STAYING AFLOAT: EXPERIENCES OF PREVIOUSLY INCARCERATED STUDENTS

Jodi Burshia
Educational Leadership

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STAYING AFLOAT: UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES OF PREVIOUSLY INCARCERATED INDIGENOUS STUDENTS AT A TRIBAL COLLEGE

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Sophia; my parents, Ben and Ruth Burshia; my brothers, Abram and Benjamin; and to my partner, Kevin. Their continued support made the process doable. You have put up with me sitting in front of my computer for hours on end. You have provided guidance and a sounding board. Sophia – let’s build that snowman. This is the point. Thank you to my aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends who also made this dissertation possible. The prayers, the encouraging words, the good food, the deep belly laughs all meant a great deal to me and will always be treasured.

I want for future generations of Indigenous students to envision themselves earning doctorate degrees and to know that it is possible. Earning a doctorate is not passive. Work is involved yet the work is not impossible. Remember to pray daily and remember that you are not doing this by yourself. You are supposed to be doing this. We are our ancestor’s wildest dreams.
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STAYING AFLOAT: UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES OF PREVIOUSLY INCARCERATED INDIGENOUS STUDENTS AT A TRIBAL COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

The experiences of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) need to be understood so that educators and administrators can include the experiences, perspectives, and realities of Indigenous students who have been previously incarcerated in Adult Basic Education (ABE) and collegiate programs at Tribal Community Colleges and Universities (TCUs). To date, considering and providing targeted support for this population has not been part of the focus of TCUs even when all tribal colleges work to strengthen the cultural heritage of their respective tribes (Bad Wound, 1990) and some students at TCUs are PIIS. This qualitative study offers a respectful critique of higher education including TCUs and focuses on the marginalization of PIIS in society and in educational settings. This includes the definitions of school-related success that Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students define for themselves and/or that they are defined by. With this study I focused on how these students’ experiences, make meaning of, and
navigate higher education. The findings from this study offer a counternarrative of a marginalized, institutionally and systemically, student population by showing and making meaning of their voices, experiences, and perspectives. This study focuses on Indigenous students who have been incarcerated and then become students at TCUs. This qualitative study employed individual and collective semi-structured interviews. Findings are shared through portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Davis, J. H., 1997) of PIIS and thematic analysis of student and instructor data. Individual and semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely because of pandemic restrictions with students and faculty at a TCU in New Mexico. Findings may be helpful for a shift in understanding how to assist incoming classroom educators to meet the educational needs of their students.

Narratives from this study suggest and provide insights for a shift in pedagogy that is more inclusive of this population. Historical situations, such as settler colonialism and societal marginalization contribute to contemporary circumstances that Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students and classroom educators need to navigate on a daily basis. I provide both portrait and thematic findings that are included in student portraiture of some individual student participants and listing the main theme titles that include student and faculty narratives. A combination of individual student participants and faculty narratives created themes titled: Steering Our Boat - Helping Ourselves and Each Other as Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students, Innovating to Navigate the College Journey as Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students and Meaning and Implications of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Student Experiences.

Keyword/phrases: previously incarcerated, Indigenous, ABE students, degree attainment, tribal colleges, Native American college students
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Marginalization happens in educational settings. There are many documented and undocumented forms of marginalization in western schooling processes, especially as colonization of Indigenous people. The Indigenous colonized mind is complex and includes the storage of unprocessed trauma from earlier generations (Silverman, 2015). These experiences are flush against Indigenous people living real lives on the contemporary stage of our increasingly globalized world (Henson, 2008) and have been imposed upon American Indians (Grande, 2004) as truth. Given these complex layers of history, it is clear that a single approach does not always work in engaging students with different backgrounds and experiences because everyone has not experienced colonization the same way. It is imperative that educators and administrators are prepared to meet the educational needs of all students. The realities that students bring to the classroom may or may not be shared with other students or with class instructors, yet each student’s reality is valid. This is a negotiation of identity that “looks different” from previous interpretations of Indigenous identity (Brayboy, 2012).

This is not just a sense of communitism, a collective sense of identity (Weaver, 2001) and respectful individualism (Gross, 2003). This is a reality that needs to be understood especially when this reality includes being Indigenous, being a student, and being previously incarcerated. With my study, I strove to explore and explain some of this reality and to delve into the persistent factors that can compete with one another as part of attending college as a Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Student (PIIS). I noted that PIIS who participated in my study seemed to encounter a new nexus that is often formed between education and incarceration (Becker, 2017) and which creates new obstacles that need to be navigated in the process of degree attainment.
For this reason, I have chosen to apply Tribal Critical Race Theory (Tribal CRT) as the primary basis for the research design and analysis within my study. I chose Tribal CRT as an epistemological framework for my research because of the ways it focuses on experiences in the midst of actual history, not the often western interpretations of history that have become staples of static understanding. Later in this manuscript I describe Tribal CRT in more detail and discuss ways that I applied it throughout. The findings from my analysis of the data collected present a foundation for future empirical research and professional practices that serve all Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS).

Statement and Context of the Problem

To date, only 14.5% of American Indians have a college degree – less than half the national average for all college students (https://collegefund.org/ourwork-2). Education has been heralded as the great equalizer, but for many American Indian students the equality gap is particularly vast (alumni of Tribal Colleges and Universities Better Their Communities, 2019, p. 2) as is the case with this 14.5% and choosing to attend college in the midst of life’s challenges requires bravery and determination especially when western educational institutions have been sites of violence and discrimination for Native peoples (Kenny & Fraser, 2012).

Sometimes this bravery and determination is seen and acknowledged, yet other times it is expected by a certain age. Many Natives who choose to attend college are students who have experienced incarceration and are part of the 14.5% who do not achieve a college degree. I believe this is the case from my own experiences as a classroom instructor. My study shines a much-needed light on this population of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) and the school-related hoops these students need to navigate in order to achieve successes regardless of how success is defined by each individual student or those around them. My analysis and the
narrative quotes from these participants and instructors who work with them at Southwest Tribal College (STC) and my review of literature includes a brief summary of Indigenous histories in US history. Southwest Tribal College (STC) is a pseudonym. For example, the histories these students shared with me during this study include the myriad ways that PIIS make sense of and discuss their lives. My data analysis included an assessment of historical trauma of strategic genocide that Indigenous students carry with them into the classroom. These experiences are expressed succinctly by Linda Cleary and Thomas Peacock in the introduction of their book *Collected Wisdom: American Indian Education* when they said, “We are not abstractly removed from history; we are products of it” (Cleary and Peacock, 1998).

The number of Indigenous people who are incarcerated today in 2021 is directly linked to colonization and the *civilization* of Indigenous people in this country. This reality continues today to affect both colonizer and colonized in more ways than we first discern (Cleary and Peacock, 1998). This impact deepens when connected with mandatory minimum sentencing laws (Healy & Healy, 2004) within the American criminal justice system that have intensified social problems by means of incarceration. Many believe that this criminalization, especially of People of Color (POC), enforces the reproduction of social inequalities (Wakefield, & Uggen, 2010) that they may have had pre-incarceration. The documented narratives of four people in the middle of this situation have been compiled in *At the Nexus of Education and Incarceration* (Becker, Carr, Knapp, & Giraldo, 2017) and provide perspectives to humanize incarceration. Having currently incarcerated people discuss incarceration through their own stories is a powerful tool framing their experiences not as merely social issues but as human issues. Becker et. al certainly shaped my study and I share many stories collected through listening sessions with PIIS and instructors at Southwest Tribal College (STC).
Native Americans account for a disproportionate amount of the prison population (Broze, 2016). Especially when facing staggering statistics such as a “…12 percent rise in arrests between 2009 and 2015, despite an 18 percent decline in property and violent crimes between 2000 and 2014. Native Americans represent a disproportionate share of those totals, accounting for nearly one in five arrests while making up only 7 percent of the overall population (Broze, 2016, REPORT: Native Americans Account for Disproportionate Amount of Prison Population - Activist Post). My study not only provides some insight into aspects of the criminal justice system shared by PIIS as participants, but also depicts the innovative ways these PIIS persevered in this setting. With this study I delve a little deeper to see how students get into the criminal justice system as well as highlight their experiences after they are released from incarceration.

Western education has been defined for Native American students and is problematic because it highlights one perspective of education instead of providing accurate descriptions of history. This history is usually relegated to observing western holidays, such as Thanksgiving, while traditions, values, culture, and language of American Indians are usually not recognized (Larson & Minnesota House of Representatives, S. P. R. D., 1990) as being important. In many cases, school curriculum addressing Indian culture and history is lacking and often perpetuates stereotypes (Larson & Minnesota House of Representatives, S. P. R. D., 1990). This gives students an unrealistic idea of history which then needs to be retaught at home and in the community. Schools and classes are also not necessarily prepared for or designed with previously incarcerated students and their realities in mind. These realities are explained and discussed with narrative findings shown chapter 4.

Current research does not include the experiences of Indigenous students who were previously incarcerated. Through my study findings I include and highlight those experiences.
My study is timely as students of color and students from lower social class backgrounds (Soria, 2012) are attending colleges as a population have been disproportionately incarcerated (Harris, Steffensmeier, Ulmer, & Painter-Davis, 2009) and seek academic success within higher education systems (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). It is imperative that TCUs and four-year universities include the needs and realities of PIIS more comprehensively in their educational programming.

American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islander undergraduates are less likely than undergraduates of any other group to attend a four-year institution, attend a very selective college, or pursue a bachelor’s degree (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, and Chessman, 2019). My study adds to the bodies of literature on community cultural wealth (García & Yosso, 2007), funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), and the school to prison pipeline (Okilwa, Khalifa, & Briscoe, 2017). These sources provide some understandings of factors that influence the transition from incarceration to college for and by Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students.

**Scope of Study**

For this study, I utilized qualitative inquiry through an epistemological foundation based in Tribal CRT, to explore development of successful, inclusive experiences of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students as well as their histories, and factors that serve to assist and those that act as barriers in a collegiate environment. I focused throughout my study on the following tenets of Tribal CRT:

“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… and self-identification;

5) 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” (Brayboy, 2005, 429-430).

Throughout the study I designed, conducted, analyzed, and made meaning of PIIS experiences through the lens of the Tribal CRT model. While interpreting stories and narrative quotes from PIIS and faculty in the study, I often made connections to concepts from Tribal CRT. For example, *success* in a western context usually includes *winning* and beating out all other
opponents in the quest of a goal. For my study, I sought to dismantle misunderstandings of students who have experienced incarceration as a way to reveal an understanding of what Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students deem as success in relation to college. As another example, the concept of time as linear must be analyzed as it has been imposed upon Indigenous people as part of colonization. This concept includes the conversion of time into minutes, which become hours, then become days, months, years, decades, centuries, and so on. Some Indigenous people have adopted this aspect of western culture and utilize this concept of time daily life to perform an act such as attend a meeting or attend a class. Yet, this ideological cultural difference is often in contrast to how many Indigenous people have identified significant occasions in their lives. For example, Dr. Greg Cajete (Santa Clara Pueblo) refers to this concept of time as a form of sustainability in *Contemporary Indigenous education: A nature-centered American Indian philosophy for a 21st century world* (Cajete & Pueblo, 2010). These authors refer to the process of cultivating knowledge over generations for future Peoples, especially as it is connected to how science is understood and implemented as place-based environmental knowledge over extended time periods and in the development of Indigenous community leaders (Cajete, 2016). Time serves as a marker yet does not encompass or define the knowledge attained or transmitted especially in the development of Indigenous community leaders.

In her book *Red Pedagogy* (Grande, 2004), Dr. Sandy Grande (Quechua) refers to this concept of time as an, “…enmeshment with the Western paradigm (p. 165-166)” that enables Indigenous people “…to define the spaces in-between the Western and indigenous thought worlds” (Grande, 2004. p. 165-166). In *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition* (Coulthard, 2014), Dr. Glen Sean Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene First Nation) refers to the concepts of struggle and labor as acts of retaliation to colonization that can be measured as
forms of time. These retaliations stem from the master-slave/colonizer-colonized relationship that serves as the primary contention impacting all areas of life and in attaining any form of success. Dr. Coulthard states that the act of turning away is allowing for colonization and domination to take place. Dr. Bryan Brayboy (Lumbee) connects these experiences by terming them acts of reclaiming scholarship that can be connected to the experiences of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students attending college (Brayboy, 2014). For example, Dr. Brayboy encourages all of these points as avenues of knowledge that Indigenous students make in the attainment of academic success and as acts of (re)claiming research and knowledge-making practices (Brayboy, 2014). These ideals are driven by Indigenous peoples; rooted in recognitions of the impacts of “Eurocentric culture on history” (Brayboy, 2014, p. 402) and are part of Tribal CRT tenet 1 which states “Colonization is endemic to society” (Brayboy, 2005, P. 429). Tenet 3 of Tribal CRT also speaks to this issue by stating “Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities” (Brayboy, 2005, P. 429). These contentions are seen by Dr. Brayboy as factors that include the knowledge of history and are utilized as motivators for academic achievement. Therefore, instead of working to counter colonization, Dr. Brayboy encourages Indigenous people to make sense of these realities and utilize them as factors for attaining academic success as a form of understanding and negotiating colonization. This connects to my study because as an Indigenous researcher connecting with Indigenous students, and I have an investment in the academic success of all Indigenous students. I understand the navigation involved in attaining academic success in western education.

Many people understand a linear concept of time and in retrospect see the progression of time as valuable and precious. These understandings are not usually cut and dry for any student
navigating the educational process yet when the focus is on navigating a system that was never intended for people to obtain and experience success. “A system cannot fail those who it was never meant to protect (unknown author).” This is even more true for students who have been previously incarcerated and are navigating college classrooms. These students might not see their presence, their time, and their experiences as being valuable and contributing to the world and especially others’ world views. Yet, understanding of these experiences is needed. The voices and insights of PIIS are needed in academia. These voices are needed in part so that we in higher education can develop collegiate processes and environments that incorporate more of their realities and ways of being as both previously incarcerated and as Native American. Their voices are needed in the college community as important contributions to conversations and learning while in college and after college. These students are keepers of ancestral wisdom as they have witnessed realities, histories and cultures of their Native community and are learning about other Native communities. Discussions about the long term, intergenerational impact of colonization, cultural suppression, and historical oppression of Indigenous peoples (Kirmayer et al 2014) are discussed in college. Sometimes college is the first place where these conversations take place and these learning opportunities can happen in this safe space. Understanding the impacts of incarceration are important for those who have experienced incarceration, as well as those who have not been incarcerated. My study will inform and educate readers about this reality and welcome their critical analysis of the issues discussed in the study.

**Purpose of The Study**

The purpose of this study is to gather narratives about experiences, perspectives, and insights of Indigenous students who have been previously incarcerated. My study includes and highlights the perspectives of 10 Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students and contributes to
the body of literature on community cultural wealth, funds of knowledge, the school to prison pipeline and findings provide an understanding of factors that influence the transition from incarceration to college for and by Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students.

This study is timely; in 2008 there were approximately 644,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students in the US K-12 system, representing 1.2 percent of public-school students nationally (Status and Trends in the Education of American Indians and Alaska Natives, 2008). These numbers have not changed drastically in ten years. Education has played a complicated role in American Indian history and was often used as a coercive tool for eradicating Indigenous cultures (Zingg, 2019). I focused on including and incorporating the Indigenous culture of participants to deepen understanding of how Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students saw themselves within a western educational process a Native College here. This is important because there are some aspects that are Western and some Indigenous that can be utilized in the process of degree attainment.

Need for Study

Indigenous voices need to be heard across Indian country and in academia. Participant voices illuminate experiences of being Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students and this study provided space for Indigenous people to contribute knowledge in this area. This study also provided a way for participants to know that their voices and experiences are valued. Achieving educational equity through classroom, school, and community transformation happens when we focus on how students are marginalized and appropriately acknowledge their roles in society and in educational settings. With this study I sought to reconfigure the spaces of resistances for those once considered vanquishable (MacKenzie, 2021) and as John Lewis, civil rights activist, stated

Assumptions

Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students might not have the same set of skills, knowledge, and behaviors a high school student should have upon graduation and entering their freshmen year of college. This directly impacts their ability to find academic success while studying at an institute of higher learning, especially if they have been incarcerated and these experiences directly impact their desire to be successful in college. It is possible to assume that because students look older than their classmates that they are automatically ready to attend college and/or are already in college. Yet, if incarceration has been part of their experience, then their journey to college (Lee, 2015) has been different from their peers. Sometimes incarceration takes place for non-violent crimes that do not involve the use of any force or injury to another person. This would allow someone to attend college after the person has been incarcerated. The seriousness of a non-violent crime is usually measured in terms of economic damage or loss to the victim, such as some sort of property crime such as larceny or theft (Rivera, 2019). This is important because if we assume incarceration results in becoming completely barred from college, we are more likely to not modify college environs so they and we work effectively with PIIS. In my experience, an all-too-common belief in US society is that once someone has been incarcerated that they do not need, or deserve, to be part of society.

There are few ways to measure what is lost when individuals return to their tribal communities after being incarcerated. These individuals take on new roles in their home
communities and usually need to relearn life outside of prison. These individuals have a choice, sometimes for the first times in their lives, of rejoining their tribal communities in a new capacity. They must take on the challenge of finding employment and working toward degree attainment. This is extremely difficult as The United States is leading the world in mass incarceration because we focus more on confinement and punishment rather than rehabilitation (Dzur, Loader, & Sparks, 2016). United States’ prisons do not prepare inmates for a new life after their sentence, instead prisons leave them with increased issues that are not treated when they are released. Regardless of the crime, it is important for everyone within these prisons to benefit from prison reform rather than allowing misconduct to happen to only a few who deserve it. When these experiences are brought to the classroom it is not clear how these experiences are understood or incorporated into classroom pedagogy.

Some of these individuals make the choice to become students and subsequently must face western interpretations and expectations of academic, financial, and cultural success. Their unique circumstances as PIIS definitely requires navigating the process of attending college. With this study I shed a spotlight on this issue and offer perspectives and experiences of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students in their own voices as well as through some faculty who work with them.

**Contributions of Study**

This study is important to me and to other higher education educators because it demystifies experiences of previously incarcerated Indigenous students (PIIS) in college and how academic success is part of their lives. This information is important to regular classroom planning and pedagogical implementation, yet it is also important to clarify what life is like for previously incarcerated Indigenous students.
Research Questions

The overall goal of my study is to explore how Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students define and experience academic success in tribal colleges. The research questions that served as a guide for my study included:

1. How do PIIS describe influences of the correctional system on their ABE/college experiences at a tribal college.

2. How do PIIS navigate the intersections of college and requirements after incarceration?

3. How are the experiences and insights from incarceration experienced by Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) and their instructors perceived in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs at a tribal college (TCU)?

Limitations

Every student is part of a growing number of people in the post-secondary education system that enters the classroom with experiences and classroom instructors and administrators must be knowledgeable about how to address student needs appropriately. Many people transition from high school, the military and/or the workforce to become students at a junior college including Native American students who enroll in Tribal and other Native serving colleges. These students might envision success differently from other students, especially if they have been incarcerated and these experiences directly impact their desire to be successful in school.

The study was limited to one TCU in a southwestern city that currently has an undetermined number of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous students that attend the school. I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and participants have agreed to be part of
this study. The number of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students is undetermined because to date this specific information has not been tracked for school use or as part of seeking accreditation. Including this information is important because TCUs in the United States must be accredited or be candidates for accreditation to access federally appropriated operational funding from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). This is important because being an accredited institution symbolizes good governance (Crazy Bull, 2015). STC was unaccredited for a short time yet has been able to maintain accreditation since 2014. According to Natalie Youngbull, PhD, editor of the *Tribal College and University Research Journal*, the first peer-reviewed journal focused on research based at TCUs, TCUs must maintain a majority American Indian/Alaskan Native full-time equivalent student enrollment to remain a member of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, the governing body of TCUs, and continue receiving federal funding (Youngbull, 2020). Accreditation impacts the funding TCUs receive and impacts students and their ability to transfer credits to other academic institutions. To date, identifying this population of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) as a distinctive community has not taken place. This non-identification could be considered a limitation because it only reveals certain information.

American Indians have a unique relationship to the U.S. government and according to Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. American Indians are dual citizens: U.S. citizens and tribal citizens. This relationship creates a complex set of laws regarding civil rights protections that impacts degree offerings by this TCU, and other TCUs in general, as degrees are responsive to identified community needs (Youngbull, 2020). The Indian Civil Rights Act (ICRA) established in 1968 (Title 25, sections 1301 to 1303 of the United States Code) directly impact degree creation and offering. Several memos and articles document the disparities in education between

Since most degrees are not tailored to, or include, the experiences of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students then there is the need to find others that share their experiences. This specification of degree offerings is not a criticism of this TCU as many TCUs have originated to counteract the long reaching assimilationist strong hold on Native Nations and communities. This is evidence of the need for TCUs to toe this line for the communities that need tribal colleges it is part of the quest to dismantle and expose systemic discrimination (05-29-Bordertown-Discrimination-Montana.pdf (usccr.gov) of Native people.

**Definition of Terms:**

Various terms are utilized throughout this dissertation to explain the populations being discussed and the situations the participants are part of. Several of these terms are stem from historical terminology and are problematic yet exist in this contemporary setting.

**Indigenous** = A culturally distinct ethnic group who originate from a place recognized as the homeland of their ancestors. This distinction includes those that represent various tribes and communities recognized by the United States federal government which utilizes blood quantum to verify membership of certain tribes.

**Blood Quantum** = A system of documenting many Indigenous people as being members of federally recognized tribes in the United States. For example, a person who has one parent who is a full-blood Native American and one who has no Native ancestry has a blood quantum of 1/2. The concept of blood quantum was not widely applied by the United States government until the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. At that time, the government required persons to have a certain amount of blood to be recognized as members of a certain tribe and thus Native
American. Blood is a metaphor for ancestry (Spruhan, 2006) and the amount of blood one possesses shaped official ideas about who was eligible to be defined as Indian by the General Allotment Act in the United States (Ellinghaus, 2017). To this day, the pedigree of Native Americans, dogs and horses utilizes this antiquated system of verification.

**Incarceration** = Confined to a prison or local jail

**Student** = A person enrolled in a school or other educational institution

**TCU** = Tribal Colleges and Universities. These academic institutions developed as part of the Native American "self-determination" movement of the 1960s (AIHEC: Our Stories—The TCU Movement). Many tribal colleges are on or near Indian reservations.

**Native American** = Member of one of the 574 federally recognized within the United States or a lineal descendant. Native American is a term sometimes used instead of Indigenous (TallBear, K. (2013) to refer to an ethnic group. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) states Native American is: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and maintaining tribal affiliation or community attachment. This distinction is usually verified by connecting oneself to a family or a clan and not merely by a Certificate of Indian Blood (CIB) that is issued by the United States government.

**Western schooling** = Philosophy of academic instruction that is based on manufacturing and industrialization (Thuy, et al, 2021) and focuses on Judo-Christian beliefs of manifest destiny, or being the first to discover something.

**Summary and Organization of the Research Study**
The historical impacts that led to incarceration, the assumptions, and realities of attending tribal colleges has a PIIS impact. Understanding how and why people believe a certain way is integral to understanding the reality of incarceration. The reality is that Indigenous people are supposed to be part of sovereign and recognized as such in federal treaties from the US Federal Government. Yet, in 2020, the reality for many Indigenous people is different. Life can be a daily battle because “education” and “instruction” has traditionally been communicated from parents and elder family/community members to youth at appropriate times and seasons, such as in religious ceremony, rites of passage and purposeful instruction. This instruction included lessons about how to teach, learn, and interact with one another. These ways of knowing were to be transmitted through heritage languages and when Indigenous peoples became oppressed, faced colonization, and were not allowed to have access to these knowledge systems these acts became violations of basic human rights. These strategic and historically violent acts of colonization caused recipients to surface scarred and incapable of adequately teaching knowledge systems to youth and one another. This gruesome reality has placed education in a precarious position. Settlers’ fears and racism combined with their insatiable desire for Indian land and resources to undergird war and genocide (Trafzer, 2018) is directly linked to the trauma that Indigenous people deal with today. Previously incarcerated Indigenous students deal with these reverberations in ways many would not have connected to colonization.

The next chapter will provide an examination of the current literature on the background of Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). I will also briefly discuss the prison system and how students get caught in the mass incarceration system. A brief analysis of literature about the student community will also be included along with an analysis of Human and Social Capital of Incarcerated people.
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Through the following review of the literature I sought to provide both background and context for academic success and degree attainment by Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) in Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). This literature review is divided into two parts. The first part begins with an overview of the Background of TCUs, including their purpose and significance in Indigenous communities. The chapter then turns to the literature devoted to Native American Students in Higher Education, how this has evolved, and what that looks like in 2021. This leads directly to Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs, now known as HiSet. From there I provide a background of Native Americans in prison systems, the school to prison pipeline, and mass incarceration. Finally, I provide an overview of Native American tribes in the region where the research study will be conducted. The second part of this literature review focuses on the inclusion of information from human and social capital of incarcerated people and funds of knowledge. This information is available yet is not documented as being directly part of incarceration. This information is especially relevant to my topic and study as this leads to emerging and related themes, I include terms such as colonization as slavery; the normalcy of incarceration; home insecurity; questions about being part of society; degree derailment; perceived limitations and forms of participation. All of these themes currently exist in literature, yet some topics have more accessible information.

Literature Specifically about Indigenous Students or Previously Incarcerated Students

Some information about the experiences of Indigenous students are documented in literature. The first half of this literature review describes information that has a clear connection
to the experiences of Indigenous students in degree attainment, especially in terms of
incarceration. The majority of studies exploring factors associated with Native American
students’ success in higher education feature qualitative designs, have smaller sample sizes, or
are derived from single-institution samples (Jackson, Smith, and Hill, 2003; Larimore &
McClellan, 2005; Okagaki, Helling, & Bingham, 2009). These are good pieces of research or
theory yet have not included Indigenous students who have been incarcerated and are entering
college. There was a clear gap in the literature and a need for a study focused on Previously
Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) at a tribal college (TCU).

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)

Tribal Colleges grew out of the American Indian self-determination movement of the
1960s as a response to the higher education needs of American Indians and to generally serve
geographically isolated populations with no other means of accessing education beyond the high
school level (http://www.aihec.org/who-we-serve/docs/TCU_intro.pdf). This community-based
response of seeing a need and providing for community members became an act of self-
determination and ultimately sovereignty. In 1968, the Navajo Nation created the first tribally
controlled college—now called Diné College—and other Tribal Colleges quickly followed in
California, North Dakota, and South Dakota (Crazy Bull, et al., 2015). Today, there are 32
tribally chartered colleges and three federally chartered Indian colleges in a total of 12 states
(Youngbull, 2020). The act of self-determination made the claim for tribal community members
significant especially as a form of envisioning the human and social capitol of each community’s
tribal members especially as well over half of the 573 federally recognized tribes are represented
at TCUs with AI students from more than 30 states ( ). Tribal leaders recognized the growing
importance of postsecondary education and became convinced that it could strengthen reservations and tribal culture without assimilation (Boyer, 1997).

According to Alumni of Tribal Colleges and Universities Better Their Communities (Gallup_Report_Final_8-1-192.pdf (collegefund.org), p. 4, in 2014, only 14% of American Indian aged 25 and older held at least a bachelor’s degree compared with 34% of white students. This is not an issue of “us” versus “them” yet there are deep contrasts. In 2017, 11% of all Native students studying at a U.S. two- or four-year public or private not-for-profit postsecondary institution attended a TCU. (Gallup_Report_Final_8-1-192.pdf (collegefund.org). This study went on to say “Four out of 10 TCU alumni strongly agree that their institution prepared them well for life after graduation (Gallup_Report_Final_8-1-192.pdf (collegefund.org). Many TCU alumni strongly agree they are deeply interested in the work that they do, have a job that gives them the opportunity to do work that interests them and have the ideal job for them. In fact, TCU graduates outperform all comparison groups by a significant margin on these three measures (Gallup_Report_Final_8-1-192.pdf (collegefund.org). Seventy-four percent report being primarily employed in areas related to American Indian communities or tribal lands, and many work directly with their tribe. Tribal college graduates (42%) have higher rates of workplace engagement than college graduates nationally (37%) (Gallup_Report_Final_8-1-192.pdf (collegefund.org). The White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Native Americans and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities (WHIAIANE) under the direction of the U.S. Department of Education stated that AI/AN students composed 78 percent of the combined total enrollment of these institutions (2010 Review of Federal Agencies’ Support to Tribal Colleges and Universities). The percentages of AI/AN students attending TCUs are increasing yearly
(Tribal Colleges and Universities | White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Native Americans and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities). The list of tribal colleges and the states they are located in are (AIHEC: Who We Serve—TCU Roster):

Alaska:
Ilisaġvik College, Utqiaġvik, Alaska

Arizona:
Diné College, Tsaile, Arizona
Tohono O'odham Community College, Sells, Arizona

California:
D–Q University, Yolo County, California

Kansas:
Haskell Indian Nations University, Lawrence, Kansas

Michigan:
Bay Mills Community College, Brimley, Michigan
Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College, Baraga, Michigan
Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College, Mount Pleasant, Michigan

Minnesota:
Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, Cloquet, Minnesota
Leech Lake Tribal College, Cass Lake, Minnesota
Red Lake Nation College, Red Lake, Minnesota
White Earth Tribal and Community College, Mahnomen, Minnesota

Montana:
Aaniiih Nakoda College, Harlem, Montana
Blackfeet Community College, Browning, Montana
Chief Dull Knife College, Lame Deer, Montana
Fort Peck Community College, Poplar, Montana
Little Big Horn College, Crow Agency, Montana
Salish Kootenai College, Pablo, Montana
Stone Child College, Box Elder, Montana

**Nebraska:**
Little Priest Tribal College, Winnebago, Nebraska
Nebraska Indian Community College, Macy, Nebraska

**New Mexico:**
Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico
Navajo Technical University, Crownpoint, New Mexico
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, Albuquerque, New Mexico

**North Dakota:**
Cankdeska Cikana Community College, Fort Totten, North Dakota
Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College, New Town, North Dakota
Sitting Bull College, Fort Yates, North Dakota
Turtle Mountain Community College, Belcourt, North Dakota
United Tribes Technical College, Bismarck, North Dakota

**North Carolina:**
University of North Carolina at Pembroke, Pembroke, North Carolina

**Oklahoma:**
Bacone College, Muskogee, Oklahoma, established 1880
Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribal College, Weatherford, Oklahoma
College of the Muscogee Nation, Okmulgee, Oklahoma
Comanche Nation College, Lawton, Oklahoma
Pawnee Nation College, Pawnee, Oklahoma

**South Dakota:**
Oglala Lakota College, Kyle, South Dakota
Sinte Gleska University, Mission, South Dakota
Sisseton Wahpeton College, Sisseton, South Dakota
Universities Better Their Communities

In many ways, Tribal Colleges are similar to mainstream community colleges yet they originated as act of tribal sovereignty and self-determination (Youngbull, 2020). However, the trait that distinguishes them from other community colleges is their mission: 1) to rebuild, reinforce and explore traditional tribal cultures, using uniquely designed curricula and institutional settings; and at the same time 2) to address Western models of learning by providing traditional disciplinary courses that are transferrable to four-year institutions (Tierney, 1992).

This commitment to tribal members is significant and necessary. Tribal colleges are important and necessary, yet they are not without room for improvement. College enrollment among traditionally aged American Indians (18-24 years old) fell from 41% in 2010 to 19% in 2016—the lowest participation rate of any race/ethnicity class measured during that time (G. I., 2019). It is here that the emphases on what is valued in empirical pursuits (Spooner, 2018; Yoon & Templeton, 2019) has dominated popular beliefs. Native American students are an underrepresented minority group in higher education, representing less than 1% of all college-going students in the United States (Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013). Also, based on the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (https://pnpi.org/native-american-students) factsheet published in November 2020 these students are often left out of postsecondary research and data
reporting due to small sample size. In addition, American Indian or Alaska Native men had the lowest levels of educational attainment, with most holding a high school credential or less ranging from 54.5 percent among American Indian or Alaska Native men to 63.4% (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, & Chessman, 2019). Knowledge of this reality can be daunting and has the potential to empower individuals to defy these odds or to shrink away and not want to contribute directly or indirectly to this situation. A common stereotype and misconception that Native American/Indigenous students are all the same. This could not be further from the truth as Native American/Indigenous students are not homogenous (Minthorn, 2018) and each of our tribal nations have complex stories and places of being. That means Native student stories are complex and need to be honored for what they are and who they represent. The average college classroom has a combination of Native American/Indigenous students who are ready to attend college and many who are in college because they are not sure what to do with their lives. Many Native American/Indigenous students are attending college as part of a step in their life lives (Lee, 2013). This transition from high school and/or any part of life to college may or may not include incarceration. In my experience as a Tribal College professor, when this is part of student experience, it is usually ignored or treated as an after-thought in pedagogical planning. Many Native American/Indigenous students will often take time out of school to go home to be part of cultural and family commitments (Minthorn, et al, 2013). Sometimes attending school is seen as a contradiction to cultural and traditional practices as many institutions represent European needs and values, such as independence and detachment (Shotton et al., 2013). Many Native American students and their families can see enrollment in a mainstream four-year institution as an act of disloyalty to their culture (Schmidt & Akande, 2011). Therefore, understanding and allowing students to maintain these connections to home communities (in
many instances, on federally designated Indian reservation lands) and attending tribal ceremonies seem to be particularly important (Barnhardt, 1994). This is an important component in academic success and when students are able to make the successful transition from high school to college, universities must consciously take into account the academic, social, cultural, and psychological needs of American Indian students (Wright, 1985). For example, the contributions to Native American student success in graduation from college has unfortunately seen a drastic decline in enrollment. In 2019, 2,765 degrees were awarded across all undergraduate and graduate programs at Tribal Colleges and 16,057 or 55.5% were considered full-time (Tribal Colleges | Data USA). These numbers tend to be seen as barriers to our college success and graduation even though those numbers have changed since the inception of the first Tribal College (Diné College, Tsaile, AZ. [electronic resource]. (1997).

**Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Hi Set Programs**

The reality of the statistics are staggering, especially among Native students who perform two to three grade levels below their White peers in reading and mathematics (http://bpcwi.com/policy-analysis-native-students-white-peers/). The need for ABE programs is apparent. Historically, Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs have been a marginalized field with fragmented and inadequate resources (Hohn, 2001). Indigenous scholars Devon, Wilson, and Minthorn write about this scenario pointing out that this can be a serious dilemma for students to see the goal as worth it especially if earning a certificate is the result of attending ABE, now HiSet, programs. In this case, if there is not a translation to success in one’s home community then sometimes Indigenous people are emotionally torn between cultures (Devon, & Wilson, 2004) and Native American students remain one of the least represented populations in
higher education (Minthorn, 2018). This is a difficult issue to contend with and every student who seeks education past a high school diploma faces this situation.

ABE programs are a necessity for many students transitioning from high school and/or the workforce. With the proper encouragement and academic redirection students that attend ABE programs are able to envision their best selves (Birkenbuel, R. (2014, November 29). They are usually designed for adults who are reading below the ninth-grade level. This is what Native American students often face when they do not find academic success in secondary school or have been separated from western education for any amount of time (Personal Communication with colleague in May 2019). Sometimes in addition to basic skills like reading and writing, these programs help students gain vocational skills; some will offer courses leading to a trade certificate in fields such as plumbing or auto mechanics. Therefore, having to enroll in ABE programs is sometimes a harsh reality to face when incarceration is part of one’s history.

**Background of Native Americans in Prison Systems**

At one point, a kid could get in a fight at school and be suspended for a few days. Now, in many tribal communities, in towns along reservation borders, and in city boundaries the police are often called and on any given day, over 48,000 youth in the United States are confined in facilities away from home as a result of juvenile justice or criminal justice involvement (Prison Policy Initiative, 2019). It can become a difficult situation in the blink of an eye. This zero-tolerance policy toward violence acts like a funnel for kids with emotional problems, drawing them into the juvenile justice system after they act out in some way (Hopper, 2017). School suspensions contribute to a division among tribal members into the incarcerated and the non-incarcerated categories. Prof. Michele Deitch in collaboration with graduate students in her seminar on Juvenile Justice Policy spoke on this topic in the Desktop Guide to Quality Practice
for Working with Youth in Confinement (Deitch, et al., 2014). This document discusses the four major phases in the development of juvenile confinement after the creation of the juvenile court system in 1899 (Deitch, et al., 2014) through to contemporary incarcerations. Another important contribution to this understanding is the Age of Jurisdiction and the fact that each state is responsible for setting the age limit for juvenile justice offenders. Youth older than the upper age limit are automatically transferred to adult criminal court, preventing the judge from considering individual circumstances (Deitch, et al, 2009). These important documents, while seminal in the information presented to the general public, do not specify Indigenous youth or youth that are members of tribes or nations.

Other documents such as those from the Poverty and Race Research Action Council focus on fair housing, school diversity, environmental justice, and special projects. One special project that is of focusing on how "Incarcerated Indian youth are much more likely to be subjected to the harshest treatment in the most restrictive environments and less likely to have received the help they need from other systems" (Cross, 2008). These systems can cause divisions and are a major distinction when focusing on Indigenous people and when describing experiences this is often hard to include as knowledge because incarceration is not normally included as a contribution to one’s community or to society. Another document produced by The Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center in 2011 by the Tribal Youth in the Federal Justice System: Final Report focused on using 1999-2008 data from the Federal Justice Statistics. This report describes the experiences juveniles at each stage of the federal justice system. The report explains the jurisdictional complexities that describe why tribal youth cases enter the federal system (Adams, 2011) and how tribal youth are more likely to be judged as delinquent. Explaining this type of background is cumbersome and not easily defined especially with how
these programs may not take into account the beliefs and traditions of the youth’s culture (Olson & Anderson, 2016).

**The School to Prison Pipeline**

In 2010, the N.Y.U. Review of Law & Social Change - Legal Scholarship for Systemic Change focused on how juveniles that become incarcerated contribute to the School to Prison Pipeline. According to legal academics and civil rights litigators Catherine Kim, Daniel Losen, and Damon Hewitt, the school-to-prison pipeline involves a confluence of education policies in under-resourced public schools and a predominantly punitive juvenile justice system that fails to provide education and mental health services for most at-risk students and drastically increases the likelihood that these children will end up with a criminal record rather than a high school diploma (Kim, C., et al, 2010). In 2013, 2015 and in 2016, Christopher Mallett, PhD wrote about the School-To-Prison Pipeline: A Comprehensive Assessment (Mallett, 2016) which recalled important aspects on many youth of color. Dr. Mallett focused on how poverty, lack of family supports, and other factors can lead to anger and acting out in the classroom and can interfere with school progress or degree attainment in K-12 settings. Mallett focused on how educational achievement gets derailed or complicated and contributes to the “school-to-prison-pipeline” (Kang-Brown, et al, 2013). This process involves a set of policies and practices in schools that make it more likely for students to face criminal involvement with the juvenile courts than to attain a quality education (Advancement Project et al., 2011).

In 2009, another examination of the school-to-prison pipeline was conducted and is titled Deconstructing The Pipeline: Evaluating School-To-Prison Pipeline Equal Protection Cases Through A Structural Racism Framework by Chauncce D. Smith (Smith, 2009). The links between educational systems and the judicial system are focused on punishing adult and youth
minorities and the pedagogical distinctions between America's education and criminal justice systems are blurred (Smith, 2009, p. 1011). In 2013, Melina Angelos Healey wrote The School-To-Prison Pipeline Tragedy on Montana's American Indian Reservations (Healey, 2013). This article published as part of the University Review of Law & Social Change focused on the impact of the school-to-prison pipeline on the Fort Peck and Rocky Boy communities of the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana, USA. This focus on a specific group of Indigenous people is important because it sheds light on the diverse manifestations of this nationwide pipeline problem (Healey, 2013, p. 677). This investigation draws attention to the innovative strategies needed to combat [the pipeline] both in regions that are not generally focused on and in the inner-city areas that have been the center of recent attention and reform (Healey, 2013, p. 677). This conversation about the school-to-prison pipeline expanded with Jeremiah A. Chin, Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, & Nicholas Bustamante in 2019 when they wrote Carceral Colonialisms: Schools, Prisons, and Indigenous Youth in the United States as part of the Handbook of Indigenous Education. This chapter focuses on the history of colonization from boarding schools to how the school to prison pipeline is represented by focusing on discipline in Arizona schools.

This focus highlights how dress code violations, when wearing traditional Indigenous hair styles, signifies the ways in which colonization permeates the educational system in the United States (Chin, J.A., et al, 2019). The reality of inadequate educational systems coupled with disproportionate contact with the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Healey, 2013) provide an example of systemic racism. This description of school-to-prison-pipeline is an example of mass incarceration as approximately 2.3 million people are incarcerated in the American criminal justice system (Wagner & Sawyer, 2018) and people of color continue to
disproportionately represent those being incarcerated, policed and sentenced to death at a much higher rate (Tucker, 2017, p. 135) than non-people of color. Amanda Gebhard spoke to this fact in the Journal of Educational Controversy when she focused on four contributors to this pipeline for Indigenous youth in the Canadian penal system which are: 1) the racist and colonial histories of law and education for Aboriginals; 2) the disciplinary culture of schools; and 3) the lack of diversity in the Canadian teaching force, understood as a larger problem of systemic Whiteness; and 4) the overuse of paradigms of cultural differences to explain Aboriginal under-education. With these contributors, Gebhard specified that for Aboriginal (Indigenous) people there are similar patterns in systems of order (Mohawk scholar Patricia Monture-Angus, 1995, p. 80) as is what is found in what we now know as the United States.

Mass Incarceration

In 2000, New York University sociologist David Garland coined the phrase “mass imprisonment” to describe the United States’ “rate of imprisonment…that is markedly above the historical and comparative norm for societies of this type.” Therefore, the reality of mass incarceration in the United States is not simply defined by the imprisonment of large numbers of people but rather by the “systematic imprisonment of whole groups of the population” (Garland, 2001, p.121). One of the pieces that requires more investigation is the discussion of how Indigenous people that have experienced incarceration and see themselves in the process of being incarcerated. For example, Stephanie Cage of the Center for Interdisciplinary Teaching & Learning said “Mass incarceration is a temporary fix for societal problems, a fix that is beginning to come undone at the seams. If we want to truly tackle social issues, we have to provide more long-term solutions” (Cage, 2019). The societal fix that Cage is referring to has to deal with
believing there is a type of justice in incarceration especially when incarceration has been America’s primary response to social problems such as crime, mental illness, failing education systems, poverty, and racial and economic inequality (Kilgore, 2015). The Sentencing Project (https://www.sentencingproject.org) compiled the information below:

International Incarceration Rates (https://www.sentencingproject.org) are:

![International Rates of Incarceration]

U.S. State and Federal Prison Population, 1925-2019 rates (https://www.sentencingproject.org) are:
Incarceration rates in New Mexico (https://www.sentencingproject.org) are:
The Prison Policy Initiative compiled this information about New Mexico:

The rates are based on the census taken in 2010 and although there was a census taken in 2020 these types of numbers are not available yet. We do know that Annis (2017) states that infractions and crimes are committed and thus many are incarcerated, but that the inherent roots of mass incarceration are historically situated in Indian dispossession and the obtainment of Indian land, and to omit this from any narrative is irresponsible. This is an ongoing situation that has been documented since colonization and included the inception of residential schools (Gebhard, 2012). For example, the facts are clear that the United States has a long, bloody history of mass shootings and mass incarceration. The truth of the matter is this country is ignoring this fact does not make this reality any more manageable but in fact it perpetuates
colonization. Some information about the experiences of Indigenous students is documented in literature. Yet sometimes the experiences of Indigenous students are not documented in literature. This second half of this literature review describes information that has not been included as part of the experiences of Indigenous students in degree attainment, especially with incarceration. This information is documented in oral histories and personal sharing between generations, yet it rarely exists outside of academic books and journals. Problems with data collection - and an unfortunate tendency to group Native Americans together with other ethnic and racial groups in data publications - have made it hard to understand the effect of mass incarceration on Native people (Daniel, 2020). Many of the experiences that are brought into the college and ABE/HiSet classroom by Native American students are aspects of colonial violence built on the backs of black slaves and the bodies of millions of slain Native peoples (Hopkins, 2019).

**Human and Social Capital of Incarcerated People**

Sometimes the value of a person who has experienced incarceration is diminished when they rejoin society after being in prison. Many factors contribute to what many see as the value of a person’s life, especially with regards to their ability to obtain and maintain employment as a form of contributing to society. Therefore, it is possible for previously incarcerated individuals to become invisible in society. Their human capital (Pease, et al., 2014) and their social capital (Lin, 2001) are challenged especially when incarceration weakens an individual’s aptitude for achieving gainful employment (DOE, 2009). Some authors such as Bonta, Martin, Rolnic, Chua and Foley discuss these complicated dynamics, such as recidivism or being released from prison and reentering society (Leverentz, et al., 2021). In 2003, the rates of recidivism for Indigenous offenders were 37.7% for Indigenous men and 19.7% for Indigenous women (Bonta et al., 2003).
in 2020 these rates were higher at 44.6% (Muir, et al, 2020). Martin Jena with the *Indiana International & Comparative Law Review* says release is complicated (Martin, 2019). A constant cycle of being in and out of prison makes it difficult for people caught in this cycle to acquire meaningful education and work experience (Rolnick, 2016). Authors at Prisoninsight.com describe the recidivism cycle as “association with a limited social circle of amateur criminals, but prison offers a network of career criminals. If an inmate isn’t actively resisting criminal tendencies and trying to rehabilitate themselves, they may learn more about how to become a better criminal and, upon release, return to a life of crime” (https://prisoninsight.com/recidivism-the-ultimate-guide/). Thus, much of the literature about the human and social capital of those who have experienced incarceration seems to be an examination of how others see the previously incarcerated (Chua & Foley, 2014. P. 138).

The voices of the previously incarcerated are slowly being featured. For example, the 2019 film *In My Blood It Runs* directed by Maya Newell challenges the prior forms of documentation by sharing the perspectives of those who have been incarcerated as youth. Seeing the human side of an issue is sometimes easy to look past when analyzing an issue and it is hard to see the backstory for why people are in certain situations. The Harvard Educational Review ("HER") published articles on the intersection of incarceration and education and one study titled *At the Nexus of Education and Incarceration: Four Voices from the Field* chronicles situation and feature stories that highlight some of the struggles previously incarcerated people encounter in navigating life post incarceration. The "invisible needs" of previously incarcerated individuals as they transition to being students is a main part of the focus of this study. One of the pieces says, “Some of us have advanced degrees and some have college degrees, but many don’t even have their GEDs” (Becker, Carr, Knapp, & Giraldo, 2017, p. 261). This suggests that degree
attainment may or may not be a factor in being incarcerated and it is impactful because it highlights the voices of people currently in incarcerated settings. A blog posted on October 23, 2019 titled *Understanding the School-to-Prison Nexus* by Circe Stumbo of West Wind Education Policy focused on the issue of incarceration by saying “…there are myriad practices that schools and prisons have in common, which condition us to see people of color as inherently dangerous and in need of constant monitoring.” Many, if not all, people who pursue college face challenges and Indigenous Peoples face similar challenges of college degree attainment and struggle in many ways (Shotton, et al, 2013).

**Colonization and Incarceration as Slavery**

Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) can be *slaves* to colonization. Cree scholar Shawn Wilson refers to “slavery” in his book *Research is Ceremony* as chains of colonization (Wilson, 2008, p. 77) enforced upon Indigenous people by the US government. Today, many people are not in physical chains but are still bound in mental and emotional chains by both systems of incarceration and colonialization. Jack Norton (Yurok, Hupa, Cherokee) describes the incarceration of Native American individuals as making sense of the physical and social death caused by colonial oppression (Lindsay, 2018) that is evident to this day and similarly played out as prisons neglect inmates’ human rights in several ways including: limiting opportunities to pursue education, unfit living conditions, and physical and mental abuse (Wakefield, 2014, P. 905). The system of mass incarceration has multiple branches that disproportionately affect Native American Peoples including the school-to-prison pipeline (Schlabach, 2020, August 12) and the systemic issues that cause the nation’s prisons to be disproportionately filled with minorities (Stumbo, 2019, October 23). Another study from the United States Census Bureau (2021, June 21) counts people in certain prisons but does not
include prisons in rural communities. The inclusion of this prison census data this is problematic because it makes the population of these communities appear larger than they really are. This knowledge skews the reality that says it is in relation to my study. The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world (https://eji.org/news/united-states-still-has-highest-incarceration-rate-world/) and this is similar to having the highest number of slaves in 2021.

Today, slavery is not legal and thus it is not visible in the same ways we have seen in history yet according to CNN, nearly 2.2 million adults were held in America’s prisons and jails at the end of 2016 (Ling, 2019). This means that for every 100,000 people residing in the United States, approximately 655 of them were behind bars, at the time of the 2010 U.S. census. These numbers are staggering because incarceration is problematic in many ways. For example, many see incarceration as a social solution that is believed to safeguard some aspects of their lives. Many also believe that incarceration “cures” social ills such as homelessness or drug use (NIDA. 2020, June 1. Criminal Justice DrugFacts.) Yet, incarceration for the Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students in this study did not always align with many in society see as a cure because their incarceration did not solve the social ills they were incarcerated for.

As district lines get redrawn every ten years [in the United States], those living in prison districts gain a representational and electoral advantage over those living in non-prison districts (Stachulski, 2019). This electoral advantage only benefits those who are not incarcerated and when the census data is skewed voters are not able to make informed decisions. Studies such as the Prison Gerrymandering Project focuses on the problem of incarceration by informing those compiling census data to count prisoners at their prior address before they entered prison (Stachulski, 2019, p. 403). This act perpetuates the idea that incarceration creates significant problems for democracy and for our nation’s future as it leads to a dramatic distortion of
representation at local and state levels. It creates an inaccurate picture of community populations for research and planning purposes. Yet, the numbers do not necessarily tell the true story (Albien Anouk J., & Naidoo Anthony, 2017) and this means for individuals, including Native Americans, the journey out of the incarceration system is complex.

Many previously incarcerated college students who have been incarcerated as youth, teenagers and/or as young adults have not followed the “traditional” course of schooling that other college students usually take in their educational journey. These students may or may not see themselves as part of what Jamaal Bell refers to as Mass Incarceration: A Destroyer of People of Color and Their Communities (Bell, 2010). For many students and families, incarceration is normal and is one of the hurdles that families deal with in the mitigation of life. For example, “I think every family on this reservation has [a relative] in prison,” Rose Bear Robe, 56, a member of the Rosebud Sioux, told CNN in an August 2012 special report. “It’s beginning to be normal now, when people used to be ashamed of it.” With these experiences outside of the classroom, entering into the classroom and the culture of school can be culture shock.

The concept of Indigenous identity is not easily defined especially when the main images people encounter are not based in Indigeneity (Tumbaga, 2018). Yet, different Indigenous communities express their own knowledge systems (Louis, 2007) and when these knowledge systems do not include incarceration, people who have experienced incarceration often feel displaced. When college students are in the midst of understanding and describing their own reality, it is important for them to be able to understand and communicate their life experiences. Over time, there has been a need to understand and describe one’s identity in terms of what and how to negotiate one’s life and what that means as a community member. These are very real
contentions that Indigenous students face as they attend college away from their tribal communities. As Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo (2001) state in their article, "How We Know": Kwara'ae Rural Villagers Doing Indigenous Epistemology, “as a concept Indigenous epistemology focuses on the process through which knowledge is constructed and validated by a cultural group, and the role of that process in shaping thinking and behavior” (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001). This understanding correlates to how college students who have experienced incarceration are not sure where they fit into society after they are released. Cynthia Dilliard (2006) spoke to this point in her article, “The Substance of Things Hoped for, the Evidence of Things Not Seen: Examining an Endarkened Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research and Leadership.” She said, “Defining oneself in relation to one’s cultural and social community also defines one’s participation within that community, both one’s connection and affiliation as well as one’s responsibility (Dillard, 2006, p. 673). Dillard does not claim to be Indigenous but she is African American and as part of another marginalized community she describes the deep pain, sacrifice, resistance, and resilience of Native peoples. Heidemann, Cederbaum, Martinez & LeBel offer a similar commentary in their 2016 journal article titled Wounded healers: How formerly incarcerated women help themselves by helping others. This article focuses on the importance of relying on the characteristics of being a caretaker and a mother and where members of this specific community were able to help one another build self-esteem and social support (Heidemann, et al, 2016. P. 5).

Recidivism programs with the highest rates of success offer models for communities that need help with offender re-entry (Andrea Fox, editor of Gov1, Jan 27, 2017). The Prison Entrepreneurship Program (https://www.pep.org/) is a nonprofit organization that connects released felons with executives and entrepreneurs and is focused on empowering men to become
better husbands, fathers and sons. Other programs such as the Obama Administration's commitment to create a fairer, more effective criminal justice system, reduce recidivism, and combat the impact of mass incarceration on communities were created. The Department of Education announced the *Second Chance Pell Pilot Program* (https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-second-chance-pell-pilot-program-a-historical-overview/) was created to test new models that allow incarcerated Americans to receive Pell Grants and pursue the postsecondary education with the goal of helping them get jobs, support their families, and turn their lives around (Targeted News Service, 2015). Another program is The Delancey Street Foundation (http://www.delanceystreetfoundation.org/) which is a residential self-help program dedicated to assisting drug addicts, ex-convicts, ex-gang members, and homeless individuals. Other programs exist such as the *Last Mile* (https://thelastmile.org/) helps inmates get jobs with a living wage. This program works with incarcerated individuals for successful reentry through business and technology training and specializes in communicating issues such as obesity, diabetes, health, etc. that have affected their lives. They are guaranteed a job when they are released from prison. This program is cheaper than building new prisons and reduce recidivism by shifting perceptions around formerly incarcerated individuals and by building business skills learned while incarcerated into careers.

In terms of utilizing education, there are programs that are geared toward teaching men about gender roles and how ingrained ideas of masculinity have contributed to their violent and nonviolent crimes. For example, *The Parker Scholars Program* at San Diego City College (https://www.league.org/innovation-showcase/incarceration-graduation-helping-men-color-transition-criminal-justice-system) hypothesized that men who have access to postsecondary education and a range of academic, social, and emotional supports to facilitate their successful
transition will be less likely to engage in criminal behaviors and activities that lead to incarceration. Similar programs that Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students still have the opportunity to apply for include the Second Chance Pell Pilot grant and as they attend a college they are accepted to. Religious based programs, like Unshackled! (https://unshackled.org/) the radio drama series which focuses on the premise that “Without Jesus Christ, we are all shackled by sin — by our wrong choices, disobedience, and selfish motives. But God is at work, and the power of Christ sets us free of our bondage. We are...UNSHACKLED!.” This message is on their website and targets people who have been previously incarcerated and those who love someone that has been incarcerated. Similar to this radio show, faith-based programs focus on religion to reduce recidivism by preparing previously incarcerated individuals for life outside of prison by focusing on religion as a tool for reducing deviant and criminal behavior. Dodson, Cabage & Klenowski discuss these programs in the Journal of Offender Rehabilitation in their chapter titled “An Evidence-Based Assessment of Faith-Based Programs: Do Faith-Based Programs 'Work' to Reduce Recidivism?” The study found that three of the four measures they instated to measure the effectiveness of religious-based programs were not statistically significant in reducing adult criminal behavior (Dodson, et al, 2011). Their study was important yet many friends and relatives claim that these programs work.

It is imperative that there is an examination of how Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) access postsecondary (college) education and navigate similar hurdles to facilitate their successful transition into non-prison society and degree obtainment. According to the 2014 Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) report, incarceration can derail the educational progress of People of Color (Wimer & Bloom, 2014) and significantly impact degree attainment. This information is important because Native American students are
an already underrepresented minority group in higher education. In 2020, only 15% of American Indians hold college degrees (https://collegefund.org/how-to-help/) representing less than 1% of all college-going students in the United States (Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013). As a response to there not being a focus on Native American students, the BJA FY 21 Innovations in Reentry Initiative: Building System Capacity & Testing Strategies to Reduce Recidivism issued a grant Request For Proposals (RFP) (BJA FY 21 Innovations in Reentry Initiative: Building System Capacity & Testing Strategies to Reduce Recidivism (ojp.gov).

To date, one tribal college the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College (FDLTCC) was selected to participate in the new Second Chance Pell pilot program. The pilot program allows eligible Americans in prison to receive Pell grants and pursue postsecondary education, with the goal of helping them get jobs when they are released (Urbanski T. Tribal College Selected for Department of Education Prison Program. Tribal College Journal. 2016.). It is unclear where the other 36 Tribal Colleges and Universities stand with these programs to combat recidivism. Yet, what started out as an experimental program out of the Obama-Biden Administration in 2015 is expanding in 2022 to include students who are incarcerated, as long as they are enrolled in prison education programs that are approved by their state corrections departments or the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and that meet other requirements (U.S. Department of Education Announces It Will Expand the Second Chance Pell Experiment for the 2022-2023 Award Year | U.S. Department of Education). This program is an example of hope that holds promise for our relatives that are Previously Incarcerated Students (PIIS).

In summary, Indigenous students bring many aspects of their lives into the classroom as they earn their collegiate credentials. Native peoples have adopted a wide range of strategies in their college journeys and challenge ideas of justice, representation, and civil liberties while
understanding many aspects of indigeneity (Cobb, 2015). Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students also grapple with these experiences and prove that they are ready for the challenges.
Chapter 3

Research Design and Methods

We have census data that identifies people as they choose to be identified yet most Indigenous people say they are from a certain tribe, family, and/or community. This is part of the unique nature of my study as I developed it, to understand and learn from the experiences of Indigenous students who have been incarcerated and have not followed a more traditional course of higher education that other college students might take. The students in my study transitioned from high school and/or the workforce to Southwest Tribal College (STC). The primary research question that guided my study was: How do previously incarcerated Indigenous college students make sense of experiences and perspectives of being incarcerated and how do Previously Incarcerated Indigenous college/ABE Students (PIIS) share their experiences with other PIIS for themselves in relation to college and their futures. My study included participants who volunteered their time and perspectives as either Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) or classroom instructors of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS). In this chapter, I describe the research design and methodology I utilized for this study. First, I provide a rationale for my choice to conduct listening sessions, versus a western case study of focus groups or interviews. Second, I included a description of the sites for the study. I then share my epistemological orientation and how it informed the construction and implementation of my research design. After detailed descriptions of my methods and procedures for data collection and analysis, I share the strategies I used to ensure trustworthiness followed by a discussion of the study’s limitations. I believe the gender breakdown was composed of males and females yet asking participants to identify their gender was not a factor in participant selection. I do not know if anyone from the LGBTQ or two-spirit communities were represented as they did not
volunteer this information. My Listening Session questions did not ask for this information. Similarly, one student participant revealed their tribal affiliation and the other student participants just stated that they were Native. This question was posed but student participants merely stated that they were from a certain tribal community. I do not believe the student participants were trying to be elusive, I believe they thought I would understand that they were Native without needing to ask. Determining the year in school of the student participants was not clear as I did not ask this information. Some of the students were in the ABE program yet some of the students were taking classes in other departments and would be considered a combination of freshmen and sophomores in college. Beyond acknowledging the Early Childhood Program, the student participants did not state their academic focus or degree. The Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students that participated in this study did not share information on their incarceration such as the years they spent incarcerated or the time in between incarceration and college. Three student participants revealed that they had been incarcerated during their time in college and due to a parole violation they needed to be reincarcerated yet they did not reveal the number of times they had been incarcerated.

As an Indigenous researcher I designed this study around Indigenous principles and this topic is extremely important to me and to my participants. We see one another across kitchen tables at feast days, we pass one another on the street, we sit next to one another in village meetings, etc. We identify one another as Indigenous and share a comradery of a shared understanding of life. I utilized a qualitative case study design (Audet, 2001) for my study, on the topic of previously incarcerated students in tribal colleges because this community has barely been researched. This type of approach is well suited for research questions that seek to understand, “…how students [of color] who exist at the intersections of multiple marginalized
identities (e.g., race) are extremely vulnerable to the school-prison nexus” (Annamma, 2018, p. 107).

**Brayboy’s Tribal Critical Race Theory**

My research approach embraced an Indigenous research paradigm, Tribal Critical Race Theory (Tribal CRT), to address the ontological, epistemological, and methodological commitments that Indigenous people have and will make. These commitments are usually not identified with words such as ontological, epistemological, and methodological yet an understanding of world views is important to research among specific populations of People. Tribal Critical Race Theory is different from western-centered approaches, especially in relation to how existence is understood and explained. The idea of western education (Pomerantz, Raby, & Harris, 2017) is maintained by most colleges and classrooms because it is seen as having the ability to produce successful professionals to work within a western economic system. This idea of promoting western education initially supported colonization and when Indigenous people did not fit into the paradigm of education, mass genocide began to take place. Most historical documents and contemporary understanding say that Native Americans should be extinct (Kakaliouras, 2012). Yet, Indigenous students, including myself, are very much here. Therefore, this study is timely and relevant.

In any society there is a dominant worldview that is held by most members of that society (Olsen, 1992). An epistemological understanding of Indigenous existence describes how people need to create themselves because there is no foundationalist language which they can establish as an anchor for their prior knowledge (Hailikari, 2008) of life and situations. Yet these constructs in society play out in the daily lives of humanity. Many have claimed Indigenous People cannot represent themselves and therefore must be represented by experts who know
more about them than they know about themselves (Miller, 2011). Some of these researchers have been *nice* and *well intentioned*, others have been vicious colonizers.

It is the responsibility of Indigenous Peoples to initiate a paradigm shift in research and to say, *this is how I see this life. These are the events that have come before me, and this is how I see the future.* I do not claim to speak for all Indigenous people, yet it is important to discuss the existence of a group of people in a research manner that is effective for smaller populations, because Native People are often viewed and footnoted as not statistically significant (Shotton, 2013) in many types of academic research. It is here that locating and utilizing an Indigenous framework is of great importance to Indigenous people because it allows the development of Indigenous theory and methods of practice and decides what is ‘normal’ or abnormal, or if that distinction even needs to exist (Wilson, 2008). This philosophical worldview assumptions that *experts* bring to the study, the strategy of inquiry that is related to this worldview, and the specific methods or procedures of research that translate the approach into practice. Indigenous researchers understand their Indigenous knowledge systems as it applies to them.

As Fredericks (2008, p. 27) argues, the role of the Indigenous researcher is, “…to speak back to the knowledges that have been formed around what is perceived as Indigenous positionings within Western worldviews.” My research needed to provide an opportunity for me as an Indigenous researcher to decolonize and reposition Indigenous knowledge within the academy (Nakata, 2007; Smith, 2013). As part of my striving to understand the incarceration and its aftermath for previously incarcerated college students I needed to try to understand colonization in relation to their experiences and perspectives. Colonization looks different in 2020 but many of us are still dealing with its reverberations in our daily lives including in research. In 2012, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori), gave Indigenous researchers guiding principles
in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies* to disrupt the dehumanizing gaze of *objective* research (McDonough, 2014). In 2012, Linda Tuhiwai Smith did this by stating that research with Indigenous communities must be reflective, respectful, have reciprocity, be responsible and inspire revolution. Until this time, the assessments of Indigenous reality, research within an Indigenous epistemology, had not been articulated in academia. Her definition of research and guiding tenets were both relevant and timely as Indigenous people were becoming more visible as humans, instead of caricatures (Coward, 2012). Indigenous caricatures have been difficult to shake in many contexts including within academic research.

Locating and utilizing an Indigenous framework is of great importance to Indigenous people, and to my own research, because it allows the development of Indigenous theory and methods of practice and helps me to decide what is ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal within an Indigenous epistemology, or if that distinction even needs to exist (Wilson, 2008). In this study I applied the conceptual framework of Tribal Critical Race Theory to frame my research and to seek understanding about the lived realities of PIIS previously incarcerated Indigenous college students. For my study I examined my approach to research by applying six of the Nine Tenets of Tribal CRT which are:

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.

TribalCrit values narrative and stories as important sources of data (Brayboy, 2005) and thus my study focuses on tenet one, and tenets five through nine because these specific tenets are most helpful to explaining the factors impacting the participants in my study. For example tenet five focuses on “The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens” and this is exactly what the participants in my study did. Recommendations from this study include tenet four.

Tribal CRT was coined by Dr. Bryan Brayboy in 2006 as a way to address the issues of Indigenous Peoples in the United States (Brayboy, 2006). In his landmark journal article, Dr.
Brayboy states, “This theoretical framework provides a way to address the complicated relationship between American Indians and the United States federal government and begin to make sense of American Indians’ liminality as both racial and legal/political groups and individuals” (Brayboy, 2006, p. 428.). According to Melissa Faircloth, director of Virginia Tech’s American Indian and Indigenous Community Center (AIICC) (https://vtx.vt.edu/articles/2019/02/020819-dsa-faircloth.html), “Building community is important for college students.” Examining this community in relation to a Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) framework offers the possibility of exposing, uncovering, and confronting colonization within educational contexts and societal structures, thus transforming those contexts and structures for Indigenous Peoples (Writer, 2008). Therefore, understanding Tribal CRT is more than being “nice” to Native American Peoples, it is understanding how education has appropriated the lived realities of Indigenous Peoples and shaped the understanding of generations. This appropriation has normalized our marginalization in general and especially in education. This appropriation within policy, practices, and curriculum often appears equitable in educational contexts and has the appearance of equitable education, yet it is hard to tell if equity for Native American Peoples is actually happening. Tribal CRT provides tenets helpful to targeting and highlighting cultures who have been previously ignored in critical analysis. Tribal CRT exposes the exoticism that many Indigenous Peoples get labeled with.

Tribal CRT provides guidance on and encourages a decolonizing analysis and critique of systems such as education and health as well as the recrafting or Indigenizing these systems of policy, practice, and more. My study is influenced by this philosophy to demonstrate how PIIS can influence academia, not just how academia influences PIIS. For my study I examined the experiences of Native American college and ABE students as previously incarcerated
individuals, their perspectives, their mentoring and work with other PIIS, as well as to some extent their definitions of collegiate success. I enacted Tribal CRT in my study by focusing on Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in tribal colleges. In doing so, I strove to redirect the focus from what has been previously ignored in critical analysis about PIIS to what I believe needs to be analyzed – the first-hand accounts of previously incarcerated students and classroom instructors who work with them. This is where Tribal Critical Race Theory fits in perfectly since it synthesizes not only how oppression and struggle has caused historical trauma but how oppressed peoples find resiliency and work toward making the best of their situations. CRT points to valuing experiential knowledge as a way to inform thinking and research (Brayboy, 2006) and this is precisely the approach that I took with my study.

Applying Tribal CRT assists researchers to analyze systems culturally, and with respectful critique generating truths about colonization in larger social and structural contexts, facilitating change (Writer, 2008), and encouraging activism. There can be meaningful collaboration amongst the historically oppressed and with individuals from historically oppressed populations that involves enacting Tribal CRT inside and outside of academia. My concern is that if PIIS do not believe they have anything to contribute to higher education or society, nor learn from community members, then our Indigenous communities will suffer from the loss of their contributions. Through my study and my own work as an instructor within a tribal college, I strive to recognize and engage the social capital of previously incarcerated students. For me, requires an understanding of networks, trust, norms, and interactions through an emic approach to understand how local people think (Kottak, 2006) -- in this case previously incarcerated Indigenous college students. Seeking understanding through my study includes seeing,
acknowledging, and working to understand through my study and work; ethnicity, culture, and race as part of identity. Analyzing the narratives of PIIS and faculty who work with them in my study through the Tribal CRT lens as well as to some extent the educational, correctional, Tribal, and societal systems they discuss is a form of educational justice and I have striven to treat them as important knowledge and not just treat as an abstract concept.

A Note on Research During a Pandemic

In 2020, my reality as a researcher took on a very different look and approach, when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in our state and in-person research activities were suspended by the University of New Mexico just before I was to start collecting data for my study. The pandemic and various state and University restrictions changed how my interviews were conducted and how I connected with participants. I needed to collect their stories (i.e. data) differently than I planned. We went from meeting in-person for classes, advising, and informal conversations on campus to seeing one another virtually through the cameras on our computers because the pandemic has not subsided even at the time of this study and write up. I share this in part because Dikos Ntsaaígíí-19 exposed the reality that separates all of us and has been a significant source of exposing the divides in our communities. As we met via the computer, students and classroom instructors shared from their experiences and we communicated in a different way that I originally planned.

Positionality

My positionality in relation to my study stems partially from being a classroom educator at a tribal college from fall 2015 to my current appointment in 2021. In this short amount of time, I have become familiar with the climate at this particular tribal college. I have seen some of the mitigations that students, faculty, and staff apply in coping with the challenges of completing a
trimester. Students are expected to take in information, understand that information, and translate their understanding in tests and exams. This process is not unlike other forms of schooling. Yet, in my experience, when students are adults (NeCamp, 2014) who have experienced incarceration (PIIS), the pedagogical approaches must be different and the challenges they navigate post incarceration can feel insurmountable. Studying, understanding, and documenting their voices is extremely important especially in documenting their life in relation to incarceration and what this means for their success in college as well as what it means for those of us who facilitate their learning. When Indigenous adults find themselves in the classroom, they may or may not be aware of the experiences they will encounter. My hope is that this study will also provide some assistance and support to previously incarcerated Indigenous college students.

I have not always valued life experiences as I do now, and I know that I have much more to learn in the journey that is life. I have learned to be open to new experiences and to love people along the way. This skill has helped in my professional world of teaching and negotiating multiple personalities as I support students and facilitate their learning. I first learned the value of love from my grandfather, Lemuel Bahe Yazzie, whose love for the land and his people I saw firsthand as a child and learned more about as I became an adult. He always had a kind word and rarely showed anger, even when it was clear that certain situations were not right in his eyes. He loved people and spoke what he believed to be the truth, firmly. My grandfather demonstrated love to the people in his congregation via sermons and by the many visits to peoples’ homes to “check on them and see how they’re doing.” He was bilingual and spoke Diné Bizaad, or the Navajo language, seamlessly along with the English language. Before he became a preacher, he utilized his impressive language skills as one of the Navajo Code Talkers and fought in World War II.
As a teenager, I had a hard time grappling with the idea that my grandfather, and other US soldiers would fight in wars for land that had been colonized by the United States federal government. Yet, I later learned, when I was able to understand, that my grandfather did not fight on behalf of the United States government. He wanted to preserve and maintain the freedom that he knew from childbirth as his land. That land was the Navajo reservation. Here, I had the opportunity to see love demonstrated in many ways to people who were blood related, and to others not blood related. I was able to witness love and the true embodiment of stewardship, which is caring for the land and other elements that are entrusted to you. I think of my grandfather when I think about love and how to serve. I think of him and the examples he revealed in his life when I think about being in the classroom and working with students, I think about this type of love. It encourages me to check on them to see how they are doing and seek to genuinely understand situations and circumstances that make up who they are and to help them reach their goals. This idea of love is at the heart of what I do and who I am in the classroom. This is the reason for this study. This is part of me checking on the students to see how they are doing. I believe this love and wanting to check on students served as a strength in developing and conducting my study.

I am Laguna Pueblo, Diné, Hunkpapa Lakota, Assiniboine, and Sioux. I come from a rich line of people who love deeply and care immensely. My family laughs hard and cries hard. My mother is Laguna Pueblo and Diné. My father is Hunkpapa Lakota, Assiniboine, and Sioux. I am here because of them, and I am thankful for the knowledge they impart to me daily. Because of them I know that I am Indigenous and appreciate the fact that I have lived my life among and with other Indigenous people. I believe this has been important and has definitely promoted my desire to see Indigenous people succeed in life and to experience academic success. This is also
part of how my identity is shared with my research subjects (Chavez, 2008). Being Indigenous similar to my participants was a strength that helped me design, conduct, analyze, and interpret my study.

I am certified to teach Language Arts and English in Arizona and New Mexico and I have a BA and MA. Ed degrees and have been an educator for several years where I usually seek to learn more about how to help my students engage with classroom material and figure out how to make it on their own. Most educators do this, and it is a common practice. Yet since fall 2015 when my credentials made it to the top of the pile, and I was asked to teach English 99 in an Adult Basic Education (ABE) program I met students who shared their experiences of being previously incarcerated. These students discussed their decisions of choosing to be enrolled in college and of carrying their experiences with them into college. Little did I know that these discussions, sometimes in passing, would be the basis for my current doctoral work and my future research. I have learned not to take their class failure personally yet to continue to help them the best ways I could. This education happens in different ways. I have needed to understand what being Indigenous means to me and how this translates into various roles in tribal communities and in the western world, especially the western views of education. I have needed to examine my own identity as an Indigenous person and acknowledge that being Indigenous is not a cut and dry reality with clearly defined identity perimeters. Not once do I remember being asked about my experience as an Indigenous person before graduate school. I do not think I would have known how to articulate my experiences, especially because I was so close to the experience itself. I would have said that it was doable, yet very confusing. It was all so normal, while actually being very abnormal. These experiences contributed to developing a
deeper understanding of the diversity within Indigenous communities that has been helpful and a strength as I designed, conducted, analyzed, and interpreted my study.

*Insider-Outsider Research*

Until that time, I did not think about previously incarcerated students until I actually met some and it became clear that I never knew previously incarcerated students before that time. I did not really understand or even know what previously incarcerated Indigenous students need to be academically successful. I have never been incarcerated and do not share this experience with people who are or have been incarcerated. Yet, I understand the importance of articulating experiences, such as incarceration, and the potential for learning about how these experiences impact academic pursuits. I admit that I thought of incarceration as a *barrier* to education and not as an experience that could lead to their academic success. This belief led me to wonder if other classroom instructors thought about this. In pursuit of this goal, I sought existing studies, I looked around the library and the internet, I asked colleagues and other people about literature that highlights these accounts. I found information on student success and on student success of Indigenous students yet not necessarily of previously incarcerated Indigenous students. The reality of this need inside and outside of academia propelled me to pursue this focus.

So much *research* has taken place in Indigenous communities and been published from an *outside* point of view that the need for *inside* interpretations are not only needed (Kuh, 1993), but necessary for deeper understanding to take place. The level of accountability to one’s community, family, and oneself is also important. Because everyone is connected to a larger whole and responsible for actions that will be remembered for generations it is imperative that Indigenous research be conducted with conscientious respect (Brayboy, 2012). Indigenous research, especially within a Tribal Critical Race Theory epistemology, aims to accomplish this
goal and has been developing over the last hundred years by Indigenous scholars in a format that is acceptable in academic and non-academic arenas. Indigenous thinking has existed beyond this recognition for thousands of years, since time immemorial, yet not seen until relatively recently. This has shaped what is considered real research. A clear historical distinction between an Indigenous Research Paradigm and a Western Research Paradigm is the teaching and scholarly pursuit of knowledge about Indigenous Peoples by non-Indigenous intellectuals. In 2009, I moved to New Mexico. This move was deliberate because as Indigenous scholars, we get to represent the communities we are part of. This choice was conscious and deliberate on my part, especially while dealing with my own reality of colonization. I understand that this move was a privilege and something I had control over. I understand that my ancestors were forced to move, such as in the Long Walk (Bailey, 1970) and other forms of forced relocation to live on small pieces of land called reservations (Tarshis, 2019). The bottom line is that colonialism impacts all areas of our lives, and we need to talk about our experiences in relation to research and other endeavors. We need to make time for our communities before we make room for people not in our communities.

I had the choice of leaving one reservation to be close to the homeland of my people, the Laguna Pueblo. I do not take this for granted and understanding this reality positions me as an Indigenous scholar in a unique position, especially with regard to being on both the inside and the outside of my research. An insider’s view constitutes a view about our own customs and beliefs. This is when a member of a group has their own interpretation of their group opposed to an outsider’s interpretation (emic) or culturally specific. (Walsh, 2007). I believe that Tiffany Lee, Ph. D. said it best when she shared (via social media on 03/22/19):
I think about activist work and how it’s defined. I often think we (Native scholars/students) have a narrow view of what this is and how it impacts our people. We need to expand that definition and stop judging our own people for not doing enough based on their own definitions. If we impact change, that is activism.

This comment not only eloquently states the reality of the situation we are all facing but it also concisely summarizes why this work must take place especially for those who are not carrying picket signs and protesting with loud voices. Activism is an extremely important act that includes many kinds of action including being in the classroom and encouraging revolutions of the academy. The listening to and the appropriate documentation of stories, such as in a narrative study like this one, is activism because this is the right time to tell these truths that are evident especially as the stories share unresolved trauma, loss, and death, and we will be more emotionally prepared for that experience when we are able to see our work as meaningfully helping those forms of pain move on (Lucchesi, 2009). Many students and instructor participants told me “Thank you for doing this” and “Thank you for telling our side.” The fact that students said “side” indicates that they felt that there are sides to this discussion, and they were on the side that was not heard.

My mother is a retired elementary school teacher and growing up I was able to see her passion for being a classroom educator. As a classroom educator, I get to pick up where she left off. This representation is not better, nor is it less, than other forms of scholarship. There is a shared goal of learning + teaching which has clarified that education happens in diverse ways. I as a classroom educator appreciate the educational process and relish the moments when concepts crystalize and the countenance of students’ faces change because they get a concept.
This experience translates across subjects, races, classes; I am cognizant that the educational process is complicated and sometimes takes years to achieve understanding. Yet understanding does happen and when it does – it is awesome! Since 2015, I have worked within the collegiate site where this study took place. I work with students who could be relatives and when I see their names I wonder if we are relatives. Yet, for every student, relative or not, I want them to know that their degree attainment is possible, and this keeps me going when days get stressful, including when this research becomes stressful.

**Inside-Outside Research**

When one is *inside* of a situation we see and experience situations a certain way. This is similar to when one is *outside* of a situation (Kuh, 1993). As a researcher, I may or may not have access to certain types of information as someone inside or outside of a situation. I am an insider in that I knew most of my participants before quarantine and recruiting them to be participants was facilitated by knowing one another in-person. We know one another from my role as a classroom instructor at my site. All of my participants know that I am Indigenous and to many this might mean something, yet this has never been acknowledged or referenced, except by one non-native instructor in a follow-up interview. I discuss more in chapter 4.

I grew up outside of the Laguna Pueblo and visited New Mexico often yet not until I became an adult did I move to Albuquerque. On the other hand, I have a Certificate of Indian Blood (CIB) which grants me documentation as a Laguna Pueblo tribal member. This has granted me inside status as an Indigenous, enrolled tribal member. This inside-outside status is as simple as it is complicated. Every Indigenous person grapples with this complicated identity and status in small and large ways. Every story is unique and our lives and identities are always connected to historical trauma as much as resilience. These experiences are complicated and
loaded, yet Bryan McKinley Brayboy & Donna Deyhle refer to this in their 2000 study titled “Insider-Outsider: Researchers in American Indian Communities” when they say, “Qualitative research, and especially ethnography, relies on what we, as observers, see and what we are told by the participants in our research studies. This is not always a seamless path” (Brayboy, & Deyhle, 2000, p. 7). It is imperative that Indigenous researchers examine the myriad identities and contexts of participants, sites, communities and themselves to ensure that we develop and share the deepest possible understandings. This is part of the hallmark of Indigenous scholarship, and we are more than representation of the communities of which we are part. Indigenous representation is not better, nor is it less, than other forms of scholarship. Yet, there is a difference in worldviews and thoughts. For example, within my academic identity, I share goals of continual learning and teaching held by many educators and scholars in an ongoing process that does not end with degree attainment. This is viewing the world from inside academia and outside academia.

I am an outsider in some ways from colonizing factors separating me from many perceptions of what it means to be Indigenous. Yet, I have also been able to connect with many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in creating a path to academic analysis. None of this is forged alone and I would not have seen this if I was not in some ways an outsider to my topic and to my participants. I am also an outsider because I do not share the experience of being previously incarcerated. I also have not been a student at the TCU where the study took place. These factors might be seen as limitations yet in reality they have allowed me to see what has been present all along. I have learned that I can engage both insider and outsider factors in myself as strengths in service to my study and to Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students.
While tackling course work in graduate school, I personally experienced circumstances that impacted my daily life, especially my school and professional success. The plumbing at my home caused my family and myself to need to live in extended stay motels for almost a month. At one point my daughter asked me if we were “homeless.” I told her “no, we are not homeless. Our house is broken and needs to be fixed and then we can move back home.” My parents, my partner, and I did our best to assure her, and ourselves. It was challenging at times to see the upside to the situation especially when stress levels were extremely high and daily life felt rough, when school assignments and tasks needed to be completed. I needed to see the situation as just that, a situation, and not life-defining. It is hard to have perspective while being in the midst of situations. Yet, two concrete lessons I learned from the experience are to 1) have sincere sympathy for student experiences, and 2) it is important to be open to learning from situations. This situation reminded me of the words of Fredrick Douglass who said “If there is no struggle, there is no progress” as part of a speech he made on August 3, 1857; in which he discussed the crucial role of West Indian slaves in a struggle for freedom from slavery in the midst of the founding of the United States of America. My experiences and identities make both inside and outside Indigenous research plausible for me. At times, people do not want to carry the burden of being Indigenous. Our daily challenges can be part of our identity and provide strength to our research. Denial takes a great deal of energy, and it makes more sense to acknowledge one's Indigenous identity than to ignore it.

A Note on the Pandemic in Relation to My Study

In March 2020, all of our worlds changed dramatically. We were faced with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and every part of our lives was changed. We learned of people across the world dying and the fear of losing community members and family members
impacted us in ways that most of us did not consider previously. We all come into contact with death and the reality of encountering a new existence without loved ones yet, this pandemic completely changed our reality. All of this hit home in ways we never anticipated. We needed to leave our in-class certainty and switch to connect and interact with each other via web services like zoom. At first, this was a minor inconvenience laced with fear of the unknown and of the possibilities of being infected. I immediately thought this would drastically change the direction of my study, yet a friend said “You're really catching lightning in a bottle. Some of the greatest, most memorable research of all time was created when something positively un-anticipatable happened. Why fight the Creator! Roll with it (personal communication, September 10, 2020).” I needed these words more than I knew. Sometimes the universe hands you something unexpected --and it turns out to be unexpectedly wonderful or original or amazing or all of these and more. In the midst of how many more pandemics do you think scholars will be able to perform research? I realized, again, that the time is now! This is why I am here, and this is what I need to do.

I always thought I was open to situations, yet the time spent on Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for both the University and for the Tribal college of my study got me down and I lost momentum especially since this was supposed to be based on in-person connections. I was counting on in person connections yet was also trying to be open about this new situation and believed I would keep learning. I needed encouragement to reboot as the reality is very different than what I anticipated. I needed to remember that Indigenous research is any research that touches the lives, communities, environment, or culture of Indigenous people (Lambert, 2014). At this point I remembered why I started this process and knew I needed to
modify my approach to my study to be remote with my recruitment and data collection processes.

Site of Study – Southwest Tribal College (STC)

I conducted my study at Southwest Tribal College (STC) a tribal college where more than 120 different Indian tribes are represented. The college is a federally operated Bureau of Indian Affairs community college located in Albuquerque, New Mexico and is funded through the Bureau of Indian Education, an agency within the U. S. Department of the Interior. This college is often chosen by students because it is affordable at $365.00 - $590.00 for the academic year. This financial factor appeals to students who are seeking a financially manageable route to course transferability and eventually degree attainment. Manageable financial costs make attending college a doable process especially when students do not have the financial support of their families and/or communities to rely upon. The site was chosen because it is a tribal college and there are high numbers of Indigenous students at the institution. STC draws a large percentage of its students from across the United States and from various federally recognized tribes.

For example, in 2019 I had the opportunity to travel to Aotearoa/New Zealand to present the beginnings of this study at the MAI ki te Ao Indigenous Doctoral Gathering. Not only was the gathering in a different country, it was site specific and all attendees were able to learn from the Maori, the Indigenous people of the land. The site of this study also carries the same importance. Participants in my study had the opportunity to learn from one another in this setting and after reading the collected recollections.
There are three other tribal colleges located in New Mexico yet this site had the most diverse group of tribes represented because of its Bureau of Indian education rather than tribally controlled status. The opportunity to include a diverse group of students from a number of tribes made this important as this opportunity was open to any student willing to discuss their experiences as a previously incarcerated student and how this fact factored into their academic success and their experience earning a degree. I also opened this opportunity to classroom instructors with experience working with PIIS.

I believed that my study needed to take place at a tribal college because it was one of the first places that PIIS participants had the choice to attend. The site was important because choosing a college is a process of going to the student at their site of choice. The college could be close to their home and/or tribal communities so it is more affordable to travel home when necessary to fulfill community and familial responsibilities. STC was created to serve Native American communities and through the collective efforts with other tribal leaders, public officials, and interested citizens. This connection to land and place is not something that can be owned or a commodity to be bought and sold. It is simply home. This common Indigenous perspective of place is in contrast to western science and education that tends to emphasize compartmentalized knowledge (Chávez & Longerbeam, 2016). This contrast is often decontextualized and taught in the detached setting of a classroom as opposed to how Native people have traditionally acquired their knowledge through direct experience in the natural environment (Kawagley, 1995). Tribal colleges serve as a connection to Indigenous pedagogies, ways of being, role models and more.

**Data Collection Methods - Listening Sessions**
The need to hold Listening Sessions stemmed from gatherings to bring awareness about the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) crisis in Indigenous communities. The need to genuinely listen to the victims and their families prompted my desire to also genuinely listen to these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) and the classroom instructors that get to work with them. Holding Listening Sessions as my data collection method is based on the work of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot who has pioneered the Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) method to document the culture of institutions and the life stories of individuals to gain an understanding of their lived experiences. The need for conducting Listening Sessions is also based on the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and her process of reclaiming control over Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Smith, 1999). The need to hold Listening Sessions is also based on the work of Agnes Portalewska and the series of listening sessions held across Massachusetts to reexamine the social condition of Native peoples in the state through the project Massachusetts Native Peoples and the Social Contract: A Reassessment for Our Times (Portalewska, 2015). The need for the perspectives of these PIIS to share their experiences from their perspective is imperative to genuinely learning about this marginalized community.

**Sampling of Research Participants**

Using listening sessions was helpful to the exploration of my research questions because it allowed for participants to share the information that they found meaningful. For example, using listening sessions as my method of data collection was helpful to my conversations with PIIS because they seemed to have the freedom to share where they have not previously. I utilized a combination of snowball, random (Martino, et al, 2018), and semi-random sampling (Yang, et al, 2010) techniques yielded participants. I believe utilizing these techniques eliminated confusion about my study and allowed me to speak directly to Previously Incarcerated
Indigenous Students (PIIS) or classroom instructors that worked directly with PIIS. The STC instructors who work with PIIS also seemed to have the freedom to share their perspectives. I believe knowing that they would have pseudonyms allowed the participants to share more candidly versus if their real names were used.

Originally, I planned to conduct all of the Listening Sessions in person yet I needed to modify the sessions to remote listening sessions because of pandemic restrictions and to keep all participants safe. The topical focus for the interviews derived from my research questions with minor differences in wording and specifics for each constituency group. See Appendices for listening session questions. In my IRB, I stated that I would utilize a combination of posting flyers around campus and snowball sampling to connect with participants. With the need to operate remotely and via zoom, I also needed to change my approach to connecting with participants. I found that connecting with instructors was “easier” than connecting with students.

The Listening Sessions with the student participants and the classroom instructors were a combination of individual and group sessions. Initially the sessions were all going to be held in groups to be sensitive to the time commitment of the participants. Yet, only two sessions included two participants – one session with two students took place and one session with two classroom instructors took place. All of the other sessions were held with individual participants. This is not what I planned but this is how it eventually worked out. Selecting the sample of research participants was dependent on the ethics and respect of the community. I needed the participants to know that I would listen without judgement. I needed them to know that their specialized knowledge needed to be shared that they could share confidentiality and without repercussions. When people hear the word “incarcerated” there is a stigma attached to this word and certainly the reality that has the power to define lives. Often, the discrimination that takes
place against previously incarcerated people perpetuates the reality and the stigma of their existence. Many only see the stigma and are fearful of anything having to do with incarceration. Therefore, including the voices of the people from a research site is integral to dismantling these stigmas. The participants must be reminded of the power of their voices in defining future pedagogy with their perspectives. There is no other way to obtaining these perspectives and maintain their authenticity as they are site specific. Student participants responded to requests to meet via zoom and followed the discussion questions as their guide. It is here that I needed to rely solely upon what participants chose to share with me. Some of the participants chose not to enable their cameras and I could only see their names in their rectangle boxes. None of the participants self-identified with pseudonyms yet they did request pseudonyms, so I needed to choose for them. Their choices in clothing or appearance were not evident and the only thing I knew was that they had computer and internet access in order to connect via zoom.

**Sampling Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students**

I contacted the students with an email specifically addressed to students where I used a semi-random, voluntary snowball sampling technique to select participants and I contacted the participants by e-mailing flyers (see Appendix for a copy of the flyer e-mailed) to all STC students and students I worked with since 2015. I kept a copy of student emails since 2015 that I titled “student emails” and were not linked to actual student names and there was no link to the identify individual students. Since I could not reach out to potential participants in-person I needed to utilize email by sending the text in the flyer via blind carbon copy (BCC) to every student I was aware of. Email was utilized as a substitute for not being able to physically post flyers around campus. I used a snowball sampling technique of asking some PIIS I already knew and then asking them to pass along my flyer to help me recruit other participants. This technique
produced participants that had overlooked my first email yet agreed to participate once their friend (another PIIS) stated that they knew me. Their interviews revealed this information and I had no idea this was happening with them. I contacted the students with an email specifically addressed to students where I used a semi-random, voluntary snowball sampling technique to select participants and I contacted the participants by e-mailing flyers (see Appendix for a copy of the flyer e-mailed) to all STC students and students I worked with since 2015. I believe utilizing these techniques eliminated confusion about my study and allowed me to speak directly to Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) and classroom instructors that worked directly with PIIS. The range of students included were those currently in ABE program/courses and at the time of the study were taking courses toward a degree. The student participants were in the midst of earning their degrees/certificates. The student did not state their Socio-Economic Status (SES) or specify their enrollment as first generation or if their parents also attended college. I did not sample for or ask student participants about this information. When participants contacted me, we set up a date and time to connect via Zoom. When we connected via Zoom, I shared the questions on the screen and listened to the participants. Connecting with the students was a little more challenging but took place in a similar way.

Sampling Classroom Instructors Who Have Worked with PIIS

I also emailed the classroom instructors I knew of by contacting them directly with an email specifically addressed to classroom instructors. I recalled that some of the classroom instructors that I chatted with in passing on campus discussed previously incarcerated students and I thought they might want to participate in my study. These conversations allowed me to work through other instructors to ask them for PIIS I could contact. This snowball (Kennedy-Shaffer, et al, 2021) technique produced one student participant that did not know me, yet the
student knew, and trusted, the other classroom instructor enough to respond to my email. Asking some of the classroom instructors I already knew and then asking them to pass along my flyer to help me recruit other participants. I knew that everyone that saw my emails would not respond yet I prayed all four times I sent the email to potential participants. I did not ask the classroom educators if they were Native or identified with a certain tribe. Several of the classroom instructors told me that they were not Native. The classroom instructors did not discuss their identified genders. I do not know if anyone from the LGBTQ or two-spirit communities were represented as they did not volunteer this information. As this was not a major factor in my study I do not believe this impacted the information that was shared in my study. The academic subject areas of the classroom instructors was also not asked and only one classroom educator revealed that he had been an educator for 35 years. I chose to include instructors in my study because I believed they were invested in the academic success and overall wellness of the students in their classes and I wanted to hear their perspectives. Each of the classroom instructors I reached out to discussed the students in their care and spoke about being concerned for their academic success.

**Data Collection Protocol During a Pandemic**

The lives of everyone around the world changed drastically when COVID-19 hit communities around the world. The week of March 15, 2020 we were all impacted, and the participants in this study all felt the shocks locally. They started the week in their usual routine of getting ready for work and school and ended the week needing to quarantine in their homes. During this time, All STC classes moved to remote learning and only a handful of individuals were allowed on campus. From this point, none of them knew what was happening to the world. They just knew that loved ones were being taken from their homes and communities to hospitals to receive treatment or die. We learned right away that this was called COVID-19 and is
commonly described in the Navajo language as Dikos Ntsaaígíí-19 or as the "cough that kills."

Because of the pandemic, I am providing a contextual section as part of my findings because of the profound influence Dikos Ntsaaígíí-19 (COVID 19) had and continues to have on Native Peoples and on the participants in my study. In order to be "safe" from Dikos Ntsaaígíí-19 we, along with many other colleges, needed to change how we met and thus my data collection process consisted meeting remotely instead of in-person. Yet, since we needed to connect remotely via Zoom, the mode for connecting was different from the in person listening sessions I originally planned yet once I reminded the participants why we were meeting and then turned on Zoom to get a recording of their voices, the mode did not seem to matter. I shared my computer screen, clicked the record button, and participants began to share. This change in venue allowed me to still feel prepared as if we had met in person because I still planned to record and transcribe or conversation. Therefore, to mimic the setting most comfortable for the participants to share I also needed to move remotely. I still intended to conduct listening sessions and audio record the sessions to keep the situation as similar to when students first shared their experiences with me and where I listened to them.

Since zoom was already set up by Southwest Tribal College (STC), I was able to share the link with participants and our connection was maintained. Instead of just using a voice recorder I was able to record our conversation via Zoom and still utilize Office 365 to transcribe the conversation. I would have been able to follow the same process if we met in person. Therefore, outside of observing the body language nuances that people make during any conversation, such as fluctuations in their voices or other forms of non-verbal communication, I needed to rely on our video cameras to capture the information. I sent the discussion questions to the participants ahead of our meeting because the participants asked what we would be
discussing. I did this because I appreciate when questions are sent ahead of a meeting. I think I can *wing it* sometimes yet I prefer to think about my responses ahead of time. Therefore, I sent the question to be answered in the Listening Session before our meeting out of respect for the participants. Some of the participants said they did not review the discussion questions after I sent them yet had an overall sense of what they would talk about when we did meet. I do not believe these tactics influenced our conversations as I wanted to listen to the participants regardless of how they prepared, or did not prepare, for our meeting as I still learned a great deal from the conversations.

Once the participant and I sat down remotely in front of our own computers I initiated small talk. All the interviews had the research questions on the screen as a point of reference for both of us and as a visual map for us to each refer to as we conversed. Some of the participants answered the discussion questions in a linear format and some of the participants answered the discussion questions with what they seemed to be more important. The participants did not show me anything such as photos or other items as they spoke about their experiences. Two of the 17 participants did not enable their cameras and the other 15 participants allowed me to view them by enabling their cameras. I did not ask any of the participants to enable their cameras as I wanted them to feel comfortable in our setting. Only one participant out of the 17 participants utilized a background filter during our Listening Sessions. I am sure they had access to a background filter yet since they did not say anything about a background filter, I did not ask as it was not relevant to our discussion. This research experience with participants led me to envision differently the metaphor I initially had of a ripple effect from my study. I have seen this as similar to how a stone is dropped into water and causes a ripple out into the rest of the water. Yet what has become clear to me from this experience is that even when one cannot see below the
surface, or the bottom of the water, that it will still ripple. I could not see my participants physically taking the flyer off of the walls on campus because, due to the pandemic, I had to modify my recruiting to an e-mail with an attached flyer. I could only trust that they were opening their emails and finding a connection with my invitation to take part in the study. I was hoping for a larger sample size, but I was still thankful for the participants I did have. The authenticity of their voices has been validated by being able to hear their voices combined with asking for their input when the interviews were transcribed and returned to the participant to be checked for accuracy.

**Data Analysis**

I applied a number of steps to analyze the data collected including:

First, during the listening sessions I took notes and jotted down possible themes to consider during my full analysis of all data. I worked also to take time after each session for additional reflection and take notes on my observations. I did this while the listening sessions were still fresh in my mind.

Second, I used a new tool, Office 365, in *Microsoft Word Online* to help transcribe all of the listening session data. In total, I listened to 17 participants and conducted 20 listening sessions – 13 sessions were conducted with student participants and seven sessions with classroom participants. Ten sessions with the student participants were individual and three sessions were a combination of an initial session and a follow-up session. The seven sessions with the classroom instructors were composed of: one group session with two classroom instructors, one follow-up session and five individual sessions.
Third, I e-mailed transcripts to each participant for them to look over, a process often referred to in qualitative research as member checking. Member checking is a qualitative data analysis process which allows a researcher to check in after data collection with participants to ensure accuracy and their comfort with what will be shared from the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The transcripts were presented to each participant and each participant had the opportunity to make sure their words were documented appropriately and meaning they wanted to communicate was represented. I used member checking for the following purposes:

- to create a process for participant agency in determining accuracy and participant meaning within their accounts,
- to check for resonance with their experiences, and
- to respect Indigenous knowledge by inquiring participants about anything they would prefer not to be shared (Wilson, 2008; Brayboy, 2012).

Fourth, I applied a combination of coding all data, thematic content analysis, and narrative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to ensure consistency in the data analysis process across all the interviews, because thematic content analysis involves establishing overarching impressions of the data instead of approaching the data with a predetermined framework. I was able to identify common themes to find common patterns across the data. This is important because Indigenous content necessarily needs to be informed by Indigenous knowledge, which encompasses the fundamental nature of Indigenous peoples: their culture, values, beliefs, and experiences (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Nakata, 2007).

My hope is that by applying a combined approach I am able to honor voices of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students that have been underrepresented in academia as well as instructor participants in my study. Throughout the data analysis and writing process I
strove to incorporates Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews to my interpretation of the findings. This is important because qualitative and Indigenous research are undertaken in natural or social settings in an attempt to make sense of phenomena through the meanings that the participants themselves bring (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Wilson, 2008) to the discussions and looking for interconnections across the data (Wilson, 2008). This process of transcribing interviews and analyzing the information that would become data was an interesting process.

**Coding Data**

The coding of data was an on-going process of listening to participants then transcribing the interviews. As I transcribed, I wrote down common themes and linked those themes to create related topics. I kept a journal of themes that stood out and also wrote on index cards and taped the index cards to display boards. If a new theme arose, I moved the index card under the theme. This process allowed me to identify themes that emerged from what participants chose to share with me. This process also allowed for the information to be and stay organized in a visual way that was helpful to me.
Transcribing after our meetings allowed me to take small notes as we talked yet I primarily was able to listen to the participants. I believe this was helpful and allowed me to genuinely listen to the participants. Genuine listening impacted the quality of the research is based on the reasoning process of the participants and is based on continually putting bits of data together to create a whole or deeper understanding of the themes in the stories. Through this process, meaning and deeper understandings emerged of the research participants. Taken together, these perceptions contribute to the construction of theory. This entire process for me became research as ceremony (Wilson, 2008).

Securing Data Integrity and Participant Anonymity

I secured the integrity of the data I collected, in part, by keeping the participant’s identity anonymous to anyone outside of the study. The transcripts of the video Zoom recordings were provided to the participants before anything is published in the hope of maintaining integrity and accountability of their stories and narratives. I kept the audio recordings and narratives on a
separate flash drive that I have kept on my person and in a secure location so as not to compromise any information. I planned to destroy the videos before closing IRB yet, per the IRB, I am maintaining records of this research according to federal and state regulations including maintaining copies of all IRB correspondence and documents for at least 3 years after completion of this project.

*Ethical Considerations*

Each interview was conducted with ethical consideration, a focus on the human-side of the student and not as a number in a larger system. This information has and will be available to STC and to every other TCU as a form of accountability. This information will be in the form of my dissertation and a report I create and present to the STC community. These measures are part of developing and maintaining a degree of trust with student participants which is important as many shared that they had not thought about the information or felt like they were asked about their experiences previously. For me, honoring and considering ethics of my study is part of a spirit-based research (Lucchesi, 2019) as well as a form of accountability to the community. This study is for Indigenous people and Indigenous communities, and I worked from an understanding of research as capable of making sense of the physical and social death caused by colonial oppression (Lucchesi, 2019). This is a very real issue in Indian Country where a *small world* is not just a figure of speech because it is a reality. If someone is not related by blood then one is related by clan or resides in the same community and knows everyone’s family.

*Informed Consent*

Informed consent is an essential part of the IRB/human protections process yet it is also part of ethical decision making. Obtaining consent did not take as long as I anticipated. I believe
participants saw themselves sharing their stories and experiences for the sake of future students and instructors. PIIS expressed that they wanted others to learn from their mistakes and obtaining consent was part of the process and only minimally impacted the plan I had for this study. I planned to start data collection in 2019 but actually began in September 2020 and continued to December 2020.

This study was the beginning of telling these important accounts. I engaged Tribal Critical Race Theory (Tribal CRT) and my own experiences in the classroom to create the framework for this study. This focus targeted and highlighted first-hand accounts and testimonies of people who have been not often included in critical analysis of higher education. I am pleased to offer these first-hand accounts and testimonies of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students and of their classroom instructors. With my study I aimed to analyze the relevant spaces and educational processes of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in tribal colleges. I collected these accounts by listening to both parties in a good way because their knowledge and experiences do not belong to me but to them as bearers of these stories and the ways that they experience education at this tribal college. These stories are not my mine, and I can only listen, compile and interpret them, and put them in one place so that future classroom instructors as well as others may learn from them.

The goal of my study was dual sided to hear from often marginalized Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students who have been and continue to be directly impacted and classroom instructors who could be perpetuating their marginalization. Dr. Sandy Grande refers to the process in Red Pedagogy as “recentering our own local knowledge and literacies” (Grande, 2015, p. 44). I chose to share PIIS and instructor experiences and insights in a type of storytelling narrative that is known in Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT suggests constructing an
alternative by naming one’s reality through storytelling and counter-storytelling; thus, the
advantage of CRT is the voice that it provides people of color (Writer, 2008) space to tell their
perspectives. Conducting listening sessions to listen to and document these stories has been an
appropriate method of choice for my study because: (a) Students seem to have more and more
demands placed on them with each passing year and Previously Incarcerated Indigenous
Students are expected to understand and negotiate these demands; (b) College can be stressful
with and without demands placed on them by their peers and by society and (c) the question of
relevancy is always at the forefront. When students and classroom instructors are able to share
these experiences they are taking a step towards healing from colonization and from the realities
of their experiences. With my study I do not intend to initiate healing from colonization and from
the realities of their experiences, yet this can happen when people are able to share and open up.
This study has the potential to open the eyes of those involved and from there they have the
choice as to how they will act or react. For example, one student, Shasta, (pseudonym) after
reviewing her listening session transcript said, “I didn’t know I said all that [during the first
Listening Session], but I hope my words help other students understand their life.” Traumatic
experiences that led participants to sometimes be incarcerated contribute to experiences they
bring to a collegiate or ABE classroom. Shasta offered generously during member checking,

…I am not saying I completely understand what has happened in my life, but I am still
here doing the best I can and I will share the best I can.

This willingness to share created a space that she needed as did the chance to share during our
listening sessions. This is another way that applying the tenets of Tribal CRT to value what
Indigenous Peoples share, and not share, is helpful as critical reflection upon their own lives to
improve understanding, decision making, and action similar in many ways to action research
(Lujan, 2013). The literature that is currently available suggests how 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” (Wilson, & Yellow Bird, 2005, p. 77). This was why it was imperative that the students self-identify as being previously incarcerated and “voice” this marginalization. This needs to be a choice they make (as opposed to being categorized as a felon (Daniels, 2017) by the institution or the Census. According to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) (https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98) the percentage of American college students who are Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Black has been increasing. From fall 1976 to fall 2015, the percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native students was higher in 2015 (0.8 percent) than in 1976 (0.7 percent). This study is a response to this marginalization and participants in this study discussed their future with degrees and thus, conquer the seemingly narrow reality that has been available to them. This is another example of data being collected but stories not being told.
Chapter 4

Student Portraiture

*I didn’t love how much I ended up talking, but I guess that those are realities when you
don’t have much opportunity to share your traumatic experiences.*

Minowa, ABE student reading the transcript from her first interview.

In this first findings section, I share and make meaning of some histories, experiences, and perspectives of 17 adult participants from a tribal college including, 10 Previously Incarcerated Indigenous students (pseudonyms - Shasta, Sheridan, Minowa, Eyota, Nita, Huera, Buck, Vida, Kaya, and Mandy) and seven professors (pseudonyms – Professor Stanley, Professor Carson, Professor Elvira, Professor Lorena, Professor Lydia, Professor James, and Professor Eugenia). The students shared their experiences while the professors observed the students and shared their perspectives on their observances over the years.

**Helping Ourselves and Each Other as Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students**

This first theme, *Helping Ourselves and Each Other as Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students* focuses on Sheridan, Minowa, Shasta, Eyota, and Nita. Their stories demonstrate how they worked within previously established programs such as the Tutoring Center and Student Government to connect with peers and fulfill leadership roles within these programs. As previously noted, I chose to provide individual portraiture of each student participant to provide a deep sense of their lives as Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students and the complexity of their circumstances, insights, contributions, and experiences. These five student participants hold student leadership roles within a program at STC and each regularly shares from their own experiences as PIIS to assist other students. These students each discussed
connecting with their peers via previously established programs and seemed to process their experiences within those programs. These programs worked by helping students adapt to college life. These students took on leadership roles such as becoming part of student government or becoming peer tutors and shared their lives as part of their responsibilities. These PIIS seemed to cater to those who were possibly older than them and were able to help others process their own lives because they had their own life experiences. Some of these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students worked within Student Organizations such as the Tutoring Center and student government.

As student leaders they imparted timely knowledge to other PIIS seeking knowledge. They also imparted knowledge to me as I listened. All of the PIIS in this study discussed issues, such as class attendance, dealing with loss, as well as drug and alcohol use. These Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students provide examples of the avenues they took to promote degree attainment for themselves and their peers where they did not want anyone to fall through the cracks of continuing their college journeys and stop out completely. These Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students took opportunities in their leadership roles to share their own experiences as PIIS to assist other students. Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students contribute to student learning and some shared with me some of the reasons they became incarcerated as well as their reasons for becoming students. They described reasons for helping one another along the way to degree attainment. Some of these reasons are deeply emotional and show deep connections to trauma. Yet, all the participants discussed obstacles they needed to overcome to be where they were at the time of their interviews. For example, Shasta, a student participant, said,
You know, I didn't know quite exactly how to interpret [and explain my experiences];
then I lost my son. I found ways to tell [other] students that are parents, I was a parent at
one time and I lost my son. For them to know that they understand like, oh okay I know
this person understands where I'm coming from as a parent as well.

Shasta spoke about the importance of establishing relationships and sharing experiences. She
exemplifies one of the many ways these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students connected
with other PIIS and encouraged them. This encouragement took place at the right time when they
were struggling and did not think anyone understood their experiences. Each of the following
five portraiture shows ways that PIIS contributed to the lives of other students as well as some
of the contexts of their lives.

*Sheridan*

Unlike the other participants, I did not know Sheridan prior to his participation in this
study. I had seen his face on flyers around campus as he garnered votes in his run for student
body representative. Sheridan, was the only student to share his tribal affiliation even though this
question was asked. He responded to my call for participants and said, “I am glad you are doing
this. I am glad you are listening. I want to participate.” From this initial interaction, I felt like I
would learn from him. I thought I was open to learning but Sheridan blew my preconceived
notions of leadership out of the water. Sheridan described his college journey at STC and
discussed a leadership role he took on with student government. When we spoke, he described
his previous college experience said, “I was at a different community college in Los Angles
before I got in trouble and went to jail.” He went on to say, “I was being stupid and that’s what
happens when you are stupid.” Sheridan described his life as parts and said, “That was the stupid
part of my life and now I am in the school part of my life.” He chuckled and said,
My life is kind of like the fresh prince of bel air, you know the TV show from the 90’s? I got in trouble in LA and went to jail in LA. When I got out of jail my mom and I moved to the Rez. It was her home when she was growing up, but this has been new to me. Here I get to start over and be the real me. The me that does good in school and is in student government. I am in action here.

Sheridan said, “Here [at STC] I had a different platform to address issues like [previous incarceration] and things like that so we don’t always have to take things with our arms crossed.” Choosing to attend college as an adult, by choice, is important especially since prior to adulthood people are obligated to attend school. This reference to 90’s pop culture was an interesting comparison that I would not have thought about as it is usually separated from one’s own life, yet Sheridan actually saw himself close enough to this satirical comedy that it made sense.

All the students who participated in this study spoke from their knowledge and experience as being Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students. This kind of information is unique and it is exactly what some students need to hear. Sheridan said,

In my first two classes that I took, you know I was 33 years old. Fresh out of prison. I hadn’t been in school since I was teenager and there’s nothing but teenagers in those classes. You know, it makes you feel like you pretty much wasted your life. But you didn’t. It is part of your life.

Sheridan shared, “I talk to people and their issues become my platform.” From here he knew he needed to speak up and on behalf of his classmates. He did not say where or how he knew he needed to step up, but like any leader, he did. Sheridan went on to say,
I’m heavily tattooed everywhere from head to toe and I wanted to bring awareness to the fact that people can change, and people will change when given the opportunity. So, when I joined student government, I would purposely wear short sleeve shirts ‘cause I can raise awareness to our plight, you know.

Sheridan’s actions were purposeful and deliberate. This response showed how he has been able to reflect on his life and use his mistakes as something to work from and to serve as an example. Sheridan described his experiences working with programs that took place beyond the classroom and said “For insurance reasons I think they thought I was a liability, but I didn't stop there. I kept on going [into student government].” because, “We were bringing awareness to this fact of something that they didn't know about.” Embracing something that others do not want to know about can be hard, yet this is what leaders are often need to do. Sheridan openly stated, “Yeah, it wasn't that long ago as I got out of prison in 2017 October, so it's barely gonna be three years and my criminal history goes all the way back to [when] I was a juvenile.” He went on to say, “Reflecting upon one’s life is the only way someone can see where they came from.” Sheridan has been open about acknowledging this reality and continued,

But I've always been headstrong that way and apparently this time it paid off. I'm a big advocate, you know, for students with criminal records. I'm a big advocate for education as a steppingstone to end recidivism and to my last breath I'm gonna be advocating for people like us you know.

When I asked Sheridan “What does academic success mean to Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs at tribal colleges and universities (TCUs)?”, he said, “I'm gonna define success by how many people I help change
their lives and obviously included in that has to be my own and the quality of life that I could provide for my family.”

Sheridan drew from his previous experiences and adapted his actions to combat situations that could negatively impact him. He made deeper sense of things in our interview and shared the internal motivation that led him to be part of student government and to share his personal experience. He encouraged his classmates to try even if they did not feel like they could obtain what they sought. For example, he encouraged his peers to apply for financial aid by explaining,

I've talked to a lot of people [who] are under the impression that if you have a felony on your record that you will not qualify for financial aid, so therefore they won't even try. But that's just not the case. Come on, I'm a fourth time convicted felon and I got my whole education paid for and I still get financial aid so it's just not true [that previously incarcerated students will not qualify for financial aid] and a lot of people that I spoke with were under that misinformation. I think seven out of ten people were the first thing they said. Oh, I won't qualify ’cause I'm a felon and that's just not true. You know, a lot of people so I believe, that being previously incarcerated can impede someone from getting a degree, but only because they won't even try because of the misinformation they've heard.

This type of information shared by Sheridan, has the potential to encourage students who are just not sure how they will pay for school. Something like figuring out how to pay for school, or rent, or utilities is benefitted by learning to work more effectively with one another and learning from each other as students.
Combatting assumptions that might keep some people from wanting to learn from one another and to understand many other populations over time. These populations include parents, veterans, students with disabilities, many ethnic populations, commuters, etc. We need as higher education professionals need to learn from Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students as well. Sheridan said after STC, he wanted to attend another community college then a four-year institution. He said he felt like these steps were good for him and explained, “College is good but I want to take it slow.” He described his experiences at STC as where he learned to be “who he was,” referring to his Indigenous identity. This perspective exemplifies tenet nine of Tribal CRT which says: “Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change (Brayboy, 2005. P. 425). Sometimes, the knowledge that someone might bring to a situation is not obvious. For example, Sheridan’s funds of knowledge helped him make sense of his incarceration and incarceration in general. He said, “Yes, people can make mistakes, but that shouldn't be a reason why it defines them for the rest of their lives. I get to help people know that they are more than these mistakes.” Sheridan’s words suggest that students who have experienced incarceration can and in the case of these five students often do act as primary motivators for one another in working toward earning their college degree.

Shasta

Shasta was one of the first students to respond to my call for participants. We had known each other for a few years before this study and I imagine our prior student-instructor relationship helped her to step forward. I interviewed Shasta two times, first as a regular interview and then as follow up. When Shasta responded to my call for participants, I remembered her as a former student. As part of class, she had mentioned her previous incarceration yet our conversations in and outside of class did not dwell on this part of her life.
Our conversations prior to this study sparked my interest in wanting to learn more about this topic and the factors that impact students and embody the reality of being a Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Student. Although Shasta was not a current student of mine at the time of the study, I knew her to be a student who submitted her assignments on time and seemed to have her academic life together. Because of her attention to this detail, I imagined that was a reflection of the rest of her life. Shasta did not tell me what she was incarcerated for, only that she had been incarcerated before attending college. Since Shasta was a student in the Early Childhood program, I figured her incarceration charge was for a non-violent offense (Dupuy, 2019) because she was back in college. Prior to talking with Shasta, I remember learning that she was a tutor in the Tutoring Center at STC. I remembered her being smart and I had a new feeling of comfort that students who sought her assistance with various academic subjects were getting to work with someone compassionate and kind.

Shasta explained that she was a tutor in the Tutoring Center and that she helped with a variety of subjects when her peers needed assistance. Shasta described how she had been able to share lessons from her own life with other Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students who sought tutoring assistance. She said “Experiences are our mistakes in life. We learned from them, and you know, we find better ways to deal with situations and understand younger students in a classroom that are just fresh out of high school.” Shasta went on to say:

…you just tell them [students who seek tutoring] you know our experiences such as telling peers ‘you don't wanna fight with your boyfriend and girlfriend out in public because that could be [considered] domestic violence and you don't want to be put in a situation like domestic violence. I know it happens but let me tell you, you do not want to be in those situations.
Shasta explained how she understood situations that can lead to getting incarcerated and without stating how she was incarcerated she was able to tell her tutees what *not* to do. Shasta summarized some of the subjects she brings up in her role as a tutor. This type of explanation helps students in ways that others may not. For example, she said, “When it comes to a subject like incarceration, we need to find better ways to communicate because, you know, once we meet these students, we build that attachment right away.” Shasta emphasized the importance of learning about students and establishing a relationship with them. She discussed listening and learning from information students shared. As Shasta discussed these important aspects of listening, I noticed that she mirrored pieces of information she described. These actions represented Shasta well as a caring educator and I imagine her connecting well with little ones in early childhood classrooms. Shasta discussed how she relies on her position of being a tutor and some of the factors that are apparent in connecting with her tutees. She demonstrated how she brings her own knowledge to the tutoring situation when she said, “…that way we can better assist them with resources or if they need to talk to us about something it's better communicated [directly] instead of being like shy and like, you know, kind of embarrassed of it.” Shasta used her role as a tutor at this tribal college to discuss the importance of connecting with her peers and made a point to discuss the importance of relationships. She discussed how she might share that she has been incarcerated to help her relate to a peer and said, “…being a peer tutor you know we work with students that say, yeah, I was incarcerated.”

Shasta went on to say “when students share this information, you can understand some of what they are sharing. You know we can better support them in a way.” To assist others in navigating the college experience, Shasta went on to discuss resources available to students. She said “They might be doing things the hard way. I know I did.” She went on to explain her
process, “I ask if they are living in the dorms or you living somewhere else and from here I know more about how to help them.” As Shasta shared, I imagined tutees feeling at ease in sharing their own information with her as she exemplified the importance of relationships.

Shasta’s approach shows an important skill in looking out for one another and a clear example of one of the ways PIIS embody the role of leader. The editors of *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education* refer to this knowledge that stem from these experiences, "Indigenous knowledge at its core is relational" (Minthorn & Chavez, 2015, p. 4-5). Therefore, acquiring knowledge by establishing and maintaining a relationship is an integral part of being an Indigenous person. For example, Shasta went on to say: “…we can ask them if they even have a bus pass to get here [STC] and tell them that bus passes are available.” She went on to say, “sometimes they just want to talk with a peer and I can help them do their work but also being there to be open ears for them to talk to.” This example of assisting other students demonstrates a way that PIIS are stepping into leadership roles. Attention to relationships, a critical leadership practice, directly shows in how Shasta encouraged classmates to utilize professional strategies in seeking tutoring assistance and for her to be paid for helping students. She explained the importance of being professional and this helped her tutees to get the services they needed. As part of encouraging students based on some of her learning as an education student, Shasta, a student seeking a liberal arts degree in the early childhood program said, “When people ask me why early childhood I say [working with] the kids really makes the difference in who you are and that's what makes the difference. And that's why I have such a passion for this career.”

Shasta discussed the importance of reaching out to peers, encouraging them in attending college, and she made a point of being helpful to other students who are unsure of where they might be going. Shasta focused especially on PIIS and her attention is especially important for
PIIS. Shasta’s role as a student tutor in leading peers to understand assignments and finding ways to academically lead them toward success in college and life assists them in ways they might not have been able to attain on their own. This behavior by Shasta, exemplifies several tenets from Tribal CRT (Brayboy, 2005) including:

- tenet seven which states: “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 (p. 429).” This situation exemplifies this tenet by explaining why Shasta’s actions are examples of how she was raised as an Indigenous person and how she navigates life as a Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Student. She is exhibiting traits that will help her navigate life in the future.

- tenet eight which says: “Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being (p. 430); This situation exemplifies this tenet by seeing the significance of their experiences and sharing that experience with others and with me. This makes stories a legitimate source of data.

- tenet nine which says: “Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change (p. 430).” This situation exemplifies this tenet by demonstrating that many can learn from this experience and this act is an act of spurring social change. Shasta was able to see the change in herself and she knew that others could see the changes in themselves.

Shasta shared a dilemma she and others face when there are conflicts between required court appearances and required class sessions. She explained the importance of communicating with
instructors and said “be ready to say you have to take off for a court date during class and you're going to have to fully admit to them you are a felon.” She went on to say,

…then you might need to say you are previously incarcerated, not just for your safety, but you know for everybody else to understand and know you know your limits to what you're going to talk about and what you're not going to talk about and whether or not it leads to you having to miss class or parts of classes. When you have a good relationship with your instructors this is a little easier.

This situation demonstrates the conflict between class attendance or court attendance and likely means the student needed to make this kind of decision regularly. Everyone makes decisions every day to attend meetings, attend certain gatherings, or associate with certain people yet much of the time these decisions do not carry the possibility of incarceration or reincarceration. In addition, most people do not have to weigh whether to tell others about something that is likely going to change that person’s impression of them. These seemingly innocuous decisions of college life carry a very different type of weight for Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students.

Shasta discussed the background check process and the need for such a process. She discussed the importance of explaining intimate details of her life such as the tribal court system and related paperwork. Some are not inclined to learn about such information when they do not need to deal with this information. Shasta said, “It is hard because you don't want to tell [potential employers about your incarceration] but you have to because you're obligated to and you think, ‘well I can't get this job’.” Shasta went on to say,
…being a tutor I'm still going through the background check process and you know it is hard because you have to explain every single thing and even just explaining where you lived and having to go through all of these tribal courts and stuff to get your paperwork.

Shasta went on to share an important story of familial history,

I think about my brothers and my uncles who were also incarcerated and what if they wanted to obtain a degree. I would hope they would go through the process smoothly, but you know it is going to be difficult thing.” She then connected this back to her work with college students, “I tell the students you have to be very open to when they ask you about your experiences.” This encouragement by someone who has dealt with this situation is mature insight that comes from life experience and has the potential to speak to those who need this type of knowledge such as PIIS. This perspective comes from learning and growing from experiences, such as incarceration, and sharing this relevant knowledge with others.

When Shasta shared her experiences, I learned about her mental strength. Shasta explained feeling, “embarrassed” about her incarceration and she talked about how her “family got torn apart from taking sides” [and talking about the incarceration]. Shasta discussed the loss of her son, and the impact family has on her life and until our listening session, I had no idea this was part of her reality and as a mother myself I can only imagine the pain she carried with her on a daily basis. This kind of loss can change a person and cause them to discontinue the life they previously led. Yet, instead of allowing this to define her she continued to attend classes and her out of class tutoring job while carrying the weight of these realities and demonstrates the mental strength needed to persevere in college as a PIIS.

Shasta’s inclusion of her family reminds me of the vital roles that family plays in the lives of Indigenous people and students. For example, this inclusion of family reminds us that
actions are not merely our own and there is accountability beyond what we see on a day-to-day basis. Many Indigenous people have similar complexity of responsibility, and this reality is understood around the world by many Indigenous Peoples and other tribal and extended family cultures (Chávez & Longerbeam, 2016; Ibarra, 1994). This navigation created a balance between Shasta, her family’s needs, and serving others. Due to needing to work remotely, this balance looked different especially during a pandemic as she seemed to feel torn between focusing on her studies and feeling sometimes inadequate or not worthy to advise or help others as a Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Student.

Eyota

When Eyota responded to my call for participants I remembered her long, black hair right away. I also remembered her name yet the first memory I had of her was her hair when she entered the classroom and I remembered it when she left the classroom. This memory was significant because she did not do anything to stand out and I imagine this was a purposeful act. Our time together on Zoom proved to verify my initial thoughts. I remembered her being a pleasant person and being a good student. She submitted assignments on time and occasionally offered insight into our class discussions. She always read the assigned reading and provided thoughtful responses when asked about her opinions. Submitting assignments on time and being prepared for class are some of the primary expectations for English 102 and where other students struggled, she figured out what she needed to do to submit assignments on time. Her navigation of all these classroom expectations is a skill I learned she would impart to her classmates who were not PIIS.

When Eyota and I sat down we exchanged small talk and she spoke about working as a tutor with students who sought assistance with their math and science assignments. Eyota shared
how she, “found it hard to watch” fellow students struggle and not seek assistance until assignments were due. She said,

…you know some of these kids come from way out of state and they’re like lost and they don’t know where to go but they see me and start to open up to me about having a hard time [with school] and with life. Hopefully I can help a little with all of this.

Similar to Nita, Sheridan, and Shasta; Eyota offered her knowledge to guide, support, and mentor other students in her role as a tutor. Eyota understood this plan for herself and for incoming students and showed her understanding when she said “when they do [ask for help] I tell them to talk to your instructors and get to know them. Get to be one of their students and be open to their teaching methods.”

Eyota said “Working with tutees is kind of like family, some you get along with and others you [tolerate] but you [learn] from all of them.” I chuckled at this comment because I understood exactly what she was saying. Eyota explained,

…sometimes you learn [something] quickly and other times you think about something days later and say, ‘oh that’s what they were talking about.’ Being in class is like that, too. You can hear something and it clicks at different times. I think it depends on how you listen.

Eyota discussed working with people who are different from you as being important to understand. In my experience as a professor, I have observed how learning to work with others that are different from you is indeed a life skill that many students encounter in the classroom and in work settings. Eyota went on to discuss student government and how the people she worked with were different from her but that she was drawn to “different.” She said,
I know I am ‘different’ to everyone else…that is what I learned when I was in jail. Everyone is different but you can learn from people that seem different and this is why I am part of student government. I am good at math and science and this is why I tutor.

Eyota was direct about these types of human interactions, “…people do and say things differently but still get it done. I hope to help students understand math and science when I am their tutor.”

This conversation with Eyota and her explanation of how she wanted her peers to experience academic success taught me about her mature perspective in student government and about being a tutor leader. She understood the importance of understanding concepts being taught in the classroom and how demonstrating knowledge of these concepts is an example of attaining academic success. This vision of academic success is part of the big picture for themselves, for nation building by contributing to our People, and for anyone who has experienced incarceration. The choice to attend college and earn a degree are circumstances that need more than navigation by all the participants. Eyota said “I just want my future students or tutee’s to know that you know, hey you can take it a step further and you can make it better for our people.”

Like many students who have jobs in college, Eyota shared, “having this job [of being a tutor] will help me after college.” She explained these efforts to obtain a degree and said, “You know you're going to have to put in credits and hours and you know you have to be fully open to people asking you why you tutor or why you are in college.”

Eyota went on to explain how she did not have access to technology while she was incarcerated, and this inexperience caused her to feel overwhelmed when she did return to school. She said,
Others that have been in jail also probably feel the same as me. Yet, when you are a tutor, you are supposed to understand this stuff. You know those days that you just, you feel so defeated that you're just like, ‘I'm so done with stuff, like technology, you know I don't wanna deal with it anymore.’ But it is my job so I need to do this.”

Eyota discussed the struggles with needing to learn and understand technology for her job. This need to learn and understand something is not a new predicament as everyone learns and understands information on a daily basis. Some of this learning includes technology. Yet, for Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students who have been kept away (Reardon, 2020) from technology, specific skill building may be needed to put into learning than by other college students. There are many populations of students who need specific kinds of skill building or navigation of college such as veterans, survivors, students with children etc.

Added attention to technology or other skills by PIIS has the potential to increase anxiety, especially when learning is connected to job acquisition and maintenance.

Eyota went on to say that students sometimes ask for help when she is not available, and this creates a different type of anxiety. She said it is hard for her to focus on herself and her family when she sees students who need assistance and eventually needs to say,

…I'm sorry, but I have to cook dinner. I have to cook dinner for my family. You know, my mom and my dad who are essential workers. I just have to know that I take care of 'em, especially when they need me. You know that's what I'm here for.

She said it is hard to tell them [tutees] that she needs to go because she is afraid, they will not come back for help. Our conversation did not immediately come to this point, but Eyota put her finger on the real issue at hand when she said, “I know how it is, you do not feel good enough to
get help.” She identified feelings of inadequacy that many students feel: yet PIIS in this study often struggle with added feelings of inadequacy and conflicted feelings about relationships. She explained the pain of navigating relationships and how being a student tutor helped her maintain the boundaries she needed. She said, “…since there is always a possibility of going back to jail you do not want to have a deep relationship, even if it is helpful to you learning [in school], so you just don’t do it.” In this case, “do it” referred to seeking help.

Eyota did not specifically say this makes her feel like this situation could make her go back to jail yet this reality described by Eyota is multilayered and is part of critical conversations (Christensen, Cox, & Szabo-Jones, 2018) that many Indigenous people are having. These realities related to incarceration and fears of incarceration are not separate from past and currently continuing forms of colonization such as profiling, and Higher education professionals need to learn to assist PIIS to navigate the dilemmas of college with innovative approaches. Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students such as Eyota, are navigating these new realities of technologies, relationship after incarceration, family histories of trauma from incarceration and from the histories of Indigenous Peoples, and relying on the experiences of and insights developed from their previous incarceration to help steer them. In the course of steering their metaphorical boats, these five PIIS invited other students to get into their boats, so others are not navigating alone.

Eyota elaborated, “You know, we deal a lot with the mental stuff, you know, the mental narration of life.” She reflected on her experiences tutoring other students and began reflecting on life. This opportunity to tutor seemed to help her to connect with other students in ways she would not have anticipated and seemed to help her mentally and with her academics. She said,
When these incoming students see me, they don’t know I have been incarcerated for drug possession. Which is something minor, but once they know me, some come back, and I tell them about myself. We have a relationship.

She discussed how for many of the ABE students their first trimester at STC is their first time away from home and they cling to her. Eyota said, “they see me and maybe they are reminded of home. I do not want to lose them, so I keep working with them.” She explained that even if this was not part of her requirement with student government that she “would have [volunteered] anyway.” As part of a mandate by her parole officer (PO), she could be part of student government if she volunteered her time to something else and tutoring is what she chose. Students discussed a constant need to be ready to defend themselves and not be able to relax. For example, Eyota described her experience saying,

Everywhere requires a background check and even if you try to get a vehicle you have to state you know whether or not you're a felon or if you were incarcerated. So just making sure that you explain it and that you have the documents to back it up and always having those documents on you because it's like even if you get stuck by a police officer they see you were incarcerated and just being like yes, I was incarcerated. Here's my papers. You know I'm supposed to be out. I'm seeing my parole officer when I'm trying to go get a job, you know.”

Eyota has come to the classroom with knowledge of life outside of classwork and possibly a different set of skills than her class peers. This skill set is valuable in terms of life perspective, yet not always appreciated in the western classroom. She along with other students might envision success “differently” from traditional students, especially if they have been incarcerated and these experiences directly impact their desire to be successful in school. These students
struggle to find the relevance to connecting their experiences to their current and future scholarship and this directly impacts their success in the classroom. Because Native American students are an underrepresented minority group in higher education, representing less than 1% of all college-going students in the United States (Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013) we needed to know their thoughts.

Minowa

I met with Minowa on two occasions via Zoom, first she responded to my call for participants, and we had an initial meeting; then we met in a follow up meeting. Minowa was one of only three students who chose to meet with me for a follow up and I appreciated that she took the time.

I had known Minowa as a good student in my classes yet beyond that I did not know much about her. Prior to being in quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic, if Minowa saw me working alone in a classroom she often stopped by to chat with me between her classes. We discussed the weather, backpacks, and her being a tutor in the Tutoring Center. Minowa is a peer tutor in the Writing Center. I have shared the syllabi for my classes with Minowa as we needed to make sure we were discussing the same assignments with students she tutors. I remember her saying “I do not want to be the lead tutor, but I want to help [other students]." Until she responded to my call for participants, I did not know that she had been previously incarcerated.

Minowa said she enjoys listening to the concerns of her peers when they come to her for assistance with their assignments. Minowa went on to say that as the students she helped as a tutor began to get better grades and disclosed “...I started noticing a lot of the attitudes of instructors were changing and I started noticing that the students were feeling better about the
classes.” She explained some of the pressure of tutoring and disclosed, "I have to really come with the information prepared." For Previously Incarcerated Indigenous students who become tutors there is a significant amount of training involved in being prepared to work with other ABE students. Minowa excelled in academics and became a tutor yet the position she accepted at STC did not include training. She understood the academic knowledge needed to help her peers and that is what landed her this role yet tutoring without any training added an extra kind of stress. Minowa took on the responsibility of serving two roles. As a friend, Minowa was available and knowledgeable. She recognized people when they sought assistance and welcomed them. As a paraprofessional tutor, she fulfilled the role of helping people who sought her assistance in the tutoring center. She said "I don't want them to get frustrated because it gets me frustrated because I'm like I'm, I'm giving [tutees] everything I can. I just need you to understand.” She continues to work on both sides of being a friend and a paraprofessional of this role because she understands what it means to be successful. Minowa said she wants “success for herself just as much as she wants it for her fellow classmates.” Stepping into this role as a Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Student is courageous, yet Minowa gracefully carried her experiences with her and stepped up into this role because she feels her peers need her. I believe this to be true based upon her words and on my interactions with her and I know that other students need her compassion and presence to keep pursuing their degrees.

Minowa offered another perspective about encouragement when she said she supported students by speaking about certain expectations placed on them by their families and community members. She explained, “When you're a Native and you've been arrested; your support system doesn't always want to support you.” She explained,
“You have to go the extra mile if you want to be successful after you've had an arrest. This includes proving yourself to your family and community. Everyone knows everyone and sometimes if you do not prove that you are better than being in jail then that is all people know you as.”

In a follow up interview with Minowa she said, “I wasn't used to actually talking about this situation and I still don't really feel comfortable sharing, but I have accepted that that's a part of my life and that it's OK.”

She continued,

…I have been given the opportunity to work at STC as a tutor. This has given me the opportunity to talk with these younger kids and tell them you know you never really think about your life ahead of you. Life happens just in the snap of a finger and following through with what you started is really what I define success as.

This insight is needed in ways that other previously incarcerated students might not see for themselves. Minowa explained that family and community are important components in the lives of many Indigenous people. She said that as she helped her peers with their writing, they discussed class attendance and job hunting, “students saw the importance of being a good writer so they would come to me and tell me about their job searches.” They would tell her that they had been previously incarcerated and when this happened, Minowa pointed out a highly problematic aspect of the judicial system. She said,

Those are steps that a person is trying to change takes but when [you are] constantly getting doors slammed in their faces. After so many doors slam, what are they gonna do
then? They're gonna get tired of trying to work within the system and once again they're going to fall back into their old habits.

She went on to discuss her sense of how Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students are impacted by this, “…a lot of people in society say they're never gonna change but they don't see the ten jobs that he applied for but didn't get. And it takes a toll on a person you know?” Minowa described the exhaustion of dealing with the stigma on a daily basis and the ways society views people like her when it comes to employment. She went on to say, “…here [at STC] people know me and know that I can help [as a tutor].” Minowa speaks about her own experience of community that exists for her at STC, which is a place where students can thrive. She stated that many of these students are carrying these experiences around similar to how Minowa mentioned as part of her follow up interview, “One of the things that made me realize that even though I wasn't over sharing that it was important for me to share the experience of incarceration because other people can't [share].” This realization is important in so many ways. Minowa understood her role in speaking up for others who do not share, either because they choose not to share, or they cannot share. The stories and narratives gathered through the interviews suggest that a community of previously Incarcerated students exists and are not just a scattered few. Sometimes situations are out-of-sight, out-of-mind and that is not the case here because this community does exist.

Nita

Nita responded to my call for participants and explained that she was a student in one of my classes who attended STC for a trimester then became incarcerated. She said “I have never done anything like this before. I talk to [students] all the time as part of student government but [this time] not just about me.” She went on to say, “But I remember you and felt like I could trust
you.” In the initial minutes of our meeting when Nita sat down in front of the web camera, I noticed her red hair and her flawless face. I do not think she used a camera filter to amplify her beauty. Her make up choices enhanced her features and I remembered her differently from her previous time in my class. I remembered her being pretty but plain, as if she would willingly blend into a crowd to be forgotten. I later learned that these choices to augment the physical aspects of her persona were deliberate.

Nita shared a narrative that highlights the complex choices and navigation she and other Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students must make and do on their journey to degree attainment. For example, Nita shared how she became incarcerated and explained the pressure she felt to explain that she was acting in self-defense. She said, “My partner’s mom pretty much tried to assault me and [my partner] was just gonna let her.” She explained further and connected this to also explaining and supporting other students as they decide what to share with campus officials such as instructors and residence hall staff. Nita said,

…Sometimes I will give more detail, but I can tell students ‘just know that it's going to be a difficult road. You're gonna have to go through a lot of questions and you have to answer them directly and 100% truthfully and explain what you went through.

Nita explained that instead of being proactive she “reacted” and became incarcerated. She went on to say,

…I don’t want to get caught up in anything like that again. So, before anyone can tell me that I should look a certain way, I choose to look this way first. I am also choosing student government first before anyone tells me anything different. This is what some of my elders did and we’re still here.
This perspective exemplifies tenet seven of Tribal Critical Race Theory which says: “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 (Brayboy, 2005, P. 429). (Author, year, page # needed for this quote).” Nita drew from her previous experiences and adapted her appearance and actions to combat situations that could negatively impact her. Each of these students has learned to depend on their experiences and they access this knowledge as a form of their own cultural capital (Amundsen, 2019) that they have been building their entire lives including from their incarceration and navigating the correctional system while in college. This capital is accrued and built, becomes part of their experiences, and contributes to the Funds of Knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, Amanti, 2005) they bring to situations. The knowledge of being incarcerated was communicated by someone who experienced the situations firsthand and can speak to those experiences. Nita explained that her work with other students as “preparing them [for life/academic success] like she wish she had been prepared.” She went on to say “I can’t make anyone look a certain way [physically] but I can prepare them [academically] so [their] classes will be easier.” This form of looking out for her peers is one of the hallmarks that may serve as protective factors (Garcia, 2020) of one’s family or community.

Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students face incredible challenges necessitating development of effective strategies navigate college and life on a daily basis. Yet, from their roles in campus programs, such as student government and tutoring centers; they have the opportunity and clearly work hard to encourage other Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students to be accountable to their community and to themselves. Minowa, Sheridan, Nita, Shasta, and Eyota form relationships with and support fellow PIIS through their leadership roles,
enhancing community and success among their peers. In forming and supporting these relationships with one another and their peers this also enhances their own success and sense of belonging. PIIS stories hold wisdom and the power of vulnerability that can be shared with other students who struggle with their past. They have learned that their stories have the ability to encourage and provide direction that might not have been present previously. For example, these PIIS have learned that there is value in their experiences that has the power to help each other swim and stay afloat in the rough waters of life.

**Innovating to Navigate College as Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students**

This second thematic section focuses on Vida, Mandy, Buck, Kaya, and Huera. All of these students discussed their experiences dealing with tensions that caused them to see the world differently. In every example, these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students encouraged their peers to own up to their reality and try not to circumvent responsibility. They utilized one another and their funds of knowledge to share with and support each other. Some people would not relate to this information as they do not share these experiences, yet for other Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students who understand this information, it has the potential to change their lives. Instead of just working along with the current academic system, these students have created a new system, an Indigenized system that reflects who they are as Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students and their experiences.

Similar to the first thematic section, these stories can be as subtle as a drop in the ocean and as drastic as an oncoming flood. In the high desert where Southwest Tribal College (STC) is located, this drop of water is disseminated in two major ways. These drops of water fall quickly and create flooding when they come in contact with previous burn scars in a forest or desert. Settler colonialism is similar to burn scars. It changes the landscape that everyone travels on foot
or by car and is carried into possible seemingly unconnected places, like classrooms and collegiate settings. It becomes a history that is redirected to be dealt with by someone else or to be faced head-on. Anyone who has been a college student or works with them knows that classrooms and collegiate settings do not exist as entities separate from the experiences of the people who occupy these spaces. Classrooms and collegiate settings have become places Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) innovate ways to navigate for their own learning and success by figuring out ways to be authentic and be their best selves for themselves, their classmates, and their communities.

Being a Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Student is in many ways an uncharted journey and

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there has been the need to figure out what works. This journey connects directly to another form of dissemination that happens when water drips and is accepted and seeps into the earth.

This was the real beauty for me of listening to these life experiences. The tensions experienced by PIIS put new strains on their lives to potentially figure out new ways to approach obstacles. Similar to the previous group of student participants, these five students spoke about processing life on an individual basis and did not want to be part of campus groups or programs that “already exist” (Huera, participant). Each of the student participants regularly observed situations around themselves to make sense of their lives, such as recognizing how their incarceration was part of systemic issues in society. These students discussed and critiqued the reality of finances and the choice to pay court fees and not be incarcerated or not pay court fees and face the possibility of being reincarcerated. Each student participant discussed this and how these situations contribute to their ideas of success by utilizing the skill of sharing knowledge at the appropriate time. The PIIS highlighted in this thematic section did all these things directly and not from within previously established programs on campus. Similar to the first theme, listening to these PIIS made me decide to create student portraits to show their depth and make meaning of some of what they have been through. This is where the distinction between themes took place in the development of my findings. Although the focus in the previous theme was on how Previously Incarcerated Indigenous students use what they learn from their experiences to assist and lead others; this set of students seemed to process their experiences on an individual basis. This group observed situations around themselves to make sense of their lives and often to critique societal systems. They seemed to be working toward figuring out life on their own and they shared their observations with those close to them as part of connecting on an individual basis. The ways these students listen to one another allows them to speak into one
another’s lives that in my experience seems to have been forgotten by many in society and allows them to connect with those who feel alone.

Vida

Vida (pseudonym) was referred to me by one of her friends to be part of this project. She was a student at STC but not a former student in one of my classes. When we sat down in front of the camera on Zoom, she said,

Brown and black men and women work extra hard just to just to have autonomy of their career, their education, and then something unfortunate happens like going to jail even one time. It can drastically affect the way we are accepted and viewed. This information came before any introductions and was information she seemed to need to get off her chest. It seemed that she wanted to make sure this information was stated first and recorded first. At the beginning of the interview, Vida said “I learned enough about you on your little flyer.” That seemed to be all the information she needed and my memory of her and our interview makes me smile and chuckle. I wondered if her seemingly rough exterior turned people off and was possibly perceived as not friendly. I wondered if her tough exterior was a defense mechanism that she learned while being incarcerated. I will share more about this when I share observations from classroom instructors. When Vida said,

What do you need to know here? Not everyone knows what it means to be [previously] incarcerated. I want to help you and others that need to know [about] this life but I know they just see me as part of the problem.

Vida went on to say,
You know, I am more than the problem and I have information people need to hear but now I am just a number and I need to wait to get a degree to be heard. Otherwise people will not listen to me. I mean you are listening but I mean when real people listen, they will know.

The younger version of myself would have been offended by this last part of Vida’s comment but I heard what she was saying the more I listened to her and realized that this could be the case for some others, yet I eventually appreciated her direct approach. I believe Vida was referring to the issue of mass incarceration and the disparities in tribal youth Incarceration (Rover, 2021) especially when she referred to White girls. Vida said,

I am brown, so of course I am a target. It is not right but unless I have a college degree no one will listen to me because I am not White. Even with a college degree that might not be possible, but I am going to try and I am going to help others try.

I am not sure if Vida planned to touch on this topic but she did. According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice (https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrplasp/glossary.asp#Race) 620,000 American Indian youths were more than three times as likely to be detained or committed in juvenile facilities as their white peers (Rovner, 2021). Her reference to this looming data was profound and timely as she unintentionally included herself in the nationwide data and spoke about it from the inside.

Vida expanded on this thought by saying “Going to jail was easy but earning a degree is hard but I am figuring it out. I will help others [other students] figure it out.”
Vida responded to all the questions on the screen but she did not seem to be interested in my follow up or interjections and acting older than her years she ignored at least some of my follow ups. For example, one of our exchanges went like this:

Jodi: how about the 2nd question? What are you dealing with now in December 2020?


Jodi: showed my follow up

Vida: (answering the next question without responding to my follow up) I just want to help other Brown people be heard.

This statement explained Vida’s motivation for herself and for the other PIIS she had the opportunity to work with. Even though Vida just moved on to the next questions while other participants responded to my follow up responses and information. I wonder if Vida’s direct approach was something she learned while incarcerated or if she had always been this direct. I learned a great deal from Vida and I could certainly see her not being in any campus organizations like the tutoring center or the writing lab. This just did not seem her style. I imagine she got along well with others who shared direct personalities. I believe this blunt communication style is part of the innovation she utilizes to connect with other Previously Incarcerated Indigenous students because when I asked her how she encouraged her peers she said “I just tell them like it is. I’m not messing around. If they want care bears they can be friends with someone else”. This pop culture reference to the toy from the 1980’s brought the care bear stare to my mind and it made me chuckle. I understood exactly what Vida meant and her techniques may have been helpful, yet it also might have been limiting for her when she needed to connect with class instructors or college administration. I found this level of blunt
directness startling at first and then I found that I liked how Vida did not mince words and the open honesty of her communication was a relief.

Sometimes that initial step into college is not clear yet each of these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students has figured it out. Vida shared, “getting here, and staying here, has not been easy. I couldn’t get anything out of my time in jail, but I can get a degree out of my time in college.” Her view about working on assignments was important, and was something that classroom instructors interviewed shared as well, which are discussed later in this chapter.

Throughout the interview, Vida discussed the people she shared her time with. At first, she said “this girl at STC” or “this guy at STC” yet she eventually referred to these people as her friends. She said,

This is coming from someone who before I was arrested, I had no problem getting a job. I had I had no problem talking to [employers] about the things that I was trying to do but now even having those conversations while searching for a job the moment they find out that I've been incarcerated. It's like they put on the white gloves and they're done.”

I said “white gloves?” She said, “Yes, like the old movies where people put on gloves and dust their hands together to show they are done with something.” This fantastic, yet for me obscure, reference seemed to sum up the situation right away. Vida critiqued the system in her own way stating, “It is easier to go back to dealing drugs…it almost felt more reliable in jail because I knew how things worked there.”

Vida (pseudonym) described college as part of her journey when she said “No one in my family has done this before. It was either jail or a job. Never college. Here I am with three trimesters away from my AA.” To Vida, college was uncharted territory and not an experience
she could share with her family. She explained, “After jail, I didn’t know what I wanted to do so I took a class at STC and I liked it so I took another class.” Vida’s experience demonstrates the importance of tribal colleges, such as STC, that provide the “next step” for many Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students.

Obtaining stable employment after incarceration is challenging (Schonberg, Bennett, & Gold, 2020) and can be a seemingly unbreakable, vicious cycle. This cycle can certainly impact college attendance. Vida’s response speaks to the fact that being able to find and keep work reduces recidivism (Western & Sirois, 2019) and the sooner ex-offenders are employed, the less likely they will commit future crimes resulting in further jail and prison time (Runell, 2020). Vida went on to say, “I don’t know what else to do about a job but as long as I do well in school, my tribe will help me. I take it one day at a time.” This every day perspective helps Vida to deal with this life’s daily challenges. In turn, and in her own way, she is able to communicate this hope to other Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students. The stories of these previously incarcerated students are that of mighty waves breaking concrete barriers down so that they might forge ahead with their lives.

*Mandy*

Mandy was a student I had in class a few years prior to this study. This is how we initially met and I knew who she was when she responded to my call for participants. We met two times via Zoom and on both occasions, she responded to my questions by focusing on finances. She did not have features that stood out and this would prove to be intentional as she did not want to stand out. She wanted to pay for her life in monetary ways and make as few waves as possible. Yet, her discussion of her reality made it clear how paying fees may take on a
completely different meaning and additional risk for a student who has been previously incarcerated. For example, Mandy said,

I need to make the decision to pay my court fees over putting aside amounts for my college savings or new clothes and I'm actually worried because there was a payment discrepancy, and I am terrified that they're saying that I haven't been paying my fees when I have!

In my second meeting with Mandy, she elaborated on her court fees and said,

I don't think I really answered very well the last time. So, it's funny because since having a job I've had to look more closely at my finances and how I'm going to afford my savings, my college tuition, and my court fees. Right now, I am struggling with my daily living essential living costs.

Similar to being prey to predatory lenders and receiving garnishment of small family income that can push a Native family further into poverty (Vigil, C. (2015) this financial hole becomes almost impossible to dig out of as Mandy explains, “…with this payment discrepancy ‘m terrified that I don't know if I can afford to keep making the payments in a timely fashion and I'm terrified that I will have to be incarcerated again.”

This financial struggle is real for many Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students and the legal financial obligations (LFOs) many find themselves in. For example, many are required to pay thousands of dollars or face more jail time (Harris, 2016). Because they are frequently unable to pay fines, the formerly incarcerated are often forced to pay punitive, high interest rates on those fines. The mental burden of accumulating debt on a low or non-existent salary is a high one (Harris, 2016). The interest charged on LFOs can be prohibitive for many Previously
Incarcerated Indigenous Students and adds thousands of dollars on top of the fines and fees they already cannot pay. As previously noted by other PIIS, those with a record have a difficult time securing employment. Mandy referred to this financial hole as being stuck in a “concrete block” that she could not dig herself out of.

Financial responsibilities can also influence other choices. For example, Mandy made a further connection between finances and her collegiate choices, “…this is why I live in the dorms. I can afford this.” She spoke about how living in the dorms helped her financially but went on to explain one of the drawbacks,

We aren't treated like adults there and I'm sure that probably has a reason why students, especially the ones who are younger, rebel so much against the policies. Like they shouldn't be treating their on-campus students like they are high schoolers.

Mandy explained that she did not have anywhere else to live and “ended up” in the dorm. She said “I think I have a home to return to, but I don’t know. It is important to stay in school and I will keep telling the other kids in the dorms to stay in school.”

Many situations can cause struggles for Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students, and this can then lead to reincarceration. For example, Mandy shared, “I didn't ask to have domestic abuse. I was intoxicated, yes, but I was trying to leave a situation that wasn't healthy for me.” She explained further, “This was beyond my control and beyond my situation that I experienced that I shouldn't have had to. I got depressed and did stupid stuff and that put me in jail.” Mandy went on to say,

I was lucky enough to have my mom tell me to talk to someone and to go to STC. Go to school, go do something with your life. You need to be able to support yourself. You
know your child is not going to be here or see to say oh my mom's just working, you know at Walmart. Working at Walmart it's not a bad thing, but you know you wanna have a career.

Mandy discussed the factors that led to her incarceration and how she got counseling. She discussed how she demonstrated resiliency through all of what she went through and moved herself toward success in college as well as having hope of additional education in the future. She went on to say,

I was lucky enough to be a Cobell Scholar and to get scholarships to better help support me. Knowing all of this stuff has led me to be a successful person. I am three trimesters away from graduating. I never saw that for myself or even graduating at 22. I plan to go on to UNM for my bachelors.

This demonstration of seeking financial and academic opportunities to pursue education beyond an AA degree indicates that Mandy sees an academic future for herself. Mandy has clearly learned from her experiences as a Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Student and shows innovation in her choices as well as an ability to respectfully critique systems.

Buck

When Buck responded to my call for participants, I remembered that he started the trimester in my class then needed to switch to another class that worked better for his schedule. I remember removing his name from my class roster and realizing that this was all I knew about Buck. Buck took a class I taught in 2015 and he returned to STC after being reincarcerated for missing a court date. I interviewed him one time via Zoom. Buck spoke to this situation including offering some critique of the correctional system, “Yes, people can make mistakes, but
that shouldn't be a reason why it defines them for the rest of their lives, especially if they're looking for jobs or trying to enroll in college and stuff like that.”

When we sat down in front of the camera for our Zoom meeting, Buck began to share that he was Diné and started talking about his collegiate life, sharing:

> You know, the assignments helped and made it a lot easier to tell my story and to be able to write papers…Earning good grades became my motivation for everything that I do. This helps me talk to people that help me whether they are here or not. In Navajo, you know we say Diyín are our Holy People and they remind us to keep working hard and to get our degrees.

Buck discussed these spiritual factors as experiences other students could relate to as they encouraged him to persevere in college. He said, “Even if they believe something else, I know they understand.” This statement supported my own experiences at STC that even when students and professionals do not share the same religious or spiritual beliefs, they are respectful of our shared experiences.

Over the years I wondered where Buck went after he stopped out, a phrase for college students who drop out and then return to college (Abeling-Judge, 2019), of college. I knew he did not graduate as he stated that he was a new student, not only in my class but at STC. I asked him about this situation, and he said, “Yes, I was here but it was for such a short time. I am new.” Buck shared this information right away and said,

> We can't always decide when we go [meet with a probation officer] and if we miss [a meeting] there's a warrant out for us the next time they see us they're putting us in
shackles regardless of our intentions or the fact that we were at school trying to escape from the mistakes that we made that put us in the situation in the first place.

At the time he stopped attending class I had no idea he was incarcerated, and this is certainly problematic when it comes to class attendance. As this was not the first time a student had stopped attending class, it became clear that there needed to be better communication from administration and/or the student’s academic advisor though students may not always notify anyone. Students might be there for many days in a row and then disappear. Nationally, 77 percent of individuals who return to their communities after being released from prison end up recidivating within three to five years (https://concordanceacademy.org/about/reincarceration/).

The kind of inflexibility to life circumstances and conflicting mandates in both the judicial system and in the academic classes in college creates situations that Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students must navigate, and Buck explains how he has needed to be innovative in this negotiation.

I learned that Buck returned to STC when he could afford to be a student again. He said that he told his group of friends, “You guys are young, don’t mess up your life like I did. Stay in school. I might sound like an afterschool special but this is real.” Buck served the role of someone who has learned to impart knowledge of life experience. He referred to an afterschool special and I wondered if the guys he was talking to understood what he was referring to. I understood and I imagine that we were around the same age. All of these students discussed the frustration that comes with students who miss class and said “I know I know of other students around campus that were having a hard time because they were still on probation and all that, and they still had to go check in.” Check in is a common term for meeting with a parole officer for any length of time. Meetings with parole officers seemed to take precedence over the
student’s class schedule, which is probably not surprising given the severity of the consequences for missing a parole meeting compared with academic consequences. This possibility of being “taken back” to jail certainly impacted regular class attendance and Buck spoke openly about this choice. This is an example of a type of situation where Previously Incarcerated Indigenous students have worked with classroom instructors who seemed to be more flexible when they knew about the student’s previous incarceration. Yet, all the student participants discussed their experience with this dilemma and described the helpfulness of being able to share this with others. Many participants explained that if you miss one appointment they will “put you back in jail.” Many participants also discussed their experiences with instructors who just do not understand parts of this process and the dire consequences from missing a check in. Though it is important for students to develop ways to navigate systems, this is also something that would be helpful for faculty to understand and will be discussed more in chapter five as a recommended policy change or adoption within colleges and universities. Buck’s eloquent sharing about this dilemma of competing responsibilities helped me want to develop a variety of ways to influence STC toward more effective ways to serve Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students.

*Kaya*

Kaya was a former student and I did not know that Kaya had been previously incarcerated until she responded to my call for participants. The only information I knew about her is that she was a mother. Our previous conversations revealed that her child had passed away. She did not go into detail about her child, and I did not ask. I held one listening session with Kaya via Zoom where she described her experience of being a private tutor and said in addition to helping her peers understand math that she listened to them as Native students. She said, “I want our Native people to understand math. They might be like Apollo 13 and go to the moon.
They need to be able to figure it out.” Kaya’s reference to the Apollo 13 space mission was especially clever and reminded me of the movie made about the crew and how they had to figure out how to return home and their understanding of math made that possible.

When Kaya responded to my call for participants and spoke openly about many of the situations that she experienced. She told me that this was her second tri(mester) at STC and being a student and earning a degree was part of looking for “justice.” She said this search for justice was what led her to be incarcerated. Kaya did not share the details of her arrest, yet it sounded like she was standing up for her beliefs and was possibly involved in “good trouble” like John Lewis (Whitfield, 2020) the civil rights activist was.

Kaya spoke about being a private tutor who utilized social media to get in contact with tutees. She said,

Tutoring just kind of happened. I was a young mother and I realized I could help classmates and a friend said ‘you might as well create a website.’ I did create a website and here we are. Also, I realized I am helping clan [relatives] and it makes me want to do it more.

Kaya described this connection to see if she was related to students or to other community members. She pointed out that what impacts one person usually impacts an entire family and community. Kaya understood this connection and relied on her own Indigenous fund of knowledge when encouraging her peers. She referred to some of the things she has said to classmates who have shared their experiences of incarceration with her, “I tell them I know you are still a good person and I see you taking care of your family.” She went on to say “I don’t take
sides. I am just here.” This encouragement from someone who understands this aspect of life is important to hear. Kaya urged the need for empathy and that this needs to be clear,

The thing with being incarcerated is that sometimes people did not go to high school and had to get their GED's (General Education Degree) or it's been so long to where they don't have their high school diploma. So, for me, whenever I applied and I did all the testing and I got in, I had to relearn everything. It was one of those things that took me a little bit harder to grasp these [concepts].

She went on to say, “I was basically designing everything over again [because] it's been four years since I have actually been in any type of classes. Yet this is where I figured [school] out enough to help others.

Kaya connected these experiences back to being previously incarcerated and having a different experience from her peers. She shared how she provides this information if it seems relevant and does not offer information just to offer information. She went on to say,

I don't want to be left out of the loop or seem like I don't know anything. It's just easier for me to understand whenever a group project comes about because sometimes, I don't always know what I'm doing so whenever I have a peer, who knows a little bit marginally better than I do it's better to ask them to for understanding.

She continued,

If I meet someone that becomes a friend and my experience helps her then I share, in fact I probably share too much because I do not want her to experience what I have experienced.”
Kaya described her experience being previously incarcerated by saying,

“That learning curve is harder for some people to be in any kind of facility and try to learn because being incarcerated kind of puts you in this like cage mentality where you are either afraid to ask questions or you're just a little too out there because you're so used to defending yourself, so it definitely impedes trying to learn a lot. Sometimes because you have this cage in people's minds. That limits us.

These words were profound as they describe similarities that many of these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students are likely to share. For example, Kaya explained how she and others learned that alcohol and drug use was not helpful to trying to earn a degree and she seemed to have a “been there, done that” type of attitude. For example, she said,

…you have to find different avenues [besides using drugs and alcohol for dealing with hard situations]. You know you can't just stay stuck with a record and going to these programs. You need to see what else is out there.”

She explained that it, “was another part of life that she didn’t want to go back to. I don’t want other kids to go [to jail] either.” She continued, “If the time is right, I’ll tell them [fellow students].” This ability to be transparent with her life and encourage her peers speaks volumes to identifying the needs she sees with her peers. This example of leadership demonstrates the ability to guide others toward the fulfillment of their shared goal of degree attainment. Kaya, and other Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students play important roles in motivating others, providing guidance, building morale, improving the work environment, and initiating action.

Huera
Huera was referred to me by a friend of hers. She said, “I saw your flyers but since I didn’t know you, I deleted the emails. But when my friend mentioned your project, I figured it would be okay.” Huera went on to say, “See I don’t talk about that [incarceration] with many instructors, especially if I don’t know them.” I am thankful that Huera trusted the recommendation of her friend and agreed to meet with me. I was amazed by the amount of detail Huera shared. She did not know me yet trusted her friend and I enough to open up and share her life. This experience reminded me of the incredible knowledge that each participant has and the vulnerability that often accompanies such knowledge.

Huera made a connection to drugs, alcohol, and debt and synthesized it in such a way that if her peers heard directly from her they would believe her. She said, “Right now I can't afford my basic day-to-day [expenses] like my essential living costs.” Huera went on to say, “since having a job I’ve had to look more closely at my finances and how I'm going to afford my college tuition and my court fees.” This strain on finances was taking a toll on Huera and she explained a similar situation to Mandy and the pressure of finances. She said, “…drugs and alcohol are okay at first but people end up doing stupid stuff and going to jail.” Huera went on to say, “…we don’t want to do that anymore because getting locked up and paying for court fee is more expensive than getting drunk or high.” This kind of wisdom cannot often be generated by observing others. In my experience, this kind of wisdom usually comes from experiencing these situations first-hand. Yet, there are many ways people learn and many learn from their parents or from some cousins who were incarcerated. Huera did not want others to learn the hard way.

Huera said she was frustrated with being previously incarcerated and the fact that it contributed to degree attainment. She described her struggle with “seeing the point” in earning a
degree as it connected to money and to debt. Huera offered a critique of formal education in contrast to other forms of learning,

As soon as I got arrested, I just didn't feel like I wanted to continue with anything, let alone education of all things. Education is a necessary debt, but I already struggle with the fact that I have to pay to be here. To say that I'm that I'm a learned woman that I've taken time to study things that I want to devote my life to. But I need a piece of paper that I have to pay almost a million just to walk on a stage to get a piece of paper in front of thousands of people that I don't know personally. That's not success to me.”

In my experience, this kind of critique resonates for so many Indigenous People as we try to make sense of financial aspects of western education. Huera points out these divisions that many PIIS make sense of on a daily basis especially as they communicate the value of earning a college degree to their families and communities. These families and communities may or may not share the experience of degree attainment and may or may not be able to provide the support these PIIS need.

Huera is not alone in this struggle and went on to share her story of degree attainment. She said,

When I got my GED (General Education Degree) I was incarcerated. I was in a class of six people and only two of us got our GEDs because of the mentality in the beliefs of the teacher that we had. When they were enforcing their ways [beliefs] on us [and] they were bringing up religion. So, the [classroom educator] probably shouldn't bring up religion or spirituality in the classroom because being a certain way when you're incarcerated you have to be mentally prepared to be able to fight back to some people because some people are bullies or some people are just set in their ways. You have to tiptoe around
people because we're here to learn and this is an accomplishment that we never thought that we would be able to receive or achieve.”

Huera’s description of “fighting back” against “bullies” and emphasizing the need to “tip toe” to make her way through earning her GED is a valuable perspective to describe degree attainment. This desire to “fight back” is discussed more by classroom instructors in the next thematic section.

It became clear to me during my study that unless students are encouraged to speak from their experiences as leaders, innovators, and utilize their critical voices; then students and classroom instructors will continue to not see the value in their experiences of incarceration and the insights developed from them. For example, PIIS often shared, “I don’t know how to do that.” Yet, all the students in this study realized what they needed and like Mandy said, “so I figured it out.” This determination is an important skill and Mandy knew it would be needed when she helped others while tutoring. Other students expressed a similar sense of responsibility and innovation, “I can’t let them [students that need their help] see that I don’t know how to do this. They are coming to me to help [them], and I need to know what I am doing.” This self-assessment and how they might be perceived in this academic setting are important to note as a motivating factor. For PIIS, the stakes after incarceration took on a different meaning than they had previously.

We are witnessing justice and accountability in new ways and perhaps systemic change. For example, Vida said “If I don’t say something I am letting someone else speak for me. I cannot let that happen anymore.” Nita also said, “This is my experience and I am not expecting anyone else to have the same experience but I want them to hear my side of things.”
These students are in the midst of these intersections and are feeling their uncomfortable state of reflection, resolve, and emotion. They see fairness as being far away and are dealing with being imperfect. Every student brings specialized knowledge to the classroom. Many PIIS have knowledge that is gained through the experience of incarceration and can be important educational resources for schools and in classrooms (Gonzalez et al., 1995; Moll et al., 1992).

I stand with these PIIS as we strive each in our own way for equality and justice for all, while struggling with the complexity of who we are. The ugliness of America must be confronted daily; we must reject and replace it with love, respect, and well-being. These Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students are demonstrating these qualities in front of our eyes we just need to pay attention.
Chapter 5 – Thematic Findings

This second chapter of findings is organized around two thematic areas that emerged from across student and professor data with an emphasis on student voices. The first is, *Steering Our Boat - Helping Ourselves and Each Other Navigate Rough Waters* and the second, *Meaning and Implications of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Student Experiences.* The seven classroom educators who participated in my study were professors and their pseudonyms were Professor Stanley, Professor Carson, Professor Elvira, Professor Lorena, Professor Lydia, Professor James, and Professor Eugenia. Each of these professors shared their observations of the students stepping into the roles of being leaders as well as many other insights. The majority of these professors taught in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) department yet some of the professors also taught classes in other departments on campus such as the Liberal Arts department, the Natural Resources department and Culinary Arts department. These appointments varied on the number of students in the departments yet these professors worked with all of the students that participated in this study.

*Steering Our Boat - Helping Ourselves and Each Other Navigate Rough Waters*

This first thematic focus includes a variety of themes on ways that incarceration has influenced the lives of PIIS and how they have navigated college including subthemes: *Ways Incarceration and Its Aftermath Impedes College, Pushing Through the Pain, Family and Community Expectations,* and *Loss of Relatives.* I chose to use an emergent participant centered approach to defining academic success and that students responded in kind with a variety of definitions/conceptions. I sought to dismantle misunderstandings of students who have experienced incarceration as a way to reveal an understanding of what Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students deem as *success* in relation to college.
**Ways Incarceration and Its Aftermath Can Impede College**

When asked if they think incarceration impedes degree attainment professors as well as Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students in my study shared important perspectives. Professor Eugina said, “I want to say I don't think it has to impede degree attainment, but I think it can because it indicates that there are other things going on in the student's life.” She went on to say,

> When especially in a hegemonic system, and I'll use air quotes, ‘Justice’ has arrested you and put you in jail, people carry these experiences with them into spaces such as the classroom. Some of these situations are not easy to understand and by first glance and it requires looking beyond first perceptions.”

Professor Elvira spoke to this reality when she said,

> This was still a period of time when there were shootings in the schools and that was kind of in the back of my mind, but I had compassion for [PIIS she knew] because I wasn’t quite sure what was going on.

From his perspective as a student, Sheridan described situations where classroom instructors would hold absences against students, pointing out how this was likely to impede college and degree attainment. He said,

> So if they if they would miss class on a certain day and then and they missed a test or they missed an assignment they wouldn't let them make it up and that kind of put a
damper on that certain person’s college run 'cause they were like man like I have no choice’.

The confusing nuances of the correctional and post correction system impact students in college as well. Professor Carson said,

They're just, you know, getting by and trying to stay under the radar with their substance issues and because of the way our justice system is set up they get to spend six months of every year incarcerated. You know? It's like incarceration is just one more impediment in their life along with everything else that comes with substance issues.

Professor Elvira contributed to this sentiment by stating,

The number of students that tell me, oh, I went up to Farmington and I went to my court day and I owed them five days. So I'm in jail for five days. I'm like what the… you know. It makes no rational sense to have a justice system that somebody would go by court and because they couldn't pay a fine, then spends the next five days in jail and then comes back to me and say, well, I owed five days and I'm like that's so insane but it's the life of substance abuse.

Professor Lydia spoke about the affective filter and described it as one of the things that would keep you from having an ideal learning environment. Examining this ideal learning environment is interesting because the students spoke about stepping up for one another as a form of helping one another experience success. Professor Lydia went on to describe an affective filter such as observing the students be “really involved in their communities at home and have super tight family bonds.” She said,
It's like when I first got to STC I'd say, ‘Where's your paper and a student would say, ‘It's on my flash drive.’ I would say, ‘Where's your flash drive?’ A student would say, ‘Well, I gave it to student X.’ Why did you give it to student X? ‘Because she didn't have one like.’ Well, now you don't have one, so. In a sense, how do you even criticize that person did something selfless for somebody else? It doesn't really set them up super well for their own academic experience, but they did it for really laudable reasons.

Professor Lydia made a connection to, “You know, your family is hungry, so you steal a loaf of bread. Well, then you spend the rest of your life. You know paying for that desire to feed your family.” She explained, “You know it doesn't come in a vacuum.” Using the metaphor of stealing a loaf of bread to feed your family speaks to how the need to “survive” resonates with many sentiments the students shared.

Many professors interpret incarceration in a way very similar to the students -- as a mistake that makes college even more challenging. The students spoke about their experiences and the professors observed their actions in relation to incarceration. Professor Lydia said,

I don't want to overgeneralize, and I don't like it when people do, but most of our students, I think, were very law abiding and had steered well clear of law enforcement. But some of them had made mistakes or gone down a different path and I think that being incarcerated indicates that there are other things going on in the student's life and the s*** that got them in hot water with the legal system is just s*** that prevents you from having smooth sailing in school.

Professor Lydia’s quote exemplifies situations many Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students deal with and describes the struggles, family and community expectations, role models, class placement, connections with classroom instructors, and instructor perspectives. The various
quotes earlier in this section represent some of the struggles navigated in degree attainment by PIIS. They are figuring out their own painful experiences while many of them help others process their experiences as PIIS.

_Pushing Through the Pain_

Navigation of pressure to push through pain (McNicholas, 2010) helps students to understand how “pushing through” painful experiences without learning to deal with them does not always allow for the experiences to be processed. This mental sort out of experiences such as incarceration need to be processed to understand what can be learned from the experience. For example, Huera said “You know, I share my story every time I have a scholarship opportunity and my relatives know their stories are gonna always be shared.” Huera knew she could rely on this family and community wisdom when applying for scholarships and she shared this strategy with fellow Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students when they were unsure what to write about when applying for scholarships. Huera learned how to push through this pain and shared her strategy with other PIIS that needed this type of insight. Huera also shared,

I push myself every day to be an understanding and humble person. I want to be a non-judgmental because I know it can be taken away from you in just a moment. We have to realize that it is a reality.

This reality is something all these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students have experienced yet they have not allowed the pain of this experience to define them. Each participant in this study has made sense of their own lives and finds ways to connect with other Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students in ways that are timely and appropriate. For example, Mandy
said, “knowing that I can share this part of my life makes me feel free. Talking with Nida and Vida helped me to know this is okay. Sharing releases the pain a little bit.” Buck also said,

The more I share, the less weird it feels. I did not say anything earlier [in life] because it did not seem to matter but it actually matters a lot. This is part of my life and is part of who I am.

No one handles these situations the same way yet what these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students shared about how they rely upon one another is powerful and has the potential to provide the support system they need.

Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students shared how they were impacted by home insecurity and finances. Vida said “It gets complicated as the individual gets older. If they don't have the education then they cannot get a good job that helps them afford stuff like food and a place to live.”

**Family and Community Expectations**

Many of the students described a deep connection to others in the community and expectations from family and community. In *Research for Indigenous Survival* Dr. Lori Lambert wrote about this connection and described it as getting to the heart of the issue (Lambert, 2014). Nathalie Kermoal and Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez wrote, “Culture and kinship ties have been cited as core components of Métis identity where “the determination of Métis identity... is not merely a question of genetics, such as family links ancestry is only one component of Métis identity (Auger, 2021. p. 7).” In a similar sense these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students faced these distinctive sets of challenges yet created possibilities for themselves and for other Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students in college and in their home communities.
PIIS often have reciprocal obligations (Durie, 1997) to one another because of their shared experiences (Mead, 2003) and to family, tribe, and community. Incarceration has implications for many different relationships within the life of an Indigenous individual. For example, Shasta spoke directly about her life,

I was young and I told my siblings and my aunt and my uncles I don't know why I did what I did and that's something that you know was really touchy for me to share and even my close friends or even my relatives do not know. I had to really hold my emotions together because you know I am still close to this.

This idea of needing to hold emotions together is a common struggle that can complicate how a family is viewed and can be the source of comparison and even gossip. These students discussed the difficulty in dealing with the expectations placed on them by their families, communities, and society. Shasta said “Being a student makes my family proud and becoming a tutor made them more proud of me. It is like they forgot I was ever in jail.” These words from Shasta signaled the hope that she saw for herself and for her community especially when she said, “my Nali said ‘I know you needing to go to jail is painful to think about but that experience helps you understand others like you.’” Shasta said “Like you” means being incarcerated and I get to share some of these thoughts when I share with other students that have experienced incarceration. Yes, this is painful but my Nali’s words help me.”

A college degree is also meaningful in many ways within a family. Buck said, “I do not mind being 30 [years old] and bagging groceries but I bet I could do more if I had a degree. I know my family sees that, too.” Either way, family and community members are impacted. Shasta and others referred to this responsibility that goes along with being part of a Native family
and/or community. The repercussions on one’s family and/or community are long lasting and have the potential of exuding pride or embarrassment.

Professor Lorena spoke about previous incarceration and said “that burden is hard to carry around and you wonder if you still have worth and know you need to do something with your life. That's harder to do when you feel bad about yourself.” She made the connection to, “You know, your family is hungry, so you steal a loaf of bread. Well, then you spend the rest of your life. You know paying for that desire to feed your family.” She went on to say, “You know it doesn't come in a vacuum.”

**Loss of Relatives**

The loss of relatives within Native families and communities is a reality that not many understand especially if they are not from a pueblo, tribe, or Indigenous community. Some people are comfortable discussing this loss while others choose not to share. For example, Kaya and Shasta both experienced the loss of children before and after being incarcerated and rejoining life outside of prison. When these two women shared these experiences with one another prior to our individual Listening Sessions they both spoke about how they were able to rely upon one another and provide encouragement to each other. Kaya said “It does happen. It's not just a myth it does happen, and it does happen every single day and my son is the reason why I do this.” Shasta said, “This is the reason why I chose this degree and it's the fact that you know people can relate to it.” Similarly, Kaya said “I am able to tell [other students] from personal experience like it's just something that happens and you know doctors don't really tell us all of this stuff when babies are born.” Kaya went on to say,

’Thear from somebody else that went through it is important, they can understand how to support somebody. When the anniversary of my son comes around and I explain why I
can't attend class, sometimes some classmates open up and say ‘I lost my child as well. I
know what it feels like, so you know, take that time to heal.

Kaya and Shasta both spoke about being mothers and losing a child. They spoke about how they
spoke with one another prior to meeting with me and how they were able to rely upon one
another to help them navigate their lives. The loses they experienced are aspects of historical
trauma that they are redefining (Logan, 2015) life for themselves and other Previously
Incarcerated Indigenous Students. This kind of family loss is understood as happening to these
mothers yet the impact of this loss is experienced by their families and communities. For
example, Shasta said,

…part of our clan is gone now and it is more than them not sitting at our dining room
table. It is part of our future that is now not here to represent our families. I feel like if
you are part of a clan you don’t have to explain why it is important. People just
understand.

This explanation makes sense especially as the other side of degree attainment among Previously
Incarcerated Indigenous Students as it is a contribution to nation building and resiliency. For
example, some experiences in college are helpful and also assist students to pass on collegiate
lessons learned to others. This knowledge is then communicated to tribes and community
members so that it becomes common and site-specific knowledge.

These participants discussed how earning their degrees became a pathway to nation
building similar to what is referred to in Beyond Access: Indigenizing Programs for Native
American Student Success (Waterman, et al, 2018). The authors of this book state that Tribal
Nations (https://nni.arizona.edu/programs-projects/what-native-nation-building) could not be
built without firm foundations and some of these firm foundations stem from personal reflections include experiences of being previously incarcerated. These experiences contribute to the strengthening and building of capacity for culturally relevant self-government and for self-determined and sustainable community development (https://nni.arizona.edu/programs-projects/what-native-nation-building).

Huera spoke to the connections between nation building, degree attainment, and employment when she said, “You want to make your tribe proud and attending college makes people proud.” She went on to specify why she believes college attendance makes her proud of herself,

It's not like regular jobs like dishwasher jobs or [being] a Pizza Hut driver doesn’t make my tribe proud. But when you have a record, you're pretty much blocked from a lot of things so you have to find different avenues.

Similarly, Minowa discussed the strain of employment, “…without a degree and having a record, these are the only jobs I can get and I want a job that makes my tribe proud and me proud. Is that too much to ask?” She discussed the importance of struggling with being qualified for certain jobs and that it could only get her so far. She appeared to be frustrated with this situation and said,

…you know there are things that you can do with the record to make your tribe proud like herding sheep or chopping wood. Others might think you are stuck in a concrete block and that you’re not able to get out, but this is nothing to get out of. I am earning my degree and I know how to chop wood, but I have this record that makes me sad.
These “other things” that Minowa spoke about may or may not be considered important in western society yet understanding how to herd sheep and chop wood are valuable skills that are considered important within many Native families and tribal nations and contribute to the building of said nations. The idea that many native families view the college experience being “normalized to the dominant” (Waterman, S. J., Lowe, S. C., & Shotton, H. J., 2018) is important here because experiences these students share would not be considered normal within most colleges. Yet, these are the skills that build nations, and this is part of the beauty of these stories.

These students explain that their lives included incarceration and they share the resiliency they have forged to overcome the “concrete barriers” that Vida referred to as getting stuck in. This shared struggle definitely demonstrated a reduced sense of self-worth where many of the Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students stated that they came to think of themselves as "the kind of person" who deserves the degradation and stigma of incarceration. Many of the student participants discussed opportunities to share with a therapist and Minowa spoke about this specifically when she said she wanted to “understand her trauma” and to see it as a point of definition that she needed to see for herself. The historical trauma (Sotero, 2006) and specific historical losses (Brown-Rice, 2013) that Minowa and other PIIS speak of referred to such as the loss of people, loss of land, and loss of family and culture certainly contribute to Nation Building. This contribution is evident in the sense that this trauma is transferred to subsequent generations through biological, psychological, environmental, and social means, resulting in a cross-generational cycle of trauma (Sotero, 2006).

**Implications from Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students Experiences**

This second thematic section focuses on implications of many factors influencing PIIS in college including: *Residential Living as a PIIS, Impact of Technology, PIIS Possibilities of*
Reincarceration, PIIS Factors for Success, Impact of Supportive Faculty for PIIS, Self-Concepts of Success, Classroom Realities for Both PIIS and Instructors, Testing and Systemic Marginalization of PIIS.

Residential Living as a PIIS

The dorms are a major contrast for students who live in them. On one hand the dorms serve as a safe shelter and are close to class and the cafeteria. Living in college residence halls is also the second highest influence on retention and graduation – second only to students having a significant relationship with a faculty or staff member (Graham, Hurtado, & Gonyea, 2018). One can see the school wanting to support the students to be self-sufficient yet when some of the students need additional assistance, the dorm staff do not seem to know how to respond to these situations. For example, Mandy said “I tried to share some stuff with dorm staff and they seemed like they didn’t know what to say.” She went on to say “…maybe they couldn’t say what they really knew or felt.” Mandy did not go into further detail but from what she did share she had mixed emotions about the dorms.

Several classroom instructors spoke about residence hall life and said,

STC is a residential program where you have dorm rooms. You have a cafeteria, so it feels a little bit like incarceration, right? You know 'cause it's three hots and a cot, so some students will tend to interpret the setting of being a college as not that much different as the setting of being inside. And if when I've had students that are in their late 20s that have probably become adults inside you know there's a behavioral pattern that has gotten him into trouble.
Classroom instructors who are unfamiliar with problems related to incarceration might misinterpret this behavior as merely disruptive yet there is more to this situation than meets the eye. Professor Eugina explained,

...because, you know, in fact, I've had students pull me aside and explain this to me explicitly. They say, you know, when you come to a new site, you know you need to establish that you're not somebody to be f***ked with, right? That means you will stand your ground.

Professor James also referred to this situation by saying,

So that behavior [of standing your ground] means that in the first couple of weeks they'll pick a fight with somebody so that everybody knows they are not to be messed with, which you know when you're inside, especially if you've been inside a long time, which a lot of these students went inside as late teenagers and if they're in their late 20s, they probably spent 80% of their time as an adult inside rather than outside, and so I've had students in my orientation that I need to say 'look, you're in an academic setting you can't do that here.

This aspect of needing to fight back is not always understood by incoming classroom instructors yet it is sometimes part of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS).

Impact of Technology

COVID-19 threw most of us into not knowing what do to about our responsibilities for work and school. For example, Mandy shared that it would have been good, “...to have a teacher ask how long has it been since you worked with technology? Or have you had technology before?” She went on to say “sometimes you don't know the background to some people? In
reference to using technology and navigating on-line learning, Buck said "we are kind of being like the. Um, the way I will put it a Guinea pig, you know? We're kind of the testers for all of this, you know, and seeing how far something can go or how far we can take something or push something." Her words were timely as many of us as classroom instructors "figured it out" yet as Mandy stated, "it was a new experience for her." She said, “[being in] jail does not prepare you for life of needing to know computers. Like many students, these students were forced to learn how to utilize technology if they were to attend classes virtually. This technological situation proved to be easier for some and harder for others and exposed the economic divides between groups of people.

Mandy discussed this struggle connected with not being familiar with certain types of technology that all students and classroom instructors were expected to use. For example, when we were getting on our Zoom video conferencing, Mandy said “I am not sure how this works but I need to know so I am going to try.” Little did she know, we are all trying to figure out technology. Yet, she chose to be open to learn and this innovative approach created opportunities for she and others to understand. Some college students choose not to learn and eventually drop out (Dunne & Seery, 2020) of college. This is one of the pieces of information that many of these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students needed to learn in college alongside other students as it is considered part of academic success.

**Impact of Dikos Ntsaaígíí-19 on PIIS use of technology**

In Diné Bizaad, the Navajo language, COVID-19 is called Dikos Ntsaaígíí-19, the "cough that kills." Struggles involved in working with technology are also common among Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students. When we were all separated from one another due to Dikos Ntsaaígíí-19 we needed to connect and communicate via Zoom. For those who were accustomed
to utilizing Zoom video conferencing it was an easy format. Yet, those who did not utilize zoom on a regular basis had a learning curve. This was another significant tension (Johnson-Bailey, J., 1999), for example, Sheridan demonstrated being innovative and resourceful by asking for help from his brother with Zoom and said that without his brother, “I wouldn’t be able to do so much stuff or show others how to do stuff.” PIIS in this study continue have less technology skills because they have not had the exposure to them. Some who were released from incarceration before we all needed to quarantine and were not exposed to utilizing anything on the computer and although physically safe, there was no safety net for them when it came to computers. Some of these frustrations stemmed from not feeling adequate at using technology. This delayed access and skill with computers for PIIS is hard for classroom instructors to understand as many millennials understand technology in ways that others have not needed to. We, myself included, usually call Information Technology (IT) for help and rarely have needed to figure it out. IT assistance is available to all students yet not all students have reached out for this assistance. Distance learning posed this complication in a way we did not know before the pandemic when all courses had to be moved online quickly. The professors did not discuss technology issues among PIIS beyond the connection issues that we all faced.

PIIS Possibilities of Reincarceration

Fears about reincarceration were common among the PIIS participants. Eyota referred to being "terrified" of reoffending. Kaya said she was afraid of getting “…stuck again in [the] big cement” of incarceration for being ****ed up.” This reality of being re-incarcerated for her substance abuse issues was a definite source of anxiety. Many of us deal with bills but most do not fear the possibility of incarceration if a bill is not paid in time. It became clear across listening sessions that this fear is a common experience among oppressed peoples that others
often do not believe are real or are deserved (Kilgore, 2015). For Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students fear of reincarceration is part of the daily baggage they struggle to carry around. It would be helpful for college professionals and paraprofessionals to understand this burden and provide support, a listening ear, flexibility, and empathy. For example, several students discussed this financial struggle and Buck said that he, “…can’t consider transferring anywhere until my fees are paid off,” he continued with,

\[\text{…if I get arrested again those are more fees that I have that will be incurred. So, it’s really easy to fall into and can become a situation where you feel helpless. If I didn’t have a job, I don’t know what I’d be doing right now.}’’\]

This fear of reoffending and going back to jail for any degree of time may delay actual degree attainment and means that PIIS are living with a high level of stress and worry. Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) can help alleviate this situation by being aware of this and by having a point of reference for some of the brutality that happens to the students when they go home to their communities for any amount of time. One blog post filed under under: Police Misconduct, Racial Discrimination, Native American, Racial Profiling says “Someone will leave the reservation, go to town, get drunk, do something dumb and if a white kid had done it, they’d call their parents and take them home. But if it’s some strange Native kid, they’ll put them in jail” (https://www.bing.com/newtabredir?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.prisonlegalnews.org%2Fnews%2F2016%2Fsep%2F9%2Ftribal-police-accused-brutality-corruption-s-dakota-reservation%2F).

This ethnic/racial based discrepancy in accountability is not only unjust, it completely impacts the lives of everyone involved especially when the imprisoned person has family and
community responsibilities that are left unattended. The reality is very disruptive. Tribal members wanted to find other ways besides prison to deal with social dysfunction (Carey, 1996). These social injustices and classroom realities will remind educators and school administrators that these issues need to be addressed at policy and professional practice levels.

One discussion with a student revealed terror of being incarcerated again because of the inability to make payments on time. For example, Kaya said,

I'm terrified that like they're saying that I haven't been paying my fees when I have, and it was an automatic. It was a system automatic appeal for a bench warrant. But like it's terrifying. Because I really don't know if I can afford to keep making the payments in a timely fashion, I'm terrified that I will have to be incarcerated again. If the judge isn't. Lenient or understanding about my situation.

Kaya went on to say, "And I've already had to move my application process back because I'm supposed to graduate.” She discussed the connections and the fear between paying for school and paying court fees. Kaya described the fact that she was not able to do both,

I need to finish paying my school fees too, so I can't really consider transferring anywhere until my fees are paid off, and because I can't build my fees there like their money is being pushed towards my court fees and if I get arrested again those are more fees that I have that will be incurred.

This financial situation related to incarceration, certainly impacts the process of degree attainment. This additional burden is a hurdle that Previously Incarcerated Students deal with. In my experience, this cyclical financial-academic situation is not often discussed most likely leading to a lot of PIIS not being able to find a way out, and getting thrown back into jail. It is
an oppressive cycle; they are at risk of reincarceration because they can't afford their fees, because they cannot get a job, because they have an arrest record. Huera said, “We live in a system that believes we deserve to be punished.” This aligned with the areas of struggle that Nita referred to when she referenced education and degree attainment as the “golden lever” that opens one up to opportunities are exemplified by this cycle. She said “it is just like the ladder that Chief Manuelito spoke of. He said ladder and I say lever.” Chief Manuelito or Hastiin Ch’il Haajiní was one of the principal headmen of the Diné people before, during and after the Long Walk Period (Denetdale, 2007).

**PIIS Employability**

Many of the Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students in this study discussed their difficulty in finding employment. This was not an overnight realization, and it was something that Vida saw after, "doors were constantly slammed in my face" because of her record. Yet, Vida, Nita, and others kept trying and found jobs that worked for them. Systematic post incarceration issues that made finding employment difficult were exposed to an even greater extent by the global pandemic that were experienced world-wide in academic institutions which are dominated by laws, policies, and political discourse that dehumanize certain students (Neden, Parkin, Blow, & Siriwardena, 2018). Kaya explained,

It's not like regular jobs like dishwasher jobs or being a Pizza Hut driver. You're pretty much blocked from a lot of things once you get a record. It seems like you have to find different avenues. You know you can't just stay stuck with a record because there are things that you can do with the record.
Students discussed difficulty in obtaining employment, yet also discussed their resiliency in finding jobs that work for them.

**Familial and Home Responsibilities**

Shasta and Kaya shared the experience of being mothers and also being previously incarcerated. In our follow up interview in December 2020, Shasta shared some of the dilemmas of childcare,

> I think it was very different [from our initial interview] because at the beginning of the trimester I was still in all my thoughts from a parent perspective until I looked at it from a teacher perspective. That is just so different, you know. It's different from a point of view. I guess I could relate it best to you're at a point where you're physically with this child and you're just like what am I gonna do with you? You know I don't wanna give you anything too hard but too easy. I want you to also learn.

Shasta compares the experience across the STC trimester as a parent caring for a child and how she learned to teach a topic by being a tutor. While Kaya said,

> Being a tutor is like being a parent. You want a tutor to learn just like you want a child to learn. They need to understand why they are learning something. I get to be here to help them learn.

Shasta also shared that “every trimester, it is hard to find the time to get everything done. But somehow I figure it out.” This insight is crucial as it explains how these students needed to be innovative and learn balance amidst their family, school, and professional responsibilities.
Many students shared the fact that they were unable to complete assignments due to their families dealing with complications stemming from COVID-19 which included loss of employment and loss of life. These situations caused their homes to be uprooted and many students found themselves homeless. They discussed the fact that they had been living in the dorms prior to quarantine and the need to return home left some with no home to return to. Some had homes to return to yet felt alone when they did, Nita said “I want to go home but since my mom is in the hospital with COVID, no one is there, and it is just a house.” She went on to explain, “It is just me and I don’t know how to take care of a home. Everyone at home [community] thinks I know what to do but I don’t.” This analysis of her role at home and the community speaks to in part to not being the same person she was before incarceration because Nita relied on her mother to be make their house a home. Nita did not see taking care of their home as part of her responsibility yet others in the community believed this was also her responsibility. Buck spoke about this as well, when he said “This is the only man I know how to be. I can help take care of people here [at school] but I don’t know if I can be that man there [at home]. These quotes demonstrate the reality of what it means to return home as they understand it. Those that have been incarcerated leave home a certain way and return home to find it either very different or not there at all. When asked what the students need to be academically successful in college, Minowa said, "if they can bring in, you know, people who represent the military and people who represent police academies, then they can bring in someone like me.” Wanting to see someone as a guest speaker who was “figuring things out, too” to see and learn from their experiences of incarceration is understandable. Everyone needs role models to see how goals can be attained so they do not feel like they are alone with the experience of incarceration. They also might need to see the hope for themselves. Class placement and funding
are major issues that students contend with and if students struggle with classes, the classes must be taken again. When students take remedial courses repeatedly they might utilize federal or other sources of funding to pay for their college attendance (Nelson, 2016). This makes, transferring to universities and/or pursuing advanced education problematic. Factors such as class placement and funding are not major pieces of this study, but they are issues that students contend with especially if they do not know that they could apply for federal funding.

**Impact of Supportive Faculty for PIIS**

The students referenced positive experiences with classroom instructors and Buck said,

> If I didn't feel that I could have relied on my educators I probably would have left as soon as the first arrest happened and tried to figure out the best way to tackle my situation. But because I had educators who supported me despite knowing, it was really relieving and it was sort of motivating too.

This relationship between classroom educators and PIIS is integral to connections happening and support taking place. Another student said,

> Susan said “I found it helpful in learning and success in my instructors is to build those relationships. Be open with them and if they who you are and what makes you who you are they are willing to work with you.

Nita described some positive experiences she had in the classroom where the instructor’s teaching methods, assignments, and subject contact created positive experiences for her. She said,
I was able to relate more to the subject. We did daily journals and this helped me to write and I showed others how to write which I thought was really creative because [the class instructor] would tell us to write about our life and that was such a wonderful thing to do because it got me used to being able to write and actually encourage me to write more.

Nita expanded on this thought by stating,

It was fun telling stories about my life and Just a fun way to get you back into writing because that's how most of us started when we were in the classes that were just beginning out anyway.

Mandy further articulated this point by stating,

Try to get used to writing and doing essays and everything like that so when it comes to subjects and methods you can rely on [other] students and their own way of writing. Sometimes but I like writing yet when I am given those little nudges and pushes every once in a while it helps.

The participants stated that certain activities that classroom instructors gave them presented the opportunities they needed to discuss their experiences in words. For example, Nita described this support by saying,

I've had some instructors over the last couple of semesters who are willing to give out additional office hours and additional texts so that we could talk to them or we can call them and ask them questions during certain times.

Professor Lydia stated, "The fact of the matter is people think that [something is] going to stop by throwing people in jail, right? That's the problem that we need to move past is incarceration
doesn't fix substance abuse issues, right?" This perspective from Professor Lydia stems from working with and listening to students over the years. Professor Stanley, who has been in the classroom for 35 years explained some of what he sees,

There's a funny cultural thing about having been incarcerated that the you know, especially with guys that they feel like, well, they you know they have this wisdom about the way the world works, that people who haven't been inside don't have.

This "funny cultural thing," is a form of incarceration cultural capital, and is likely that what I offer here is useful to learning and success for PIIS and could be an opportunity for classroom instructors to learn about students and understand why this wisdom is beneficial to some yet may also be detrimental to others. Professor Stanley went on to offer additional interpretation, "You have to be prepared to understand the enculturation that happens ‘inside’ and that many PIIS have been accustomed to this behavior." Professor Stanley went on to relate this to teaching, "If there's any answer to your first question about how incarceration might affect teaching it is to try to re-enculturate students to an academic model…." This same classroom instructor offered important insight about the influence of a college teacher when he said:

I'm a really big believer in self-concept for the student that you know my job is not really to teach them. You know GED content right? My job is to actually to give them the concept that they're worthy of having a degree, and if they get that, then they'll learn the material right? They'll take the test but I get students who have no self-concept that they'll ever get it done.

Self-Concepts of Success
Developing a self-concept of success is important for college students including PIIS. Professor Eugenia shared his thoughts on self-concept among students, "They'll take the test, but I get students who have no self-concept that they'll ever get it done and when I speak with their parents, they have even less support.” He connected to the expectations and influence of others, especially family,. You know their parents say…”this is one more thing. You know, he/she failed at everything else in life. I mean, I’ve contacted parents when a student had gotten their degree and had the parents expressed complete surprise to me like am I making this up that it can't really be true that you know Josh finally got his degree. He's never gotten anything in his life.

Professor Eugenia went on to offer addition meaning making, You know they have that fraught relationship with their family and their family in many cases has given up on them. I mean, the reason they're at STC is not because they were supported and sent to STC. The reason there are at STC was because they were not allowed to stay in the house any longer and STC was, you know, a place that would take them. They were not sent to STC with the with the solid goal of getting a degree, OK, they were sent to STC with a solid goal of getting them out of the house.

I see this yet hearing this from a long-term classroom instructor hurt my ears and my heart. The fragility of these situations and the harsh realities of some of the students’ lives is sobering. This classroom instructor, Professor Potts shared a similar sentiment and said, The reason that my students were incarcerated in the first place is as much because they were Native as because they did anything. Right? There's just, they're Native and they are
poor and you know poor Natives coming from families that have incarceration already in the home. It's you know it's a path that's really difficult to get off of.

*Classroom Realities for Both PIIS and Instructors*

The reality of previous incarceration is complicated and both groups of participants approached this reality from different angles and are bringing different perspectives with them. Sometimes this certain *behavior such as standing one's ground* is seen as playground maturity (Corsi, P., & Neau, E, 2015) or as actions demonstrated by adolescent youth. These types of behaviors are commonly seen as something for someone else to deal with because the classroom instructor is teaching xyz and is not a school counselor. This makes appropriate training for professors important because of the short time frame that educators get to work with the students before the student leaves the "safety net" of tribal colleges for the world of larger colleges and/or the workforce. This makes the role of TCUs even more crucial than ever before. When tribal colleges were initially established, they were created to serve as a steppingstone between high school and/or the general tribal/community member yet today in 2021 many students experiences are lifetimes away from the initial *typical* tribal college student that tribal colleges were created for. In my experience and according to some of the students and faculty in this study, when PIIS come to the classroom, they are often needing to be "built up" to want and "expect success."

*Testing and Systemic Marginalization of PIIS*

During our interview, Professor Stewart said, "When I'm teaching GED or HiSet, I have probably the largest percentage of previously incarcerated students of any of the programs at STC." In my observations, this [HiSet] class placement process is dependent on testing, yet it often puts people back in groups of potential offenders. Many student participants and classroom
instructor participants referred to this as *going back together*. Both professors and students wondered if this was because they have similar experiences and demonstrates a possible discrepancy in how placement tests are administered or perhaps ways they may be culturally or experientially differentiated. Professor Steward continued, "There's benefits for taking GED and Hiset classes right away. It gives students time to understand the culture of this college community but there's not benefits for passing [HiSet classes]." I have seen this in my classes, and I have heard other instructors discuss the frustration of students not taking their classes seriously. Yet, in my experience, classroom instructors at STC have not discussed how they can learn about why some Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students enjoy taking classes yet not the test that is intended to show their knowledge. Some of these placement tests actively inhibit learner achievement and suppress cultural vitality where "understanding context" is an essential ingredient paving the way for student success (Nelson-Barber, S., & Johnson, Z., 2019).

Professor Stanley said, "…that's because of the way [prisons] have “dropped education into justice services." Professor Stanley focuses on this a critical period of adolescence when incarceration is most likely to end one’s high school education (Aizer, A. & Doyle, 2015) and how educational classes are perceived as a secondary form of reducing recidivism (Pompoco, et al., 2017). This secondary form of recidivism is second to programs like ‘Scared Straight’ which involve organized visits to prison facilities by juvenile delinquents or children at risk for becoming delinquent (Petrosino, et al., 2013). Until I met with this classroom educator I had not thought about this link. Yet it makes sense when we think about students who have come directly from high school or incarceration. This study suggests that PIIS bring their previous experiences to their current life in college and those experiences may contribute to their academic success in college.
In summary, I learned a great deal from speaking with students and classroom instructors. Some clear connections were made between what Previously Incarcerated Indigenous students need to be academically successful in college how they may or may not be perceived by their classroom instructors. All of the participants spoke openly and honestly about life. The participants were genuine, especially as they acknowledged their experiences. These stories are examples of Tribal CRT in action by their enactment of their Indigenous knowledge as seen in tenet 5, tenet 7 and tenet 8. Tenet 5 of Tribal CRT says: The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens. Tenet 7 of Tribal CRT says: 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. Tenet 8 of Tribal CRT says: Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being. Yes, the support from the classroom instructors is necessary yet many of these examples have come from the students themselves and provides insight into their perceptions of their self-concepts. For example, classrooms are problematic for many PIIS as they are places of regrouping. Classrooms are helpful for Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students by exposing another possibility of acquiring a degree. These stories were told first-hand to me as part of this study and will be sources of encouragement for future students who seek college degrees. I do not know how these accounts will be told around kitchen tables or by relatives who know their younger generations need encouragement, but the stories and lesson PIIS share with other PIIS will be new allegories that will teach the power of resiliency. These students envisioned the big picture for themselves and for anyone that could be connected to incarceration in terms of their choices to attend college and earn a degree.
Chapter 6

Summary, Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will synthesize what I learned in relation to each of the research questions I originally posed for my study, provide recommendations for policy and practice in higher education to more effectively serve and facilitate learning for Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students, provide suggestions for future research, and offer some concluding reflections.

What I Learned in Relation to My Research Questions

Responses from participants provided answers to my research questions though not always in ways I expected that exposed needs in the lives of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students. My research questions were developed to examine the relationships between students, school and society among Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students. Dr. Bryan Brayboy (Lumbee) referred to these acts of reclaiming scholarship that can be connected to the experiences of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students attending college (Brayboy, 2014). As an Indigenous researcher, I share this vision for and with other Indigenous students. We are reclaiming scholarship!

We know that western education was never intended for Indigenous people to obtain and experience success and “a system cannot fail those who it was never meant to protect” (unknown author yet often attributed to W.E.B. Du Bois). This is even more true for students who have been previously incarcerated and who are navigating college classrooms. These students might not see their presence, their time, and their experiences as being valuable and contributing to the
world and especially others’ world views. Yet, understanding of these experiences are needed and the voices and insights of PIIS are needed to deepen our understanding of the world.

What does academic success mean to Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs at tribal colleges and universities (TCUs)?

Academic success includes seeing yourself and your community members successfully attaining academic goals such as earning degrees. For Indigenous people, this includes the negotiation of curriculum and instruction in school and policy outside of school. Indigenous students must deal with the history of boarding schools and other forms of genocide that have not contributed to the process of degree attainment. This history has the power to weaken and empower people.

Previous incarceration for non-violent offenses have also not contributed to the process of degree attainment should not bar anyone from having access to education. Instead of working to counter colonization, Indigenous people need to make sense of their realities and utilize these experiences as factors for attaining academic success as forms of understanding and negotiating colonization. The attainment of academic success is an act of (re)claiming knowledge-making practices (Brayboy, 2014) and this can never be taken from anyone.

How are the experiences of incarceration seen by Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) and their instructors in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs at a tribal college (TCU)?

Struggles were recognized by both students and classroom instructors as students stepped up to meet the challenges before them. We do know that we are not abstractly removed from history; we are products of it (Cleary and Peacock) and for many this includes incarceration. We
know that having previously incarcerated people discuss incarceration through their own stories is a powerful tool that frames their experiences not as merely social issues but as human issues. We have been able to see how these experiences of incarceration are seen by Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) and their instructors at a tribal college (TCU).

Classroom educators need to be prepared to understand that there are multiple realities with their students, and specifically with their Indigenous students, that are part of their identity formation. This preparation includes being familiar with how certain experiences, such as incarceration, can be a form of their identity formation. These perceptions include what being Indigenous may or may not mean to the student and the classroom instructor. There is never the expectation that classroom educators share the same experiences as their students, yet there should be a desire to understand the experiences of their students.

**What do Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students (PIIS) need to be academically successful and to attain degrees in a tribal college?**

Misunderstandings must be dismantled as a way to reveal an understanding of what Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students deem as *success* in relation to college. We know that attending college became a life preserver for the Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students in this study and the participating classroom instructors who helped these students swim. The ways that many previously incarcerated students step up is often different from what others consider stepping up and the balance of family and community life is slightly different from what others see or experience. This stepping up is still considered brave and mature. Students are stepping up for their families and communities in ways that are not usually deemed "successful" in terms of academia as many stopped out of school and/or were absent from school instruction while incarcerated or while taking care of responsibilities in their lives. Yet, we know
that wisdom does not always coincide with old age and it is represented among many Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students.

**Recommendations for Professional Practice**

The following are recommendations for professional practice in tribal and other Native Serving colleges that emerged from the findings of my study. They include:

- Anti-Recidivism and College Success Training for PIIS
- Develop a Balance of Student Self-Advocacy with Support from the College and its Professionals
- Develop and Require Professional Development for Staff and Professors on PIIS
- Create a Speakers Series composed of Indigenous students and scholars that speaks to experiences as benefits, instead of deficits
- Develop communication between tribes about the needs of their tribal members incorporating a wide variety of experiences

*Develop and Provide Anti-Recidivism and College Success Training for Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students*

This study revealed a need for an anti-recidivism and college success training program for Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students who take on leadership roles on their own. I believe that the four R's - Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991) must be integrated because every generation needs these ideals as part of their daily lives. The gathering and analysis of narratives do not include the experiences, perspectives, and insights of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students therefore there is the need to
develop and provide anti-recidivism and college success training for previously incarcerated indigenous students.

Programs that are geared toward understanding the needs of tribes and Indigenous communities must be inclusive of all students. Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students need to be part of the planning and implementation of programs that include multiple perspectives and experiences. For example, tutoring programs and prevention programs are currently in place yet it is not clear if tutors are prepared to listen beyond discussing the topic at hand. It is clear that some of these programs were created to meet the academic needs of passing exams or classes yet students with experiences with incarceration needed assistance beyond tutoring. The current programs helped them to a point yet their needs exceed the capacity of the tutors. Because other programs did not exist these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students utilized their funds of knowledge to create what they needed to be successful and this turned out to be what other Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students needed to be successful. Some of the special directives they need come from other students who have experienced incarceration. For example, tutoring and prevention programs have been in place yet students who have experienced incarceration need a different approach. It is helpful for them to hear the words of their student peers therefore there needs to be training programs that integrate student funds of knowledge and student voices. These programs need to encourage self-advocacy, promote class attendance, and urge appropriate attention to assignment completion.

**Develop and Require Professional Development for Staff and Professors on PIIS**

Findings from this study suggest the importance of assisting faculty and staff to develop skills and approachability to genuinely listening to the needs of students to understand how to build what they learn into their professional practices, policies, etc.. For example, connections to
home are an important component for students attending college. This connection is just as strong for classroom instructors. It is imperative that the perspectives of our colleagues and students are shared, otherwise we are missing pieces of the proverbial puzzles that make sense of experiences. I am reminded that we need to advocate for one another when we have the opportunity to do so because we all work passionately for reasons beyond ourselves. Devon Mihesuah and Angela Wilson wrote about this very phenomenon by saying, "Perhaps we might engage in an educational dynamic with our students that is liberatory, not only for the oppressed but also for the oppressors." This valuable change in perspective allows us to see these connections. Therefore, developing and requiring professional development for staff and professors about Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students has the potential to build much needed connections. Indigenous voices need to be heard across Indian country and in academia. Participant voices illuminate experiences of being Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students and this study provided space for Indigenous people to contribute knowledge in this area. This study also provided a way for participants to know that their voices and experiences are valued. Achieving educational equity through classroom, school, and community transformation happens when we focus on how students are marginalized and appropriately acknowledge roles in society and in educational settings. When these experiences are brought to the classroom it is not clear how these experiences are understood or incorporated into classroom pedagogy therefore the need to develop and require professional development for staff and professors on including Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students is integral to equity.

*Develop a Balance of Student Self-Advocacy with Support from the College and its Professionals*
This recommendation stems from the true purpose of tribal colleges. Colleges might be different today in 2021 than the initial creation of the colleges themselves. Therefore, there needs to be a focus on the practices that TCUs can implement which include the change of the community (Lambert, 2014). This vision of academic success is part of the big picture for all students and for anyone who has experienced incarceration. The choice to attend college and earn a degree are circumstances that need more than navigation by all the participants. The traditional system of education that many Indigenous students experience does not necessarily prepare them for western education (Mercier, 2012). They get to learn from local elders and their kin, designed to help them live a fulfilling life in a harsh climate without hurting nature. Western schooling does not encourage this experience.

There needs to be an inclusive school environment that is seen as a place where students feel like they to not need to shed their identities in order to flourish and/or be academically successful. Providing a connection with community stakeholders is integral in the learning process and is especially valuable, particularly when they can empathize with students and speak directly to student experiences. This community partnership is an example to the moccasin telegraph, as described in *Living indigenous Leadership: Native narratives on building strong communities* (Kenny, C. B., & Fraser, T. N, 2012). When community stakeholders work in partnership with class instructors and administrators, the value for student experiences is evident and students feel that they can trust that the process of education. This trust for many Previously Incarcerated Indigenous students is not only part of the educational process but must be communicated as a *valuable* part of the education process.

*Develop better communication between tribes about the needs of their tribal members who are attending college*
Historically, the primary contentions Indigenous people have had to mitigate have been about *how* their respective communities interpret contributions. Incarceration has not been seen as a positive contribution to one’s community or to society. Incarceration is still not seen as a positive contribution especially when it requires separation from one’s tribal community. Yet, this is an opportunity to acknowledge this reality in 2021. Now is the right time for tribal leaders to contribute to their communities through their members. Sometimes if there is not a reason to do something, such as create and institute a program, then sometimes things do not get started. Similar to how these students expressed their needs, tribes and communities have community members that are stepping up and sharing their experiences. Listening seriously involves an ability to make connections between “traditional” community values to places like schools and life inside of a classroom. Understanding the experiences of previously incarcerated people in the classroom could help classroom educators and students alike to understand their experiences.

Because previously incarcerated individuals are attending college as part of mitigating life and many previously incarcerated students are seeking higher education as a way of reintegration (Giraldo, 2016) into non-prison society. This integration gives tribes and communities a reason to revisit the inception of TCUs and to work more closely with the Native Serving Colleges and TCUs that serve their tribal members. This is an opportunity to exercise sovereignty in 2021.

In a conversation with Professor Stanley, a current adjunct professor and former language and culture teacher of his pueblo’s language, he said “Based upon the premise of what good leaders know and do, it makes sense that we would want success for our communities.” Therefore, we can sincerely wonder if/how this is happening. Are we producing graduates with qualities that communities want and are proud of? This is an opportunity to produce evidence of community members seeking and attaining success. Professor Stanley went on to say “Take the
language and culture of the pueblo, the primary requirement to be a language and culture teacher is to know the language and culture. This is great, but how is this knowledge making connections between what they need to know to survive in 2021?” Dr. Greg Cajete spoke about this situation when he said “the earlier we begin the process of supporting leadership development among Indigenous People, the greater the possibilities for our Peoples to sustain good leadership through successive generations” (p. 164). Tribal Colleges need to partner with nearby correctional systems to benefit incarcerated and previously incarcerated Indigenous individuals.

**Implications for Future Research**

*PIIS narratives as they progress through college*

A longitudinal study of PIIS as they progress through college is needed because it sheds a spotlight on the issue of previous incarceration and offers perspectives and experiences of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students in their own voices. This study is important because it demystifies experiences of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous students (PIIS) in college and assess situations that cause students to stop out of the trimester after they start out strong. This is a common situation and needs to be analyzed.

*PIIS and faculty narratives through college*

When Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students and the faculty that work with them make sense of experiences by engaging and placing value on experiential knowledge the focus is directed to shared goals. The choice of attending college and the carrying of experiences is important because it contributes to developing a deeper understanding of the diversity within Indigenous communities. Therefore, narrative accounts and testimonies are valued as key sources of data and include the potential for learning about how these experiences impact academic pursuits. Colonialism impacts all areas of our lives and the need to talk about our
experiences in relation to research and other endeavors is important to Indigenous-based Research. It is part of the commitment and responsibility to our communities. These commitments are complicated and loaded and it is imperative that Indigenous researchers examine the myriad identities and contexts of participants, sites, communities that other Indigenous people because we develop and share the deepest possible understandings. This is part of the hallmark of Indigenous scholarship. The need for Indigenous-based research is vital in academia because it is geared towards gaining the authenticity of the voices of Indigenous communities. A small world is not just a figure of speech because it is a reality. If someone is not related by blood, then one is related by clan or resides in the same community and is part of someone’s family.

Mental health

Sometimes anxiety can lead to substance abuse, PTSD etc. that leads people to be incarcerated. The incarceration of Indigenous youth and college students experience and its outcomes needs to be analyzed further as the connections are extensive.

Conclusion

Putting in the work and the necessary time to listen to our relatives makes our Ancestors proud and this is what we need to do. This is what I hoped to do. There is a need for TCUs and other ethnic serving colleges to learn about and provide specific kinds of support and flexibility for Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students. These impacts future research because it validates this community and examines the issues that impact this community experiences because all tribal colleges work to strengthen the cultural heritage of their respective tribes (Bad Wound, 1990) and this includes the tribes of the students at the tribal colleges including those that have been previously incarcerated. For example, Vida referred to life after incarceration and
discussing the significant struggle she faced from what would affect her long into her future. For example, Vida said, “It’s like a big cement in front of you for the rest… until I am 55… I think is when the DWI deal goes off of your record and that’s for everybody.” I imagine that Vida referred to “the rest” as the rest of her life, yet this is not necessarily clear. She did express the fact that she felt stuck and with the lingering reality of having a DWI (Driving While Intoxicated). Vida said “It’s an embarrassing topic though I don’t know how to talk about it to help other people.” I imagine that most people would not know how to talk about this reality with other people. This student clearly understood her situation. She said,

I do wish and I hope the school will take away from this is that it shouldn’t just be about what happens after [incarceration]? It should be about how can we help you prevent this from happening?

Vida’s comments are important and speak to the reality that before we can create a collegiate culture where students do not feel like they have to, “… engage in [alcohol abuse] and toxic behaviors that will ultimately get them arrested and cause issues for their career pursuit.” Vida’s perspective has the potential to put pressure on the College to take care of their students and the importance of colleges to provide support for Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students.

Student support is important especially at TCUS, Hispanic Serving, and Black colleges since judicial systems are targeting people of color.

Preceding Incarcerated Indigenous Students made important points throughout this study - there is a need for understanding the realities of Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students. and being able to assist Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students to navigate misinformation, stereotypes, and other factors they face. These Preceding Incarcerated Indigenous Students in this study regularly help their peers to understand information, and they also educate colleges
and collegiate professionals who are learning how to effectively step into their roles in working with a diversity of students. We need to acknowledge roots of oppression that force people into one direction or another. Sometimes this direction helps students stay in school and their time away is merely stopping out. They have not completely dropped out of school.

These Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students discussed an “inflexibility” in both the judicial system and in the academic classes in college that creates an often untenable situation that Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students must navigate innovatively. Greater awareness of these realities among collegiate faculty and staff would be helpful to encourage to innovation and flexibility in facilitating learning and success among PIIS. To meet this goal, tribal college faculty have a vital role to play by interpreting and communicating the cultural traditions of their tribes to students. Educators must be at the center of informing educational policy as we are the ones who are both able to listen to youth and design classrooms (Weis, L., & Fine, M., 2005). It is imperative for classroom instructors and tribal school administrators to be cognizant of issues facing students in their classroom, especially those that have been previously incarcerated. In addition to teaching grammar and sentence fragments, classroom instructors and administrators must be prepared to impart knowledgeable words that demonstrate the value of the process. Therefore, classroom instructors must be ready to explain the relevance of their class in the grand scheme of their respective program. This is largely the part of the student’s academic advisor, and sometimes this happens, yet it is still the responsibility of the classroom instructor to clarify where the class fits in the degree completion plan. When this piece is missing, it is possible for students to not see the bigger picture for why they are in the classroom and relevance for degree attainment, in general. Educators do not usually know the background of the students placed in their classroom. Although sometimes, students take the same classes
repeatedly from the same instructor and this sometimes brings some understanding to the surface of the classroom instructor. Other times, classroom instructors and students are starting this classroom relationship from the beginning of the trimester. Both situations have the potential for learning. This is the nature of the western classroom. Yet, when classroom instructors are also tribal community members along with the students this could change the classroom dynamic. Tribal colleges sometimes work with this dynamic and it has the potential to make students feel more comfortable and for them to share some of their life experiences, such as being previously incarcerated. I have seen this play out in my classrooms when we are discussing seeming unrelated topics, such as grammar and appropriate sentence structure. This study has influenced and impacted me as a collegiate professor and a human being by being thankful to be able to listen to these Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students and classroom instructors share their experiences.

Daa’waa’ee.
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Appendix A:

Student Recruitment flyer text

Hello and my name is Jodi Burshia (Laguna Pueblo, Diné, Hunkpapa Lakota, Assiniboine and Sioux) and I grew up on the Tohono O’otham reservation in southern Arizona. I currently live in Albuquerque, New Mexico and attend the University of New Mexico. I am an English writing instructor. I am looking for participants to participate in a study about their experiences as a previously incarcerated Indigenous student. Participants will engage in a 45-90-minute interview that will focus on their experiences of whether or not their experiences being previously incarcerated student factor into their academic success and their experience earning a degree. Participation is voluntary. Interviews will be video or audio recorded to obtain the entirety of the conversation, yet participation identity will be concealed. Narrative responses in this study will create training materials and curriculum for incoming classroom instructors in tribal colleges in preparation for appropriately conducting classroom education. If you would like to participate in this study and/or are interested in learning more about this study, please contact me at jburshia@unm.edu. Thank you, Jodi Burshia
Appendix B:

Classroom Instructor Recruitment flyer text

Hello and my name is Jodi Burshia (Laguna Pueblo, Diné, Hunkpapa Lakota, Assiniboine and Sioux) and I grew up on the Tohono O’otham reservation in southern Arizona. I currently live in Albuquerque, New Mexico and attend the University of New Mexico. I am an English writing instructor. I am looking for participants to participate in a study about their experiences with previously incarcerated Indigenous students in their classrooms. Participants will engage in a 45-90-minute interview that will focus on their experiences of whether or not their experiences being previously incarcerated student factor into their academic success and their experience earning a degree. Participation is voluntary. Interviews will be video or audio recorded to obtain the entirety of the conversation, yet participation identity will be concealed. Narrative responses in this study will create training materials and curriculum for incoming classroom instructors in tribal colleges in preparation for appropriately conducting classroom education. If you would like to participate in this study and/or are interested in learning more about this study, please contact me at jburshia@unm.edu. Thank you, Jodi Burshia
Appendix C:

Student - Focus group questions

1. If a classroom educator knows a student has been previously incarcerated, does that change the way a classroom is conducted?

2. If so, why or how do you believe this happens?

3. Does being previously incarcerated impede degree attainment? If so, why?

4. In what ways? Can you share a story or example?

5. How do you define success?

6. Are there any other comments or insights you would like to share or offer?
Appendix D:

**Instructor - Focus group questions**

1. If a classroom educator knows a student has been previously incarcerated, does that change the ways a classroom is conducted? If so, why or how do you believe this happens?

2. Does being previously incarcerated impede degree attainment? If so, why?

3. In what ways? Can you share a story or example?

4. How do you define success?

5. Do you think/believe that Previously Incarcerated Indigenous Students envision life success the same as academic success?
Appendix E

Student Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and your background? What is your tribal affiliation or what Indigenous communities are you connected to?

2. Have you been previously incarcerated?

3. Does being previously incarcerated impede degree attainment? Why?

4. In what ways? Can you share a story or example?

5. How do you define success?

6. How has your definition of success been influenced by your experience with incarceration?

7. How has your definition of success been influenced by your time at STC?

8. What are ways a college could provide support for you and other students who may have similar experiences with incarceration?

9. How do you think sharing your experiences may help future incoming students, especially those who have been previously incarcerated?

10. What is helpful to your academic success and learning?
Appendix F:

Classroom Instructor Individual Interview Questions:

1. Please introduce yourself and your background? What is your tribal affiliation or what Indigenous communities are you connected to?

2. How long have you been a classroom instructor?

3. Do you know if you have previously incarcerated students in your classroom? How do you know?

4. Does knowing if a student has been previously incarcerated change the ways you conduct your classroom?

5. Does knowing if a student has been previously incarcerated change the pedagogies you use?

6. Does knowing if a student has been previously incarcerated change the projects you assign?

7. Does knowing if a student has been previously incarcerated change other aspects of your class? Why?

8. Does knowing if a student has been previously incarcerated change the ways you interpret and/or work with that student?

9. What are your thoughts on the influence that being previously incarcerated impedes degree attainment? Why?

10. How have you or might you develop your curriculum and teaching practices to include previously incarcerated students?

11. How does this college provide support for students who are previously incarcerated?
12. What are ways that this college could provide support to you as an instructor who may be working with students who were previously incarcerated?

13. What are ways that classroom instructors can provide support or instruction for previously incarcerated students?

14. How do you think sharing your experiences might help future instructors prepare for meeting the academic needs of incoming students, especially those who have been previously incarcerated?