Agent Orange poisoned and defoliated great areas of Vietnam in the war. Additionally, since that war,
there has been incredible usage of depleted uranium and chemical weaponry. Thus, the U.S. military is overwhelmingly responsible for a great extent of the earth’s and its peoples’ suffering. Native lands in North America have been the subject of many military projects resulting in such suffering: Goshute territory and chemical warfare; Los Alamos National Laboratory on Pueblo land; Alaska as an occupied territory; nuclear testing and nuclear waste among Western Shoshone; the bombing and militarization of Hawaii; and the establishment of forts across many reservations. Winona LaDuke provides ample evidence for the claim made in the quote on the U.S. military being the largest polluter in the world. Unfortunately, much of this pollution has taken place on what remains of Indigenous occupied land.

Winona LaDuke concludes her review of the militarization of Indian Country with the hope that the military transitions itself into an ecological friendly institution and Native peoples use their veterans’ knowledge for the enrichment of their societies. Moreover, she envisions an Indian country that provides for its citizens what prospective military recruits are seeking. Finally, she seeks the enactment of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples passed in 2007 which states precisely that Indigenous people be directly consulted for authorization in regards to any military activity taking place on their land. LaDuke contends that having the Declaration signed by the United States, as promised by Barrack Obama in 2010, would possibly indicate hope for a more responsible and accountable relationship between the military and Native people.

Perhaps the most outspoken Native North American scholar, in regards to Indigenous peoples and their participation in the Iraq war, has been Michael Yellow Bird
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(2004; 2005; 2007; 2007; 2011). His 2004 work included a published essay, “Cowboys and Indians Toys of Genocide, Icons of American Colonialism”, in the Wicazo Sa Review which highlighted the ever-present racist undertones of the portrayal of Anglos and Native Americans symbolized by toy figurines of cowboys and Indians. He especially highlighted the terminology used in the present Iraq war such as the military and media referring to American enemies as Indians. His work in 2005 was previously mentioned in chapter one. In this edited book with Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, *For Indigenous Eyes Only A Decolonization Handbook*, the contributors provided concrete definitions and lessons on how decolonization can take place in our communities today.

In his piece on “Tribal Critical Thinking Centers”, he used the war in Iraq as an example of how tribes as a whole can come together and rethink their support of the unjust war. In 2007, Yellow Bird began circulation of two pieces across Native America intended to spark discussion and change in the way Indigenous peoples were supporting injustices in Iraq and at home by not looking more critically at the ways in which our Native youth were being sent overseas to battle. One was written as a “Brown Paper” and the other was an “Open Letter to all Indigenous Peoples”. I happened to receive both pieces while I was working on the conception of my dissertation proposal, which I knew would center on the same issues Yellow Bird wrote so passionately about.

At this point in time, Michael Yellow Bird (2011) has produced a manuscript that is a culmination of the ideas he has put forth over the course of the current conflict in Iraq. This manuscript will be published in the near future in the next volume of *For Indigenous Eyes Only*. The work is again labeled a “Brown Paper” and is designed as a proposal directed toward Indigenous Peoples to reexamine their participation in the Iraq
war and to look to the future by creating or resurrecting traditional tribal concepts of a Just War in order to prevent future suffering or injustice. Yellow Bird reviews the illegal aspect of the war under International law as well as the incredible cost of life, money, and infrastructure this war has brought to the world. Furthermore, he discusses the lack of active dialogue on the part of tribal governments to speak out on what this war truly means for tribal members and especially tribal participants in the military. He see’s this as not only a sovereign responsibility but a moral one as well. He notes that inherent to tribal sovereignty is the ability to start or stop a war. Tribes had the inherent power to debate the costs and benefits of war along with making declarations of war or peace. It has been a detriment to tribes that they have chosen to allow the colonizer to act on their behalf in making decisions to send our youth into combat. From a moral standpoint, by allowing Native youth to participate in an unjust war, we are sanctioning the actions of the United States, which are seen by most of other countries as an illegal invasion. In his analysis, this does not bode well for any moral high ground Indigenous Peoples in the United States may have over their colonizer.

However, Yellow Bird does note the complexities of why there may be political silence at such a time when there should be much more vocal protection for Native military men and women:

Because of their sense of loyalty to their warrior traditions, the lack of employment opportunities on tribal lands, the manipulation of Indigenous warrior cultures by colonial society, and the loss of tribal principles of just war, Indigenous Peoples became involved in the illegal U.S.-led war against Iraq. These complex realities of Indigenous life made it much less likely that politically
elected Indigenous leaders would openly advocate for the withdrawal of their citizens from this war or condemn the pretext of this war and its planners. Moreover, since Indigenous Peoples have been pushed so far and for so long to the margins of colonial society many have gravitated to military service since it provides the status that they may not otherwise gain from colonial and tribal society. (p. 23)

These deductions are supported to various extents by the background research, empirical literature, theoretical framework, and even the narratives that will be discussed in the chapters to come. Yellow Bird argues that what this means for tribal nations is that all other constituents, including elders, veterans, teachers, and youth, have the critical responsibility of organizing debates and establishing principals of just war for their respective tribes. While the current conflicts may end, new potential for war is always on the horizon for the United States.

Michael Yellow Bird’s strength in this manuscript is that his analysis is followed by concrete recommendations for tribes, which are not so specific that they are not applicable to all communities. The challenge is gaining the interest, the momentum, and the will of community members to engage in the meetings and organization for critical thinking that he proposes. Unfortunately for scholars and activists, no matter how closely ingrained we are with our communities, our passion for instituting change is not seen as central when it comes to the lived realities of other tribal members. Perhaps, as more of our youth return to us in body bags, extreme distress, or loss of limb, their realities will become the communities’ passion. And perhaps once the dust of the bombs settle and the true realities of structural racism to tribal people becomes clear, socially and
economically, there will be greater movement toward the sovereignty expressed by the women in Andrea Smith’s work. Lakota Harden tells Smith (2005):

If it doesn’t work for one of us, it doesn’t work for any of us. The definition of sovereignty [means that]…none of us are free unless all of us are free. We can’t, we won’t turn anyone away. We’ve been there. I would hear stories about the Japanese internment camps..and I could relate to it because it happened to us. Or with Africans with the violence and rape, we’ve been there too. So how could we ever leave anyone behind? (p. 187)

Confronting racism and advocating for sovereignty are not always seen as one and the same by academics. However, some Native scholars have been able to make clear the connections between the two. Much of the work has to do with how definitions are used and conceived. While Jeanette Haynes Writer does not necessarily pinpoint her article, “Terrorism in Native America: Interrogating the Past, Examining the Present, and Constructing a Liberatory Future,” as a discussion of sovereignty. Her deconstruction of the term terrorism through Critical Race Theory is an act of sovereignty. The wars, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, are often summed into one term: The War on Terror. In creating this singular term, it was easier for George W. Bush to push his agenda during his terms as United States President. Writer’s contention is that the concept of terrorism is nothing new to the United States, or to Native Americans, for this act has been practiced by the U.S. on Indigenous peoples throughout history. She asserts, through Critical Race Theory, that the history of genocide imposed upon Native people is an extension of defining terrorism. However, in present day and according to the FBI, the United States is never the terrorist but only the victim of such
acts. Because the U.S. defines terrorism, they are able to sidestep any responsibility they may possess of terrorism. She recognizes that no universal definition of terrorism exists. However, in her article, she positions the definition of terrorism from the point of view of those on the margins who have most experienced it. She writes:

As such, terrorism involves violence and threats for the purposes of intimidation and coercion to establish, gain, and maintain power. Terrorism is not comprised of only physical threats and violence; it also includes mental or emotional violence. Terrorism has also been manifested in the silence and conformity expected of Native peoples or other cultural and marginalized groups. Expressing individual or collective voice or agency has met with swift and sharp punishment or terror. (p. 321)

This definition helps to explain the political silence observed by Michael Yellow Bird (2011) in his discussion of tribal leadership. Another example is the resistance academic programs such as Native American Studies, African American Studies, Women’s Studies, Chicano/a Studies, and Equity Offices undergo in universities and high schools in the United States. Educators, she argues, have the prime opportunity to teach students how to counteract stereotypes of groups or individuals.

This is a necessity because obviously bad forms of education exist in the media. Moreover, terrorism practiced upon Native people is a lesson that shall be interrogated in the educational system if peace and freedom are to be truly achieved. Haynes Writer discusses how Americans and American media viewed the attacks of September 11, 2001 as the first time an act of terror had occurred on U.S. soil. She argues that this is an example of how the historical relationship of terror between the U.S. and Natives has
quickly been forgotten. She states it has been erased from the consciousness of non-Natives in the U.S. as exemplified by their media. Another example she brings forth is how Geronimo (Chiricahua Apache leader Goyathlay) and Osama Bin Laden were synchronized in the New York Post shortly after 9/11. The U.S. media was quick to make links between the two men, while Natives understand that there were great differences and complexities separating the two. Further discussion of Goyathlay’s portrayal in regards to Osama Bin Laden and how this affects Native American veterans will take place in the results and analysis.

In essence, Jeanette Haynes Writer argues that it is all of our responsibility to recognize how we participate in perpetuating acts of terror upon ourselves, each other, and on other marginalized peoples. These acts include how we contribute to the American economy, the military, the maintenance of the social inequality, the absence of critical thinking in decision making, and the colonized rituals that we perform on ourselves such as blind patriotism to the United States, sexism, homophobia, domestic violence, and substance abuse. In so doing, I interpret her work as a reminder that whether our perspectives emerge out of Critical Race Theory, Tribal CRIT, Decolonization, Indigenous Education, Indigenous Feminism, other Indigenous Thought, or other forms of Social Justice Theory, the goals of our respective alliances will not be achieved without finding common powers.

Conclusion

I opened chapter one with three quotes from Darren, Jayson, and Vicente. These three young men represented a few breaths of Native youth in the last ten years. Darren,

Many Native American warriors – many American Indian soldiers, sailors, and Marines – have given their lives for this nation, with its ideals of freedom and liberty. Many Native American academics, native newspaper editors, and native Hollywood stars would have us fight the old Indian Wars all over again. The truth is that we have become Americans and have increasingly enjoyed the fruits of this land – our land! I would not throw our treaty guarantees away to support some foreign ideology or religious philosophy. (p. 198)

Jayson, who provided a critique on how the warrior spirit should be used, resembled the words of theorist Mills who stated that we are taught to value white and non-white death/suffering as being unequal. Vicente, who protected his knowledge from being revealed on the ASVAB, exemplifies the following quote from Four Arrows in that Indigenous knowledge and critical thought is sacred enough to be protected but important enough to be shared at the appropriate time.

The language of conquest ignores the Indigenous idea that we are all related and thus, to lie to one another is to lie to ourselves. Communication is a sacred release of power. Words can literally sing things into existence. A language of conquest has the power to bring about destruction. A language of truth has the power to renew. (p. 274)

In sum, these are example of how the literature review has direct connections to the experiences of participants in the study.
The empirical review allowed for the study of past research on the military and Indian education as well as the reasons for Native enlistment. Educational opportunities; financial needs; family and cultural tradition; being drafted; and service to the United States all emerged. Darren’s story reflects many of these elements.

The theoretical review covered Indigenous education, Decolonization, Critical Race Theory, and Tribal CRIT. Having served in the Army, earning a bachelors degree, and experiencing wisdom gained with age, Jayson’s take on his service is well oriented with the theory that has been presented.

Finally, in the last section of the literature review, the voices of Indigenous scholars speaking against the United State’s conquests in the last ten years are symbolic of Vicente who made the decision not to enlist after reading many books on the history of colonization of his people. He is an intersection between practice and theory just as the scholars’ voices against the war is an act of practicing theory.

All three components of this chapter are equally important in telling the remainder of the story.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A continuing legacy of what has come to be taken for granted as a natural link between the term ‘indigenous’ (or its substitutes) and ‘problem’ is that many researchers, even those with the best of intentions, frame their research in ways that assume that the locus of a particular research problem lies with the indigenous individual or community rather than with other social or structural issues (Smith, 2002, p.92).

Standing before a group of seventeen Native American veterans in an attractive council room constructed out of tribal enterprise revenue, I introduced myself in the Diné way by clan and my home community. With a slight tremor in my voice, I explained that I was a student at the University of New Mexico working on a study examining the relationship between education and contemporary Native participation in the United States’ military. I spoke from my soul and briefly shared my passion for education and the future of our youth. I expressed my concern over the enlistment of so many young men and women into the U.S. military given the dangerous current states of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. Praying from a spiritual place of peace in my heart as an Indigenous woman, as I was once advised to do by Larry Emerson, I respectfully informed these elders I was asking for their help. I acknowledged the wisdom in the room given the hundreds of collective years in which these Native elders survived the eras of assimilation, relocation, and termination who have witnessed or participated in at least six U.S. American wars. I described my end goal as being the creation of a system
of greater informative education for Native students in high schools to turn to when considering enlistment into the U.S. armed forces. I listened as wounded but strong veteran after veteran stood and spoke deep powerful pain filled words of support for the study. The last statement spoken was: “It’s about time.”

In that moment, the apprehension I had going into the project dissolved. In gatherings of Indigenous educators, the sacredness and importance of the event is established by opening with a prayer. This event, as in many other meetings of Indigenous people, was no different. It is in this capacity, where the hearts of veterans come together to pray for the mental, physical, and spiritual health of our youth. This is the movement and the moment that frames this study. This chapter will provide a description of the methodology utilized to complete the data collection. More than any research tradition that can be followed, the heart of this dissertation is rooted in maintaining the integrity of Indigenous methodology as has been described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2002) and has been practiced by an emerging pool of Indigenous academics (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Wilson, 2008). In my approach, I conceive of practicing Indigenous methodology through prayer and respect for the interconnectedness of every aspect that I explore, including every person that I touch. Furthermore, while I will personally benefit from the completion of this study, the true goal is to make a contribution to the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples in all its definitions. Indigenous methodology is broadly research done by Indigenous researchers for the benefit of Indigenous people within the context of respecting and honoring the cultural protocol of research participants and their communities. In other words
Indigenous methodologies as explained by Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, (2009) is summarized as:

research by and for indigenous peoples, using techniques and methods drawn from the traditions of those peoples. This set of approaches simply rejects research on indigenous communities that use exclusively positivistic, reductionist, and objectivist research rationales as irrelevant at best, colonialist most of the time, and demonstrably pernicious as a matter of course. Rather than nonindigenous peoples framing indigenous worldview from a distance, IM situates and is reflected on by research/researchers at the location most relevant to that being gazed on, the indigenous experience. (p. 894)

As I explain the methodology throughout this chapter, I will make references to how Indigenous methodology has been engaged. The chapter will be composed of the following sections: the general perspective, the research context, the research participants, instruments used in data collection, procedures used, data analysis, and a summary.

**The General Perspective**

Upon the conclusion of my second session in speaking with Jayson, I was elated at how much of his experiences and perspectives he was willing to share with me. He told me so many stories and spoke with such ease and clarity. As I did many times with participants, I wanted to reiterate how much the meeting meant to me.

LT: Yeah this is why I’m glad I did this more story-based in-depth research as opposed to choosing something that’s scientific or trying to get a thousand responses but it’s more personalized.
Jayson: Well it’s better. Qualititative is always better than quantititative.

LT: You feel that way too?

Jayson: Cause you get the specifics and you get the real story rather than someone’s guess or estimate. Just because you’re getting a lot of people’s estimate yeah. I don’t know. To me qualitative is better. You could combine the two and make qualitative and quantitative and shit you got a sick study. It will probably be more precise and probably be more of what you’re looking for and it will probably help people that read it or see it.

LT: I’ll use that in my methodology chapter. [smiling]

This exchange represents not only a way that I wanted to express my sincere appreciation for what Jayson had given me but became a discussion between two people who believed in the merits of qualitative research. I often reflect upon how every life experience I have ever had has prepared me to complete this dissertation. In this small exchange, I began by trying not to sound like an academic outsider by refraining from using research terminology but was able to switch gears into that mindset once Jayson brought it in. Furthermore, as he often did, he used youthful vernacular to present his ideas. I was able to comprehend his speech based on my proximity to youth and/or others who spoke in the same way.

As a master’s student in American Indian Studies, I completed a thesis that was essentially mixed methods between qualitative and quantitative. I had just completed a bachelor’s degree in sociology where I was trained primarily in quantitative and positivistic thinking. While I believed in person-to-person research with the twenty short interviews I conducted, I resorted to analyzing my codes numerically and I feel I lost the
voice of my participants. Early on in my doctoral studies, I quickly realized that my approach to learning, teaching, and research is best represented by qualitative research. Thus, this is a qualitative research project. To be sure that I was ready to engage in a qualitative based research study, I prepared myself in the following ways (Creswell, 1998):

1. I committed to the notion that I would have to spend extensive time in the field in order to gain an “insider” perspective. I did spend many collective hours attending events that I thought would be rich in Native and military culture as well as took great care in establishing the rapport necessary to have good communication with participants.

2. I engaged in countless hours of data analysis, which included reviewing research notes, transcribing, coding, re-reading, clustering, and generating essences of meaning.

3. I used long passages of quotes to demonstrate the multiple perspectives of participants and to substantiate my claims.

4. I understood that the qualitative form of social and human science research did not always have specific methods to follow in terms of guidelines or procedures. It is always evolving. I did my best to combine my knowledge of qualitative research with Indigenous and phenomenological methodology.

Furthermore, the compelling reasons I had for pursuing and completing a qualitative study were (Creswell, 1998):

- The nature of the research question was how or what versus why (quantitative)
There was a need for my topic to be explored. Current understanding of the variables involved in the topic did not exist or were not adequately explained by theory.

A detailed view of the topic was needed from the perspective of education in order to closely examine answers to the problem.

I was willing to gather information based in the natural settings of individuals.

I was able to apply my personal interest in writing in a literary style and including self in the study through the use of first person and engaging in storytelling narration.

To a certain degree, I had the availability of time and resources to spend on data collection in the field and the analysis of data text.

Audiences in Native American Studies and Education are responsive and interested in qualitative research.

I served the role of active learner and can tell the story from the point of view of the participants as opposed to passing judgment as an expert.

All empirical efforts were made from the phenomenological tradition of qualitative research. Phenomenology examines the lived experiences of multiple individuals and the meaning that becomes of their experiences in relation to a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The primary method of data collection was in interviews with ten primary participants. Other methods used were to support and/or triangulate the core findings in my interviews.
The umbrella research question for the study is: Is there a relationship between education and participation in the United States’ military by Indigenous people during the period of 2001-present? The sub questions are as follows:

1. What are the factors and conditions that shape the decision of Indigenous individuals to enlist?

2. How did the experiences of veterans in education formulate their ideologies as they decided to enter the military? Were hegemony and education in this context linked?

3. What are the positive outcomes of participation in the military? What are the challenges? What are the links to education?

4. What is the educational, inside and outside of schooling, relationship between veterans and the conception of Native warrior in both traditional and western lenses?

5. What alliances/support groups/organizations exist for Native American veterans or potential enlistees and how are they linked to education?

6. What alternatives to the military exist for Native youth?

As I stated prior, the questions were answered utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach within the context of Indigenous methodologies (Battiste, 2008; Grande, 2008; Emerson, 2005; Smith, 1999). This is a phenomenological study of Native American men and women residing in the southwest who have served in the military from 2001-2009. Some exceptions were made for individuals who have chosen to enlist more recently. Overall, these are individuals who have experienced the common phenomenon of service in the military during the current U.S. conflicts and have been
purposefully selected as a sample because of this shared experience. As is the tradition in phenomenological studies, I sought out 10 primary participants for long interviews that were transcribed and saved on computer files (Creswell, 1998). To sharpen the focus on the phenomenon that these individuals have experienced, I also engaged in data collection with peripheral individuals who have commonalities with this group but differ in either 1) the time of military service or 2) the decision during the 2001-2009 period not to enlist in the military during the same years. For the purpose of triangulation, I also informally spoke with other peripheral figures that emerged as being critical in the phenomenon such as teachers, veterans, coaches, family members, and recruiters.

By employing triangulation through multiple methods of data collection, my goal was to maximize trustworthiness. Therefore, my study relied on dependability through triangulation due to the three initial instruments of data collection: interviews, surveys, and document analysis. All materials were saved in order to create confirmability. Finally, credibility was centralized as the most valued element of my research. Participants were continuously respected and involved from the time they were recruited to the member checking while the interviews were taking place. The following section will provide a detailed frame of reference for why the questions were asked and how they were answered.

The overall research question asked broadly if there was a relationship between education and the military for Indigenous people in the United States during the last decade. The purpose of asking this question has been analyzed extensively throughout the first chapter. In essence, I asked this question as a researcher because there has been a lot of research on the tragic history of American Indian education; the continued legacy
of U.S. education policy which is centered upon standards and methods which do not reflect the best interest of Indigenous youth or communities; a resurfing push in academia by Indigenous scholars for schools and communities to reclaim the roots of Indigenous education; a long-time Native honored tradition of military service within the United States; a current conflict which has been resulting in the death/wounds of thousands of service men/women and countless Iraqi civilians at the profit of U.S. corporations; and an ongoing theoretical dialogue on the oppression of Indigenous peoples by way of colonization and racism.

The umbrella question was answered by the sub-questions through surveys, interviews, the ongoing observation of daily discourse, and the document analysis of websites, newspapers, speeches, military recruitment materials, and veteran association meetings. I gathered the data through personal contacts, person-to-person meetings, Internet research, news media, agencies of interest, and school visits. More detail will be relayed in the latter sections of this chapter. Essentially the general perspective is that this is a qualitative study following the tradition of phenomenological research guided by Indigenous methodology.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith recognizes 25 Indigenous projects which have begun to constitute a research program that reclaims, reformulates, and reconstitutes Indigenous cultures and languages (1999). My goal is to honor this Indigenous research program by making a contribution with my dissertation. Smith identifies the 25 projects as: claiming, testimonies, storytelling, celebrating survival, remembering, indigenizing, intervening, revitalizing, connecting, reading, writing, representing, gendering, envisioning, reframing, restoring, returning, democratizing, networking, naming, protecting, creating,
negotiating, discovering, and sharing. She notes that these projects are not an exhaustive list nor do Indigenous scholars solely claim them. Through assisting in the claiming, storytelling, and testimonies of my participants, I hope to celebrate and remember the survival of Indigenous peoples. By indigenizing the pathways of education to or away from the military, I hope to become an active educator in facilitating knowledge by means of intervening when appropriate and revitalizing Native nations and communities. In writing my dissertation and reading the research of social justice scholars, I hope to connect these ideas in a meaningful way that truly represents a vision that reframes, restores, and returns the spirit of our ancestors. Furthermore, by including gendering in my analysis, I hope to decolonize how we view democratizing, networking, naming, protecting, creating, negotiating, discovering, and sharing.

Indigenous peoples have traveled a long road, which may seem a distant past to many of the descendants of white colonizers and to the profiteers of wars against people of color and their lands. However, this road is not a linear one that is owned by the self-described conquerors of virgin lands, pagan savages, and nations in need of being saved by white ideology. Our path is one that continuously parallels the journeys of our ancestors. It is in remembrance of their will to survive that we need to question the motives of those who thrive in racial, political, social, cultural, and economic power.

The Research Context

The research context will be described in three components: 1) the time period, 2) the general location, and 3) the settings in which data collection took place. The three components were shaped by factors that included Institutional Review Board (IRB)
approval, participant interest, participant availability, building relationships, researcher preparation, financial resources, and time to complete the research.

My IRB application was officially approved in January 2011, nearly six months after my initial submission. However, my research conception of the questions to be examined took place over the course of four years. In this time, I did what I could to prepare myself to engage in the research that would incur. This did include the three chapters I wrote for my dissertation proposal, which was passed in June 2009. This preparation also included attending meetings focused on Indigenous or disadvantaged youth participation in the military and such activities. I also took the opportunity to teach at a high school with a predominant Native population in order to engage in mentorship, classroom culture, immersion in a school setting, and to gain an understanding of the perspectives of today’s Indigenous youth. I also continued my various work with Native organizations in education and research. I participated as a Research Assistant for the Indigenous Education Research Group from 2008-2009. This allowed me to gain first hand experience and mentorship in conducting research with Indigenous communities in the southwest. Engaging in everything from the recruitment process to the coding of data proved to be invaluable to preparing for my individual research. Essentially, the preparation period prior to my actual interview and survey data collection occurred from January 2007 to December 2010.

I began official survey and interview recruitment in January 2011. I had made some prior contacts that were interested in participating in the study that I began to reconnect with as well. My goal was to complete all interviews and surveys by April of 2011. However, I needed to extend my timeframe to May to ensure I had an adequate
number of participants. While I was successful in this endeavor, I began to hear from potential participants that I had decided to stop following up on who were ready to either set up an interview or complete their second interview. This extended my time period to August 2011 as I felt it was important to do everything I could to incorporate these final participant voices. Therefore, the data collection period for interviews and surveys occurred between January 2011 and August 2011.

The location context for the study was in the southwest region of the United States, which was again a delimitation. All the interviews took place in one state with a very high concentration of Native Americans in its population. All general types of tribes (i.e., Apache, Diné, Pueblo) in the state were represented. Additionally, the participants also represented tribes from the broader region outside of state lines. This context was chosen for its high Native population and for my understanding/proximity to the tribes. As stated before, all experiences that I have had prior to this research came into my advantage in developing relationships and better comprehending the stories of the participants. For example, the school that I spent the year teaching at was the same school that at least seven of my participants either attended or referred to. I had made no attempt to specifically recruit participants who attended this school. As I related in Chapter One, I attended a boarding school in the 1990’s where I became intimately familiar with tribes in the southwest through my close friendships. I chose to focus on this region as a way to benefit the richness of my analysis. I do not consider it a limitation.

Finally, the settings in which the research occurred were quite varied. The interview locations are where most answers to the research questions occurred. The
locations were chosen based on the comfort of the researcher and the participant; the ease in which the participant was able to travel; respect for privacy; considerations of safety; and access to buildings and/or rooms. The meeting settings occurred in coffee shops, library study rooms, parks, tribal buildings, and in homes (special instances). Due to the multi-tribal nature of the research as well as the time limitations involved in my study, I chose to present the option of three cities to meet with participants. These cities are all border towns to reservations and have high Native populations. In the one instance where I did present or conduct an interview on official tribal lands, I ensured that I had permission to do so from my contact whose activities were approved by the main tribal administrator. I also asked the leader of the Native American Veterans Association of my primary state to look at my research questions, interview questions, survey questions, and methodology to ensure that I was doing everything appropriately, respectfully, and significantly to Native veterans and their tribes. He was enthusiastic about my project and gave me his blessing to proceed.

The Research Participants

The original goal of the study was to obtain at least twenty-five participants through survey responses and then to secure 8-10 of those participants who were enlisted at any point from 2001-2009. All other survey respondents who were interested in being interviewed would be pursued depending on the availability of time and resources. Those other participants were to consist of 1) college students who considered enlistment but opted to go to school after 9/11 and 2) veterans prior to 2001. For reasons that will be described in the Procedures Used section, the data collection resulted in 19 interview participants and three survey-only participants. I organize the participants into four
groups: 1) the primary group of Natives who enlisted since 2001, 2) veterans who enlisted or served prior to 2001, 3) college students who considered enlistment but have not since 9/11, and 4) survey respondents who I did not have the chance to interview. I must note that I quickly learned that many of the participants do not fall strictly singularly into any of my categories. Thus, I believe that this is an important section for me to introduce the participants to the readers of this study. Due to the many ways in which Native communities and individuals are connected, I will not reveal information that might identify the participants. All names are pseudonyms.

*The primary group.*

I will first introduce the Natives who have or will become veterans in the post-9/11 era. I interviewed seven men and three women in this primary group. Several of these participants were especially intrigued by the study and shared story after story about how their experiences informed their responses to my questions. For example, when asked about her elementary school experience, Jessica explained to me why she became so focused on academics in second grade:

Jessica: I guess as far as the least favorite teacher was my second grade teacher. Because I remember her telling me that, “you could actually be someone in life if you stop speaking your Native language.” And now that I look back on it, you know I did stop speaking Apache. I don’t speak Apache. I can understand it now fully. I just can’t speak it. When I look back on that I can say that’s probably my least favorite teacher because of her I stopped speaking it…So that would be my least favorite. And that really pushed me because she said “if you ever want to be someone, if you want to be successful, you have to stop.” And so it made me
concentrate more on English and wanting to do better so I could be someone but now I look back on it, it was so wrong.

This story was pivotal in many of the decisions she made since her time as a young girl in elementary school speaking Apache. By her sharing of this story, all the questions that she answered after that were that much clearer for me to relate to. Four other participants from the primary group responded to the interview questions in this story telling to answer questions manner. Therefore, I am calling these participants the core five of the primary group: Celeste, Jessica, Jayson, Nick, and Darren. The outer core were no less powerful in their experiences. I simply have fewer contexts for their responses. They are: Aaron, Phillip, Faren, Adele, and Mark.

Celeste is currently in the Army Reserves and has a very high ranking among the enlisted soldiers. She joined because she had a general interest in the military, she wanted to learn more about it, she had a family legacy, she recognized the Code Talker legacy, and she wanted to pursue the educational benefits. She has survived deployment to Iraq and is very critical of the structure and leadership in the military. She is a mother and carries that mothering instinct with her into her work with her soldiers. She has a bachelor’s and two master’s degrees. She had the option of pursuing entrance as an officer but chose to go in as an enlisted soldier so that she could have a full understanding of the experience. She advises Native American high school students who are interested in the military to first go into an ROTC program in college and then join the military as an officer. Celeste grew up on the Navajo reservation and also has relations in two other tribes.
Jessica served in the Army and exited to be with her son. She entered the military after completing her bachelor’s degree to get a new start away from her abusive husband at the time. She saw it also as an opportunity to pursue her military endeavors. She chose the army because they were willing to pay off her student loans. She had a very positive experience overall and misses the structure and discipline of the military. She now has the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill that she can share with her son. She is pursuing her doctoral degree. Jessica still has dreams of going into the Commissioned Corps in a health career. She has a close bond with her brother now that they have the military experience in common. She advises Native American high school students who are considering the military to do it only for themselves and to really consider fully if that is what they want to pursue. Youth can hear about it but they have to experience it to truly know what it is like. Jessica spent much of her youth growing up in the Apache tribe that she is from but spent episodes away from home where she gained an excitement for the world.

Jayson entered the Army in 2003 after he began to struggle with discipline in college. He needed a change and decided somewhat spontaneously to pursue the military for that change. His father was in the Army and his brother was in the Navy for a time. He realized the military was not for him and found a way to end his enlistment term earlier than he was signed on for. Due to luck and circumstances, he also avoided deployment three different times. He strongly believes he was being protected by a higher power. Once out, he completed his degree and is now serving youth in a program where he is able to share the lessons he has learned in life. He is very critical of the military and military operations abroad. He likens his time in the military to being in
prison. He advises any Native youth who are considering the military to make the
decision of whether he or she wants to be a Native American or a soldier. He says that
you cannot be both. Jayson is Diné and Pueblo and grew up in proximity to both tribes.

Nick entered the Army in 2003 as well. He made the decision over time as he
was growing up with the desire to help people. His decision was cemented on September
11, 2001 as he observed the reactions of everyone to the attacks on the United States. He
wanted to not only do something for others but also wanted to experience independence
for himself. He saw the Army represented in his home area and felt it was the best fit for
him. He has gone through deployment and remains positive about his experience in the
military. He realized he was ready to begin a new chapter in his life and chose to exit the
Army when his term was up. While he struggles with adaptation to civilian life and
recovering from his time in danger, he retains a strong sense of motivation. He is now
contemplating how he can best use the lessons he has learned throughout his young life to
help others in need. His advice to Native Americans in high school is to consider the
military if they are looking for what the military offers. If not, they should go to school.

Nick is from a Pueblo tribe.

Daren began his military service in the Marines in 2001. He was always
athletically driven and academically oriented. He attended a community college after
high school and began to drink heavily in the college scene. His wake up call began after
he fell out of a three-story window during a party. He then went home to regroup and
met a group of veterans who he highly admired while doing firefighting work. He made
the decision to pursue the Marines as a way to be productive and build his résumé. He
considered his time in the Marines a part of his education. He has been very active in
sharing his experiences in order to educate people about issues faced by contemporary soldiers. When we met, he said that none of my questions were questions that had not been asked to him already. He was very enthusiastic about sharing his stories with me. We built a strong connection in our sense of our work being a prayer for Native people. His advice to Native American high school students is to only do it if they are doing it for themselves. Daren is Diné. He asked that I use his real name in my publications. His real name is Donavon Barney and I acknowledge him by that name in my acknowledgement section. Donavon has recently completed his bachelor’s degree and is looking into the next level of education.

I will now turn to the introduction of the outer core group. Again, these individuals’ stories are no less powerful or meaningful than the core. However, due to a variety of circumstances, I do not have as bountiful a portrait of their experiences as those I previously introduced.

Aaron is a Marine who left for his deployment a week and a half after our interview took place. After high school, he had spent a year at a community college before transferring to a university where he spent another year in school. His synopsis of how he joined the military is best told in his own words:

Aaron: Mmm well this is my story. I was walking through the mall and a recruiter stopped me. And he was in the Marine Corps and he asked me if I ever thought about joining. Um but when he asked me I said okay. And he was like, “What? Are you sure?” And I was like “Yeah.”

LT: Oh really [laughing]? Was this in the middle of a semester or during the summer?
Aaron: [chuckling] I had just finished my semester. It was right in the middle of May.

He later told me he really did not know why he joined and he had never thought about it seriously until that day in the mall. It was completely spontaneous and if he could change any decisions, he would not have joined. His advice to Native Americans considering the military is to do their research. He especially advises youth to speak with a recruiter who is off duty and ask questions about what it is really like. He had initially thought he could continue to take college classes while he was in but has found that the courses he would be able to take were not the kind of classes that contributed to earning a degree. Aaron is Pueblo.

Phillip served in the Army in the early part of post 9/11. Being academically talented, he initially went to an elite private college after graduating from high school. It was after a couple of years and the need to find a new direction that he decided to pursue service in the military. The decision was largely driven by his religious and moral values of service. He also could no longer afford to keep up with the tuition at his college. Once he completed his enlistment term, he regained entrance into the college and completed his bachelor’s degree. He is now pursuing a master’s degree at a different university. He is the participant who was very closely behind the group that Lori Piestewa was in when her supply convoy was attacked upon taking a wrong turn. He values his time in the military and the benefits it has brought him. He does advise Native American high school students to take advantage of educational opportunities and to get a bachelor’s degree to go in as an officer. Phillip is Diné and Pueblo.
Faren was also mentioned in the opening chapter. He is the young Pueblo man who finalized his decision to join the Marines upon the death of Emilian Sanchez in 2007. He grew up with the goal of becoming a Marine while observing the benefits of the military within his family. As soon as he was 17 years old, he signed up. I interviewed Faren while he was home from his station overseas. He was very enthusiastic about being a Marine and the connection the military has to Native culture. He feels like the military offers a strong foundation for young people. It is a good choice for Native Americans and results in a lot of respect from the community. His schooling did not influence his decision. It is something he wanted to do on his own.

Adele is a young Diné woman who has gone back and forth between entering the military and continuing her college education. She has debated this decision ever since high school in the mid-2000’s. She has completed several years at differing institutions but ultimately decided she needed the security and discipline of the Army at the time of our interview. She had already been sworn in and was scheduled to leave for boot camp a few months later. Always at the root of her desire to enlist has been the promise she made to her mother as a child that she would fulfill her mother’s dreams of joining the military. Adele lost her mother before she entered high school. While Adele acknowledges her military friends’ warnings not to enlist, she feels the need for structure and discipline is the more powerful message in her life. Her case especially begins to highlight the lack of resources participants were able to access in the communities they belonged to. She continues to highly value higher education and recommends that Native youth pursue college first and think about entering the military later.
The next participant is probably one of the most significant figures in this study. While he is on the outer core due to his time of first entrance, he is extremely key. Mark is a Diné Marine who is nearing eighteen years in the military and is approaching retirement. He has spent many of his years as a Marine recruiting in high schools with high-density Native populations. He has incredible passion for the Marines and his experience as a Marine. He describes Natives in the military as an honorable thing that is both culturally and educationally meaningful. He initially entered college after high school in the early 1990’s. After struggling in his first semester, he decided to pursue the challenge of the Marines in order to do something productive and fulfilling away from home. He has learned that the best way to recruit is to connect with students on a personal level and be a mentor to them no matter what path they are planning on taking. He is a strong proponent of education but believes the military offers a great opportunity for those suited for service. I asked Mark if this was his personal approach to recruiting or if all recruiters he knew were trained in this method. He stated that it was his approach based on his collective years of experience. He had strong recommendations for educators having spent so much time in high schools and with students as well.

Having introduced the primary group that represents the stories of Native Americans who have enlisted or re-enlisted in the post 9/11 era, it is clear that the participants are actually very dynamic as they fit into the categories. This was not intentional. It was a theme that emerged as the study went on. In fact, the majority of the primary group first attended college before making the decision to enter the military. While this may seem to point toward this being more of a schooling issue for college
rather than high school, I still contend that the education and preparation Native students receive in high school is a major factor for eventual military entrance in this sample.

**Pre-2001 veterans.**

The second group of Native veterans represents those who enlisted prior to 2001. The lone female in this group did end up on a deployment to Iraq years after she initially enlisted. One served in Operation Desert Storm. Two served in Vietnam. Two served in other situations of intensity and endangerment. This group consists of: Leah, Brad, Ken, Leonard, Thomas, and William.

Leah is a Diné woman who enlisted in the late 1990’s after attending college for a few semesters. She enjoyed her service but ultimately decided not to re-enlist in order to concentrate on her baby daughter. She endured deployment and is very respectful of all military veterans. She considers her time in the military a success for her quick promotions and overcoming her shyness. She recommends the military for only certain Native students if higher education is not a strong option. As a Native woman, she feels like she has proven herself by doing what non-Natives do in the service. Leah has earned her bachelor’s degree and is currently working on her master’s.

Brad is a Diné man who became a Marine after several years of attending various colleges. Towards the end of his term, he began to question his place in the United States’ military given the history of colonization upon Indigenous peoples. After more reading and more experiences, he was anxious to end his relationship with the Marines. He is now a sharp critic of the institution and strongly advises Natives to look for least dangerous options or to not join at all. Brad returned to school and completed his
bachelor’s degree. He feels he had grown and changed a lot since he has graduated from high school.

Leonard was involved in the military from 1993 to 2001. For the first six years, he was in the Army. He then went on to the National Guard. He is Diné and is highly critical of the United State’s government. Leonard is currently pursuing his bachelor’s degree. He spoke strongly about the impact post-traumatic stress disorder has had on his everyday life.

Ken is an Army veteran of Operation Desert Storm. Like others, he initially went to college before joining the military. He had a good experience but returned to school after his first term was completed. He has since earned both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees and now has a career in Native education. He is member of two tribes of the southwest. He is against the United States being in the two wars right now. At the same time he is supportive of Natives in the military. He recommends the military to Native students for the benefits only if they are fully aware of the risk and sacrifice involved in the service. He suggests the Air Force as the least dangerous branch.

Thomas is a veteran of Vietnam and an active participant in Native Veteran affairs. He attended college but was drafted into the military. He considered going to Canada to avoid the draft but after a discussion with his dad, Thomas realized he could become a medical tech in the Army. He did not want to kill anyone. He is very much against any killing of human beings and especially the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. He is a very spiritual and traditional Pueblo man. He believes in education very strongly. He states that Native Americans should not go into the military without an
education. Thomas earned his bachelor’s degree in the last few years and is now working on his master’s degree.

William is another Pueblo Vietnam veteran. He served in the Marine Corps from 1962 to 1966. He enlisted in the Marines to see the world and for financial benefits. He is a survivor of major combat and a Purple Heart recipient. He still suffers from trauma sustained during his tours of duty. Having witnessed the cost of war first hand, he is against all war. His blanket stance distinguishes him from the other participants. Also having witnessed the lack of discipline in some Native youth, he would recommend the military to those who need that responsibility. At the same time, he does not wish the war experience upon anybody and recognizes that is always a possibility. William is now a retired professor and is active in leadership affairs in his pueblo. He has strong ideas on recommendations for Native youth.

In sum, the veterans who began their military experiences prior to 2001 have all had more time to reflect upon their experiences than those who have more recently served. They also have had the time to reflect on the changes that have occurred in both Native and American societies. Due to the delicate nature of this research, these veterans are integral to contributing critiques of the United States’ empire and to making recommendations for youth considering enlistment. Given that most Natives in the military come from a family or cultural legacy of military service, it is imperative that elders from previous eras have the opportunity to speak to the next generation of Native youth who may be anxious to follow in the footsteps of their veterans.
Non-Veteran students.

This group represents students in the post-9/11 era who considered enlistment in the military but opted to go into higher education instead. The most expressive participant was Vicente whom I have referred to in chapter’s one and two. He ultimately discovered Native American Studies books and classes, which steered him away from participating in the United States’ military. He also witnessed the trauma endured by his brother who had served several years away from home. Vicente is Diné.

Another is Hallie who at the moment was decided on not entering the military but was still in consideration of it as an option if needed. She was a victim of the current economy and its lack of employment opportunities. She also did not have the structure of parents to support her financially. These factors contributed to her consideration of enlistment. At the time of our interview, she leaned more towards the option of remaining in school and had the support of other family members to help her. Hallie is Diné.

Calvin was not an official participant due to his age at the time of data collection but he presented his research and conclusions on a similar topic in a public forum, which I recorded and transcribed. I developed a personal relationship with him as well. He was willing to share his research findings to contribute to my study. He is Pueblo.

Survey-Only participants.

These are participants who completed surveys but I was not able to interview due to not having immediate proximity to at times that I had extremely limited resources. They are Wayne, Ella, and Marcy. Wayne served in the Navy and National Guard for a total of seven years. He is Pueblo. He encourages military service for those that do not
have plans after high school. Ella has six tribal affiliations and served in the U.S. Army for 22 years. She encourages education first. If the interest in the military is there, she advises the Navy or Air Force for better quality of life. Marcy is a 20 year veteran of the U.S. Navy. She is Diné. She advises that Native youth join the military for four years in order to gain experience and educational benefits for when their service is completed.

Early on I discovered that the survey instrument was not going to be a successful tool for me to generate the kind of relationships needed to pursue interview sessions. Furthermore, I realized Native veterans were simply more interested in talking with someone they became familiar with rather than completing a written questionnaire to a stranger. I am extremely grateful to the veterans who took the chance and sent me their survey responses.

**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

Two forms of instrumentation were used in the data collection for the study. The primary instrument was interview sessions with the three types of participant groups I was interested in working with. The other instrument used was a survey.

I developed three sets of questions for the interview participants. The first set was for participants who entered the military or re-enlisted from 2001 on. The second set was for participants who were veterans or entered the military prior to 2001. The third set was for the group of participants who graduated from high school since 2001 and considered the military but elected to go to college. The majority of the contacts were made through establishing relationships with people I knew or met who were veterans or individuals currently in the military. This could be described as a convenience sample but I view it more as a relationship-centered effort. I gave the option of an
autobiographical written response that I would use as document analysis for the first group of participants. The majority of those who were interested opted to have a second interview session where they would answer the autobiography questions as opposed to giving me written responses. This did work out much better than the one autobiography I did receive in written form. I was able to ask for more details immediately and to express my enthusiasm or empathy when appropriate during the storytelling.

The survey instrumentation was the less successful method in my data collection. The surveys were meant to assist me in recruiting interview participants for in-depth responses to my questions. They were also meant to gain a broader collection of responses so that I would have 25 surveys total to triangulate with my minimum of eight interview participants. I sent out recruitment messages to various Native list serves in the area, to personal contacts to forward, to friends of friends, and to contacts I had made prior to IRB approval. I am confident that the distribution was successful in terms of the wide range of the few responses I did receive. At the same time that I originally sent out the recruitment messages for surveys, I attended the Veteran’s meeting and distributed hard copies of the surveys to those in attendance (about 17 veterans). They were all very willing to help in some form but my contact suggested that they take the surveys home to complete with more time and assistance. At this point, I decided to halt my survey recruitment until I knew how many responses I would have returned. Unfortunately, the monthly meetings of the Veteran association were suspended and I was unable to re-establish contact with the administrator until many months had passed. Based on the lack of survey responses I was receiving from other contacts, I also realized that Native veterans were much more willing to speak with me in person. Those that did complete
the survey noted that they would have much more to say verbally when we met. I decided to change my strategy to make the effort to complete as many interviews as I could and to forego pursuing the survey instrument. What I was learning from the interviews was just too personal for me to expect veterans to express in written form to someone they did not know very well. As an Indigenous researcher, this was a moment in which I made the decision that it was in the best interest of both my participants and my study to focus on creating respectful relationships before asking my questions. During interview sessions, I began to ask the survey questions with my interview questions in order to ensure that I was not missing any planned data collection. This proved to be much more effective and respectful than sending out or printing out more recruitment postings. I am actually very thankful that my survey instrument did not work out as I would not have met so many wonderful people in my attempts to secure a greater number of interviews as opposed to surveys.

In order to help inform the data I was collecting, I acquired as much knowledge as I could through various efforts in order to build relationality. ShawnWilson (2008), discusses relationality as incorporating relations with people, relations with the environment/land, relations with the Cosmos, and relations with ideas. I took note of my visits to tribal facilities and the homes of Native communities. Most of these were notes that I made mentally as a member of these communities and less as a researcher. I also took the opportunity to attend pow wows as I learned this was a significant setting for demonstrations of honoring groups and individuals which often included veterans. I took pictures of gourd dances, outfits, and the flags that were represented in the arenas. I also visited Army and Marine Corps recruitment offices in the mall to gain a feel for what
many of my participants experienced when they made their initial contacts with recruiters. I spoke with recruiters in both offices simply saying that I was interested in Native Americans who joined the military. I asked for their thoughts as well as for copies of what they often distributed to potential recruits. As stated earlier, I was able to make visits to multiple school settings in the areas of interest where many of my participants went to high school. This gave me an idea of their high school experiences and I was able to visualize various high schools during my interviews. Furthermore, working in the Native school that I did allowed me to not only get in touch with the experiences of Native youth but to immerse myself in the whole culture of the school where eight of my participants either attended or referenced. I learned a lot about the assumptions I had been making in my proposal that I was able to clear up before engaging in the actual data collection. I also was given the privilege of visiting a Native Veteran Affairs office and meeting where I was welcomed openly. I was allowed to sit in on a meeting and gain an understanding of what veteran issues and camaraderie are like at the present. These efforts to understand and establish relationality were all made so that I could better appreciate the complete picture of what participants shared with me. I consider what I learned through establishing a better grasp of relationality to be critical to the results and analysis of the study. I consider the experience gained from these activities as useful to informing the study through a relationality context as opposed to a data collection method or instrument.

**Procedures Used**

Aside from the methods described in the systems of instrumentation that I had that were not interview sessions, I would like to use this section to explain the procedures
used for my main source of data collection. I first began by either introducing my study and myself (or reintroducing myself and my study) to a Native person that I have identified as a veteran or that has been referred to me by an associate or contact. This was done in person, by email, by phone, and/or by computer networking. I tried to make it as personalized as I could as I did not want to come across as a researcher who only wanted to take from the person I was asking help from. The potential participant would reply in time, hours to months to not yet, and I would answer any questions they had. If they remained interested, I would ask them for their best days and times for an interview.

Once we secured a meeting time and place, I would send them (usually by email) my interview questions and interview consent form to preview ahead of time. At the time of our meeting, I gave the participant another opportunity to review the questions and consent form to make sure they were comfortable with everything that was being asked of them. I assured the participants verbally that they did not need to answer any questions they were uncomfortable addressing. I also asked for verbal permission again before turning on my voice recorder. I tried my best to find locations that were most convenient to the participants so their travel would be limited. I let participants know that I would compensate them $50 for their time and travel. Before getting into the interview questions I would take some time to make the participant more comfortable by offering something to drink as well as getting to know them a bit more personally.

During the interview sessions I did my best to follow the protocol of phenomenological interviewing recommended by Seidman (1998). I became better at this as I interviewed more people. I learned to balance my desire to build a connection with the participants while allowing them all the time they needed to complete their
thoughts without interruption. The following list is an overview of Seidman’s recommendations. The only method I did not follow was avoiding reinforcing participant responses. I simply felt, as an Indigenous researcher, it was more important that I demonstrated my complete involvement in what the participant was iterating.

1. Listen more, talk less
2. Follow up on what the participant says
3. Ask questions when you do not understand
4. Ask to hear more about a subject
5. Explore, don’t probe
6. Listen more, talk less, and ask real questions
7. Avoid leading questions
8. Ask open-ended questions
9. Follow up, don’t interrupt
10. Ask participants to talk to you as if you were someone else
11. Ask participants to tell a story
12. Keep participants focused and ask for concrete details
13. Do not take the ebbs and flows of interviewing too personally
14. Share experiences on occasion
15. Ask participants to reconstruct, not to remember
16. Avoid reinforcing your participants’ responses
17. Explore laughter
18. Follow your hunches
19. Use an interview guide cautiously
20. Tolerate silence

After realizing the effort it took to simply establish contact and solidify an interview time and place with a participant, I decided it was a good plan to engage in member checking the best I could do within the interviews themselves. Schwandt (2001) reviews the pros and cons of member checking and determines that it is perceived as a method of triangulation that is inconclusive in its necessity in qualitative research. I believe it is necessary to a certain extent and chose to have member checking as it was most appropriate in the flow of my research. Here is an example of how I engaged in member checking during an interview in progress:

Celeste: My family is really proud of me. You know what I mean? They really admire like they just like that about me. You know they really respect veterans, especially the community. We always get a warm welcome anytime we’re in our uniform we get you know “thank you for your service” And it feels kind of weird because people. Just recently we went to a two-week training at Fort Huachucha and we drove our humvees down there and everyone was like honking in Las Cruces. And sometimes it feels you know you just don’t feel like you. We’re just doing our jobs and but people come up to you. Buy your food. Give you free stuff. I mean and that’s nice. That’s really nice cause. And then on the other hand there are some people who don’t have respect for us and don’t think. They think that the war is you know that we shouldn’t be that there shouldn’t be no war. So we get both sides. But mostly good treatment from my family and friends and they always like try to say “you’re a hero” or whatever. It’s like no. I’m just a regular person so yeah.
LT: Would I be saying it correctly if I say like from your position you have this involvement but it’s there’s a certain line drawn that you have between the war and what you as veterans or soldiers do? Like as individuals? Like you were saying the people who are against the war. They end up being against the individuals but to you is there a difference between that?

Celeste: Um..I kind of get what you’re saying but.

LT: So you were saying that for you, you feel like you’re just doing your job when people are very excited about you and then when you see the people who are anti-war and they ended up being kind of anti-solider, you think that’s, do you think that there should be more of a separation between the conflict equaling how troops should be treated?

Celeste: Oh yeah because they don’t understand that whether you like it or not, even though you. Like I’ve have people say well you’re the one that volunteered for this. You’re the one that decided to join the military. Well yeah you know that’s true but still you have no idea what sacrifices people have. Especially the soldiers, you have no idea what they sacrificed. You have no idea about the living conditions. You have no idea what it feels like to be in a different country. You have no idea what it feels like to be in such a disorganized organization who really doesn’t like. There are times when you just don’t feel like the military cares about you. You’re just a number. So if you’re going to disrespect anyone, disrespect the leaders, or the people who make all the decisions, or who you know. Or the people who are benefitting from this war monetarily. There’s millions of companies out there who are making tons of money from this war. Be
mad at them or be mad at President Bush. You know. I don’t know but not the soldiers because the soldiers are the ones who really do make a lot of sacrifices.

LT: Good. Your own words. [laughing]

In this long exchange, Celeste is making a statement about her views on being a solider and the responses she receives from those around her. I attempted to interpret her statement through my sense of analysis of how she saw the connections between the dynamics of being a soldier versus representing the entire actions of the military. Celeste then helped me see more clearly what she was really trying to express and I felt confident that I understood her position 100% after her clarification. I used this personal form of member checking whenever a participant was making a statement that I immediately knew was answering a specific focus question but I was not completely sure I comprehended accurately.

Another note on this exchange was my laughter. Humor and emotion were both tremendously important to the interview sessions. By being able to share laughter or tears or excitement with the participants, I felt like I was assuring the participants that I was completely engaged in their stories. I believe this was more important than attempting to remain impartial at the risk of appearing disconnected. At times when I disagreed with statements a participant was making, I simply offered nods or other forms of reassurance that I was listening intently. Being a non-veteran, I felt it was critical that I find ways of connecting with my participants on as many levels as possible whether it be through common friends, common schools, common hobbies, and most of all common interest in their future steps. I feel this reflects back on Smith’s (2002) 25 projects. For example, here is an exchange I had with Nick at the conclusion of his interview:
LT: From like the way you describe like your experiences in education and life lessons that you learned in the military about being strong, individual, self-sufficient and you always go back to like helping people. I don’t know. I think like a career in teaching or education would be really good for you. Especially cause like I keep telling you you’re a good storyteller and you’re really good at expressing things and putting them into a way that people understand. So just like on a personal level I hope you think about working with youth or just any people. Anyone. Especially with you youth because I think you’re still at that age where you’re young enough to like impress people or connect to [laughing] students you know what I mean?

Nick: Yeah.

LT: I think about with my experience at [the high school I taught at] how much just building those relationships mean to the students. I hope you think about that. It doesn’t have to be teaching. A lot of it is like healthcare, youth centers,…

Nick: Yeah I was looking around. I keep looking around. The only thing is I really wanted to do is I guess is help the youth. Those who are in danger of becoming. Those who already got into trouble but trying to help them.

LT: Like rehabilitating?

Nick: Yeah like not be a habitual offender. And steer them into a better path.

Mentoring or just the fact that you know maybe they don’t have a father. I’m sure there’s … what I’ve seen and what I’ve lived through is a lot of kids don’t really have father figure in life. That’s the only thing. I didn’t have a father figure. Just one thing I would empathize with younger ones who are getting to trouble.
LT: Have you tried volunteering any place or working with any place like that?
Nick: Yeah that’s what I was looking into with the VA. The VA is helping me talk to some of the like...who are thinking about coming into the military. I actually spoke to a few of them who I guess got into a lot of trouble. So right now is trying to help them erase some of the tattoos they have. They won’t let them in for the fact that at that time that was a cool tattoo. Like explicit scenes that a normal individual wouldn’t want to put on their body maybe last forever. Some of them I’ve talked with. Like some of the military people that are coming out too. Trying to help them out like try to find different jobs or just talking with them. Just being the fact just talking with them.
LT: That’s good! I’m glad you’re finding that. Maybe that will help you finalize your directions.
Nick: Yeah I’m sure I’ll be able to lock it down.
LT: You will. You’re getting there.

My interview with Nick ended in a way that I felt brought some sense of positive closure to our session. This was indicative of how I attempted to conclude all my interview sessions with each participant. I felt it was crucial that they all understand I am not a researcher only interested in what they can give to me but I am a person invested in their future well-being. I was prepared to make referrals when necessary but in all instances the participants were receiving the assistance they needed and I served the role of cheerleader or advisor if it came to something I knew about like pursuing graduate school. In addition to this, I followed up with a thank you through whatever means we were communicating in prior to our meeting.
If a participant mentioned a specific movie, organization, news event, or individual that I could possibly follow up on, I did so for triangulation purposes. For example, Nick spent a lot of time talking about how much his basketball coach in high school did for him while he was an adolescent. I was familiar with this coach but decided to ask one of my former high school students what his thoughts were on the coach. My student completely validated the experience related to me by Nick and also was able to offer me alternative views on the coach that people might have on him.

These were the procedures used in my most important facet of collecting data in this study. Again, above all else, maintaining the integrity of Indigenous methodology (within the parameters of my IRB) is what was my primary concern throughout the research. I employed the concept of situated response as discussed by Mary Hermes (1999) to maintain the most culturally appropriate manner of interaction with my research participants whether it meant displaying my active engagement in their story telling, meeting with participants in their homes if I felt completely safe, or deciding to not pressure a contact for an interview during inappropriate times no matter how much previous interest they displayed. Hermes describes her experience in engaging situated response,

I approached the research methods as something that could change over the course of the research. To start, my only guide was that what I did and how I did it were ‘situated responses,’ specific to the culture, the problem, and the dynamics of the particular context. One other guiding principle emerged over time: Be in the community as a community member first and a researcher second. In this way the community itself influenced and shaped the methods. (p. 97)
In my own context, I made every effort to maintain my cultural integrity as an Indigenous researcher while doing my best to complete the phenomenological research steps with a Tribal Crit framework under the restrictions of University policy.

**Data Analysis**

In this section I will explain how I reduced the data I collected, how I reported the reduced data, and finally how I analyzed it for meaning. I recorded my interviews with a digital recorder and then uploaded each interview as a music file onto my home computer. I then loaded each interview file onto a computer software program called ExpressScribe. At that point the software allowed me to transcribe each interview efficiently to the best of my skill. While transcribing the data, I took notes on each interview on major themes that were occurring for each participant and themes that were emerging across interviews. I also highlighted passages that I felt would be important to quote later on in my reporting. Once the transcription was completed, I read through each interview and reduced the responses into short descriptions of what was being stated. I then began to identify categories of responses that answered each of my focus questions. I categorized these responses by using a different color for each focus question. Under each category, I determined the codes that emerged the most across interviews. I listed the codes in order of the frequency they appeared.

The next step was to report the data by order of focus question. Each focus question was reviewed and then the categories and codes of responses or findings were reported through narrative text and excerpts from interviews. A great amount of data was collected and it was a challenge to focus on only the data that answered the research questions. I hope to produce other publications that will allow me to utilize the precious
findings that came out of the study. The reporting of results was reserved for chapter four. They were strictly the findings of my data collection as they corresponded to the research questions.

At this point I reviewed the phenomenological data analysis process and reorganized my findings so that it followed the steps used most frequently in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 1998). I followed these steps for the ten primary participants as I realized that was the best way for me to answer my focus questions and to remain true to the phenomenon of interest. The first step was to describe my own experience with the phenomenon, which I have done in up until this point. The second step was horizontalization, which meant listing out all significant statements in interviews as having equal worth. I determined significance in reviewing transcripts by including any statements that helped to answer a focus question. The third step was to create clusters of meaning or meaning units, which was a grouping of the significant statements into themes. For each cluster of meaning, I created textural descriptions of those units and included multiple verbatim examples in my description. In the fourth step, I added structural description, which meant that also considered divergent perspectives of the phenomenon. Finally, I constructed an overall essence of the experience for myself, each participant, and then wrote a composite description of the phenomenon at large. The essence I wrote for each participant is included in this chapter as an introduction to the participants.

The final step was to take these findings and apply Tribal Critical Race Theory to the analysis. The categories as coded for each focus question were reviewed under the lens of what Tribal Critical Race Theory tenets best explained the phenomenon for the
findings. As a final method of analysis, I included a discussion of what these findings mean to Critical Race Theory in general.

Summary

This methodology chapter explained the study as being a qualitative phenomenological study on Natives in the southwest that have elected to enter the military since 2001. Indigenous methodological principals guide the study. The 22 research participants were introduced by category and by individual. The instrumentation for data collection was shown: interviews with three participant groups and surveys. The procedures used in interviews were detailed and the means for analyzing the data was explained. As central as it is, I used to view methodology as such a sterile aspect of research. Having been able to apply an Indigenous perspective to the methods I described in this chapter, I would like to share one final exchange on the topic of methodology. The next chapter will present the data that was collected.

Applying phenomenological methodology to the research questions has allowed for a broad collection of voices as well as the synthesis of data into both multiple and singular meanings. The purpose of the results chapter is to disseminate the data that was gathered from the ten primary participants over the course of the interview sessions. Data from interviews with the other participant groups, as well as the surveys and other forms of creating relationality, will be applied as it helps to answer the research questions or to further illuminate the findings stemming from the primary group. The organization of the chapter and the presentation of the data will follow the phenomenological tradition as suggested by Moustakas (1994). The chapter will include descriptions of: the data collected; data analysis (phenomenological analysis); synthesis of data; horizontalization;
meaning units; clustered themes; textual and structural descriptions; and a synthesis of meanings and the essences of the experience. The outline of the findings will be reported by way of research questions, as this is the most relevant pattern to the results chapter that is suggested by Glatthorn and Joyner (2005).

As a qualitative researcher, I wanted my positionality to be known and thus decided upon including authorial representation. Creswell discusses the integration of authorial representation in qualitative research as one that may be considered when examining the need to address the influence a researcher has on his or her study. These influences could include biases, values, or preconceived notions about the topic. Researcher voice or position could occur in many different forms including sections on: role of the researcher, an epilogue, researcher commentary, reflective footnotes, or interpretive commentaries. The phenomenological steps that the study followed were described in the methodology chapter. The first step, “the researcher begins with a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 147) began in the introductory chapter and has continued throughout. At this point, the epoche or bracketing of my preconceived experiences has been achieved. I feel I have sufficiently stated: my relationship to the study; my interest in the participants and their communities; my values as a Native female researcher/educator; my passion for the theoretical framework that has led me to this topic; and my personal experiences that have shaped my outlook in this research. I can now direct the remainder of this chapter to the final five steps in the phenomenological analysis of my findings. To the best of my abilities, my experiences have been bracketed. I have made every effort to exclude my epoche from what will now be reported.
In order to combine the phenomenological narrative report of findings (Moustakas, 1994) with the format (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005) best suited to my particular dissertation in the College of Education, I will address the research questions so that they follow a chronological order of participants’ experiences and their reflections. This will allow me to 1) keep the chapter organized by addressing each of my research questions and 2) provide a complete report of the findings in phenomenological process which results in a composite description of how the phenomenon is experienced.
CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

I have a lot of kids come in and they sit down and they’re like “oh that’s what you’re talking about.” It’s a lot easier for me to talk one-on-one with my students instead of to get up. But just recently in the last semester I’ve been able to share a lot of my experience with them as far as education. And so I have one student that’s actually testing for her GED next Wednesday. She’s like, “You’re my role model. Just everything that you’ve gone through.” She’s like, “I know the thing about having kids and being abusive. I went through that but I’ve told my husband and it was eye opening for him to know that…I just realized it’s up to me.” I use a lot of my experience.

- Jessica (Apache), United States’ Army 2003-2006, current Ph.D. student

Jessica’s statement represents the culmination of completing the three phases of the phenomenological interview process (Seidman, 1998). Jessica and I began exploring her experience through autobiographical questions, which allowed her to tell her life story from the perspective of her schooling experiences. We then moved into the details of her experience particular to her entrance into the military as the second phase. Finally, we concluded with questions that generated her reflections on the meaning of her experience in the military and the relationship it had to her education as well as what it could mean to other Native Americans. I utilize Jessica’s quote to illustrate the depth of information that is reached upon conclusion of in-depth phenomenological interviews. Moreover, the quote exemplifies how one participant makes meaning of her experience in
the phenomenon to her everyday life as a professional mentor to Native youth in her Apache nation. Ultimately, the goal of this study is to do the same by exploring the many elements of the education and military experience for Native Americans in the last ten years and to find an essence of that experience to help inform Indigenous education. The following reports of data will focus on presentation while reserving Tribal Crit analysis for the final chapter.

**Educational Experiences and the Formation of Ideologies**

This section will report on the data collected in response to the issue question:

*How did the experiences of veterans (or current military service men/women) in education formulate their ideologies as they decided to enter the military? Were hegemony and education in this context linked? Why or why not?*

The following table presents the initial codes exhumed upon horizontalization of statements significant to the topic. Again, horizontalization refers to the listing of every statement that is deemed significant in relevance to the topic and each is given equal value (Moustakas, 1994). The codes in Table 5.1 represent statements made that were significant in terms of being able to answer the respective focus question. Due to the incredible amount of horizontalization statements that were collected, the statements being shared in this table have been lightly coded for initial overlap. Essentially, not every single comment is included but each significant response/comment is represented by a horizontalization code in the table. The first column lists the codes on schooling experiences. Because the interview questions were based around participants reflecting on their experiences, this column is the largest. The other columns are to represent educational experiences participants had outside of school and emerging ideologies or personality traits. These
codes generally represent the early experiences participants had in their lives leading up to their military entrance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiences in Schooling</th>
<th>Experiences Outside of School</th>
<th>Ideologies/Personality Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive elementary and junior high experiences</td>
<td>Family instability</td>
<td>Developing critical awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teachers in junior high school</td>
<td>Alcohol abuse in family</td>
<td>Family belief in honor and pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good classes in high school</td>
<td>Lack of parent nurturing</td>
<td>Value of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teachers in high school</td>
<td>Intergenerational family completion of college</td>
<td>Selection of entering military branch based on familiarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racist teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Selection of entering military branch based on research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports competition in high school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Selection of entering military branch based on preconceived notions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports participation in high school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Admiring veterans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting to teachers in high school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Experience with sexist ideologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting to coaches in high school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Popularity focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting to other school staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clear military goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of advisement in high school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family moral values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate advisement in high school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus and motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school distractions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shyness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic success in high school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favoritism/Racism in high school athletics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic summer programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College challenges with curriculum</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>College challenges with culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>College challenges with study skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
College challenges with focus
College challenges with institution
College loans
Inadequate advisement in college
College distractions
Being bullied
Love for reading

The horizontalization codes in Table 5.1 were then grouped into clusters of meaning that further eliminated overlapping or repetitive statements to determine core themes of the experience. These themes are called meaning units in Table 5.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.2. Meaning Units: Educational Experiences and Ideologies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences in Schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive K-8 schooling experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment of high school classes &amp; teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being “pushed”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of adequate advisement in high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic summer programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges in college</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The meaning units on educational experiences and ideologies will now be described in summary (structural and textual descriptions) by the researcher and in detailed examples in verbatim by participants. Providing verbatim examples of data collection is a recommendation made by Moustakas (1994) in the creation of a research manuscript. Many quotes from the transcripts will be shared in this chapter. Most of the
passages will be shared in elongated form so as to properly capture the context and essence of the stories being told or the points being made by the participants.

**Experiences in schooling**

Eight meaning units or themes were clustered from the horizontalization analysis of educational experiences and ideologies. Participants’ experiences in schooling evoked generally upbeat memories of grade school. The strongest memories seemed to be centered on individuals, special programs, or athletics.

**Positive K-8 schooling experiences.**

As children, participants enjoyed having a place to go to on a daily basis where they could interact with their friends, have fun, and get to know teachers. Only in a few circumstances did participants discuss very negative experiences in grade school.

Celeste: School was something that I just really enjoyed. I loved going to school. But you know I didn’t come from a very good family. It was kind of a broken family. I wasn’t raised by my parents. So I know that was a little difficult. So school was my outlet and I really enjoyed being there with my friends and it was a place where I could socialize. You know just going to school was fun for me.

Celeste’s quote exemplifies the meaning that the stability of schooling provided for her while she was experiencing fluctuation in her home life. She was able to rely on school as a solid foundational structure for her to rely on as a child as she could not rely on that sort of structure in her homelife.
Enjoyment of high school classes and teachers

In response to asking if he enjoyed his classes, Phillip described the impact his teachers had on his learning experience.

Phillip: Yeah for the most part and I had a couple of teachers that really challenged me. Like my junior and senior years but that really helped me like in my college career. But at the time I just thought they were being mean to me or. But it was the opposite. I guess they really were pushing me because they saw potential and at least that’s what I hope. But yeah those are the classes you remember. The one’s that really challenge you. I got a lot out of it though.

Phillip describes how teachers demonstrated an invested interest in his future by challenging him within his classes. Many of the participants reflected on the impact their learning experiences with teachers, inside and outside the classroom, had on their lives in high school and even after. They felt that teachers who demonstrated creative pedagogy, were down to earth, and showed sincerity in their care for students were the most influential. Teachers who did not encompass these qualities were considered inconsequential or least favorite.

Social influences.

Stories about social influences ranged from participants being bullied to participants being overly focused on peer pressure or having fun with friends. Social influences had both short and long term consequences on how well they did in academics. Darren describes his preoccupation with his non-academic life in the following passage.
Darren: I really didn’t pay attention a lot to academics at that point. I just thought the whole idea for high school for me was to be popular. To have a social life. You know to have fun. To have as many friends as I possibly can from my school and then from other schools. And then to be noticed through sports. Yeah I really thought that’s what it was. And then I didn’t really value the true authentic meaning of education at that time. So then I left school like that and I just kept making goals for myself.

The theme of wanting to have social status and prioritizing friendships or fun over doing well in school, as noted by Darren, was a theme that arose for several participants.

**Athletics.**

A major aspect of being popular for Darren was his participation in sports like cross-country and basketball. Jayson also had a fondness for athletics. He spent a great deal of his energy and time in high school trying to earn and maintain a starting position on his high school team. This was a theme reflected in most of the male participants in the study from all time periods. Jayson describes the significance of sport in his junior high and high school life.

Jayson: That was my first love I guess is basketball. And I think that’s what kept me in school for a lot of things. Being on a team, being able to play, realizing that grades are kind of important, some school came easy to me too.

Jayson had particularly negative memories of his latter years on the basketball team in high school. Later in the interview, Jayson told a story in great detail about how he lost his starting position on the varsity basketball team in his junior year. This is just an
excerpt from the narrative he told me when I asked for an example of his experience with racism in sports.

Jayson: It came from the pressure to change coaches. And then it came from the brother. The two brothers? Uh turns out they were having dinner at the coach’s house like every Sunday for like that whole summer before. They were actually playing from the whole summer before like his brother was even on the team.

They were having dinner at their house every Sunday. And like getting to know their family. And the coach was… To me he was a racist [expletive]

In essence, Jayson describes the importance of basketball to his life and how devastating it was to have adults have such a negative impact on his experience.

The older veterans such as Ken and even Vicente, a non-Veteran student, also echoed memories of experiencing unfair treatment from athletic programs. I looked into the history and current coaching trends at the schools by asking anonymous informants if they had observed racism or favoritism in their schools’ athletic programs. Jayson and Vicente’s schools were both reported as having legacies of racism. Ken’s school had mixed reviews of whether or not favoritism occurred.

While there were reports of racism or favoritism occurring, just as pivotal were the stories from participants like Nick and Celeste who felt their basketball coaches were mentors inside and outside of the gym. The coaches expressed genuine care for the students even after they were no longer players on their respective teams. These kinds of relationships are common in Native schools. Darren explained the impact a coach could have on a Native community and why he had previous interests in becoming one himself.
Daren: You know cause one of the big things I wanted to do was to be a coach. … Yeah cause I felt like I could teach them a lot more as far as that goes. Have a lot more of an impact for them cause when you grow up like toward the reservation area you know these coaches that have been coaching for years and years. And they’re much respected in the community you know. And a lot of the kids have a lot of good powerful things to say about their coaches.

Thus, the presence of a strong coach in a community has lasting powerful effects on the kids in their young lives as well as into the aspirations as young adults.

An informant had the following to say about one of the coaches who was particularly admired by Nick. I obtained permission to share this description from my informant when I asked for his opinion on the coach and if there were alternative perspectives others might have:

He was a good coach. I feel there are only some coaches that know how to coach and work with Native Americans cause they don’t have other luxuries like tall players of other races. He knows how to work with all players of different levels. He teaches not only on the court but off about life and how to deal and face certain obstacles, he made me a better player and also a better person at life. He was tough at times but only cause he expected better always knew there was room for improvement. If it weren’t for him I don’t think my high school experience would have been the same or we wouldn’t have had the senior season we did. I think others may see not positive because he has a loud voice and declines people but that’s what students of the game need to deal with. Also with how hard he
pushes his students but only cause he expects the best of a person to come out.

Over all wouldn't ask for any other coach.

Again, this description of a coach speaks to the influence and power coaches may have in Native communities and especially on individual adolescents. This theme was especially important for me as a researcher to triangulate as it was touched upon by so many participants and is an observation I have made in Native schools in general. The informant who was just quoted is a college student and former high school student of mine who did not consider enlistment in the military. In essence, the important role that sports programs play in the lives of veterans is a significant finding but is also one that is relevant for non-veterans as well. While Mark, the Native Marine recruiter, stated that they do not focus recruitment on a certain type of student, he did say that athletes were targeted for their physicality and motivation.

**Being “pushed”.**

As can be seen in the quote about the coach just described, being “pushed” was a term that was repeated very often. I did not have any questions or statements in which I was the one who first brought up the term. Nearly every participant told stories of how they were pushed to do well in school, in sports, or in life by educators, family members, or veterans. Phillip describes overcoming challenges in his family through striving to succeed in school.

Phillip: Well my family really pushed me to do well in school. They let me know about all the opportunities and I saw my mom struggle. You know she was a single parent and I didn’t want to go through the same struggles she went through. And um my grandmother she really directed me to put all that energy or anger I
had towards just feeling like I didn’t have any control over my life or my situation in to school which definitely helped me become more focused. And set those goals early. So it was definitely my family, my grandmother, my mom that pushed me to do well in school so.

Adele discussed the consequences of not having someone to push her. She describes what it was about college that ultimately made her decide to go into the Army instead of taking more semesters of courses.

Adele: Well it’s just like it’s hard to. I don’t know for me it’s hard to go to school at the same time like working. And it’s just a lot of a lot on myself so I just like I really want to do it. It’s just hard for my part because I need someone like I need that push. Someone to push me for school and like I don’t really have that person to do that anymore. And I can really slack off and really I get distracted easily.

In discussing the recurrence of this term with another Native researcher and educator, we came to the preliminary conclusion that Native adolescents consider being “pushed” as more than an act of encouragement but an action that also required fulfillment of expectations due the nature of the relationship. This is a concept that shall be explored in my further research.

**Lack of adequate advisement in high school.**

While there was a presence of individuals who “pushed” participants to do well, there was also a recurring theme of participants who did not seek advisement or were not offered substantial help in making post-secondary plans.

Jayson: I think whatever you want to do…or whatever you want to be you got to go search for. And I didn’t know that law at the beginning… And there was
college fairs and yeah I was interested in going to like some east coast universities but I was like. I was thinking in my mind, how is it going to happen?…And it came to my senior year. I was just like already messing around too much. Just having too much fun. …When it came to decision making, I was like I got the Brown university packet. I got Cornell University. Cornell is where I waned to go. … I was I want to take a trip there but then I didn’t know who to go to I guess either. And I guess if someone would have been there to like help me like, “oh what you’re interested in that? Let’s look into it for you.” I think I just didn’t have no assistance or no one was there looking at me to offer assistance. And um I didn’t know how to ask for it. Or I didn’t know how to go look for it then. And I think I missed my opportunity by doing that. …And I think I gave up on an opportunity by doing that because I think my tribe would’ve paid for me to go to Cornell. But they would have paid for me to go do something with my life. Cause they do for a bunch of other morons that waste their life. And so I just came here.

In essence, participants did feel that advisement was available to a certain extent but the format in which it was offered or available was not conducive to many of their one-on-one needs. Those that had positive advisement experiences were participants that maintained academically oriented goals their entire lives.

**Academic summer programs.**

An experience that most participants who entered college after high school in the last decade had, veteran or not, was the participation in academic summer programs during their high school years. These are programs that occur during summer months in
which high school students attend academic institutions and engage in pre-college curriculum in subject areas of interest. The purpose is to create pipelines into fields of interest and to prepare students for college. Many of these programs are oriented towards members of underrepresented groups in college. Phillip describes his experience and the impact it had on opportunities it opened him up to.

Phillip: Definitely it was really rewarding you know like doing well in school and getting to go to like Oklahoma to basically take classes during the summer but they would take us to really fun places like Six Flags and we’d go canoeing on the Red River and go to like pow wows out there you know. And just really see what that state had to offer and so it was really fun to get away. … You want to get out and explore and see what’s out there. So that really gave me a chance to do that where otherwise I really wouldn’t travel. My family didn’t really have the money to travel or anything like that. So it was a great opportunity.

Phillip’s experience in a summer program is an example of how students were able to enter into new environments and learn from those environments while away from home, thus expanding their sense of self and education in a new setting.

Challenges in college.

Unfortunately, while summer programs and positive high school experiences did lead many participants into college, they were insufficient in the long term for some. In Jayson’s case, he was focused on athletics and his social life in high school but always understood that he had strong academic capabilities. While he fulfilled that potential during periods of focus, he struggled in other semesters, which led him to making drastic changes. Many participants described the challenges they faced in college as being
financial, social, academic, and having issues with alcohol. Jayson clearly remembers his pivotal moments in college.

Jayson: So I lost my scholarship and I was like…damn what am I going to do?...

It gives you money for the semester too, gives money for books. …And so my spring semester, I paid for it myself and I ended up getting a 4.0. But before that decision was made like in December. It was around Thanksgiving I think. Thanksgiving/December I don’t know I just felt like school was going down. And I felt like I needed to get out. I felt like I just kind of stepped back and looked at my life. And been like, “Man like I have my friends here. I love my friends and I really don’t want to leave them. But I know I’m partying too much. And I love basketball. And you know I love the community here. Like I don’t want to leave.” And I was really attached to this place. …But something inside of me was telling me like “you just gotta go”. …I just felt like that one day and I went to the recruiters’ office. And just said like, “what kind of jobs you got?”

Darren’s story carries a similar theme but he also includes a discussion on his lack of academic preparation in high school for college. This is what he has to say about the realization he made in terms of his schooling.

Darren: When I was back at home on the reservation with their educational system I was smart. When I was compared to the regular norm, compared to the city I was average. Yeah so there was a big difference there. …I would be like “man in my class I’m the best writer” and I was. Or I would score the highest on my math exams you know. And then I went into college and I was just an average writer and I would just like I became like a C plus B minus student.
Instead of an A, A minus B plus student. I was like “man this is hard” and… I needed to blame someone so I blame the educational system that I grew up in on. Back at home they’re so behind and they don’t push us hard enough and they don’t give us enough summer programs to be involved in. …Private school system definitely more keyed in on the individual teaching style. More helpful you know. Like more parent to teacher contact. But the public school system it’s just there you know. It’s going to be what you make of it.

In effect, Darren felt like he was ill prepared for college in high school and was misled to believe he would continue to be academically competitive in his higher education classes. This realization made college all the more challenging for him.

Experiences outside of school

Family structure.

Many of the stories about family structural changes or challenges that the participants shared were recalled by what grade the participant was in school at the time of turmoil. Darren tells of his family’s house being burned down and his father’s bout with alcohol during his very early elementary school years. As related in previous quotes in this section, Celeste, Adele, and Phillip all referred to their families’ dynamics of having the absence of one or both parents. Those absences severely influenced their experiences in schooling and their perspectives on how to pursue their personal goals.

Ideologies and personality traits
**Family values.**

The absence of parents or the tragedy of events were not completely negative elements in shaping participant ideologies. In many cases, the values that participants were taught by their families were made that much clearer to them. While Darren’s early childhood was not stable due to the presence of alcohol abuse and the house that was burned, he was able to clearly articulate the lessons he learned from his father and how those lessons shaped the stories that he was telling me.

Darren: Of course I couldn’t think of this all on my own. I had to have the influences from a lot of people because everything that I’m saying, I was taught or I learned through understanding. Picking it apart from something else. So I can’t take credit for any of the things I’ve said already. But I think probably had to come from my father. …he would always tell us always to push ourselves and to make every experience an educational experience you know. To not clock out early but to be present the entire time. … when I was younger I was wondering what does present mean. Like being present when someone’s talking do you pay attention to them? Do you look at them in their eyes? You nod. You give them some sort of feedback that you are listening or if you’re involved in a game you do all you can to be involved in that game. So always to be present. And he said you can always learn something from that and whether its from someone that you might hear something from, you can always take it and understand it and then turn it into your own teaching for your life. And then when you understand all these things. When you understand these teachings, you can help that to sustain your life the rest of your life. And you can teach your children the ways that you
understand life. The more that you understand, the more that you’ll be able to help people when you get older. And the easier life is going to be. …So just going back to my dad and saying like in this moment I only want to experience the most amazing beautiful energy that I absolutely can. And even though this person’s not the best person in the world, I’m only going to focus on all their positive attributes. And even though like this information I’m hearing over hear isn’t the best, I’m only going to take away the things that can nurture my soul and nurture me. It’s like to always decipher what you want to inhale and take in.

Darren’s reflection on what he learned from his experience with his father was that ultimately he respected the family values that were taught to him. The values of being present in each moment for the purpose of absorbing information was a value in education that Darren strived to practice.

**Connecting personal goals to military branches.**

Making the decision to enter the military became a matter of specifying personal goals to the branch that offered the best fit for a participant’s needs and personality. Most participants explained the selection of their respective branch by first eliminating the consideration of other branches based on what they understood those branches to be. Several participants, in various eras, mentioned that had they given it more thought, they would have selected a different branch to serve in. Nonetheless, initial selection was often told in the manner that Phillip did.

Phillip: All the stereotypes of each branch and yeah if looking back maybe I would have joined the Air Force if I was a little bit smarter but the Army was a good fit. It was real physically demanding which I liked with all my running and
at the same time it was mentally challenging with my public affairs job and learning how to take pictures, write stories, articles. Essentially, characteristics such as physical demands, job opportunities, and benefits offered were all connected to participants seeking fulfillment of their personal goals.

**Military goals.**

While many of the primary participants’ decisions to enter the military evolved over time and into their college experiences, other participants set their sights on the military early on in their lives or in high school. The military goals were often driven by the observation of veterans, usually family members, who the participants admired for their characteristics or careers. Other ways in which military goals were born early on were the desire to serve or the desire to be successfully independent outside the reservation. Some of these stories will be quoted later on in this chapter under other meaning units.

**Motivation.**

The greatest essence of what participants experienced in schooling was the motivation to do something meaningful once they completed high school. Whether initially or after some experience in college, that motivation led participants to the military. Mark, again the Native recruiter, graduated from high school in the 1990’s and is nearing retirement (under the age of 40) describes the essence of motivation particularly well. His description of having a strong drive to be productive and to succeed translates well to what the other younger primary participants expressed when making their final decision to enter the military. His positive reflection on his experience after entering is more specific to him and participants such as Jessica and Faren.
Mark: I think the one driving force for me was I never wanted to fail. And I didn’t think I would but that was one thing I don’t want to fail. I wanted to do good. And then this career field that I chose and that just kind of pushed me. …I love it. I love the lifestyle. I love everything about it. It really is just a way of life for me. I think that’s why it’s easy for me to talk about it and kind of relate my story to people. And I have nothing but good things to say about it.

Marks found a means to apply his motivation and achieve a sense of success as well as to make a career out of the passion he felt for the Marine lifestyle.

Summary

The following paragraph summarizes the meaning units in answer to the issue focus question: How did the experiences of veterans (or current military service men/women) in education formulate their ideologies as they decided to enter the military? Were hegemony and education in this context linked? Why or why not? The essence of the experience was multi-faceted in terms of experiences in schooling, experiences outside of school, and ideologies. Veterans and current service men/women over the last ten years generally had positive schooling experiences from kindergarten through high school, developing ideologies that built a desire to achieve their potential in their post-secondary agendas. This passion to achieve in the dominant society of the United States’ was framed within their learned ideologies of what constituted success from the perspective of what they were taught in school as well as by their families.

The remainder of the focus questions will now be presented in the same format as the one just discussed.
Factors and conditions for military entrance

The next issue question was posed as: *What are the factors and conditions that shape the decision of Indigenous individuals to enter the military?* Table 5.3 demonstrates the coded horizontalization of statements significant to the research question.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.3. Horizontalization Codes: Factors and Conditions for Military Entrance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational benefits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attending multiple colleges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support for troops after 9/11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education helps with military experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Struggles in college</td>
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<tr>
<td>Love for excitement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time involved for enlistment term</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic abuse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life changing experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>New settings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support self</td>
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There were many factors and conditions that shaped the decision of participants to enlist in the military over the last ten years. The range of responses are listed in Table 5.3 equally in importance. While there was a broad assortment of reasons given by participants, some factors and conditions emerged as being especially meaningful across
multiple experiences. The six meaning units or clusters of meaning emerging out of the horizontalization are indicated in Table 5.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional development</th>
<th>Educational opportunities</th>
<th>Financial needs</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fulfillment of goals</td>
<td>Family &amp; cultural tradition</td>
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<td>Spontaneity</td>
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**Professional development.**

Participants expressed the urge to expand their professional development at all times whether it be while taking a break from college or within the military itself. Celeste explains why she chose go in as an enlisted solider as opposed to training to become an officer right away.

Celeste: I had gone in and I enlisted rather than becoming an officer because I kind of wanted. Cause I did a little research and I would talk to like soldiers and a lot of them said you know these officers come in straight from college and they don’t know how to be a soldier for one and then two how to work with the lower enlisted. So I went in as an E4 which is a specialist and that is like the highest rank you can get because I had a degree.

After she finished telling her story, I asked her if she would advise others to do what she did in terms of going the enlisted route. She quickly responded she would advise them not to do that.

Celeste: I think I’ll make a better officer than someone because they have ROTC programs you know these direct commission programs but I learned a lot. And I’ve learned how to work with soldiers and I’ve learned that I enjoy working with soldiers and I learned how to do certain things that you can’t you know coming
from college straight into the military? You can’t get that even though you have to go to like basic training, whatever you have to do, you still can’t get that experience. And I was deployed as a noncommissioned officer so that was even better. But as far as encouraging people to do that, I’m like no. Number one is the pay isn’t worth it, especially if you have a degree. …Anyone now I say no if you have a degree go in as an officer because in the long run you can get promoted faster. You can retire with better pay.

As will be shown later, most participants recommend becoming an officer in the military as opposed to going in as an enlisted soldier. However they also recognized that the training they received in the military, regardless of the amount of schooling involved, translated to their current occupations. Although the schooling they received while in the military may not be applicable to degree obtainment, the skills developed have been useful in employment opportunities and job performance.

**Educational opportunities.**

Most participants discussed their educational opportunities in the military as it applied to training, earning money for college, and having student loans paid off. However, as Mark verified in his discussion of educational benefits for recruits, earning college credit while actually serving is another opportunity presented. Leah, who began her service prior to 9/11 and completed it after, explained that she completed her Associate’s degree while on active duty. However, in Aaron’s case, the educational benefits were not what he expected.

Aaron: Well actually the Marine Corps told me I would be able to take college classes too. I would take college classes that I could finish my degree here and
then once I got out I was just so busy and you have to make time for college and they’re usually online classes. If I take classes here it’s about the Marine Corps. It has nothing to do with what might help me in the future. …It’s like a, it’s just like an extra credit or something.

Thus, Aaron felt that he was misled in the kind of college classes he would be able to take and realized that the classes that were available to him would not benefit him in seeking a degree. Nonetheless, educational opportunities were a major factor and condition for nearly every single participant in the study regardless of when they served.

**Financial needs.**

Another major factor and condition that affected nearly every participant was having financial need. For participants entering straight out of high school, they saw their need as finding a means to immediately support themselves as young adults. For college students, their financial challenges came to head while they were in school whether it be due to loss of scholarship or insufficient financial support. Phillip’s explanation was especially poignant.

**Phillip:** And my family was kind of upset I joined the military especially when I was at [the elite private college]. They couldn’t understand. But at the same time they weren’t really helping me pay for school. So they didn’t understand that part and that stress I had. So it was something I’d definitely do again.

In other cases, such as Celeste and Jessica, they had their degrees but were still carrying the burden of student loans, which the Army paid off as part of their entrance package. They also received signing bonuses.
Fulfillment of goals.

As was reported in the previous section on educational experiences and ideologies, participants developed aspirations to fulfill their potential in the dominant society while maintaining family connections. This included having a sense of direction and taking significant steps towards financial, educational, and professional goals. For participants like Nick, he completed his time in the military and was grateful for what he learned but decided that his next step would lead him in another direction. For many participants, in all eras, this direction led them back to higher education. Mark shared that he will likely go back to college to obtain a degree once he retires but he explains the feeling of fulfilling goals as a Marine.

Mark: It’s hard to explain. It’s just a passion…like going through bootcamp is the first step…It’s extremely tough and it’s thirteen weeks of earning the right to call yourself a marine. That’s all it is. Nothing else…You’re there to earn that title marine. And that’s the initial step. And that’s how we. As a recruiter that’s how I tell the story. That’s what boot camp is about. It’s so tough and it’s the longest out of all the branches of the military. The other branches, they’ll give them breaks. They’ll let them call home. They’ll let them interact with females because they train together. But with the Marine Corps it’s segregated training…And I think that from that point on it’s just ingrained in your body your mind and everything that you worked for this. You know through the blood sweat and tears. And the loneliness being away from home so it’s just so. I feel it’s more of a pride thing. And it’s important to let go. And it’s hard when I do talk to kids about it. I mean it’s like I can’t explain what the transformation is. And I
tell them it’s not being brainwashed because I am who I am. I don’t have a different personality. But it’s just the respect for the institution and everything that marines have done up to this point is like I don’t want to let them down.

…it’s emotional for me. You know I’ll tell the kids that. If I’m talking to them in front of a classroom or whatever and I’ll be up there and you can see the goose bumps on my arm. You know just from the passion I have about it. … You know I think it’s a great thing. And I always tell them the Marine Corps has made me who I am today. It’s given me everything that I have. I owe it so much. So that’s kind of how I present it too them. But with the realism with it coming out when I talk about it. They just catch on to it. When they see it you know it’s like wow I want a part of that. I want to be a part of that you know stuff like that.

Mark’s narrative explains the sense of excitement that is rendered through his passion for the Marine’s that is transferred to potential recruits. He relates how fulfilling it is to meet challenges and to feel like those accomplishments make him the person that he is.

**Family and cultural tradition.**

All participants, in every group, shared a family and/or cultural connection in various degrees to why they considered the military an option for themselves. These stories are integrated throughout the quotes provided for other meaning units. Even family members who did not serve in the military express their honor for the family and cultural tradition. Mark shared one of his most precious memories about bonding with an uncle over the family and cultural tradition.

I think the biggest advantage that I have is like my extended family. …They all support the military. And again a lot of it has to do with my grandpa [the
Codetalker]. And like when I lost him, I was twelve years old I believe. So my aunts and uncles, my older cousins, they really, they knew him a lot better than I did. ... It’s always been encouraging for me, always. And I remember one time before I went to boot camp, we were building a pavilion like a shade for the church, for my church. And I was helping them out. We were putting the like the shingles on the roof. And I remember my uncle saying, he was kind of talking to me like, “Make us proud. You know do your best. I mean you’re representing your family, you’re representing being Navajo.” And I remember that. I remember it very well. And it was kind of surprising for me because that uncle, he, I don’t know. It seemed weird coming from him. And he was really into education. He was a principal. He was a superintendent. Things like that. So...it kind of felt weird coming from him. I guess that’s why it meant so much to me. And that’s something I carried with me throughout my career. I always think back to it. I can picture it where he said it. We’re up on top of the roof when he said it. So I always remembered that. But it’s always been good. I think a lot of it is just when I get a chance to come home and interact with my family. You know they see the positive. They see my family. They see I’m dressed decently, things like that. And now that I’m closer to finishing out my career, they’re in awe because it’s like “wow you’re going to be able to retire and move on to something else.”

Basically, Mark shared a story that exemplifies the respect that family members had for military service whether or not they were veterans. The respect stemmed out of the larger family and community tradition.
**Structure and discipline.**

One of the major themes to come emerge was structure and discipline. This theme is applicable to all of the focus questions but was most present in this one and the question on benefits and challenges. As a factor for making the decision to enter the military, structure and discipline was a need that participants were looking to fulfill in their lives whether it be for academic, economic, or social struggles.

Adele: Um yeah my well like I guess you could say I don’t really have like the parent to take care of me that I can go to help and I wanted to change that and I wanted like I know the military will help me in a way with that. With benefits and like I know I’ll be taken care of but I guess like in the civilian world I feel like I’m lost. I need that boost to like I don’t know think about what I want to do after when I get out or I still want to make it a career. …And I know I’ll be taken care of once I’m in. But I’ll be like stuck with that job or whatever I’m doing.

I asked Adele if she felt it was a search for structure and she responded that it was.

Darren talks about his healing process in recovering from the incident of falling out of his third story window. He first found some stability by spending time with veterans and realized he could immerse himself in structure and discipline in the military.

Darren: You know when you’re on the fire crew you can’t drink so that was a perfect thing. …Everyone was sober around me. You know there was no temptations. Quite frankly I didn’t want to be with anyone in that way anyway. So then that summer brought me a lot of clarity and it brought me a lot of people that were really wise. And so it happened to be a lot of people that did bring something wise to the table were veterans that had something to say to me. And I
did open up to a few of them saying like this is what happened to me. This is why I’m back at home. And you know they just encouraged me and stuff and I kept hearing if you’re not completely together right now you know there’s always the military. And I thought that was the most perfect thing for me because I wanted to be productive and move forward and still build a résumé but at the same time not go to school. So then I kind of took the military as part of my educational system. And it completely was because once I went to school before and I went to the military and right after the military I went straight back into school. So it really was part of my education in a different type of way.

In effect, the military offered a place where participants could feel their basic needs were taken care of as well as an institution that offered strict guidance in everyday life.

**Spontaneity.**

While Daren’s decision was a process that took time and led to significant rewards, other participants were very spontaneous in their decisions. Jayson and Aaron both expressed that they felt their decisions were rather spontaneous. For Jayson, he was unwilling to reconsider his decisions because he is unable to change them. However, for Aaron, he is pretty clear about the consequences of making his decision while walking through the mall the day the recruiter approached him.

Aaron: I don’t think I would have joined if I knew what it was about. I didn’t really know what I was getting into. For some reason I just said yeah I’ll join.

**Life changing experiences.**

Spontaneity was certainly an element for those participants who began to seriously consider the military after they experienced life-changing events. Celeste had
long-time dreams of entering the military from the time she was in high school. She wanted to become an officer. After completing her bachelor’s degree, she had to find a way to overcome severe social issues and decided to join the Army as an enlisted soldier.

Jessica: I can honestly say at the time I enlisted it was because of that not because of my goals of wanting to go in. It was just being abused and losing a baby. And all of it happening in front of my son. At the time that I enlisted, that was my main reason is because I felt that I wasn’t strong enough to go on my own. I didn’t. I went to school. He provided for me financially. I didn’t have financial grounds to start on my own. And I guess I wasn’t secure enough that I had a degree to find my own job. Now that I look back on it I was wrong but I don’t regret going into the military. I don’t regret anything that I’ve done. But that was my pushing point at the time.

Daren can still illustrate his life-changing experience with great clarity and how that event created a condition for him to rethink his path and where he wanted to go in life. He tells the story of a night when his partying in college led to extreme consequences.

Daren: And they brought me back up to the room and then they locked me in and I guess I was still trying to find a way out. And I don’t know what I was thinking but I climbed out of my window. …But I fell out of my third floor window. Like completely down. I don’t know what I was thinking but I remember falling. I remember landing when I fell and I remember looking up and in the back of me. And there’s was people that saw me fall out of the window. …And I was so lucky to have these guardian angels to watch over me cause you know I could have broke my neck. I could have hurt something really bad but I just ended up
breaking my ankle on the fall yeah. So my friends took me to the hospital and I woke up in the hospital and I had all these wires all over me. And I was trying to figure out exactly what happened you know. And at the point you know that was the turning point of my life from that day forth because I was like man like this isn’t the person I wanted to be in college.

Daren lost his track scholarship after this event. In essence, life-changing experiences for participants forced them to rethink their lives and reconsider how to best achieve their goals. For Jessica and Darren, they saw the military as a place for retreat and rebuilding from what they had gone through.

**Service orientation.**

Nick, Phillip, and Faren all particularly expressed an orientation towards service to people. However, I felt that nearly every veteran I interviewed not only wanted to share their experiences with me because it was important to them but they also wanted to assist me in what I was trying to do for myself as a doctoral student. Nick explains how his early interest in the military became a solid decision once he saw the responses of those surrounding him to 9/11. He wanted to make a contribution to as best as he could and decided that the military would allow him to do that.

Nick: I had it in the back of my mind way before. Maybe the year before 9/11 I guess. I’d be seeing flyers and brochures everywhere. You would see these cool pictures of them doing different stuff and I mean I had that in the back of my mind. And I guess the feeling of it is being from when I first got that job, being independent, being able to actually spend the money the way I wanted to, and actually kind of giving a little bit to my mom. And then just the fact that reading
the brochures saying you get an education, you get paid, you choose your job, whatever. I mean I did have that and then later on in the years. In junior year, my senior year I guess just trying to figure out you know they tell you you gotta start figuring out what you’re going to do. And this probably kept on coming up more. I wasn’t really thinking much of college cause I didn’t know where to go. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know how to pay for it. And 9/11 came around, seeing the destruction. It just made it more of a solid choice for me. Given the fact that I was helping people, seeing the world. That’s what pretty much I guess tipped the iceberg was 9/11, basically made it a solid choice.

Nick’s story makes it clear that there was rarely a single factor or condition that propelled participants into the military. It was most often a combination of circumstances. In answering the focus question on factors and conditions, Celeste provides an excellent synopsis of the factors and conditions that shape the decisions of individuals to enlist.

What are the factors and conditions that shape the decision of Indigenous individuals to enter the military? Celeste had just finished telling me about people who proclaim soldiers should not complain about their situations because they volunteered for the military.

LT: In relation to that, to people thinking it’s voluntary now. Do you feel that way? That it really is voluntary or do you feel like some people just have to do it because given the you know what they have or don’t have in life?

Celeste: Yeah I’ve noticed that a lot of the people especially a lot of my soldiers. I look around and I’m like it’s sad. Because this is their only option. You know especially with the economy being the way that it’s been in the past couple of
years. They don’t have an education. You know sometimes they have families and some of them are volunteering to go to war because they need the money. I talk to my soldiers and say you know if you need help getting a job, three jobs, I’ll help you. But if I can avoid ever going back you know getting deployed again, I’ll get like ten jobs. I don’t know. But I know that for a lot of people, it’s their only option. You know for school, cause school would be the number one. You ask you know ten soldiers why did you join? “Oh like education benefits.” That’s probably like eight out of those ten people would say cause that’s all I hear from my soldiers. “I needed the school benefits. I didn’t have any other options. I needed the money. I didn’t have a job. I was getting in trouble. I was into drugs and drinking. And I needed a way out.” And then if you look at their backgrounds and stuff you really understand that it really wasn’t an option for them. You know to better their lives that was their only option for most people. So I think that the military is taking advantage of that.

LT: Would you say that it’s almost like that’s the case across the board, but would you say that that’s the case more with Natives or people of color or men or women?

Celeste: I would say with a lot of the lower enlisted and a lot of the minorities and Natives you know. For Natives I would say it’s more like it involves that but it’s more of like a family tradition or a sense of you know doing because they want to be in. They’re proud to be in. … You know there’s some sort of like of this warrior phenomenon type of thing. But also because of their financial situations or their I guess their economic socioeconomic status they way the grew up. And
how a lot of us don’t have parents who could support us through college or you know. I knew that that was you know that was part of my reason. I’m like oh great you’re going to offer me like thirty-nine grand to join the military when at the time it seemed like oh this is great but now I’m like that wasn’t even really worth it. [laughing] you know what I mean? Because and they you know they did pay like my student loans off. That was great. But there are times when I think that that experience was worth it and the money was worth it. And other times I’m like ugh. I will get like ten jobs before I go back to more. It kind of just goes like based on your experience. Like my experience it goes both ways. Like I can be on either side.

Basically, according to Celeste, there are a variety of reasons for why people enter the military but in her observation it is largely for education and socioeconomic reasons. Specifically considering Native enlistees, there is also the strong element of family or tribal tradition.

**Summary**

Experiences in schooling that formulated participant ideologies were: positive kindergarten through eighth grade experiences; enjoyment of high school classes and teachers; social influences; athletics; being “pushed”; having a lack of adequate advisement in high school; academic summer programs; and challenges in college.

Ideological formulating experiences outside of school were rooted in family structures.

The ideologies formed were family values; connecting personal goals to military branches; development of military goals; and motivation.
The connection to hegemony was that participants developed the notion that in order to be successful, they needed to be considered a success not only by their families but by the dominant society as well. That meant either college education or military service.

**Cultural conceptions of military participation**

The research question to be addressed in this section is: *What is the educational, inside and outside of schooling, relationship between veterans (or current military service men/women) and conceptions of traditional culture in the military?* The horizonalization in Table 5.5 is a collection of significant coded statements in relation to this research question.

| Table 5.5. Horizonalization Codes: Cultural Conceptions of Military Participation |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Sense of desire                  | Warrior phenomenon              | Calling                        |
| Military intergenerational tradition | Pride                           | Change in conflicts/consequences |
| Overlooking healing needs        | Navajo Code talkers             | Traditional healing            |
| Be a warrior or a soldier        | You have to do something significant to be recognized by U.S. | Be a warrior at home |
| Could be culture shock           | Shocked response by friends/relations | Post people are older |
| Social issues associated with military | More respect in the past         | Connected to religious values |
| Some family/friends upset at enlistment | Being called upon by non-Natives | Reverence at home |
| Social issues at home            | Doesn’t view any difference to service as a Native American | Female bond is the greater connection |
| Passion                         | Showing that you have goals     | Being a role model             |
| Sense of serving for my people   | Use Native community as motivation to get through |
As can be seen, there was a great amount of references to cultural conceptions of military participation. I did have specific questions that asked participants to consider their military experiences as Native Americans. However, the participants also made references to connections outside of my questions oriented towards culture. The meaning units for cultural conceptions of military participation are shown in Table 5.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family tradition</th>
<th>Common cultural aspects</th>
<th>Tribal tradition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Native views</td>
<td>Sociocultural Issues</td>
<td>Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverence</td>
<td>Reactions</td>
<td>Healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role modeling</td>
<td>Meaning of being a warrior</td>
<td>Changes over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other bonds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Family tradition.**

Family tradition of participation in the military was present for every participant. However, not all participants referenced family tradition as a major factor for their enlistment. Those that did, made it very clear that observing their family members’ benefits were a key element in setting their military goals. One of the most family tradition focused participants was Faren.

LT: At what point did you decide to join the military?

Faren: In the sixth grade.

LT: …Okay, what was it that sparked you?

Faren: Uh my dad. …and my grandfather uh both Marines, you know good people. I’ve seen what the Corps did for them. You know created a great foundation to build off of.

LT: Okay so you knew for a long time?
Faren: Mmm hmm

Many of the older participants, those over 30, observed that family tradition was more of a factor than the concept of warriorhood. See Celeste’s most recent previous quote and her quotes throughout chapters five and six.

*Common cultural aspects.*

Several participants made links between the military and Native culture, based on their understanding. Those links were made in terms of a cultural history of service, the idea of protection, warrior societies, and even the element of ceremony. Primary participant Mark and pre-9/11 veteran Brad both discussed the strong tradition of ceremony in the Marines as having cultural appeal for some Native soldiers. Other participants, like Darren, made intricate links between protecting the earth and being deployed overseas. See his previous quotes for evidence of his links as well as his quote to come on *Values*. Faren explains his thoughts on Native Americans serving in the military, which encompasses the general idea of common cultural aspects being made by various participants.

Faren: I think it’s good. You know it helps out a lot of individuals. You know cause uh I don’t know um it ties in really well with culture. It depends really what branch you go into. I think most Native Americans join the Marines because they have a history in the Marines yeah real strong so you know it kind of ties in with the Native culture.

For the most part, simply having the historical tradition of Native Americans serving in the military was seen as a cultural factor.
In relation to general Native cultural connections, there was also the more focused idea of tribal tradition. Veterans, in all groups, discussed their observations of tribes outside of the southwest who had an even more intense connection to the idea of warriorhood in the military. Ken even sent me a powerpoint of a parade honoring a Native veteran from a Plains tribe which included hundreds of community members in attendance with many people dressed in traditional regalia. Other than those references to tribes outside of the four corners states, the most common tribal tradition discussed was the Navajo and their Code Talkers. Mark explains the Navajo tribal tradition in the Marines.

Mark: Well a lot of it is you know the Navajo Code Talkers they’re so well known and with me that was my grandfather was a Navajo code talker, …that was a big influence on me even you know when I was young I didn’t really understand it. You know I didn’t really understand why he was dressing up in a uniform and why is he going to participate in parades. …One thing I noticed was the respect my grandfather got you know. And I didn’t really think about it so much at the time but I can remember it. When I was looking into the military I never looked at any other branch but the Marine Corps because I know that had a lot to do with it. But I was also looking at the challenge of it as well. One thing that I notice when I’m out there especially on the reservation is a lot of the vehicles out there have like Marine Corps stickers. …And it was to the point where the Army recruiter that works in [the city], they would say to me, “are you guys putting stickers on vehicles?” you know. I’m like no. To us it’s more of a pride thing you
know. And I think a lot of it is just the Navajo Code Talkers. …so I guess it’s just a warrior mentality when it comes to like the Native Americans.

Every year, on August 14th, the Navajo Nation celebrates the National Code Talkers Day. This day was first designated by President Ronald Regan in 1982. A description of the planned celebration sponsored by the Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs in 2011 was reported by the *Navajo Times*:

Sunday's event in Window Rock will start with a flag-raising ceremony at 7:30 a.m. at Veterans Memorial Park.

The DNVA is sponsoring a Parade of Colors beginning at 9 a.m. at the Wells Fargo Bank branch and ending at the park. The parade's route will be marked and lined with flags from all 110 Navajo chapters.

DNVA's Nez said the parade is free and open to all veterans, auxiliary members, color guards, and marching units, and the wearing of uniforms is encouraged.

At approximately 10 a.m., the commemoration ceremony will begin, with flag raising, wreath laying, reading of names, and speeches. (Bitsoi, 2011)

This type of event reinforces participant descriptions of the honor the Navajo tribe has for its Code Talker legacy. Furthermore, it also serves to normalize war. Military service may appear to be much more powerful than education or having money.

**Non-Native views.**

While there were stories and observations of non-Native Americans being racist or ignorant in terms of the Native presence in the military, there was also a theme of non-Native recognition of Native culture. Some include the warriorhood portrayal of Native
Americans in the military as evidenced by photography journalists (Clevenger, 2010; Viola, 2008), newspaper journalists (O’Connor & Crow, 2008), and the Naval History and Heritage website (2011). Darren describes his personal experience with non-Native interest in his identity as a Native American.

Darren: When I was in Iraq we’re convoying. … There were times when like you just didn’t know what was going to happen. So then when we would go through those really I guess mentally stressful times, some of the guys in my convoy they would be you know “Darren, can you sing a Native American song?” … Cause for some reason they were drawn to me. They were saying like I had a little bit more connection with the land and that my prayers will ultimately be heard more than anyone else’s. So they really respected me in that way. So anytime they were scared you know like, “Darren can you say a prayer?” like “Darren can you sing us a song?” cause they felt blanketed by a Native American. You know they did. And they put a lot of faith in me. I was like man. And for me I wasn’t like holy crap you know what are you doing? I was like yes! That’s right! Cause I am. I can do that. That’s something I can do for us you know. And I didn’t have any kind of doubts in my mind. I just knew that you know from being Native American prayers are answered. When you talk to the earth you can talk to the earth anywhere and she’ll listen to you. So I just knew that we were going to make it through. We were going to be okay because of that so there is definitely like a different type of respect being Native American in the military. And the same thing like when I came out you know. Like just on the bases there would be people coming to me for advice. You know in a very weird
stereotypical way I became like the older wiser medicine man that they seek out on the reservation when they come visit as tourists you know. I was like that person within the little areas that I was. …They would do that so there was a different type of feel being Native American because people see us from our past and then connect that with modern day. And they depict us in this new way but then they still hold on to the old attributes that we did have.

In effect, his fellow soldiers treated Darren very highly because of his Native American identity. While he had some concern about being honored partially as a historical stereotype, he still respected the desire of non-Natives to embrace his current presence as a Native man.

*Sociocultural issues.*

I use Mark’s quotes significantly in this section due his positionality as an eighteen-year veteran currently still serving and as a long time recruiter in Native schools. In terms of sociocultural issues, Mark explains the connection present between cultural conceptions of military participation combined with the social needs for opportunity potential recruits are contemplating. Again, many previously shared passages from participants reflect sociocultural issues faced by Native veterans.

LT: What do you think about Native Americans serving in the military?

Mark: I think it’s an honorable thing. I think a lot of Native Americans based on my experience as a recruiter for seven years total they value it. And from then a majority of them they will tend to mainly like it’s almost like a cultural thing. They see it as a. Or I guess it’s almost in line with education. You know not everyone is qualified for the military. I mean I. It’s a positive thing I think. I got
nothing but positive feedback you know from people interested in the military.

Or maybe not so much interested but just finding out some things are available in
the military that they may not necessarily thought was available before they talked
with us.

Thus, he makes the connection between it being an opportunity for youth to not only
honor their culture but to also access resources that would not normally be available to
them.

**Values.**

Participants believed that the values they were raised by in their homes and in
their communities were translatable in the military. Darren explains.

Darren: Being that Native American and um what it means to be in the military
you know. It’s just basically to be of service to your country because people can
ask like how can you serve when your people have been done so wrong? But then
when you’re Native American you’re really connected to the earth. You’re really
connected to the elements. You know the water the fire the air the herbs. And
wherever you go you know we’re taught that wherever you go you can always
talk to the earth because these elements always exist. So there’s always this
mentality of being at one with nature. So then you automatically want to protect
what’s yours. You could be fighting for the land in China or you could be
fighting for the land in Iraq. You could be fighting for all these elements because
when it comes down to it you know, we are a body of people that represent life on
the planet of earth. And you want to sustain that balance as much as possible
even when people don’t understand that balance. You know you still want to
fight because YOU understand that balance. And that’s like that warrior call like when you understand something so intricately you know you can’t ignore it. You know you have to do something about it if you know it. If you don’t do it then you’re not answering your call. So then when you are a veteran you know you take on this mentality of protection. You know protecting your homeland protecting your people protecting your family protecting your culture protecting … the history everything that you know as a Native American exists. So yes we’ve been done really wrong but at the same time…we can’t completely judge them because they don’t understand the things that we understand. So if we understand the things that we understand we have to fight for what we do know even if they’re naive to the whole balance of Mother Earth.

While these ideas and thoughts trigger additional discussion and analysis, the current objective is to identify how participants find cultural connections in the military. For Darren, it is through the learned value of being a protector for his family, community, his homeland and practicing this protective intuition through his relationship with Mother Earth and the military.

Reverence.

Again, Darren provides a significant quote in understanding the meaning unit of reverence. Native veterans are revered in Native America from parades to family gatherings.

Darren: You’re respected. You’re often called upon. …For that big family like 200 strong you know to call upon me and ask me to say the prayer you know that’s a huge honor you know to represent a family like that in front of the eyes of
Creator. You know that’s something that’s really good. So that sort of respect you get, I think that probably sums it up. You know a whole family is saying like, “you’re so good and you’re so strong that we want you to pray for the entire family right now.” And you’re like man out of everyone here you want me to pray for them so you know that’s a huge honor. You can’t get anymore bigger than that you know to pray for a whole family.

Essentially, Darren was chosen to say the family prayer because of his status as a Marine, which was a symbol of the reverence he receives in his family for this status.

**Reactions.**

For most participants, people in their surroundings had various reactions to their service in the military. Many were positive and encouraging while few experienced either disinterest or negative responses. Overall, Darren’s explanation of his mother’s perspective is an indicative reaction of most primary participant’s loved ones.

Darren: And then when the national anthem is singing of course all the moms and aunts think about person that serves in that time frame. And so you know when I came back my mom would always cry during the national anthem you know. And I was just like that’s the national anthem but it brought or evoked emotions within her you know. She always cried. And then for me I was like wow it brought a whole new meaning upon what that national anthem meant to me so all these events you know.

This type of description of how those closest to military veterans feel about their service are also reflected in all of the other forms of data collection I engaged in. In a discussion with Brad (pre and post 9/11 veteran), who was very disinterested in being publically
recognized as a veteran, I shared that many other participants I met with felt overwhelmed or nonchalant about being recognized as heroes. I asked Brad if he thought public recognition of veterans was more important to Native communities than to Native veterans themselves. He enthusiastically agreed that it was certainly the case for those who felt like him or similar to him.

**Healing.**

Not many participants spoke in detail about their healing processes after returning from experiences that caused them pain. However, it was a recurring theme that there was a search for healing in both the Native and western paradigms for those participants. Darren recalled his return home, which included an initial ceremony, and he later realized he needed a complete cleansing ceremony to completely heal. Vietnam veteran William noted that his most significant healing came from his Pueblo nation. For the most part, some primary participants touched upon healing in Native contexts but most sought treatment from the VA hospital or VA support programs.

**Role modeling.**

The majority of the primary participants understood that they were recognized as role models in their communities and by their tribes. Not only were they approached for advisement but their family members were recognized as well. Nick spoke about how his mother experiences his position of prestige.

Nick: I mean at first of course your mother would be worried but I mean she told me the stories when I was over every time she would always be scared but just knowing that I’m helping others. She’s proud just to the fact that other people would actually come up to her and tell her that I was actually a role model for
their kids. It kind of I guess assured her more what I was doing was good. I knew what I was doing was good too.

Darren provides his thoughts on the role of veterans in Native communities. Based on my research across all forms of data collection, his description is very accurate.

Darren: You know a lot of the young Native American men and women that grow up on the reservation, they have aunts and uncles that have been in different wars, that have served in different branches of the military. So instead of having role models directly like Michael Jordan within the reservation you know. We don’t really have that. We have that nationally but not within that really rural area you know. You have veterans.

Nearly all the participants spoke about their status as role models in their Native communities due to their military service whether or not they considered themselves role models.

**Meaning of being a warrior.**

I described the Non-Native conception of modern Native warriorhood equally service in the military. Some participants referenced the same concept. However, those who described the meaning of warriorhood in detail made statements such as Darren’s.

Darren: So when you come from that type of household or that type of community system you have a tendency to be taught this warrior nature and that warrior nature is not really told in one word. It’s more like an embodiment of a representation of strength of pride of leadership. If you break down the word warrior, warrior just basically means to be of service to people. So then you can translate that into any way that you would like. You know a teacher that’s in a
kindergarten class you know she could call herself a warrior because if she’s being of service to people which she is you know that’s something that she’s going taking that call of duty upon herself to serve her people. You know that’s what the warrior aspect, the warrior mentality means. So when you’re growing up around that mentality you are in a culture that has been enriched by military life.

Therefore, to be a warrior is not necessarily to be in combat but to be a person who serves others. Jayson’s quote at the very beginning of chapter one echoes the same sentiment about what it means to be a warrior but he makes a clear cut disconnection between practicing warriorhood and being in the military.

**Changes over time.**

Changes over time refers to advances in technology, views of veterans socially, health treatment of veterans, changes in conflicts, and the Native understanding of what their veterans are experiencing. Veterans, in all eras, spoke about the cost of war and what those costs meant for Native people. They considered the costs of any war as being too high. At the same time, many of those same veterans still felt the benefits of being in the service were substantial enough for certain individuals to enlist. They just did not wish war upon anyone.

**Other bonds.**

This meaning unit refers to bonds that participants had with other special groups who were not Native American. Those bonds included military units, regions of hometowns, economic backgrounds, and most significantly: motherhood. I interviewed three veterans who were mothers and their sense of motherhood were all determining
factors in their decisions to exit the military as quickly as possible. Furthermore, they experienced a special bond with other mothers they came to know in the military regardless of any other background they did or did not share.

Celeste: I think it’s more just the mother part of it. Just having that nurturance instinct. Just wanting to care. You know you carry that when you’re in the military. You don’t forget you’re a mom. Like in Iraq someone’s hurt you just have that mother instinct and whether you’re Native American or not, I think it’s there and I think that’s. Like I said all my friends and my roommates, we all got out cause we’re mothers. It just makes it hard and the majority of my friends in the military were Hispanic or white or black. They all got out for that same reason.

This idea was reinforced by Leah (pre 9/11 and post 9/11 veteran) in her interview. She decided not to re-enlist once she found out she was pregnant. Jessica was initially going to re-enlist but changed her mind once she completely realized how much it would take away from her ability to be present as a mother.

Summary

The educational relationship between participants and conceptions of traditional culture in the military are based on the experiences they have inside and outside of school. Family traditions; tribal traditions; reverence of veterans; values; sociocultural issues; reactions; common cultural aspects; the meaning of being a warrior; healing; changes over time; non-Native views; and other bonds were learned through observations made at home and lived educational experiences. These conceptions were thought
through intensely upon reflection of those experiences and while participants were undergoing decision making episodes in high school or college.

**Positive and Negative Educational Outcomes of Participation in the Military**

*What are the positive and challenging outcomes of participation in the military? What are the links to education?* ? Table 5.7’s horizontalization is composed of two columns signifying the significant statements made. When a link to education is apparent, it will be made in parenthesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.7. Horizontalization Codes</th>
<th>Challenging Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Outcomes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-9/11 G.I. Bill</td>
<td>Problematizing conflict in Iraq (Learned from lived experience, reading, academics, research, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pay for higher education)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying off student loans</td>
<td>Problematizing conflict in Afghanistan (Learned from lived experience, reading, academics, research, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Financial cost of previous schooling)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having focus</td>
<td>Post traumatic stress disorder (Inability to focus or be confined in a space)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Ability to concentrate on new information)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of fulfillment</td>
<td>Lost lives (link is apparent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Good translate to educational endeavors)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free stuff from civilians</td>
<td>Uncertain cause for conflicts (Learned from lived experience, reading, academics, research, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respect from colleagues in school settings)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General acknowledgement</td>
<td>Cultural issues (May be turned off from institutions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respect from colleagues in school settings)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Understanding Native conditions at home (Learned from lived experience, reading, academics, research, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Ability to do what needs to be accomplished in school)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having structure</td>
<td>Concerns over media portrayal (Learned from lived experience, reading, academics, research, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Stability and preparation for return to school)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An opportunity</td>
<td>War seen as war for oil (Learned from lived experience, reading, academics, research, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Opportunity includes educational experiences and benefits)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying military experience to success in school</td>
<td>Mixed emotions about war (Learned from lived experience, reading,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Use of appreciation for school, focus, skills for overcoming challenges, and discipline)</td>
<td>academics, research, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical fitness (General health is good for learning)</td>
<td>Still an obligation as a soldier (Cannot actively disengage from obligations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better credit options (More ability to support self through school)</td>
<td>Representing soldier interests (Includes education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health benefits (General health is good for learning)</td>
<td>Sacrifices of soldiers (Includes time away from school, educational opportunities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic benefits (More ability to support self through school)</td>
<td>Lack of support for soldiers (Includes education and well being)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA Home Loan (More ability to support self through school)</td>
<td>Lack of respect for soldiers (Soldiers viewed as having less education than officers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to more places (Greater access to potential learning sites)</td>
<td>George W. Bush seen as beneficiary (Learned from lived experience, reading, academics, research, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No taxes</td>
<td>Leaders in military focused on own careers (Not focused on soldier education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General educational benefits (link is apparent)</td>
<td>Non-soldiers are real beneficiaries (Not focused on soldier education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Needs at home in Native communities (Includes education)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>U.S. not honoring treaties/obligations (Includes education)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inability to speak out (Cannot publically educate others)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military system is like Indian Health Service (Educational benefits challenging to obtain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexism (Challenge to promotion and more education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual harassment (Challenge to promotion and existing education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military recruiters targeting Native populations because they know the economic hardships (Recruits will not attend college nor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As best as I could, I included all positive and challenging outcomes in the data analysis without bias. The longer list of challenging outcomes reported does not necessarily mean that participants’ perspectives were more negative than positive. The table represents more the diversity expressed in the challenges participants have had or are trying to overcome.

Table 5.8 indicates the clusters of meaning the horizontalized codes were grouped into.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Outcomes</th>
<th>Challenging Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational Benefits</td>
<td>Issues with conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Benefits</td>
<td>PTSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and Discipline</td>
<td>Loss of lives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positive outcomes

*Educational benefits.*

Educational benefits were plentiful according to the participants. Most of them took advantage of the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill and considered their training/experiences in the military as contributing to their overall education. Another benefit was the appreciation the participants had for their lives outside of deployment or the rituals of discipline they could apply to completing their degrees.

Aaron: It really felt good to go back to [college] after I had fulfilled my obligation. Five years in the military and people really welcomed me back there like really proud of what I did. And that meant a lot to me and it was a lot easier to go to classes there after I had been in the military because I knew what really hard work was [chuckle] being in the military. So going to class was nothing. So yeah I’ll go to class. I’ll take as many classes as I can. …And I actually finished [college] sooner than had I been there four years, I was technically only there for three years and I got my degree. So cause I went during the summer and I wasn’t like your traditional student.
**Economic benefits.**

Economic benefits included being considered more highly when it came to credit approvals, access to home loans, having a steady pay check, signing bonuses, and again financial support in college. The economic benefits were incredibly significant to participants but they were rarely considered the most important benefit or aspect of the military experience.

**Structure and discipline.**

Structure and discipline emerged again as a cluster of meaning. Having experienced structure and learning discipline in the military, participants applied their lessons to the paths they decided to follow. Jessica goes even further in her consideration of structure and discipline in her explanation of why she misses being in the military.

Jessica: I think right now working on the reservation with the tribe just seeing how chaotic and opposite everything is. I like that structure. I like having the discipline. I like the physical part of it. … Running that you have to keep in shape and just the structure. Just having the organization. Just respecting the job and the rank. And that you are actually someone if you do something right. You get recognized. You get awards for it. Just being academic. Wanting to do not so much academic but just wanting to be the best in what I do. That’s something that they push. I just felt like that was for me. And if I did something good, I would just. Not so much wanting to be recognized for it but just knowing that someone appreciates it. As where as right now where the job on the reservation … My job is a really great job but no one really cares. They’re just like oh she went to school so she thinks she’s better than everyone. I don’t like that idea.
I’m not only trying to help myself but I’m trying to help other people. I think the military just. You know appreciating that is something I do miss. Just the whole structure of it. I like to be creative but just having that systematic pushes. And then to rely on build on is what I miss about it.

**Sense of accomplishment/fulfillment.**

Upon completion of their military contracts, and even during their time of service, participants expressed a fondness for the sense of accomplishment or fulfillment they have from being a part of the system. Nearly all of the veteran participants, regardless of the time in which they served, noted that they were who they were (in a positive sense) due to the military experience whether they enjoyed it or not.

Nick: Actually that’s one of the main things that I’ve learned. Mostly just living life doing what I do. It changes a lot of perceptions of where you want to go, things you want to do. I’ve seen you want to live life to it’s fullest basically. You want to try to do everything possibly you can and at the same time still keep in touch with family. Still make things strong with family. Being away in a dangerous environment makes you stronger basically to overcome more things. I mean I know when I see myself in a situation to where sometimes it gets dull sometimes it gets irritating but then I always think to myself well I was in a worse situation than this. I mean this is a piece of cake. It’s just a piece of cake I mean I’d rather be here doing this than be wearing a forty ruck sack with armored vest being in 120 130 degree weather everyday. Just like a walk in the park basically. That’s the one thing that motivates me even more is I’ve been in worse situations. I just feel a lot better.
Mark explains the feelings he has had throughout his career.

Mark: I think the biggest thing that I take to heart is the sense of accomplishment. … I can honestly look back on my life and just be proud of the twenty years of service that I’ve put in. And I feel like the lives I’ve touched, the friends I’ve made, the relationships I’ve built, and experiences that I never would have got if I never got into the Marine Corps. And that’s something that I don’t know it’s hard to explain. I like that sense of accomplishment. The sense of helping or things like that. To me honestly the monetary stuff, obviously we all need money to survive to buy groceries for your family things like that. That’s always going to be there. I mean it’s never really about the money for me.

Basically, participants such as Nick and Mark felt very strongly about what the military has done for their sense of growth, their sense of strength, and their sense of having accomplishments in life.

**Acknowledgement.**

While acknowledgement was not a benefit participants necessarily sought after, most of them did or do experience acknowledgement from both Native and Non-Native society. Acknowledgement included verbal expressions of gratitude, public recognition at events, and “free stuff” from strangers. Stories about kindness from strangers offering to buy meals or offering money to the participants (usually in uniform) were abundant.

Nick: I mean at the time. I remember at the time when at the beginning of the war in Iraq. I mean a lot of people were. I always got questions. “Good job” whatever and doing this get this people give you like stuff for free or give you a big discount or give you money. I mean it didn’t matter. I remember just going on a
plane like “are you in the military?” “yeah” There was this couple sitting right next to me pulled out some money. Like, “here, here.” Yeah I’m just, “No, it’s okay. It’s okay.” …They want to give for Iraq. Of course a handshake would do a lot better. Just stuff like that. Random stuff you know? And then now it’s just like quit already.

Nick’s story was indicative of what I heard many times over. His story is also indicative of the theme noted before of changes over time.

**Health benefits.**

Participants did not tell stories about their health benefits but most of them acknowledged that they receive health benefits in the form of disability checks or service from the VA hospital. The term benefit may be debatable but I think it is important to include health services as a benefit at this point.

**Challenging outcomes**

**Issues with conflicts.**

As has been evident in many of the previous quotes, participants have mixed feelings about the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan since 9/11. Celeste and Jayson in particular have demonstrated concern for why the United States is engaging in war. Other participants such as Darren and Phillip, remain committed to the idea that the wars serve a greater purpose. Out of respect for the participants who may have intense emotional connections to the wars, I did not directly ask the majority of primary veterans questions about the conflicts unless they brought it up on their own. I did ask all the
veterans who did not serve at any time during the current conflicts for their opinions. They all expressed critical concern over the United States being at war.

*Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.*

Darren spoke in great length about his experience with PTSD. Other primary participants either only touched upon the challenges they faced in returning from deployment or did not indicate they had personal experience with it. Two of the three female primary participants have experienced deployment. Three of the seven male primary participants had experienced deployment at the time of our interviews. The majority of pre-9/11 veterans did share that they suffered from PTSD. Again, out of respect for the participants, I did not ask any questions about their experiences at war. Darren’s experience with PTSD echoed stories that were told to me by the older veterans. Darren: I think the biggest challenge that I face on an individual basis is just the post-traumatic stress disorder. It was a huge hindrance on my life for a number of years afterwards. Like I said earlier, it didn’t really hit me right away but when it did hit me, it hit me hard. I had like a huge anxiety, fear of death you know. Like to go to sleep at night you know to let go and to relax and to like go into a place where you can’t control yourself? It was something that was really hard for me and I always wanted to be in control almost at all times. You know that protection of trying to surround yourself with something good. You know I would always pray that I would wake up the next morning you know. Fear of death was a big thing of me. I was very alert all the time. You know like when I did go to sleep, I didn’t sleep well. I was really anxious even in my sleep. I couldn’t be in confined spaces. You know any type of confined space I would
kind of freak out in. Like even when I came back to be in an environment like this, it would be too loud for me. And just that sensory overload would really freak me out you know. So I would be like man I gotta go outside. Thirty minutes into our interview I would be like can you give me a second. I’d go outside and stay outside for like five minutes and then come back in and regroup and then start over again. In classrooms you know I was very claustrophobic in classrooms. I just couldn’t be around a big body of people all at once. I sat in the back all the way to corner as much as possible. I would try to get there in time to get the most easiest seat to where I can escape. You I always wanted to escape something if I didn’t feel comfortable. And you know the restlessness that I had, I would just walk around at night. I couldn’t sleep. I needed to walk to make myself tired. I couldn’t deal with a lot of things internally so I turned to alcoholism. You know I drank a lot. I medicated myself and soothed my mind through like food and through alcohol. I was very needy. I got to be this really empowered person but all that disappeared when the stress disorder like came over because I became this really needy guy.

Essentially, PTSD was something that could not be completely avoided as it permeates the lives of many of the participants whether or not they are given specific reminders of traumatic events.

**Loss of lives.**

Participants often noted the loss of life experienced by soldiers whose deaths were covered in the media. Celeste in particular, was very emotionally torn by hearing of Native soldiers who were killed.
**Deployment.**

Participants were not asked to discuss their experiences in deployment but many who had been deployed considered it a very challenging outcome of their service. Again, Celeste is the participant who stated she would get ten jobs if it meant she did not have to be deployed again. Deployment was not only a stress on the soldiers but a stress on the families of participants as well. In particular, the mothers found it very overwhelming to be so far away from their children.

**Health of Native communities.**

Several of the participants questioned military operations in other countries while the health of Native communities were still in dire conditions. Some of those participants even questioned why so much money was being spent overseas when treaty obligations have yet to have been made at home. Participants often joked about how Non-Native soldiers had a hard time adjusting to the lack of utilities during training or deployment but for the Native soldiers it was like being on the reservation. These concerns casted doubt on some participants feelings about their service to the United States.

**Soldier challenges and obligations.**

Jayson shared with me that he avoided deployment on three separate occasions during his enlistment. He concluded that guardians of a higher power were protecting him. Nonetheless, he was able to articulate very clearly why he detested his experience as a soldier. When asked about his challenges in the military, he discussed what it meant to feel like he lost his identity.

Jayson: Uh losing my identity. Losing who I was and I didn’t like the feeling. I really thought I was in prison. And I didn’t like the things they were forcing you
to do. Even though I bet it was worse back in the day. Like about ten years ago I bet it was worse. And I didn’t get that. But I still got the point that I didn’t like the system and I didn’t like what it taught and I didn’t like how it took my identity because you can’t grow your hair. Or you can’t shave your face or you can’t grow out whatever you want or they don’t allow you to do that or glasses have to be BCGs or you know all these government regulations and bullshit. And piles and piles of laws that you have to follow specifically and laws about how to make love to your wife and all kind of like weird shit. Like please like. It’s just I don’t know. Yeah so to me it was like I didn’t like it. It was too restricting and that was a challenge. And for them to shave my hair and be like that and be just a number and not really being someone that people care about. That you’re just there to like do what they say and that’s how it goes and that was a challenge. The other one was being a Native American in the Army when I don’t know. When I myself still have tension against the United States government and like I don’t know if I’m making the right choice but I’m here, haha. And I might as well get something out of it.

Essentially, Jayson detested the lack of control and freedom he had over his life. Celeste and Aaron also felt that the challenges of being a soldier were significant challenges in their experiences.

**Beneficiaries of war.**

Celeste, Jayson, and the older pre-9/11 veterans expressed concern that the real beneficiaries of war were President George W. Bush, oil companies, weapons producers,
and the non-enlisted officers of the military. The soldiers were the men and women who were paying the greatest price for the wars.

In the introduction of this study, I shared the monetary figures of the companies that were financially benefitting from the wars contrasted with the lives that were being lost by both American soldiers and Iraqi civilians.

**Sexism and sexual harassment.**

Celeste and Jessica both experienced negative treatment from officers, which were related to their sex as females. Jessica’s experience was laced with racism as the officers told her that she would return to the reservation and become a punching bad. Celeste’s experience was broader. She spoke about the challenges of working with men as it pertained to sexism and sexual harassment in everyday working situations.

Celeste: And another thing is there are times when I seriously I mean I’m not sexist but I just cannot stand working with men sometimes. Like they don’t know how to multi-task. A lot of them they’re sexist. There’s a lot of sexism. A lot of sexual harassment. I dealt with a lot of that. And although they implemented rules and regulations and laws, it still happens. You know the way women get treated. The way they’re kind of they’re not allowed to make decisions or so we have. And there’s a lot of men who are like the old school. They call it the old Army and the new Army. Part of that old Army who don’t want the women to have a voice or don’t want to hear their perspective or don’t want to hear your plan. You know what I mean? Because they know it. They know it all. So there were a lot of like I said there was a lot of sexism. A lot of generation clashes, …there were a lot of like rank wars you know. And a lot of people who were
there for like selfish reasons. A lot of ineffective leaders. A lot of bad leadership so yeah. I mean it’s just like any other organization except it’s a little more serious cause you’re like in the middle of a conflict. But yeah.

Rethinking recruitment.

The majority of the primary participants sought military recruitment as opposed to being sought after by recruiters. Nonetheless, many of them expressed distress over the information or lack of information that was made available to them by the recruiters they worked with. Jayson discusses how he felt he was tricked.

Jayson: Mmm they trick everybody. They sign up okay how much do you want to sign this contract for? And whatever contract you sign to get into the military, they got your butt for eight years. So okay I want to go to the army for three years. I thought I was getting in three years. After the third year, see ya. Give me my GI Bill. Catch you later. And um nah. That’s the end of your first contract. And you gotta serve eight years total. And so when your three years are up they ask you how you want to spend your next years until you serve your eight years. And that’s the trick is that you’re in for eight years. And they say you could get on the. You can say I just want to be out just leave alone. And they’ll put you on a list and they’ll call you every three months. To make sure you’re living there in case they need to draft somebody. And they do a lot of drafting. Or they were when they were going to Iraq a lot. They would do a lot of drafting from the inactive reserves. Inactive ready reserve whatever it’s called. IRR. So they trick you. I don’t know. I don’t dig it.
While none of the participants decided to enter the military based on recruiters who visited their schools, some did acknowledge the presence of the military in their schools. When asked about being expected to follow a certain set of coursework in college, Celeste brought up the presence of military recruiters at her high school.

Celeste: I was only because I did so well in school. And I like graduated top ten percent. And like that was you did good so you’re going to go to college you know. That was. But I’ve seen you know some of my friends getting pushed more towards like vocational schools or not being encouraged to go to college. I remember the recruiters always being there…because like our school is primarily like we had a huge percentage of Natives and I think that they targeted those kids because they know the background. They know the stories. They know that there’s not a lot of money. Or you know there might not be any money for school. They knew that you know the larger percent of the Natives were in like the lower half of the graduating class. And that was a way to target them. You know so yeah I think for me like college was my only option because I had done so well. But for others it wasn’t.

From a Native recruiter’s perspective, Mark explained his approach as a long time recruiter.

Mark: When I talk to kids out there as a recruiter, it got to the point for me that it really wasn’t about recruiting trying to get them to join the Marine Corps. I looked at it more like hey this is an opportunity for you whether you want to take advantage of this opportunity is up to you. And if they do or if they sound interested but you know “I’m going to go with this plan of going to school” or
technical school whatever. I was cool with it. I was encouraging them well that’s
great man. At least you have a plan and stick to your plan. I would try to help
them out as much as I could. Well did you think of this? Or maybe you should
look into this as well. So I mean it got to the point with me that I wanted them to
be successful with whatever they did and just preparing for life after high school
you know like as soon as possible. Not the last semester of the school year it
would help them out a lot better. I wanted them to understand that. Cause a lot of
these kids they didn’t hear that from home. They didn’t get that encouragement.
One thing I noticed is that they preach education education education but there’s
more to it than that and I just kind of talk about things that I’ve been through you
know. Hey you go out there, how are you going to get around. You know you
need to have a car. Are you going to buy a bus ticket or what are you going to do.
You know that kind of stuff. Just the cost of transportation you know did you
even factor that in to your finances you know. Or even having a vehicle. Do you
have a car payment? Oh you do or you paid it off. Now you have to pay
insurance. So just things like that.

I visited with Marine and Army recruiters at a mall that was in proximity to many of the
participants and asked them about what information they shared with potential recruits.
They did not make personal connections in the same way Mark did but they did state that
they present their branches as an opportunity as was the essence of Mark’s approach.
Both recruiters did acknowledge that in the current time (2011), there was not a high
demand for recruits. The Marine recruiter was especially interested in talking to me
when I told him I was doing a study on Natives who entered the military. He was quick
to make the Code Talker connection for me. Both offices were gracious and allowed me
to take brochures even though I was not a potential recruit.

Racism.

Blatant racism was reported by several of the participants. Those with more
college education seemed to report it more often. Both Celeste and Jayson described
instances of what they perceived to be racism. As I noted before, Jessica experienced
racism and sexism together.

Jessica: Well I can tell you one thing that was told to me when I got out. I was.
My captain and my first sergeant. You know everyone just has this negative
perception of Native Americans, like “oh you’re never going to be anyone.
You’re just going to go back to the reservation” and my first sergeant I had
actually got divorced a month before deploying to Iraq. And he was like “oh
you’ll probably just end up going back to your ex-husband and just being a
punching bag and what not.” But when I had graduated from my master’s
program, I actually ran into him. He and my first sergeant and the captain. And
my captain and I were actually in this same masters program but he never
completed it so he was like “you totally proved me wrong.”

In general, racist stereotypes by other soldiers or by officers was the most common type
of racism the participants shared stories of. Racism was not a question that was directly
asked unless it was first brought up by a participant. If it was, I also for the participant
for a story or an example.
Maintaining standards.

Jayson described his challenges with the idea of becoming a soldier and feeling stripped of his identity. Participants also talked about following restrictions, following orders, and knowing when to salute. Other standards included maintaining physical fitness. Aaron describes his challenge as maintaining his weight.

Aaron: Well I was it was definitely challenging just to finish out. Maybe my body type didn’t fit the typical soldier body type. It was a lot of work to maintain that and that’s the reason why I’m real happy not to be in the military cause they wanted to me at like 185 and that was like whoa. That was really hard to do especially with how much I like food and everything but uh I guess that was the most challenging part. Just keeping physically fit and passing all their tests that they have to keep you a certain body type. So but it’s all part of the job and I did my part for five years and so.

Adjustment to civilian life.

While adjustment to civilian life made the benefits of military experience clear for many participants, it also highlighted the challenges they had to face as veterans becoming civilians. Nick’s story was especially touching with his use of metaphors.

Nick: I tried a few times talking to my ex-girlfriend or either sometimes my parents or friends but it’s kind of hard to fully express. They’ll be sitting there with a deer in the headlight look. And sometimes they try to agree with you just cause they think that “well if I agree” maybe I’ll understand. I mean you may think I understand whatever but its not really that. I mean you know they don’t after a few things you’re saying. You’ll be like all they’re doing is just really
nodding you know? They don’t really have like anything to say because they don’t know what to say. They don’t know how to express what I’m saying or be able to imagine what I’ve seen. So it’s kind of hard. It’s just like talking to a wall or something. You want a little bit of feedback like just a little bit of understanding from other people that knows what you’re thinking. “yeah yeah” and have their little point to the guy “yeah exactly”. It kind of feels a little bit better knowing they actually know what you’re feeling. After being overseas and coming back. Coming back and just trying to relax and say. Over there it was kind of you were always on the go. Coming back you wake up and you want to do something. You want to keep moving. You want to you know. It was kind of hard. Then it got a little bit harder when I actually got out. Just the fact that coming back home and everybody had continued on with their own lives you know? Everybody had a nine to five job or went to school or made plans with other people knowing you weren’t there you know. They just can’t wait for you. Me I just kind of felt like I needed to try to catch up to everybody. After a while it just wasn’t happening. I just…yeah haha. …Yeah it’s just like some body just dropping you off in the middle of the desert and not knowing which is where. …like, should I go there should I go there should I go there. Or will I find somebody there or will I.. you don’t know where you’re going. You don’t know really turn to. So you just feel like staying put in the environment that you’re a little bit familiar too. You don’t really got out and test the boundaries. So what you might find there’s just going to be nothing there. You keep going into nothing. Haha.
LT: So can you tell me about what got you out of that point to where after you came back and you were just kind of like surveying everything, what gave you direction again? Or not that you didn’t have direction but what helped you decide about which avenues to pursue?

Nick: Well with me I guess when I was dropped in the middle of the desert, for a while I stayed where I was dropped. But now I’m I guess you could say I’m just I don’t know where I’m going. I’m still trying to find. I’m still in that stage where I’m trying to see if anything comes my way. See if I see a house or see something later on down the road. I’m in a place where I’m getting there. And I’m getting like maybe I’m in a small town or something. I’m making way towards the big city. Just a lot of little towns to help me I guess be prepared. I’m still wandering around. I’m still trying to figure out what I want to do. Where I want to go. It’s just going to take time. It’s going to take a little bit of time.

In effect, Nick was having a difficult time adjusting to finding fulfillment and understanding in his everyday life, especially in his goals and relationships. He did not desire to go back into the military but he was still seeking positive stepping-stones on to his next endeavors.

Regret.

Quite simply some participants expressed regret over their decisions to enlist but they were all very thoughtful about trying to make the best of how their experiences would help them in their futures. Regret was often due to lost time, stress on being away from home, overcoming traumatic experiences, and not understanding the full demands that were going to be made upon them.
Summary

The positive outcomes to participation in the military for Natives since September 11, 2001 have been: educational benefits, economic benefits, structure, discipline, sense of accomplishment/fulfillment, acknowledgement, and health benefits.

The challenges include: post traumatic stress disorder; soldier challenges and obligations; deployment; having issues with the international conflicts; maintaining standards; adjustment to civilian life; regret; loss of life; considering the health of Native communities; racism; having to rethink recruitment; questioning the beneficiaries of the wars; sexism; and sexual harassment.

All positive and challenging outcomes have links to education in terms of both schooling and knowledge gained outside of school.

Alliances, Support Groups, and Organizations

What alliances/support groups/organizations exist for Native American veterans or military recruits and how are they linked to education? Table 5.9 is an exhaustive list of alliances, support groups, or organizations that were mentioned by the primary participants.

| Table 5.9. Horizontalization Codes: Alliances, Support Groups, and Organizations |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| **Specific**                    | **General**                     | **Other responses**             |
| VA                              | Mentorship within the military  | People are unaware of Native Americans and their livelihood (Lack of public education) |
| (Supports mental and physical health for education) | (Includes educational mentorship, obtaining educational benefits) | |
| VA Special Programs             | Codetalker recognition          | Technology helps (Could be a mode for education) |
| (Supports mental and physical health for education) | | |
| Veteran Student Affairs         | Local veterans’ societies—      | Better treatment now for |
There were not very many specific types of institutions to begin with so the meaning units are fairly similar to the horizontalization.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.10. Meaning Units: Alliances, Support Groups, and Organizations</th>
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<td><strong>Specific</strong></td>
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<td>VA</td>
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<td>Veteran Student Affairs</td>
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VA.

All participants were very thankful for the VA. They expressed a sense of appreciation for how the VA offered counseling and physical health services with an understanding of what they had gone through as veterans. The VA was also a place where participants could see other veterans and feel a sense of comfort being among those who had similar experiences.
**Veteran Student Affairs.**

Veteran student affairs was only mentioned by one participant but seeing as how many veterans return to college after completion of their service, this could become a significant resource in the future.

**Informal mentorship and networks.**

The most powerful and accessed resource for veterans of the last ten years was from informal mentorship or networks. This refers to friendships and professional relationships that the participants had with their comrades, veterans in their family, role models, or their officers.

**Local veteran organizations.**

Most of the participants were aware of local veteran organizations but did not participate in them. Having been to a meeting as a researcher, it is clear that the foundation of these organizations are made up of older veterans with the largest representation coming from the Vietnam era. That is not so say that more recent veterans are not welcomed. They just have not begun to engage on a regular basis. The popularity of veteran organizations for older veterans is likely due to the description that Jayson offers.

Jayson: My dad was Vietnam veteran. And him and his friend or his cousin or whatever were both Vietnam vets. They share stories and he runs a VFW post down there in [the pueblo] but we never go. …Um they definitely don’t like to talk about shit. And the only people they’ll talk shit about is with each other. So it’s kind of like a burden that they carry. You see that like the only people they get relief from is someone that has experienced the same thing. I think that’s good
and I think that’s good that they still bond as older men because I think all men need bonding like that. Which is the purpose of clans and societies and ceremony.

*Lack of awareness.*

A few participants did state that they were not aware of any veteran organizations.

*Being a resource.*

Almost all of the participants were more than willing to be of service to their peers or to Native youth seeking military advisement. Nick in particular wanted to find an official capacity for such service. He has begun work with the VA to find a means of being a long-term resource.

*Disengagement.*

Several of the male participants, in all groups, respected the camaraderie offered to them by other veterans but they did not look to seek it themselves. They were ready to put their experience as a chapter in their personal history and move forward. They noted that they did not stand when veterans were called in a crowd to be recognized or they did not introduce themselves as veterans when other veterans likely would. Much of this disengagement was tied back to being opposed to the history and present relationship between Native Americans and the United States.

*Changes over time.*

This theme is in respect to notion that many of the participants discussed how much they have changed over the course of their experiences. What I captured was a
snapshot of their reflections based on their lived experiences up to the point of our meeting.

Summary

Specific organizations that participants referenced were the VA and Veteran Student Affairs. General organizations were: informal mentorship and networks; local veteran organizations; and scholarship organizations. Other responses included: a lack of awareness; being a resource themselves; disengagement from veteran recognition; and observing changes over time.

Veteran Recommendations to Native High School Students

What are the recommendations of Native veterans to Native high school students considering military entrance in the 21st century? Are there alternatives to the military? Table 5.11 is a presentation of the recommendations of the primary participant group of veterans.

| Table 5.11. Horizontalization Codes: Veteran Recommendations to Native High School Students |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Recommendations                  | Alternatives    | Vision          |
| Go in as an officer              | Go in as an officer | Carry on cultural traditions |
| Do ROTC in college               | Don’t do it     | Self-sufficient tribes |
| Ask yourself if want to be a soldier or a Native American? | Be a warrior at home | True sovereignty |
| You have to experience life      | Higher education doesn’t have to be in the classroom | Academy for Native Americans that includes basic training and a specialized curriculum |
| Research to find out is that what you want? | | Make an example/model out of your community |
| Advised for high school students | | Healthier communities |
| Do it for yourself               | | |
| Hear experiences of others      | | |
The meaning units were clustered as follows in Table 5.12.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Vision</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entrance as an officer</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>Cultural, economic, and political sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider options carefully</td>
<td>Be a warrior at home</td>
<td>Academy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Don’t do it</td>
<td>Model communities</td>
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<td>Go in as an officer</td>
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The following are the descriptions for each meaning unit.

**Entrance as an officer.**

The overwhelming recommendation from all veterans was that Natives enter the military as an officer if they are going to pursue it. To enter as an officer, education must come first.

Aaron: I would first tell them that education is important and to take advantage of those opportunities. To see what they are interested in and the military is very physically demanding. And it takes that commitment to be able to do that type of work. So I wouldn’t say that everyone should join that is definitely not the case and there’s real strict…it’s really hard to get in the military. There’s a lot of things you have to go through, physicals so…unless you’re ready for that like boot camp straight out. To go to boot camp straight out of high school I don’t think that’s the best option. I think they should try to go and get their bachelor’s degree and become an officer you know if they want to go into the military. I went in as enlisted personnel, not an officer. So it’s a different world. It would
be nice to have more officers that were Native and you would get that if they go
to school and but uh…I didn’t really see many Native officers but there were a lot
of Native enlisted personnel when I was in the army. So education is a difference
and then yeah if they want to join the military later on then that’s always an
option but.

In essence, most participants recommend attending college first and then making a
decision about entering the military later. If they do decide to enter, then they can go in
as officers.

*Consider options carefully.*

Most of the participants urge Native high school students to consider their options
very carefully and to do a lot of research before deciding to enlist. Jayson had very
ideological points to make.

Jayson: It’s like they don’t allow you to be who you are. And I think Native
Americans have a lot of spirit. I think Native Americans have a lot of traditions
and I think Natives have a lot of, especially from the region that I’m from, Native
Americans have a lot of things that they hold just to themselves and they don’t
really share with a lot of people and so trying to be native American, trying to be
in the military, it don’t work. You gotta choose one or the other. You gotta be
Native American or you gotta be a soldier. And so it’s no place for Native
Americans. It’s only a place for soliders.

Darren adds the notion of doing it for yourself which also a strong theme from Jessica.

Darren: So like when people ask me about military advice now. At first I would
have been like yeah go for it you know it’s good. But then now I tell them if you
really want to do it on your own, personally if you really want to do it on your own then you can do it. But if you’re doing it because you’re trying to get out of court or you’re trying to escape from something or you’re like you need money all these different things like I wouldn’t do it if those are your reasons. I only tell people like if you really want to do it for you then you’ll make it through. And that’s how I was. I wanted to do it for myself but I know a lot of people around me that didn’t do it for that reason and they’re the ones that are suffering more than I am. You know I was able to pull myself out because I already knew that’s what I wanted and I reminded myself like even though I was going through those times of fear of death and stuff I telling myself Donavon you wanted this. You know this is something that you want. You’re not forced to be here. You wanted this. And that was just kind of reality wake up call that I would always have to tell myself. You know this is something that you wanted so I welcome the experiences good or bad.

From a recruiter’s perspective, I had this exchange with Mark who again represents his singular voice but that does not mean he is the only recruiter who thinks this way.

LT: Have you had a different approach or do you have a different approach during heightened times of like risk of deployment or do you approach it any differently now that like you’ve mentioned we’ve been at war for almost 10 years. Does that play into it or do you mostly stick with the other things you’ve talked about?

Mark: I think I’ve kind of learned and evolved with the experience of recruiting for so long for so many years. And myself being older, experiencing different things, having a family and stuff like that you know. More financial responsibility
and things like that. but I always made it a point this time around to really emphasize to these kids that it’s a commitment that they’re making. Not just to me but to themselves. I’m not tricking you to join the marine corps. You’re the one that’s signing yourself. You’re the one that’s going to take to the physical. You’re the one that’s going to take the ASVAB. And you’re taking the ASVAB because you want to see how well you’re going to do so it opens up opportunities for you to have a job. I would always emphasize that to them that this is a commitment and that’s what we’re looking for. We don’t want you to waste. I don’t want to waste your time and I don’t want you to waste my time. And I think just like that lady said, being straight forward it alleviates a lot of things. I can understand you being apprehensive or scared or whatever. Right now if you’re not ready or willing to do this but you’re interested, that’s fine. If we go weeks sometimes to think about it that’s fine. Talk to your mom and dad or let me talk to them. And then you can make that decision down the road but keep in mind the more you wait the more people. People are going to join irregardless if you’re still waiting. Cause they’re going to be taking up all these other jobs and being able to kind of ship to boot camp whenever they want and so forth. That’s just how it is because it’s not like we have jobs available all the time because recruiting and confirmation, we can only have so many military police officers in the marine corps for this year so once all those jobs are taken up, then that fields closed. But guess what? You can’t do that anymore cause it’s closed. To me just that seems to work a lot better. Being really direct with them. And not giving them a way out….but I look at the military when it relates to native Americans as
a good opportunity. I really believe that in my heart and I think that from the time I retire on if I see maybe it would be good for somebody I would encourage them. It’s really all about making good choices. And finding doing some research and making it a choice. I would encourage them. Hey just look into it. It’s an option. You don’t have to take it but at least you kind of know. You might not even be qualified but at least you kind of know. If you’re not qualified for some reason then hey you can don’t even worry about it and kind of focus on something else. I just think it’s a good opportunity and I definitely learned a lot from it.

Mark’s approach is essentially for Native youth to understand the opportunities available to them as well as the challenges that will be needed to fulfill the goals linked to those opportunities. In school, it is having the skills, the financial assistance, and the logistics of attendance prepared and worked out. For the Marines, it is understanding the physical challenge, commitment, and passion that is involved with joining. His approach is not to trick anyone into joining but to develop a relationship with high school students so they best understand what will benefit them the most after graduation.

Alternatives

**Higher education.**

The primary alternative to the military at this time is higher education.

Nick: The only experience from military is…like I said it’s unforgettable. It’s good. It makes you think. It makes you work hard for certain things. It makes you a stronger person. Independent. Of course you can do anything well. You just got to get your mind set right. And education will do the same thing. It will
Nick makes the point that a person can get similar benefits out of education as they would in the military. Aaron states that college is the better place to start before entering the military.

Aaron: Well I’m sure after September 11, um 2001 right? I’m sure the desire to go join the military was a little bit more with the terrorism strikes. So that initial patriotism, um wanting to be in the military, probably hit Natives, Native youth stronger because they have that, I think there’s that stronger feeling to serve the country. Maybe not to prove something but to give back or to earn their place to feel like maybe they need to do that to join the military. So there was probably more enlistments. But now I think it’s probably cutting back if anything with extended wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and so I think that education is definitely the better option for Native youth and they need to start there and go to college first before they decide they should be in the military.

**Be a warrior at home.**

For those young men and even women who want to follow a warrior tradition, Jayson advises service at home.

Jayson: My advice is if there is someone interested I think like for me, military wasn’t for me. Some Natives, pshh, they’re all about it but then they forget where they come from and they forget a lot of things so then they just turn into a soldier. So I would ask them the question of like do you want to be a Native American or do you want to be a soldier? And that would be the question that they should ask
them right there. So that’s the choice. That’s the ultimate choice that you’re making. You could be a soldier or you could be a Native American because there’s no really being both. You could be a warrior in your community. You could be a warrior around here. And that’s a warrior. That’s not a soldier. So that’s the difference. So what do you want to be cause… and that’s what I would ask the kid.

Jayson is speaking to those who might join the military primarily to honor a warriorhood tradition. His reasoning is that people need to rethink warriorhood in the military because you are not allowed to fully be Native American as a soldier. Practicing warriorhood through service at home is his recommended option.

**Don’t do it.**

Most participants are hesitant in making black or white recommendations, as has been shown. However, sometimes when the person considering enlistment is very close to home, a participant will be very straightforward.

Aaron: Yeah cause when I joined I didn’t know what it was about and then after being in there for almost two years now and then my brother telling me that he wants to join too. I was I mean flattered that he wanted to be like me. Then I honestly told him that it wasn’t a good choice a career path. The Marine Corps has a lot of ups and downs.

LT: So if anyone else aside from your brother asked you, you know, should I join the military? What would your advice be?

Aaron: I would tell them to do whatever they please but do their research and see how it is first. What kind of benefits are they really going to get out of it.
LT: Okay. Would you recommend they talk to other veterans or teachers or anyone in particular as part of their research?

Aaron: I would recommend they go talk to a recruiter but ask them questions and then … on how you can get him off the job off his marine job and talk to him especially on what it’s like an stuff.

In the end, when it came to his brother, Aaron advised against entering the military. However, when it came to other people, Aaron advised that they do their research before signing up for any branch.

_**Go in as an officer.**_

While this is still going into the military, it is considered an alternative to enlisting straight out of high school.

**Vision**

A few participants offered their personal vision of alternatives for Native youth who want to enter the military.

_**Cultural, economic, and political sovereignty.**_

Vision was not a question that was posed to the participants but some discussions led to ideas about sovereignty. In essence, participants who spoke of it noted that until true and comprehensive sovereignty is achieved, there would never be a complete alternative to military entrance for Native youth. More discussion on this will follow in the final chapter.
Academy.

Celeste dreams that Native nations might have an academy that teaches and maintains Native cultural values but also provide the essence of basic training for those who have interests in the soldier aspect of the military. In that type vision, youth would not have the dilemma that some do now as Jayson describes.

Jayson: Because they’ve grown up to not American values or military values. They’ve grown up to traditional values. And so them going in there. It’s confusing. Or it’s like it’s adaptation. And you gotta adapt either way. You do. But it’s like the second part of it is do you hold on to your own beliefs or do you or can you fight the beliefs that they’re trying to push in your head? And so for Natives it’s a war. It’s like a mental war. And it’s like a war over your heart or where your heart belongs.

Model communities.

Jayson’s vision is to make an example out of one’s community in becoming healthy and sovereign. He states that once a community reaches that point, they can then become a model that can spread across tribes. Having these types of communities would dispel the need for many Natives who might enter the military.

Service learning across tribes.

This vision was not included in the tables because it comes from a pre-9/11 participant. However, it was a vision that the participant had thought about to a great extent. Vietnam veteran William envisions a service learning experience for Native youth that would take them to doing work with other tribes across Native America. They would then learn the values of service while gaining an appreciation and understanding of
similar cultures. This would then make Native youth more productive members of their tribes once they return home.

**Summary**

Recommendations from veterans to Native high school students considering military enlistment are to consider their options carefully and to go in as an officer. The alternatives to enlistment are: higher education; being a warrior at home; not to enter at all; and to go in as an officer. Veterans who thought about this prior to meeting me offered visions of sovereignty, having a Native military oriented academy, and creating model communities for replication.

**The Umbrella Research Question**

The umbrella research question was: is there relationship between education and Native American participation in the military from 2001-2011? The following sections will address the question.

**The essence of the experience for the participants**

The essence of the experience for each participant was shared in the introduction of the participants in the methodology chapter in order to provide for better contextualization for the reading of the current chapter. In review, the core participants are: Jayson, Jessica, Celeste, Nick, and Darren. The other primary participants are Adele, Mark, Phillip, Faren, and Aaron.

Jayson and Darren both attended college for a period of time before struggling with issues of distraction and deciding to enter the military. Jessica and Celeste both completed their college degrees before enlisting in the Army/Army Reserves with signing
bonuses and having their student loans paid off. Nick enlisted in the Army straight out of high school because he wanted to be independent and be of service to people. Jayson and Celeste accept their decisions but have had deep reflections on the consequences of the time they have had to devote to the Army/Army Reserves. Jessica, Nick, and Darren are all enthusiastic and positive about their time in the military but do reflect upon some of the challenges they experienced or are continuing to experience.

Faren also entered straight out of high school and was inspired primarily by his family and cultural legacy. Mark attended a semester of college before deciding he needed to try another direction and was intrigued by the passion of the Marines. Phillip was attending an elite college but needed a financial and career field solution to his struggles with his tuition and major. He also wanted to fulfill a moral desire to serve. Aaron was attending college and was doing fairly but decided to agree to enter the military on the spur of a moment decision while being approached by a recruiter at the mall. Adele completed several semesters of college but decided she needed the security, stability, and discipline of the Army after some time of not taking classes or finding employment. Since our interview, she has decided to not report to basic training and to consider Officer Training School. Faren and Mark are and continue to be very proud Marines. Phillip is content with his service and is focused on graduate school. Aaron is on deployment and expressed that he regrets his decision to enter the military.

While all participants experienced the phenomenon in various capacities and had differentiating experiences, there was an essence that emerged across the field of lived experiences.
Composite Description of the Phenomenon

Essentially, when making the decision to enter the military, primary participants sought an opportunity to balance their values, goals, and needs in what they perceived to be a solid familiar institution. In most cases, the institution of the military or military branch was familiar to a participant because of their family’s prior experience.

Tribal and family traditions of participating in the United States military have become linked to cultural concepts of what it means to serve. The sociocultural and political conditions of Native people in the U.S. foster a need for both military benefits and cultural pride in Native communities. Demonstration of Native contributions and allegiance to American ideals exist in various degrees. These ideas are rooted in the lived experiences of Native youth inside and outside of schooling. Issues in high school and college education enhance the search for making meaning out of being both a Native American and a student or soldier.

The positive outcomes include the tangible benefits that are received economically, through education, and in health services. The knowledge gained from experiences throughout the term of participation contributes to the future path of veterans. Both the tangible benefits and knowledge generating aspects of military service enhance, in most instances, fulfillment of higher education goals.

The current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan amplify the moral, physical, cultural, emotional, intellectual, health, and spiritual challenges of Native soldiers prior to, during, and after periods of service in the U.S. military.

The primary institutional resource for Native American veterans in the last ten years has been the VA. Recent veterans are mostly aware of local veteran associations in
and outside of Native communities but have yet to engage in participation. Most recent veterans turn to informal mentorship and networks within and outside the military. Some veterans are unaware of organizations or have chosen to disengage from their public identities as veterans. No matter what the perspective veterans have of the military, they understand their sense of responsibility to each other and future potential Native veterans. The link to education lies in the knowledge of what it means to experience being a soldier in the United States military. That knowledge is a source of education and research for Native youth.

Most veterans, regardless of era, recommend that education be given the highest consideration prior to potential entrance in the military. If an individual chooses to pursue the military path, that person can then enter as an officer which provides for greater benefits and more respectable conditions. Some veterans do recognize the immediate opportunities available to Native high school graduates whose options are limited or whose goals are clearly in sync with enlistment. In any case, the decision must be well researched and considered very carefully. Alternative suggestions to military enlistment are similar to the recommendations: 1) go to college or 2) get a degree and enter as an officer. Some suggest foregoing the option completely and/or focus on being a warrior at home. Especially passionate veterans envision greater practices of sovereignty, which would allow for tribal nations/communities to run academies, service oriented experiences, or to create models for replication across tribes.

**Conclusion**

The objective of this chapter was to present the data based on the interviews with the primary participants that was significant in offering answers to the focus questions.
The epoche of the researcher was withheld in this chapter. The experiences that were shared in the previous chapters were bracketed out. The final chapter will include a summary, discussion implications, and outcomes. Primarily the chapter will provide a Tribal Critical Race Theoretical analysis to the data found for each focus question. A great wealth of data was collected from the interviews with all participants. It was an especially humbling and rewarding experience for me to meet every veteran and student that I spoke with. I am a more complete and inspired person for every single word and story that was shared with me. I will cherish the time spent with each veteran and student for the rest of my life. I only hope to have assured each person that I met with that my experience with them was heartfelt and that I valued their relationship to me in whatever way suited them best either as a friend or professional acquaintance. As will be read in the final chapter, I do not discredit any lived experience that was shared with me but use everything that I learned to best analyze the phenomenon of Native American participation in the military in the last ten years.
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND OUTCOMES

The government’s going to use you for their purposes and they’re going to get everything they can. And this is what I always tell my soldiers, I’m like “they’re going to use you for everything you have. So why don’t you use them for everything they have? Every benefit. Every dollar they can give you. You take advantage of that whether it’s healthcare, whether it’s monetary, gifts, or…education benefits. I mean use that to the max. Give your kids your benefits or you know something.” I’m like, “because they will take everything they can from you.” … I try not to be too pessimistic about that but sometimes that’s just how it is.

-Celeste

Summary of Study

The relationship between education and Indigenous participation in the military from 2001 to 2009 is an intricately woven story of pre-colonial Indigenous values, a history of racist Euro-American invasion, and the continuing endurance of love between one Native generation to the next. It is a story that begins in the emergence of Indigenous peoples to the earth. It is greater than the boundaries, the weapons, the policies, and the suffering that are the roots and the product of what has become the United States of America.
The umbrella research question of the study asked if there was a relationship between education and Native participation in the U.S. military. The answer is that a relationship does exist on multiple levels. The first level is in the education that Native youth receive outside of school. They learn the values of family tradition, pride in Native culture, and the need to achieve in the dominant society of the United States. Achievement is measured in the ability to be recognized for financial independence and equivalent social standing with the descendants of the immigrants to this Native homeland. The second level of an educational relationship is in the history of American Indian education and the current state of schooling for Native youth. The history of education for Natives has been shaped by United States’ ideologies, which privileges Euro-American pedagogy and curriculum in efforts to strip Native nations of their identity and resources (Adams, 1995; Lomawaima, 1999; Smith, 2005). Furthermore, this legacy prevails in current schooling institutions, as both the pedagogy and curriculum remain largely centered on Euro-American constructs (Faircloth & Tippeconnic III, 2010). This state of education allows for dominant White society to retain control over what counts as knowledge and what measurements of knowledge are to be implemented in schools.

While great progress has been made by Native educators to gain control over the schooling of their youth, the funding for the education of Native Americans remains linked to overarching national policies that continue to measure Native students as underachieving (National Indian Education Association, 2010). As a result of such measurements and results, Native students are forced to contend with schooling experiences that either limit their preparation or their consideration of opportunities
related to higher education. Eight of the ten primary participants entered college right after high school but only two of them completed their bachelor’s degrees prior to enlistment. These eight participants who did initially enter colleges or universities either: 1) struggled with the challenges of curriculum and institutional structure or 2) completed college but still found a need for greater education or repayment of loans. The two other primary participants who did not enter college immediately after high school either: 1) did not deem college an option and/or 2) were focused first and foremost on attaining military experience.

The first focus question asked how the experiences of veterans in education formulated their ideologies as they decided to enter the military and if education and hegemony were linked in this context. The findings were that participants had generally positive experiences from Kindergarten to the completion of eighth grade. There were some instances of blatant racism from teachers or problems with participants’ family life but overall there were not any perceived significant problems with schooling experiences. From these early years and into high school, participants developed ideologies that framed success as being college degree attainment, serving in the U.S. military, or both. In most instances, the ideologies either began at home with their families and were reinforced at school or vice versa. All participants indicated that their sense of fulfillment in life included educational attainment and/or military service. They were essentially taught to engage in the Achievement Ideology (MacLeod, 2004). The participants expressed their belief that their hard work would result in financial or educational rewards.
The primary participants attended schools located within or in proximity to Native communities. They were all asked to describe the classes they enjoyed or disliked as well as any educational experiences that influenced their decision to enter the military. None of these participants made reference to the curriculum of the schools as being a factor they identified as being significant in their decision-making process to actually enter. This included the lack of naming Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) programs. In hindsight, I would have asked participants specifically if they were involved in JROTC. The sole mention of the program came from Aaron who stated that his experience with JROTC solidified his decision, at the time in high school, not to join the military because he did not like the experience he had with the drills and instructors.

A limitation of the study that emerged was that I did not seek or obtain research permission from the University IRB or the high schools to visit JROTC programs. However, the phenomenological process of data collection is interview-based and that is where the resources were directed. Future research will incorporate more attention to the details of the high school curriculum of participants in terms of both JROTC programs and how students formulate their values based on specifically identified content learned within their classrooms.

Patricia M. McDonough (1998) expands upon the concept of habitus and presents the college-choice organizational habitus in how the culture learned at home and in school shape the aspirations of students. Having a strong sense of Native American identity was also apparent. This meant that participants felt connected to their family and community through the shared values practiced or encouraged by their tribe. This included providing or giving back to one’s community through service or representation.
as well as being spiritually based in the homeland of their respective tribe in whatever way was practiced. Having traditional cultural connections and the ability to navigate through United State’s society was important to the participants. Their answer to finding this balance existed in higher education or military enlistment. Upon reflection, many participants formed different conceptions of how to attain these goals.

The second focus question was to identify the factors and conditions that shaped the decision of Indigenous individuals to enter the United States’ military. Nine themes emerged: professional development, fulfillment of goals, spontaneity, educational opportunities, family/cultural tradition, life changing experiences, financial needs, structure/discipline, and service orientation. Most participants’ decisions’ were based upon a combination of several of these factors in relation to their current state of education. Participants who desired or needed professional development saw the military as a means for building their résumé, being productive while taking a break from college, or obtaining education through military training. Fulfillment of goals was a factor for participants who developed dreams of entering the military during their Kindergarten through high school years. These were participants who became attached to veterans as role models, saw examples of what the military had to offer other individuals, or fashioned military participation as their eventual destiny. Other participants made the decision to enlist in the military more spontaneously in a response to other factors they were experiencing such as the need for financial stability, structure/discipline, or educational opportunities. Educational opportunities were viewed as having the experience and training offered by the military or as obtaining educational benefits like the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill to pay for school after their terms of enlistment were completed.
This was not only a major factor for the participants but also a factor that most participants cited as being important to fellow soldiers regardless of demographics. Family and cultural tradition was always present even if participants did not name the tradition as a primary reason for enlistment. They all stated that they had close family members who served as a source of inspiration and encouragement either prior to enlistment or during their experience as soldiers. They also all observed that family tradition was linked to cultural tradition for either themselves or for other Native American veterans. Participants often times made the decision to enter the military right after experiencing major life changing events that required them to rethink their goals and direction in life. Those experiences included relationship issues, tragedy, 9/11/2001, and the loss of college scholarships. Again, most factors and conditions for military entrance were interrelated. Financial needs were connected most often to issues in college, finding opportunities outside of college, and securing immediate self-sufficiency without dependence on family members or significant others. The military was viewed as an institution that would not only offer financial structure but the structure and discipline of belonging to an institution that provided and required intensive continuous training. It was an institution that offered immediate rewards provided that participants contributed hard work. This was seen as something reliable that the participants could find security in as opposed to the world that they were previously experiencing. Finally, one of the most interesting factors was the factor of service orientation. Service orientation was not only the concept of serving in the warriorhood tradition or a patriotic contribution to the United States. It was also a moral, even spiritual or religious, need to be of service to other people that participants felt they needed to fulfill. Hence, participants told many
stories about what led to their entrance into the military. These nine themes were the factors and conditions that emerged across those stories. These themes were reinforced by the older veterans but were shaped a little differently according to the era in which they all served.

The third focus question asked: what is the educational, inside and outside of schooling, relationship between veterans and conceptions of traditional culture in the military? Once more, participants told stories about education and traditional culture that took place inside and outside of school. The first connection made between traditional culture and the military was through family tradition existing within Native American tribes. Just like many primary participants had a family tradition of college education, they also had a family legacy of serving in the United States’ military. Annette Lareau (2003) explains the concept of *concerted cultivation* as being the nuanced education parents teach their children at home to prepare them for college. Teaching children how to enter college in the everyday context of their lived experiences occurred for several participants. This did not seem to be the exact case in terms of participants being groomed for the military but it may have been done in more subconscious ways such as praise for older siblings or relatives who were veterans. Many participants spoke about the pride they observed in their families for those who were in the military or who had served. Many also discussed the positive responses they received from their families upon announcing their intentions to join. They also discussed how other community members took the time to congratulate the parents of the participants for having sons or daughters in the military. Participants were also asked to be sources of encouragement for their younger tribal members. In essence, the presence of family members as role
models created examples participants were able to follow and the participants themselves were becoming a factor for others to be cultivated toward military entrance.

Often times, this family tradition led to the strengthening of relationships between participants and other family members whether or not those other family members were veterans. The participants often discussed the pride that family members had in their veterans through the portraits that were proudly displayed in their homes and the recognition that was always inherent in the presence of military family members. Because military participation is held in such high esteem among tribal communities and families within those communities, Native veterans are automatically a source of pride and honor for others. They are honored in parades, community events, news media, and in social recognition. This tribal tradition of participation and honoring of veterans is the second connection.

For the Diné nation, the Code Talkers are the most recognized source of tribal tradition and military participation is most often followed in enlistment in the Marines as opposed to other branches. Furthermore, the honoring of veterans also exists in the revered status that they hold among the tribe and family. This is the third connection found. Native participants spoke about how they were not only recognized in honored social treatment but also spiritually by being called upon to say prayers at family gatherings. This revered treatment is also evident in pow wows where the gourd dance, although not originally specific to Native veterans, has become a means for honoring individuals who served in the military.

The fourth connection found was in the cultural values that were seen as parallel to participation in the military. Those values included protection of the people,
protection of the homeland, and even service to the United States in recognition of the dual citizenship Native Americans have now. The fourth connection is in sociocultural issues that exist due to the history between Indigenous peoples and the United States. Issues arising out of acts of genocide and assimilation continue to affect the sociocultural status of Natives. Hence, as discussed in the second focus question, participants had to consider many sociocultural factors when making their decisions to enlist.

After these decisions were made, often times the family reactions to those decisions were positive based again on family and cultural tradition. Those reactions, in most occasions, reinforced participant decisions. The affirmations usually existed in the form of verbal encouragement or the sharing of the news with pride throughout the community. This was the fifth connection.

The sixth connection was that the military, particularly the Marines, were seen as having common cultural aspects with tribes or general Native culture. The most obvious one was the warrior culture but there was also the element of tradition and ceremony. The Marines were recognized by participants as being very strong in tradition and ceremony, which are viewed as two important cultural aspects of being Native American as well. For example, the Marines take great pride in their historical contributions to the military as well as the extended time and requirements one must fulfill in basic training to earn the title of Marine. Additionally, the Navajo Code Talkers were Marines so that was another connection made between cultural tradition and service. Finally, Marine culture was repeatedly described as being very ceremonial, oriented toward communal goals, and a branch that was driven by passion. Participants either made this connection based on their experience or based on what they had observed/heard.
The seventh connection does specifically cite the warriorhood tradition but it is really defining the meaning of being a warrior. Participants recognized that they themselves, or other Native Americans, recognize military entrance as being an act of warriorhood. However, many of them defined warriorhood more as being of service to others in various capacities that either specifically excluded violence or was not centered upon participation in war. They learned this through their experiences in the military and through reexamining their learned values in school and at home. Several participants mentioned that they specifically learned to reevaluate what it means to be a warrior by connecting their experiences to books or lessons learned in academia. The men in the study took more time in contemplating their definitions of warriorhood. The women in the story recognized the warriorhood concept as being present for men but their female identity in the military really became tied to motherhood. They practiced motherhood through their compassion and caring for other soldiers as well as through exiting the military to be full-time mothers to their children.

The eighth connection made was the act of healing. Most participants spoke of the need for traditional healing either for themselves or veterans of past generations whose needs were not satisfied by western medicine. The realization of the changes that have occurred over time was the ninth connection made. In particular, participants across eras spoke about the need to reevaluate participation in current U.S. conflicts due to the uncertain reasons and beneficiaries of war. The recognition of changes over time also spoke back to rethinking the true practice of warriorhood and what it means in 2011.

The tenth connection made was in the views of non-Natives. In terms of popular books such as *Warriors in Uniform* (Viola, 2008) and *America’s First Warriors*
(Clevenger, 2010); military literature; military recruiters; and participant stories, non-Natives recognize Native veterans as having special ties to the military based on Native warrior culture. However, the most engaging story that I was told was when Darren spoke of being in danger and the other soldiers asking him to pray for them because they felt his prayers would be answered due to his Native spirituality. Not only did this take place on the battlefield, but he was also asked to be called upon for his wisdom for general advice in life. An interesting note is that many of the participants, including Darren, felt humbled over their revered treatment by fellow family or community members. They understood that they needed to respect their honored positions but they did not necessarily feel deserving of that treatment.

At the same time, many of the participants were more than willing to share what they knew as Native Americans with non-Natives in terms of educating non-Native people on the history and current state of affairs for Native Americans. In essence, they were more receptive to the respect they were given by non-Natives than by their own communities. A broad example of this is how the participants repeatedly expressed humility in the revered treatment they received from their Native communities. One of most distinctive examples, as previously discussed, was Darren who was overwhelmed by the honor of saying the prayer at his large family gatherings. However, when he was asked by his non-Native comrades to say a Native prayer or sing a song while they were in dangerous territory, he held no hesitation. Another example in a different setting is Jessica who spoke about how she openly shared her veteran status with her peers during class introductions in her doctoral program. On the other hand, she noted that people in her Native workplace and other surroundings only knew of her veteran status by word of
mouth. She did not openly share this information so as not to be viewed as flaunting her background. I interpret this as the participants placing greater esteem on Native values of humility in Native contexts and practicing individual recognition as success in non-Native institutions.

Finally the last connection made was that participants found commonalities and formed bonds with non-Natives during their military experiences that transcended or allied culture. The most apparent bond made was that between mothers. All female participants told stories specific to their experiences based on motherhood and how those experiences related to non-Native women as well. In essence, there were many deep connections uncovered that highlighted culture and military service. Those connections were not simple static ideas but connections that have become especially dynamic over time.

The fourth focus question was to identify the positive and challenging outcomes of participation in the military for Native Americans. This question yielded long lists for both types of outcomes. The positive outcomes were: educational benefits, economic benefits, structure/discipline, the sense of accomplishment/fulfillment, acknowledgement, and heath benefits. Essentially the positive outcomes reflected the fulfillment of reasons for enlistment. The positive outcomes were essentially the tangible monetary based benefits along with the knowledge gained from having experienced military life. Every veteran participant I interviewed spoke of how much motivation they had for their future direction in life based on having gone through, whether positive or not, their time in the military. Unfortunately for participants overall, the list of challenging outcomes stemming from their experiences was far longer. Those outcomes were categorized as:
issues with conflicts, PTSD, loss of lives, deployment, health of Native communities, soldier challenges/obligations, beneficiaries of war, sexism/harassment, rethinking recruitment, racism, maintaining standards, regret, and adjustment to civilian life. In regards to PTSD, I researched military and non-profit websites to better understand the symptoms and signs of the condition (helpguide.com, 2011; military.com, 2011). I quickly realized that it remained important for me to avoid combat oriented questions as I was doing but that I also needed to realize participants were going to share the challenges of their everyday lives with me as it related to their recovery from or management of PTSD.

The benefits have been very useful but they are not as high in value as they once seemed due to the stress deployment has caused on their lives and their families. Nonetheless, the majority of the participants do not regret their time in the military regardless of how much they have had to endure or sacrifice. They all feel that the positive and challenging outcomes have made them the men and women they are today. They all appreciate themselves and their experiences for what they are able to contribute to others now whether it is through knowledge/stories or tangible benefits.

The fifth focus question asked what alliances, support groups, or organizations exist for Native veterans or military recruits and how are they linked to education? Essentially the Native associations that do exist are primarily oriented towards veterans of past eras and are not yet accessed by veterans of the last ten years. Nonetheless, informally, veterans have formed an association with each other that allows for the moral support and understanding they need to make steps forward in life after the military. In terms of non-Native organizations, all veteran participants access the U.S. Department of
Veterans Affairs for their health and adjustment to civilian life needs. They all spoke very highly of the care provided by the VA. The other organization specifically named was the Veteran Student Affairs at a college campus. One other organization was named but it includes the name of a participant’s community that will not be revealed. The only notable non-VA or military organization mentioned was scholarship organizations. Most participants, at one point or another, experienced college life and having financial support through scholarship organizations was a major component of degree attainment or lack of attainment. Other than these organizations mentioned, the participants were unaware of any other forms of support available to them specifically as veterans.

The final focus question asked what are the recommendations of Native veterans to Native high school students considering military entrance in the 21st century and what are the alternatives to the military? The recommendations nearly all participants made, regardless of era served, was that Native youth consider their options extremely carefully and to enter the military as officers if that is their chosen path. They discussed that entering as an officer meant that Natives would have more education going in, have greater financial benefits, have more career opportunities, be able to get promoted faster, would be in less danger during war, and would retire with good pay. They discussed the need to consider options carefully as the military is an option that offers a lot of benefits but does require proximity to danger, potential deployment, and years dedicated to an entity making decisions on their behalf. Alternatives to enlistment discussed were higher education, being a warrior at home, going in as an officer, and to not do it at all. Higher education was a means for advancement socially and financially while continuing to learn through schooling and lived experiences. Being a warrior at home was specifically
speaking to the notion of military participation based on the warriorhood tradition. Being a warrior at home was to practice serving one’s community as a warrior though teaching, mentoring, or other service-oriented methods of contributing to a tribe. Going in as an officer was directed towards those who are determined to enter the military no matter what the consequences may be. Primarily for this population, going in as an officer meant less danger and a better quality experience in terms of how they would be treated. Other participants simply stated that the military should not be an option for any Native American who wants to retain their identity as Native.

Essentially, the advice overall is to attain education and social status through college and to research what it would really mean to serve in the United States’ military at the current time. Veterans who offered their visions of alternatives to the military considered ideas centered upon cultural, economic, and political sovereignty. In terms of cultural sovereignty, the vision was to have programs, education, or institutions that teach cultural traditions first and foremost. Economic sovereignty meant that tribes would be economically self-sufficient and would operate entirely without ties to federal funding. Political sovereignty was viewed as tribes disengaging themselves from the United States and becoming completely autonomous. The alternative institutions envisioned were academies based on service learning and Native values for students to attend or creating model communities within tribal nations that could be replicated in other locations.

In summary, the relationship between education and Native participation in the military is ingrained in Native history and very complex on many levels. All participants were searching for a means to be successful in both Native communities and in United States’ dominant society. Immediately following high school graduation, every primary
participant either entered college or enlisted in the military. As Native Americans, all participants are particularly interested in the health of their communities and to contributing to the pride those communities have in their tribal citizens and families. They all told stories about how their success as individuals in the military or in school reflected well on their communities. Native veterans are both concerned with education received at home and education received in schools. Having both forms of education allows for the best quality of lived experiences either inside or outside the military. Regardless of affinity to the United States, the participants in my study were all united in Indigenous spirit and love for each other. This is the true meaning of sovereignty and the true story of what our ancestors fought to save: they truly continue to be our heroes and the essence of the warrior spirit in our education.

**Relationship to the Literature**

In relation to empirical and popular literature, my study told the stories of participants who were both enthusiastic and opposed to Native American participation in the military in the last 10 years (Carroll, 2008; Clevenger, 2010; Holm, 1996; Holm, 2007; Ledesma, 2006; MorningStorm, 2004; Viola, 2008). Although my theoretical grounding situated me in opposition to Native participation, my goal was to share the individual stories of passion and triumph both for and against the military tradition in Native communities. While other researchers like Holm and Carroll have done the same, MorningStorm and popular literature authors have remained focused on promoting the warrior tradition in the military while focusing less on the physical and ideological consequences of war. Ledesma’s study was well structured in explaining the factors and conditions for participation over time but did not provide ample critical theoretical
analysis. As stated prior, the purpose of my study was to specifically look at the relationship that existed for Native Americans between education and entrance in the military over the last ten years. Like researchers prior, I included efforts to hear the stories of older veterans as they have laid the foundation and pathway for current Native soldiers. I believe my study to have begun to fill the need for making links between education and military entrance in the current century.

In terms of NCLB and the current state of Native American education, several of the participants found that they were unprepared for college either academically or in terms of maturity. While NCLB and the history of American Indian education in general has focused on standards, Native youth continue to be challenged by the limited design of their schooling. What the participants valued most were teachers who were enthusiastic, taught creatively, and developed personal relationships with. In school at large, participants appreciated one-on-one assistance and encouragement in planning for life after graduation. Only a few participants expressed that they had adequate advisement. The current state of education is not conducive to these best practices. Teachers are forced to teach to the test and curriculum honoring Indigenous knowledge is absent due to the stress of NCLB (McCarty, 2009). Greater flexibility would allow teachers and schools to incorporate creative learning environments and post-secondary curriculum into their educational plans and thus allow for more individualized attention for students.

The reasons given for enlistment in the literature review cited economic reasons, family/tribal tradition, duty/honor, service to the United States, honoring treaty obligations, warriorhood, education benefits, avoiding the criminal justice system, service to tribal people, excitement, cultural values, protection of the homeland, and the
protection of the *ideals* of the United States (Carroll, 2008; Clevenger, 2010; Holm, 1996; Holm, 2007; Ledesma, 2006; MorningStorm, 2004; Viola, 2008). The strongest relationship to my findings was economic benefits, educational benefits, service in general, and family/tribal tradition. The other factors were either not mentioned or were discussed but were not a strong factor for the participant personally to enlist. Overall, the participants in my study found stability in the military by means of finances, structure, discipline, becoming a part of a familiar institution, finding meaning in service, and laying a foundation for college education. The findings on major factors for entrance were essentially similar to those of prior studies but I have much more focus on education and decolonization in my approach.

**Recommendations for Future Studies**

I believe that more research on Native American veterans since 2001, which includes the voices of older veterans, needs to be done from all perspectives. The purpose of that research would surely fill in literature necessities but more importantly would help in the advisement and research that Native youth must have in making holistic decisions about their futures. The fields of education and Native American studies are ideal fields for continued research but studies that include specialized knowledge in sociology, psychology, economics, American studies, history, philosophy, management, anthropology, film, and comparative literary studies would also be of vital analysis in the future. I envision an action participatory research study that would produce academic literature, popular literature, film, and community presentations by scholars and veterans. As researchers MorningStorm and Carroll have noted, there is a
disconnect between academic/decolonization theory and what are perceived to be prevalent veteran’s conceptions of Native American traditions in the military.

**Limitations**

My limitations were: my non-veteran status, the region I worked with, the time I could contribute, my monetary resources, and the type of study I was conducting. While I do position my non-veteran status as a strength in being able to recognize things that I do or do not take for granted, I believe the better strength for a researcher on this topic would be someone who was indeed a veteran (i.e. Holm, Carroll, and MorningStorm). I worked with an excellent region of veterans living in the southwest but my study was limited in that I did not interview Native Americans from other regions that likely have stronger or more subdued traditions of military service. While I did have a fair amount of time and monetary support to complete the study over the course of several years, being able to dedicate myself full-time over the course of those years would have been more ideal. Nonetheless, the lessons I learned while working as a researcher/instructor in college and in high school did allow me greater understanding of my study. Finally, I chose to follow a phenomenological research design because it was the best fit for how I would answer my research questions and address the overall topic. I still consider the phenomenological tradition a success for my study but I believe I was not able to fully comprehend the philosophical and psychological roots of this tradition and apply them, as researchers fully trained in the tradition would have done. Nonetheless, I felt that applying Indigenous methodology where I felt it was appropriate made a tremendous difference in where I might have been lacking complete phenomenological expertise. Combining the two approaches allowed me the flexibility necessary for the sensitive
nature of my topic as well as the structure of methodology needed to fulfill my doctoral obligations within the University.

Specifically in reflecting upon the processing of data through horizontalization, meaning units, and essences, I appreciated the regimen as I had such an abundant collection of data. I was able to utilize the process in a method that would best allow for fulfilling my research objectives. However, there were many detailed stories and metaphors that were told to me, which I partially included in my analysis, that were not clearly captured in the categorization process in phenomenology. The goals of the process were oriented toward finding the essence of the phenomenon for each individual but more importantly for the group overall. The process did allow for very powerful findings. Yet, there are so many more intricacies within the interview transcripts that could be explored and reported given additional methods of analysis or research objectives. If I could change anything, I would have found or somehow created a specific phenomenological research model that provided direction on how to include stories, intricacies, and metaphors in reporting the essences. The findings I reported in the previous chapter are based upon phenomenological analysis. The discussion I present in this final chapter is guided by applying Tribal Critical Race Theory to those findings.

**Introduction to Implications**

In the group of veterans I worked with, I did not experience much personal disagreement with the ideologies of participants and my ideologies as an academic and Native person. We all are connected in the idea of wanting community health, support for Native students at all levels of schooling, and in some sort of peaceful relationship with the United States whether it be as patriotic citizens or as moral intellectual
decolonization activists. In particular, participants like Celeste, Jayson, Brad, Ken, Leonard, Thomas, William, Vicente, and Calvin all applied Indigenous theory to why Native Americans should rethink their participation in the military while the United States’ is engaging in war. Their voices might have seemed unique prior to this study but actually are very well represented in my pool of participants. I did make some concerted effort to include voices such as theirs but many of them expressed their opinions after I had already secured the interviews. My recruitment efforts made no mention of trying to find veterans who were either opposed to or for Native participation in the military, unless I already knew an individual’s perspective going in. In such cases, I would then inform potential participants that I felt it was important to get their perspective, whatever their particular opinion was, for my study. For example I recruited Jayson because I knew he would be critical of the nature between Native Americans and the military. I also recruited Mark because I knew his passion for the Marines and that his profession was to recruit Native Americans into that branch. I wanted both stories to be included so that I would have an accurate portrait of the phenomenon and the recommendations of veterans. I found myself strongly agreeing with both Jayson and Mark throughout their interviews. Having spoken with such a diverse field of veterans, and non-veteran students, I feel that the real critique is not in the colonized mindsets of glorifying Native traditions in the military. The critique lies in the blatant disregard for Native knowledge in schools and inadequate preparation for Native youth once they graduate as well as the lack of honoring treaty obligations between the United State’s and tribal nations which has fostered a sociocultural need for entering the military.
Why is it that my participants who were both veterans and college graduates received more acknowledgement and social reward, from both Native and non-Native society, for their accomplishments as soldiers versus their accomplishments as students? Attaining education in college was seen more as a personal, even selfish goal for Native students. All communities who demonstrated at least a passing interest in veterans viewed participating in the military as an honorable act. The following section will provide an analysis that engages Tribal Critical Race Theory and expands upon this question.

**Implications and Tribal Critical Race Theory**

In review, I am engaging in Tribal Critical Race Theory as a tool for analysis as it best provides tenets that combine both Decolonization and Critical Race Theories. Brian Brayboy’s (2006) nine tenets of Tribal Critical Race Theory employs the elements necessary for considering the implications of the findings in this study situated in the fields of Native American Studies and Education.

*Colonization is endemic to society.*

The colonization of Indigenous peoples by the United States is endemic in that the U.S. has done everything in its power to constrict the identities of Native people so that they are either limited to life on the reservation where they cannot be seen or are fully assimilated citizens serving U.S. White dominant interests. Celeste describes the experience she had when she first arrived in Iraq and was asked what she thought of the progress the military was making in the country.

Celeste: Like when I first got there and saw how everything had improved. …And I’m like these people here, these local nationals people here in Iraq, they live
better than some of my people back home. You know they have access to telephones. They have access to running water. We keep pumping more money while my people back home in our own Native land are like suffering. Cause I’ve seen it. I’ve seen back on the rez. You know some people choose to live like that which is fine. But for the people that you know like at least have it available for them. You know… I feel we’re wasting billions and trillions of dollars on these people who are kind of like Native Americans. I mean when I got off the plane in Iraq I’m like, am I in [home community]? Yeah so but that part of it and especially the fact that I saw so much waste and excess of everything it just made me mad cause I’m like you know they should be helping Natives. They had these treaties and pacts and they’re not honoring them. And they had an obligation to our people and they’re not. And I see these people living better than our own people so that bothered me a little bit. And then it bothered me because I was kind of the only one in my company that knew about things like that.

In essence, Celeste made the connection between her experiences at home on the reservation and what she saw in Iraq. She discusses how there are still needs to be met, federal obligations, in her homeland while she is out fighting a war in a foreign land on behalf of a government that is not considering her identity as a Native American. Furthermore, she later states that she had no one to share her frustration with at the time she first arrived in Iraq. Thus, she recognizes that she is in such an isolated position as a Native soldier that she is unable to relate to anyone else in the field unless they are also Native.
Considering the history of colonization, Native American history has been subjugated to a forgotten space of time in Western history. All that is left, in the context of the colonizer, are the assimilated descendants of Native America who now understand the merits of Western civilization and democracy. According to popular literature like *America’s First Warriors* (Clevenger, 2010) and *Warriors in Uniform* (Viola, 2008), it would seem that Native Americans, in both Native and Western perspectives, have come to the conclusion that U.S. citizenship has been unquestionably embraced and has even become a part of an evolved culture of Native warrior tradition. These two books focus on the celebration of Native veterans as warriors through pictures and stories. The consequences of war on Native communities are either ignored or downplayed. By celebrating Native American soldiers as practicing Native tradition or honoring their U.S. citizenship, the tenet of colonization as endemic to society is fully evident.

However, as Celeste and other participants have demonstrated, the minds of many Native American veterans remain critical and suspicious of the colonial agenda of the United States of America. By calling upon all forms of education, many participants realize that serving in the United States’ military was an experience in which they came to fully comprehend that the history of Native and White relations remain an integral issue in Native communities and U.S. international policy. They have come to respect the tradition that has been established of Native veteran service but are ready to begin discussions of what new traditions can emerge that do not include service to U.S. imperialism. In order to create this type of change, and to engage in coordinating this change, it is vital to obtain the support of veterans such as Celeste in order to articulate
the experiences of Native veterans with their positions of knowledge, reverence, and power in Native societies.

By beginning to: publish in academic circles, communities outside the academy, and online; engage in discussions with veterans and non-veterans; strengthen networks of critical dialog across tribal nations, gender, race, and fields of occupation; and essentially generate spaces where people can come together with the common goal of peace, the hegemony of the military presence in Native country can be viewed more clearly as a colonial project. By presenting research such as this, perhaps those in attendance will become more willing to share their concerns. Furthermore, perhaps veterans who read such various thoughts will realize that they have more commonalities in their critiques than they thought previously existed. Findings such as those being shared in this dissertation as well as other perspectives will be a lot more valuable to Native nations if it is shared in dialogue as opposed to being presented as ultimate truths.

Michael Yellow Bird (2011) has voiced his concerns over Native American participation in United States’ wars but recognizes that the next steps are truly in the heart of Native communities. He proposes, for the sake of saving lives and maintaining traditional principles, that Indigenous Peoples actively engage not only in in-depth discussions but take more proactive roles in the stance their nations take on U.S. war and tribal members participating in those wars through resolutions. These steps work well with my research findings as well as Tribal Critical Race Theory. Essentially, he offers these solutions as simply starting points for instituting critical change as opposed to dictating what should be done. He argues that ultimately communities, veterans,
educators, elders, parents, advocates, and youth must all take responsibility given the destructive nature of colonial war across the globe and in our homes.

*U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.*

No matter what the rhetoric in national policies have stated, the purpose of White invasion on Indigenous peoples/land has always been for power, supremacy, and to obtain wealth. For Native Americans, we have had to endure political subordination, the loss of resources, a social hierarchy, and a battle over the essence of who we are as human beings. These struggles are all hidden from the American consciousness. In the current American conflicts, Jayson identifies the same phenomenon.

Jayson: I think Americans are too saturated in their own lives and their own drama and everything to really give a shit about a vet. Unless it’s someone closely related but even at that point I think a lot of family members give up on those spouses who are dismembered or who are left like that. I think a lot of them get left to just their family that raised them. And so I think it’s a sad thing. I think it’s based on greed and I think it’s based on money and I think it’s based on false morals. False values and I think that’s where American society is at right now.

In terms of the perception U.S. society has on Native Americans who serve, Jayson had the following to say:

Um you have to do something significant. If you want to be known as a warrior. You got to be Geronimo. Or you gotta be the Navajo code talkers. Or you gotta
do something that’s pivotal in history to actually be acknowledged in US history like that.

As long as domestic and international conflicts retain imperialism, White supremacy, and material gain, U.S. citizens who are comfortable with their status quo are not going to debate the merits of the costs of war. It is to their best interest to focus on their individual comforts and material possessions. For Native Americans, service in the military offers both monetary benefits and social status among all societies. This makes reconsideration of military participation extremely difficult no matter what the war debate might look like or if it exists at all. Again, this is why veteran voices that offer a discussion of what might be best for Native soldiers and communities is especially dire. They again have the position of being able to both speak towards the issues and have the respect of being heard. Unfortunately, the prevailing notion is that Native veterans are all in support of the warriorhood tradition and that there is no conflict between U.S. history and current military service. Once more veterans see that their critical analysis is common and accepted, that discussion can grow.

*Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.*

Native Americans are identified, depending on what circumstances suit the U.S. best, as a political or racialized group. Native American attempts to self-identify are often misunderstood. Essentially, this revolving status results in the complete lack of awareness U.S. society has of Native Americans in general. Again Celeste, who has two master’s degrees and is still enlisted, offers an example of how this tenet is experienced from the perspective of a soldier.
Celeste: So I went to a unit in… Texas which is about an hour and a half two hours it would be northeast of Houston, Texas. And when I first got there, those people knew nothing about Native Americans. And I’m just sitting there going, oh my gosh these people are so stupid. Cause like the first week I was there, they would ask “What are you? And I’d say I’m Native I’m Navajo and [other tribe]. I mean I just got bombarded the whole time I was there. Like, “oh so you’re Indian?” I’m not Indian you know. I’m either American Indian or Native American. “Do you live in a teepee? Do you have electricity? Do you have running water?” I mean all those questions so I think a lot of the people like the general American public is like they have no knowledge of Natives. So but you know people groups like the Code Talkers or who’ve brought some sort of recognition to Natives has kind of helped but then…it’s totally like negated by Hollywood with that movie. I’m like that was so dumb…. Yeah Windtalkers.

I’m like okay we were doing such a good job and you just totally ruined it. Yeah. Celeste relates her experience first hand of being treated like she did not exist and when it was realized she did exist was forced to debunk numerous stereotypes. She also gives an example of how popular culture has the opportunity to help inform the American public about Native Americans but those efforts result disastrously as was the case with the movie Windtalkers about Navajo Code Talkers. The movie centered upon the story of the leading White male character and did not do much else but glorify the White soldiers. The Native characters were one-dimensional at best.

Existing in this liminal space, Native American veterans are forced most often to either embrace one of these identities and to demonstrate their willingness to patriotically
serve the United States of America. This results in the revered status among Native communities and the respect of non-Natives for military service. Once more, this has been the most direct method of achieving both monetary benefits and social capital in both Western and Indigenous societies. It has become a means for Native Americans to balance and embrace their political identities as tribal members and American citizens as well as retain positive recognition of their racialized selves or perhaps even honorary membership as Whites.

*Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.*

Essentially, Indigenous peoples desire sovereignty both politically and culturally with full determination of what happens to Indigenous land and tribes. It is a desire to have control over resources and the autonomy to make those decisions independent of the U.S. government. Native veterans and non-veteran students all displayed a passion for making meaning out of their lived experiences as self-sufficient strong willed Native Americans. However, tribal sovereignty and tribal autonomy were not necessarily one of the more apparent factors in the overall experience. Celeste was the main participant who spoke of sovereignty in the context of Native participation in the military. She made the point that the only way to have a true alternative to the military would be to have complete sovereignty as Native nations.

*The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.*

Knowledge is experienced through culture, survival, and academia. Achieving knowledge and combining it leads to power. Not all participants claimed to view their
experience in the military differently than Non-Natives but all veterans did demonstrate their Indigenous lens in how they experienced their lives thus far and what their next steps were going to be. They all held culture, knowledge, and power in high esteem. For Jayson, although he detested his experience in the military, he uses his knowledge as a form of power.

Jayson: Like I said, it’s not meant for me. It’s a whole other world. It’s you giving up your whole life basically to... you sign a paper and it’s over. You don’t get to make no choices for yourself and I just didn’t like it. I figured out there’s better things for me to do with my life rather than serve someone’s military and go fight someone that didn’t do nothing to us maybe. And so there’s morals there too and that’s what I learned from the military. But they also taught me a lot of things too that I used today with the training I got. So there is good but what they do with their training now that I was in I guess coinciding with and I didn’t agree with. But like I said the training I went to yesterday, like I was pretty good with because the training I got in the military was the same class but more basic. More I don’t know sticking it to your head and so that military experience was something too. And even though I didn’t like it, I did learn from those experiences that I had and it made me who I am today.

Jayson is the participant who claimed that you have to make a choice between being a Native American and being a soldier. Once he realized those were his options, he did all he could to retain some semblance of his Native identity and to exit the military quicker than was even possible. He decided that his Indigenous lens was more important than any facet of serving in the military and he embraced this lens as best he could while he
considered himself a prisoner of the Army. Taking what he learned as knowledge, he now practices it as power. Essentially, he understood that the military was trying to assert its authority over not just his body or his actions but over his Indigenous mind.

Another example of how this tenet was evident in the research was how participants told stories about how their fellow soldiers were in discomfort or extreme distress over having a lack of utilities or shelter. They found it quite humorous because to them it was something they practiced as Native Americans back home on the reservation during ceremonies or common events. They felt empowered by being able to practice their knowledge of culture as a means of living without luxury. The empowerment expressed was not just through accepting various living conditions but also through the relationship some participants felt with the land regardless of the location.

_Governmental polices and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation._

In effect, governmental policies have been established to assimilate Native peoples politically, economically, and through schooling. While current policies allow for greater tribal autonomy, funding is still linked towards what is considered appropriate by the colonizing government and those standards are assimilation oriented. Tribal Crit calls for the rejection of assimilation policies in schools and the incorporation of knowledge American Indian communities have into schools. In terms of the study, a key finding is that participants measure their achievements in relation to American standards of college education or military service as being key to having economic and social status. While the participants made cultural ties to both education and military participation, the motivating factors behind college or military entrance was fostered by
assimilationist policies and colonial structures which privilege White supremacy. It was
to survive in capitalist society. For example, participants did not decide to enter the
military because they were primarily motivated by family legacies but because they were
familiar with the benefits that were brought on by legacies in education or the military.
Participants spoke of wanting to practice family and traditional values in life but
specifically connected military enlistment or college education to being successful in
what they deemed the modern world, meaning 2011’s western dominant society. In
essence, assimilation is problematic in this study because participants are still taught that
the only way to be successful in the current state of American society is to join the
military or obtain a college degree. While this may be true from various standpoints, it is
problematic in that Native notions of success are still tied to the values of dominant
White society.

As Native people, we have made strides in entering the military and education
institutions and finding Indigenous meaning in academia or military service. However,
the controlling powers of these institutions remain firmly rooted in the hands of those
with White privilege: the politicians, the businesses, the bankers, the weapons
manufacturers, the standardized testing companies, the military leaders, and the world’s
economic elite. As long as the top power remains in these hands, Native people’s
interests are never going to come first. While it is worthwhile to participate and make
differences in academia and the higher ranks of the military, it is also dire that we create
more Indigenous institutions that are not tied economically, politically, or ideologically to
White supremacy.
Veterans’ experiences varied between eras of blatant discrimination and tracking in schools to more subtle forms of funnelling the less academically inclined away from higher education. Nonetheless, all participants recognized the value of education in schools and by Indigenous communities. While education learned in schools is specifically conceptualized by way of earning diplomas, education learned outside of schools is something that still needs to be articulated and privileged by Native Americans concerned with military and education issues.

*Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrated the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.*

Essentially, Native philosophies embrace community well-being while individual attainment is a value that has been encouraged by western practices of schooling. Nick discusses this tenet as he reflects upon his experience and how it has challenged him in his return to his community.

This tenet was extremely strong when it came to participants discussing how they were treated in their home communities. They were often very self-conscious about being recognized as heroes by their fellow tribal members. They had been taught to be humble and not to seek individual accolades so it was a new experience for them to be placed in the spotlight. However, when it came to being recognized by non-Natives, they were less embarrassed and either neutral or accepted simple acknowledgement. In United States’ mainstream society, they had been taught that was desirable or at least acceptable to be treated as having prestige.
Stories are not separated from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.

Stories are essentially a means of orientation in life. Stories tell the meaning of lived experiences. As I planned and hoped would be the case, the so-called data that I collected were largely based on the storytelling of the participants. The knowledge and the conclusions that the participants were making were all based on their stories growing up in schools and in the military. All the participants referred to experiences they had in life as pivotal to many of the decisions they made or wish they had not made. In making meaning out of their stories, participants used their experiences to inform their current work whether it be in continued military service, in education, or in their new found careers outside of either education or the military. For Jayson, he ingrains how he shares his knowledge with youth in many pedagogical methods.

Jayson: I do it in all types and settings. I talk with them. I express it through art or I’ll express it to them through music or I’ll express it through documentaries. Or we’ll have a talk. Like we talked last night. It was a neat talk because we talked about how to have respect for the Native traditions and why they can’t transfuse that and send that same respect when they’re in a school setting. And if we ask them like are you, so are you traditional? Are you Native American? They’re like yeah. So how many days out of the year are you Native American? They say 365. And we say so you can be respectful and all that stuff here on the reservation but when you go out into the other world those rules no longer apply or what? Because they’re saying at the schools it’s easier to be bad. It’s easier to get in trouble. It’s easier to do all those things. And it’s like so you have to talk
to them about integrity. You talk to them about okay like my definition of integrity is like doing the right thing even when nobody is watching. And so they get it and my way of educating them is talking to them. Or using words that they understand. And this age range where they’re at they’re really wondering about where they come from and who they are. They’re looking for identity. And so they have their creation stories that they learn from their elders but then we also have the history that we try to teach them too. Which is historical trauma, prehistory, and we try to teach them what happened in between. Why we live on reservations, or why we have blood quantum, or why we have a tribal council and governor and different things going on in our communities. But that they understand that they’re in a setting that they can make change to the setting so that they understand the system rather than being in the system and just watch it work around them. I want them to like get out of it and look at it so that they could assess it and wrap their minds around it and fix what needs to be fixed. So one of the other things that I try to push into their heads is for them to make their own choices. And well before they make a choice, to find out all their options. And to make sure that they’re making the best choice for themselves. And a lot of them they just don’t care. They don’t have a lot of role models or their parents are just not parents right now. They probably think they’re good parents and I don’t want to talk trash about no parents but like cause you know I’m going to be a parent so it’s. You can’t really do that. You can’t bash another parent. Cause I don’t want no one bashing me but as parents I guess we all need to wake up. We all need to like feed our kids what they’re thirsty for and that’s our attention or
that’s us teaching them something about the world. And they love it. Cause we talk to them about weird stuff. We talk to them about business stuff. For reals and it’s fun. And I talk to them about how they learn in school and how they have them dividing up algebra. How they have math divided from science and science divided from English and English divided from history. And it’s like I told them the other day, back in the day it was all one class. You didn’t go from here to here. You made connections to everything cause everything is connected. Rather than teaching it separately. You made the connections. Maybe we do need to teach them separately to some extent but you need to make the correlations between them and it makes a stronger mind.

While this passage was an especially extended quote from Jayson, I feel like he explained the connection between theory and story as well as I have ever heard or read before. He integrated the lessons learned at school, at home, and in experience in general with connecting to Native youth in having them understand the interrelatedness of knowledge and Indigenous values systems. By practicing such types of education, Jayson demonstrates the kind of way in which academic theorists can engage in their communities by way of storytelling. In terms of the military and education, questions about power and resources can be answered or taught by role models who know how to engage and interact with kids. This was the case with the recruiter Mark who spoke time and time again about how his strategy was to teach the kids that he knew where they were coming from and he had their best interests at heart. I believe in Mark’s lived reality 100% because that was his experience and he wants Native youth to believe in themselves. At the same time, Jayson’s reality of discovering he did not want to be a
soldier is another precocious jewel of knowledge that needs to be shared with Native youth who are making decisions that could result in life or death. This leads the discussion to the final tenet of Tribal Critical Race Theory.

*Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change.*

Research in Tribal Crit must be done for the sake of taking action on behalf of Indigenous people.

LT: There’s actually one thing I forgot I wanted you to expand on if you could. Earlier I think we were talking about reasons for Natives to enlist or you personally to enlist and you mentioned that you think some people might join because of the warrior tradition but you like put it in [air] quotes. How do you feel about that idea of warriorhood. The connection between warriorhood and the military for Natives?

Celeste: I think there is a strong tradition especially with like I see it more with the Marines. A lot of just generation after generation seeing the fathers and the sons. You know just trying to uphold that I guess you would call it the generational. Just the military keeping it.

LT: The legacy?

Celeste: Yeah the legacy. And I really like that cause there’s just a lot of pride involved in that so um. But on the opposite side of that I think there’s like completely different reasons. Like it’s all changed so much. Like just with like I said these conflicts and the wars. It’s all so much different. Because for example my ex …his grandpa was a Marine and so his grandpa encouraged him because he
you know he wasn’t doing good in school. His grandpa encouraged him to go to join the Marines. So he joined. Him and his brother joined the Marines but when they joined the Marines they joined the infantry and they were deployed. So his grandpa doesn’t understand. They don’t. Like his family doesn’t understand why he the way he is. He has PTSD. And he has some really bad emotional issues and so although there is still that legacy I think you know just trying to understand that and not really knowing what. Because like now with my daughter. I’m like no you’re not. I don’t care what I have to do. You know I’m going to get you through college. You don’t have to join the military. I’m gonna do it. If you want to that’s great. But she’s like no I’m not joining [laughing] you know I really respect the fact that some families have that but you know a lot of them don’t understand like it’s like this day and age what really. You know they might have had a different experience, and especially someone who. Cause we have just between the Vietnam war and the war today, there’s this huge gap. And there’s several conflicts in between that but not like these. So the people that were in between that, basically our parents, they didn’t experience any of that so they were still trying to encourage their kids but don’t really understand what they’re getting them into.

LT: So would you feel like it’s more of a family tradition versus a warrior tradition?

Celeste: Yeah I would say it’s more of a family. But like I said a lot of the families because like you know they don’t really know exactly is going on. Like I said for example my significant … guy like I said his family doesn’t understand.
They were proud of him and he’s a warrior in their culture in their tribe but at the same time they don’t know like emotionally what he’s been through you know. They want to hold him on this pedestal and. But they don’t so rather than saying you know he needs help. They’re like no he’s strong and he can get through this. He’s been through this and that and he’s going on his fourth deployment. And I’m like okay how’s he going to come back you know? Do they understand it’s not just going there fighting? So there’s like two sides to it.

Again, I include a long description of the issue as discussed by Celeste because there are so many elements at play in the encouragement of military enlistment and the need to rethink the family tradition that is being upheld when Natives participate. Several participants have noted that they have actively had to dissuade their sons, daughters, or younger siblings from considering military enlistment based on family tradition. These participants encouraged either higher education or officer training. In essence, military veterans are indeed reconsidering what it means to be a Native soldier and that reconsideration reflects tenets present in theory traditionally housed in academia.

The current situation, the wars and the state of education in the United States, is a prime opportunity to work towards social change as veterans have their lived experiences in war and in schooling to expand on. They can work with scholars and activists on discussing theory with the various communities involved in the promotion of schooling and/or military entrance. The benefits and the consequences of Native American participation in the military are both very real lived experiences that must be shared. Creating stronger school systems that honor Native knowledge, Native history, and all the options available to Native youth is an act towards social change that is essential to all theory.
The Significance to Critical Race Theory

By returning to the broader framework of Critical Race Theory, this is now an opportunity to examine the issues of military participation across demographics. William Ayers (2006) contends that high schools are a battlefield for military recruitment. He recognizes that military recruitment in high schools has been in place since the armed forces became all-volunteer. He also notes the vulnerability of this population: “High school kids are at an age when being a member of an identifiable group with a grand mission and a shared spirit—and never underestimate a distinctive uniform—is of exaggerated importance, something gang recruiters in big cities also note with interest and exploit with skill” (p. 595). Additionally, he identifies the desire of youth to essentially have social appeal and to prove oneself as tough or macho. This vulnerability is combined with a constricted sense of options for poor and working class communities.

In examining the 2009 total representation of 18-24 year olds in the Department of Defense, Blacks, Native Americans, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders were the three groups whose representation in the military was greater than their civilian population (Office Under the Secretary of Defense, 2009). Native Americans were overrepresented more than any other group comprising 1.96% of 18-24 year old civilians versus 4.55% of the Department of Defense. When examining Native males only, the overrepresentation was even greater at 1.01% civilians versus 3.57% in the military for the 18-24 age group. Native females were the only group overrepresented in the female category with a slight .95% civilian population versus .98% military representation. All figures were based on self-identification. Hispanic figures were difficult to determine, as they were included in the White category when identified. However according to a study
on America’s military population (Segal & Segal, 2004), African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to serve. Essentially, the figures show that people of color are represented in the military in greater ratios than Whites.

Ayers directs his critique to the presence of JROTC programs in high schools due to the targeting of poor, Black, and Latino kids. These programs allow for the integration of military culture into the school system of the already disadvantaged where they are taught aggression and mindless obedience. He also implicates No Child Left Behind and its policy to give the military recruiters access to students in the same way colleges are given access as well as personal contact information. While most of my participant sample did not enter the military straight out of high school or participate in JROTC programs, Ayers analysis still supports the argument that students of color are targeted by military recruiters because of their vulnerability, which is largely financial. This supports the finding that one of the main factors for enlistment was for financial or educational benefits. Specifically, Adele provides a narrative that illustrates financial hardship, vulnerability, and some race ambivalence.

Adele: … in a way I do feel…like I shouldn’t be going or enlisting because I’m Native because I’m a little on the traditional side… but then like I think about how am I doing to support myself in really being in like the modern world now? I’m just I don’t know just do it like I know I’ll be okay… I took like um classes at [a university] for like Native history I guess. And it like being Native I know in a way the elders still talk about how the Whites took our land and everything and I know for me it’s a little weird to join cause I know the military took our land in the first place. It just like it’s like well I’m not I shouldn’t be joining because they
did this to our people like a long time ago but then again it’s like...whatever cause it happened all in the past and might as well join them. … It’s a little weird but then I know it’s like the modern days now. Gotta think about today and I can’t really hold back all that all those feelings. Yeah.

Adele discusses the debate she has between understanding the contentious history of Native relations with the United States and the need to be able to join the military without worrying about that history any longer because it is a necessity she has in today’s world. Given more experience and perhaps more Native American Studies reading, Adele would likely come to the realization that her struggles in the modern world and her need to find financial stability in the military are direct symptoms of the ongoing agenda to maintain White supremacy in the context of colonization. The challenges Adele has faced in her life are not challenges that children of White middle class or elite families have had to endure. The challenges Adele is striving to overcome are more familiar to people of color in the United States who have been raised in a society built upon a foundation of three simple claims according to Charles Mills (1997).

The first claim is the existential claim, which states that local and global White supremacy exists and has existed for many years. In terms of Adele, and the participants’ experiences, everything they have experienced as racialized individuals or as tribal members have been shaped by a White supremacist paradigm both locally and globally. While the most brutal acts of colonization seem to have occurred in the past, they still impact Indigenous people of today across international political spaces. By supporting the U.S. military, Native Americans are contributing to world domination by Whites who are in political power. I assume these contributions are unintended but there is evidence
from MorningStorm (2004) that he enjoys his American freedoms and that could be interpreted as the comforts that are maintained through U.S. exploits. Perhaps other Native Americans feel the same way. There has to be a line drawn somewhere between protesting colonization and participating in the maintenance of it. What makes racism so ingrained in society is that line is very delicate and open to much interpretation.

One concept to consider is race ambivalence as is discussed by Zeus Leonardo (2010). He contends that there is much debate pertaining to the significance of race, racism, and race studies. This era of race ambivalence makes it difficult for scholars to rely on the stability of race. He argues for a post-race position, which not only recognizes the presence of racial structures but seeks a politics of being anti-race. Essentially, the idea is to continue to study racism in society and name it in order to engage in anti-racism and reach a point of post-race structures ending inequality. For Native Americans to clearly recognize and name the racism that continues to permeate not only the school system but the military structure might allow for greater movement in the efforts of decolonialist activists in promoting the reconsideration of Native participation in the military.

The second claim by Mills is the conceptual claim that White supremacy should be thought of as a political system. This claims makes a lot of sense in that when war is made based on political ideals, those ideals are those promoted by White dominated countries imposing their politics on countries with desired resources. In the Native case, the resource was land and the wealth abundant on that land. In current cases, it has been argued by scholars and participants that the desired resources are oil and military positioning in the Middle East. The political system might be labeled democracy but it is
really White supremacy. Leonardo (2010) provides a broad synopsis of how racism has impacted peoples of color: “For instance, in the US race has affected each group differently, such as the significant history of citizenship status for Asians, sovereignty and land rights for Native Americans, documented immigration for Latinos, and enslavement for African Americans” (p. 11). At this point in time, military service has become another common ground for impact on Natives, Blacks, and Hispanics.

To explore this ground further, I found a study that focused on the factors associated with joining the military after high school as opposed to entering college, finding a civilian job, or another activity. There were a few similar results to the current study in that Kleykamp (2006) concluded voluntary enlistment during a time of war was associated with living in an area with high military presence, having lower socioeconomic status, and college aspirations. However, Kleykamp did not find racial or ethnic differences. It must be noted that Kleykamp relied on quantified data sources conducted by other entities and only Black, Hispanic, or other race/ethnicities were identified. The study by Segal and Segal (2004) included an examination for the propensity to serve and revealed that enlistment was predicted by desire, parents’ education, high school grades, race/ethnicity, and the attractiveness of military work roles. Those who desired to serve, whose parents did not have college educations, had lower grades, and were Black or Hispanic were more likely to enlist. The commonality between the studies and my own is the relationship to education and socioeconomic status.

The final claim by Mills is the methodological claim which is that, as a political system, White supremacy is a Racial contract between Whites enacted to obtain and
maintain power over people of color. This claim discredits the notion that racism has been left in the past and that everyone’s success is tied to their personal efforts as opposed to the barriers or opportunities they have based on their racialization. By recognizing the methodological claim, Native Americans would be better able to reconsider the veneration of the United States’ military. The research in this section has demonstrated that people of color and/or people of lower socioeconomic status are vulnerable targets for military recruitment and entrance. Furthermore, I contend that people of color are also subject to the racist paternalistic notion that their problems can be solved by the discipline and structure of the military as well as the No Child Left Behind Act. What further compounds the situation for Native Americans is the extreme need for financial resources, unfulfilled educational obligations by the federal government, and the history of military tradition in Native communities.

Intrinsically, the United States is a country founded upon racism and continues to follow the Racial Contract for the sake of maintaining local and global White supremacy. This argument is validated by not only the stories of people of color but by the statistics of which racialized group has the most power and privilege by means of education and financial earnings in the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

By incorporating Tribal Critical Race Theory into Critical Race Theory and vice versa, scholars are better able to support each other in the work of social change for the social justice of all people of color. After all, as Indigenous theorists note quite often, we are all related and the health of one community is dependent on another. Even more so, with the environmental destruction that is occurring across the globe, the earth is a vital life source to all people regardless of race. Essentially, it is imperative that activists of
social change and social equality work together to save ALL races from White supremacy, from White addiction to greed, and White systems of destruction.

Theory and action are imperative in this study. If Native Americans are continuing to enter the military for educational and financial reasons, that is evidence of how racism and colonization remain ingrained in the Native experience. Jessica and Celeste were both given thousands of dollars when they enlisted as signing bonuses and loan repayment. This could be argued to be economic and colonial extortion. If Natives are also entering the military, especially during a time of war, based on cultural conceptions then the danger is even stronger. Darren spoke very eloquently about the relationship he has to the land based on his cultural values. Unfortunately, the United States manages to shield the fact that they have drastically damaged Mother Earth with their various bombs and nuclear spills throughout war and at times of lowered conflict (LaDuke, 2011).

The simple but powerful conception that Native traditional warriorhood is to act with courage, skill, and prowess must be reexamined. Racist stereotypes can lead to irreversible life changing events. William shares his story.

William: For one thing you know being in the military as a Native everybody knew that for whatever reason. Everybody who’s ever been in the military as a Native person has memories of being singled out. Being called “Chief” or something you know. Or Indian or something. And I think you tend to get treated differently. And so for me of course being in Vietnam I was regarded as somebody who was supposed to know something about fighting. Regarded as somebody you could count on to be on the patrol and stuff. And so there was this
expectation I think of Native people especially in combat situations and you were singled out in that way. And then I think the crazy thing about it is when people unload on you with stereotypes regardless if they’re negative or if they’re positive. You’re going to begin to see yourself as that. And I think sometimes and I really think about situations, times I got wounded, it was because I was playing a role. And I think it’s not unusual for Native guys because we don’t tend to be large in numbers. But every time I ran across somebody from another tribe whether they were from the Sioux or the Cherokee, they were “Chief”. They were something like that. So I think as a Native person, we saw ourselves differently. They saw us differently as compared to a non-Native person.

If there were one suggestion that I could make that coincided with the recommendations of my participants it would be simple: do your research. I can only imagine the informed decision a young man or woman would make if they could hear William’s story, or Celeste’s, or even Mark’s. I envision a high school curriculum that incorporates post-secondary planning as an actual course in which students engage in research and experiential activities that would allow them to be adequately prepared for college, work, or community service. My next step is to design this curriculum specific to military considerations and college, based on the research I have collected here. The participants for the most part made choices that were meaningful to them at various points in each of their lives to enlist whether it be for their education, careers, structure, or a sense of destiny. Although, Aaron was not able to pinpoint why he joined so spontaneously, the factors identified by the other participants could shed some light on his decision. All in all they were seeking more than what was being experienced in their civilian lives.
Having had their military experiences, they demonstrate an even greater capacity to identify and pursue opportunities that did not seem plausible prior to their time being enlisted. Our youth need a means of safely finding this type of experiential or story-based knowledge without devoting eight years of their life to the United States’ military forces. What we (the participants and I) all desire is for our youth to make well-rounded well-researched and well-thought out decisions based on their values and special talents in this world. It is my hope that those values are guided by peace, cultural sovereignty, and respect.

A Final Perspective

Mark: Starting at home these educators kind of feed off of that. Kids they should be encouraged oh I’m going to get an education because my mom or dad that’s important to them and it’s important to me. And then the educators kind of keep pushing them along and kind of showing them through education. The way I look at things is there’s always a value and that value has to start at home. The value of you getting an education is so that you can use it or you can be there or open up more opportunities for you. Now that kid can have something to shoot for. There’s a value that he’s trying to reach or trying to get. The value of an education is like okay now closer to that whatever I want the goal I have. And it should continue but I don’t feel a lot of encouraging and it’s not totally. It’s not like it’s not there but it’s like they really encourage the kids that have potential. And that’s what I kind of noticed. And that’s why it’s easy for me to relate to these kids because I’m encouraging to them. Even if it’s a bad kid who gets in trouble whatever I tell him that’s not worth it. You know why do you want to go
down that road getting in trouble constantly or whatever. Why don’t you fix yourself now and then you know what you’re going to have more opportunities taking this path or that path. I may not I’m not going to change kids over night but I think them hearing it from a different point of view or from someone not related to them or whatever. It does spark some type of interest in their head I guess and hopefully they do change their ways. But I think just being on the same page when it comes to education it does start with seeing the leadership there the principal and the superintendent things like that.

LT: Okay so you’re saying they give a lot of encouragement to the students who they perceive as having potential. So do you mean like all the other students they’re kind of like overlooked? Or not given as much.

Mark: I would say yes.

LT: Yeah? Okay. For you as a recruiter do you approach all students equally like the high academic achieving ones the same way as or to the same extent as maybe those that are seen as the trouble makers or those that are kind of barely getting by? Is there a difference for you as a recruiter in your approach to them?

Mark: Not necessarily. There’s really not a difference. The only thing that would kind of make it different is are they qualified? Are they initially qualified? What kind of police involvement do they have? Are they qualified with that? You know things like that. As long as they’re basically qualified you include like physical health things like that you know. Then it’s just an even playing field with me. Then I’ll just talk. What’s your plan? What’s your goal? How do you want to get to that point? We don’t necessarily treat them any differently. And
the only reason we probably…is if they have police involvement or things like that recurring. Then it’s more of a risk with us working with them than we’re willing to take.

LT: I see. Do you feel like that’s kind of an approach that’s unique to you and those you work with or do you think that’s kind of across the board how marine corps recruiters go about it?

Mark: I think the way I’m presenting it is a lot different. I know it is. I know it’s different from the other branches of the military. I think the advantage I had when I was dealing with Native Americans is I am Native American. I am from the same tribe and I grew up just like they grew up. I can honestly look at them and say you know what I’ve been there. I’m from that. I grew up on the reservation like you are. I grew up herding sheep. I grew up not having a lot of things at home. You know material things whatever. And that helps me because I understand that. You know I went to college before I got to the Marine Corps so I kind of know that. I know things have changed but it’s real truly the same.

…but I think what really works for me when I’m talking to them is the emotional appeal. Touching a nerve with them. You know when I say I grew up just like you guys I didn’t have a lot of stuff. Gives me that kid who doesn’t have a lot of stuff whatever, gives me that connection. It’s like oh this guy was like me whatever. You know so. And honesty is the best policy. And I was always honest. Because I don’t know it just seems it was more trouble than it was worth to try to lie. Like oh I had that when I was growing up and I did that when I was growing up cause it never worked for me. So when you come across these kids
that seem genuine. Then I mean they just you get more respect you get more
attention. And that’s all I want. Whether you want to look at this opportunity is
up to you. You know I’m not trying to shove it down your throat but it is an
option after you graduate from high school. And I would even go so far as to tell
them you know I’m not just talking about the Marine Corps but any branch of the
military. You know and if you want to go check out another branch hey that’s
fine by me.

I share this exchange because it essentially tells the story of what Native education should
be but how it is practiced by a military recruiter, of all people, as opposed to what needs
to be required of every single educator: relationships with students; interest in every
single student regardless of background; passion for helping students achieve their
potential; finding bonds through lived experiences; and encouragement to look into all
options and opportunities despite the personal interests of the educator. If local and
national policy created standards based on local knowledge and rewarded school
administrators and teachers for these types of efforts, perhaps Native students would no
longer be punished for not meeting No Child Left Behind standards or college entrance
exam average percentiles. I also share this exchange to present the heart and intellectual
thought present in the minds of all participants. I think Mark is an incredible example of
how he is practicing cultural sovereignty within the confines of Western institutions. I
thought going into the study that Indigenous education could not exist in the United
States’ military. I have learned that sometimes the only way to realize that power is to
experience it through the narratives of those who made the journey and returned with
grace and knowledge. By considering the stories of Native veterans, we can best
understand what it means to sacrifice lives for the greater good of society. It is not to sacrifice a life for American constructs of freedom, but to sacrifice time served in the military to come out with a stronger appreciation of true Indigenous values and save the lives of future generations from all devastating symptoms of colonization.
Appendices

APPENDIX A

Survey
Veterans 2001-2009

All information provided on this survey will be kept strictly confidential.

Name:

Contact information (optional)

Email:

Phone number:

Address:

Date of Birth:

Sex:

How do you identify yourself racially and/or ethnically?

What is/are your tribal affiliation(s)?

Are you an enrolled tribal member?

Which tribe?

Military branch or branches and years of service:

Name and location of high school(s):

Name and location of college(s) attended:

Please respond to the following questions:

1. Was your high school experience positive? Why or why not?

2. What were your options as you approached graduation?
3. What was your primary reason for entering the military?

4. What were your other reasons?

5. When did you first decide you wanted to enlist?

6. Why did you decide to enlist in the branch that you did?

7. Did anyone help you make your decision? If so, who were they and how did they assist you?

8. Did being Native American influence your decision to enlist? Why or why not?

9. Do you have any family members, tribal members, or anyone else close to you that are veterans? Who?

10. What have been the benefits of your participation in the military?

11. What have been the challenges?

12. How has participating in the military impacted your education?

13. Would you advise current Native American high school students to consider the military? Why or why not?

14. Please list any organizations that have been of help to you as a veteran:

15. Please list any organizations that have been of help to you in your career or as a student:
16. Are you interested in sharing more about your story? If yes, please fill out chart below.

What are the best ways to contact you?
Please include appropriate contact information.
What is the best time to contact you during the day? (i.e. morning, lunchtime, evening)
What is the best time to contact you during the week? (i.e. weekday, weekend)
Are you interested in a one-on-one interview?
Are you able to meet for an interview in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, or Gallup? If so, which one(s)?
What dates in July or August would you be available for a meeting?
Do you have any acquaintances that might be interested in completing the survey?

Thank you for completing the survey.
I will contact you if you have indicated that you are interested in an interview.
APPENDIX B  
Non-Veterans Survey

All information provided on this survey will be kept strictly confidential.

Name:

Contact information (optional)

Email:

Phone number:

Address:

Date of Birth:

Sex:

How do you identify yourself racially and/or ethnically?

What is/are your tribal affiliation(s)?

Are you an enrolled tribal member?

Which tribe?

Military branch or branches considered:

Name and location of high school(s):

Name and location of any colleges attended:

Please respond to the following questions:

17. Was your high school experience positive? Why or why not?

18. What were your options as you approached graduation?

19. What was your primary reason for consideration of entering the military?

20. What were your other reasons?
21. When did you decide you did not want to enlist? What prompted your decision?

22. Why did you contemplate enlisting in the branch or branches you considered?

23. Did anyone help you make your decision? If so, who were they and how did they assist you?

24. Did being Native American influence your consideration of enlistment? Why or why not?

25. Do you have any family members, tribal members, or anyone else close to you that are veterans? Who?

26. What have been the benefits of your decision not to participate in the military?

27. What have been the challenges of not enlisting?

28. How has not participating in the military impacted your education?

29. Would you advise current Native American high school students to consider the military? Why or why not?

30. What improvements could be made in high schools to better serve Native American students?

31. Are you interested in sharing more about your story? If yes, please fill out chart below.

What are the best ways to contact you?
Please include appropriate contact information at the beginning of survey.
What is the best time to contact you during the day? (i.e. morning, lunchtime,
evening)
What is the best time to contact you during the week? (i.e. weekday, weekend)
Are you interested in a one-on-one interview?
Are you able to meet for an interview in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, or Gallup? If so, which location(s)? If not, are you interested in a telephone interview?
What dates in July or August would you be available for a meeting?
Do you have any acquaintances that might be interested in completing the survey?

Thank you for completing the survey.
I will contact you if you have indicated that you are interested in an interview.
APPENDIX C
Interview Questions
2001-2009 Veterans

What do you think about Native Americans serving in the military?

What was your experience in elementary school like? What did you enjoy? What did you not enjoy?

What was your experience in junior high like? What did you enjoy? What did you not enjoy?

What was your high school experience like?

Did you participate in sports or extracurricular activities?

Did you enjoy your classes? Why or why not?

Did you have favorite or least favorite teachers? What did you like or not like about them?

How did you feel about the availability of the advisement given to you in high school regarding your choices after completion of your GED or HS diploma?

Did you have mentors or role models? Describe them.

Why did you decide to join the military?

Why did you select the [branch]?

Do you have any close friends, relatives, or people that you admire who are veterans? How would you describe them?

How do your friends feel about your service in the military? Your family? Your community? Any one else?

What perception do you think U.S. society in general has about veterans? What about Native veterans?

Do you think there is a different response to veterans of the current conflict in Iraq? What about Afghanistan? What is your feelings towards that?

As a Native American, do you view your service in the U.S. military any differently than non-Native veterans? How so? Why do you think this is the case?
What benefits, of any kind, have you received since joining the [branch]?

What challenges have you faced?

Having had the experience you’ve had in the United States’ military, would you change any of the decisions you have made about enlisting or since enlisting? Explain.

Do you or would you advise Native American high school students to consider military careers? What is your advice?

How did your education in school influence your decision to enlist?

In my study, I consider what we learn and how we learn outside of schooling to also be a part of an individual’s education. How did your education outside of school influence your decision to enlist?

Do you feel like you were expected to follow a certain set of courses in high school that would prepare you for community college, a university college, a vocational career, the general workforce, the military, to serve your community, or some other option? What was this experience like?
APPENDIX D

Interview Questions
Pre-2001 Veterans

Tell me about yourself.

Tell me about your journey throughout high school and into the military.

What was your high school experience like?

Did you participate in sports or extracurricular activities?

Did you enjoy your classes? Why or why not?

Did you have favorite or least favorite teachers? What did you like or not like about them?

How did you feel about the availability of the advisement given to you in high school regarding your choices after completion of your GED or HS diploma?

Did you have mentors or role models? Describe them.

Why did you decide to join the military?

Why did you select the [branch]?

How did your education in school influence your decision to enlist?

In my study, I consider what we learn and how we learn outside of schooling to also be a part of an individual’s education. How did your education outside of school influence your decision to enlist?

Do you feel like you were expected to follow a certain set of courses in high school that would prepare you for community college, a university college, a vocational career, the general workforce, the military, to serve your community, or some other option? What was this experience like?

What was your experience in elementary school like? What did you enjoy? What did you not enjoy?

What was your experience in junior high like? What did you enjoy? What did you not enjoy?

Do you have any close friends, relatives, or people who are veterans? How would you describe them? (i.e. their characteristics, their successes)
How do your friends feel about your service in the military? Your family? Your community? Anyone else?

What perception do you think U.S. society in general has about veterans? What about Native veterans?

Do you think there is a different response to veterans of the current conflict in Iraq? What about Afghanistan? What are your feelings towards the responses?

What were your feelings towards these conflicts at the beginning of the conflicts? How did these feelings impact your feelings towards Native American participation in the military?

Have your feelings about the conflicts changed? How does this influence the way in which you reflect upon your time in the military?

As a Native American, do you view your service in the U.S. military any differently than non-Native veterans seem to? How so? Why do you think this is the case?

What benefits, of any kind, have you received since joining the [branch]?

What challenges have you faced?

Having had the experience you’ve had in the United States’ military, would you change any of the decisions you have made about enlisting or decisions made since enlisting? Explain.

Do you or would you advise Native American high school students to consider military careers? What is your advice?

What are your recommendations to high school teachers, counselors, staff, and administration in supporting Native American students in preparation of and in making decisions about their post-secondary options?
Tell me about yourself.

Tell me about your journey throughout high school and into your current occupation.

What was your high school experience like?

Did you participate in sports or extracurricular activities?

Did you enjoy your classes? Why or why not?

Did you have favorite or least favorite teachers? What did you like or not like about them?

How did you feel about the availability of the advisement given to you in high school regarding your choices after completion of your GED or HS diploma?

Did you have mentors or role models? Describe them.

Why did you consider joining the military?

Which branch did you give most consideration to? Why?

How did your education in school influence your consideration of enlistment? How did it influence your decision not to enlist?

In my study, I consider what we learn and how we learn outside of schooling to also be a part of an individual’s education. How did your education outside of school influence your decision to not to enlist?

Do you feel like you were expected to follow a certain set of courses in high school that would prepare you for community college, a university college, a vocational career, the general workforce, the military, to serve your community, or some other option? What was this experience like?

What was your experience in elementary school like? What did you enjoy? What did you not enjoy?

What was your experience in junior high like? What did you enjoy? What did you not enjoy?
Do you have any close friends, relatives, or people who are veterans? How would you describe them? (i.e. their characteristics, their successes)

How did your friends feel about your decision not to enter the military? Your family? Your community? Anyone else?

What perception do you think U.S. society in general has about veterans? What about Native veterans?

Do you think there is a different response to veterans of the current conflict in Iraq? What about Afghanistan? What are your feelings towards the responses?

What were your feelings towards these conflicts at the beginning of the conflicts? How did these feelings impact your feelings towards Native American participation in the military?

Have your feelings about the conflicts changed? How does this influence the way in which you reflect upon your decision to not enter the military?

As a Native American, do you view your consideration to enlist in the U.S. military any differently than non-Native individuals seem to? How so? Why do you think this is the case?

What opportunities or benefits, of any kind, have you received since making the decision not to enlist?

What challenges have you faced?

Having had the experience you’ve had since high school, would you change any of the decisions you have made about not enlisting or decisions made since then? Explain.

Do you or would you advise Native American high school students to consider military careers? What is your advice?

What are your recommendations to high school teachers, counselors, staff, and administration in supporting Native American students in preparation of and in making decisions about their post-secondary options?
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