

The Educational Goal Achievement Among Diné (Navajo) And Their Resiliency

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

Liberty University

2020

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study aims to examine Navajo life experiences, which foster resilience and contribute to educational achievement. Resilience contributes to educational achievement and ongoing success in higher education. Chapter one is an introduction to the study and the significance of the study. This chapter discusses the limitations of Navajo academic achievements, including poverty and difficulties with no electricity and running water. Chapter two provides an overview of the theoretical framework of the study and the contextual challenges. It discusses the contributing factors that complicate educational success historical trauma, ongoing trauma, the generation gap, and the achievement gap. Despite the adverse hardships, resiliency among Navajo students can contribute to their educational achievement. Navajo culture and traditions, family support, community support, protective factors, and emotional regulation can positively impact Navajo students. Chapter three explains the design, setting, participants, procedures, data collection, and data analysis for the study.

*Keywords:* Navajo, education, resilience, achievement, trauma, poverty

## Dedication

I am dedicating this dissertation to the people that positively influenced me to pursue my doctoral degree. They encouraged me and showed me that anything is possible with great determination. To my wonderful husband, Devin, for believing in me and never letting me give up. Your endless love and support are the reason for completing this dissertation. To my uncle Raye for lighting the fire in me and pushing me to further my education. You are a true inspiration to me and always remind me to do my best. To my sons, Cayden, and Logan, for their endless patience when I was writing this paper. To my mom Laverne and my sisters Bitá and KK, for their infinite love and support. And for being my cheerleaders and always celebrating my successes. To my brother Dustin for being my sidekick growing up. To my aunt Norma for believing in me and knowing my potential.

This dissertation is dedicated to my late Cheíí Sammie and Masani Mary. You both laid down the foundation I needed to complete my educational goals. To my Cheíí Sammie, for his endless love and encouragement when I was in college. This wouldn't have been possible without you, and you taught me always to persevere and have grit. To my Masani Mary, thank you for teaching me to have courage and to be selfless. To my other late grandparents, Alice, and Alex, for reminding me of the importance of education.

A'he'hee

## Acknowledgements

First, I wish to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Jackie Craft and Dr. Todd Schultz. Without their guidance and dedication, I wouldn't have made it. To Dr. Craft, thank you for the endless support that you provided me. You spent countless hours reading my dissertation and meeting with me. You are a true inspiration to me, and I can't thank you enough. To Dr. Todd Schultz, for taking the time and reading my dissertation. You believed in me and my dissertation, and I appreciate everything you did to help me.

Dr. Linda Warner, for being the support, I needed. Thank you for taking the time and proofreading my paper. You are the definition of a strong, resilient woman. You took the time to help me with resources and took time to help me when I needed extra support.

To Dr. Petervon Tanedo for taking time from your busy schedule to help me with my dissertation. Thanks to everyone that made an impact on my life and this dissertation. I am grateful to each of you who stood by me and never let me give up.

Thank you to my Casamero family for being the support I needed to finish this degree. To my Nodestine Family, thank you to my Uncle Tony, and Uncle Darryl for believing in me and praying for my successes.

A'he'hee

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

This chapter provides the framework for the study by illustrating the nature of resilience of the Navajos and examining critical factors that preserve and accentuate success beyond common expectation. The researcher postures herself as a member of the Navajo culture and presents her own lived experiences. The problem statement points to candid and inherits resilient factors that preserve the heritage of the Navajo people despite historical maltreatment, limited opportunities, and inequality within the educational system. The purpose statement emphasizes the need to examine resilience and protective factors that cultivate success. The significance of the study acknowledges the need for more profound clarity and context to the strengths that are evident in those that experienced disparity and trauma yet found academic success. The research questions steer the study, and the definitions conceptualize the terms that guide the literature review and specify relevant language throughout the narrative.

### **Background**

The completion of secondary education programs within the Navajo culture reveals a low achievement rate. Only forty-one percent of Navajos, age 25 and older, have earned a high school diploma or a GED. Three percent of Navajos, age 25 years and older, have no schooling, and nineteen percent have completed less than a high school diploma. Twenty-three percent of Navajos had some college but did not graduate. In comparison, eight percent of Navajos completed an Associate's degree, four percent completed a Bachelor's degree, and two percent completed a Master's degree (Navajo Nation CCD New Mexico, 2019). Resilience plays a crucial role in success academically and socially in how individuals approach a relationship with peers, advocate and collaborate with teachers and other authority figures, and navigate

demanding or confrontational situations. Examining resilience factors inherited within the Navajo culture provides a meaningful understanding that can help maximize students' academic potential and capacity and become more socially adept (Gonçalves et al., 2017).

### **Situation to Self**

This research study is relevant to my position as a member of the Navajo culture. I grew on the Navajo reservation, raised by my grandparents; through their care, guidance, and teachable moments through stories of the Navajo, I learned the values of hard work. I developed a greater appreciation of the traditions of the Navajo, which instilled principles of resilience, motivation, and perseverance. My elementary and secondary education took place in a boarding school on the Navajo reservation, as generations of Navajos students have been accustomed to attending.

After high school, I had a difficult time deciding what to do with my future. I experienced many hardships growing up on the Navajo reservation, including having no electricity or running water. These family members struggled with substance abuse, job loss, domestic violence, and enduring the consequences of poverty. My grandparents continued to insist that education was essential to my future and a means to attain a higher quality of life. During my undergraduate college experience, it was difficult to transition from the disparities of living on the reservation to a more modernized lifestyle. However, the lessons, values, and morals my grandparents instilled provided the awareness and insight that I needed to be successful. After completing my undergraduate degree, I continued to pursue my graduate degree, and now my Ph.D. I desire to build a more enduring understanding of the experiences of Navajos who pursued higher education and were successful, despite the common hardship and disparities that exist for our culture.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that poverty, trauma, and other hardships are often the focus of research casting a negative perception of the Navajo culture. Empirical studies and historical narratives point to the disparity and lack of achievement rather than the values inherited from the culture that provide resilience and protective factors to cultivate success. There are limited studies that link educational attainment to positive cultural attributes. Therefore, this study will provide detailed descriptions of the participants' resiliency experiences within Navajo culture and traditions that supported academic accomplishment.

### **Purpose Statement**

This study's purpose is to illuminate the resiliency factors within Navajo culture and traditions that support academic success and personal accomplishments. The stories of Navajo who endured trauma, poverty, and hardships yet are successful academically provide insight into the positive impact of resilience, culture/tradition, and family support for furthering their education.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study illuminates the resilience framework inherently built into the Navajo culture, traditions, and practices. Although historical poverty, trauma, and hardship exist, the unique story of Navajos, who have successfully achieved their academic goals, provides insight into characteristics, strengths, and elements of resilience that are not understood as critical to preserving and furthering prosperity of the Navajo people. Giving a platform to these attributes can provide a paradigm shift in how educators and counselors support Navajo children and students towards academic success.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative narrative study:

RQ1: How are the traditions, values, and cultural identity of the Navajo experienced as resilience factors that contribute to educational goal achievement?

RQ2: How does the investment from family and community contribute to personal success?

RQ3: How are barriers to success mitigated to avoid the impact on academic achievement?

## Definitions

**Achievement gap-** The term "achievement gap" is regularly used to describe between-group differences in educational outcomes (Quinn et al., 2019)

**Assimilation-** Assimilation involves members of ethnic or racial minority groups becoming more similar to members of the ethnic majority and social and spatial boundaries disappearing over time (Silm et al., 2018).

**Diné-** The terms Diné (a Navajo word, meaning the people, a preferred term used by the Diné when referring to themselves) and Navajo (an externally derived name for the people of the Navajo Nation) are used interchangeably throughout this article when referring to citizens of the Navajo Nation (Kahn-John et al., 2021).

**Educational Achievement-** Educational achievement is the most important indicator of the success of students in educational activities, but its nature is complex and multifactorial. (Moghadari-Koosha, et al, 2020).

**Historical Trauma-** Historical trauma is cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences (Garcia, 2020).

**Resilience-** Resilience has been defined as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity; it involves bouncing back or steering through difficult experiences (Baldwin, 2020).

### **Summary**

This chapter provides an overview of the study and the purpose of the study. The background of the study examines the percentage of Navajos not attending or completing higher education. Growing up on the Navajo reservation and growing up with the traditional teachings and values. This study provides details about the significance of the study for me and the reasons for conducting the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

This literature review discusses the various aspects, including the literature framework and contextual challenges. The literature framework focuses on the Native Reliance theory, the Indigenous Psychology theory of resilience, and the Social Ecology of resilience. The contextual challenges include trauma, disparity, culture and traditions, educational achievement barriers, and protective factors. The disparity among Navajos includes Suicide, domestic violence, substance abuse, poverty, and job loss. These disparities often establish limitations on Navajos pursuing higher education.

Additionally, Navajo culture is discussed in this section, including traditions, an introduction to the four worlds, Navajo oral traditions, healing and ceremonies, and family and lifestyle. The barriers to academic success are also discussed, including achievement gap, poverty, lack of culturally relevant education, cultural disconnect, and mental health barriers. Barriers and obstacles play a vital role in the limitations of academic success among Navajo students.

### **Historical Overview Navajos and Trauma**

Historical trauma among Navajo began with the Long Walk. One of the turning points in Diné history was the Long Walk (1864–1868). During this period, more than 8,000 Diné were forcibly removed from their homeland and incarcerated at Bosque Redondo in southeastern New Mexico (Goodkind et al., 2012). The Long Walk had a significant impact on Navajos, unable to cope with being removed from their homes, crops, and livestock killed; they endured this hardship for many years. Many Navajos died on the way to Bosque Redondo; women were forced to abandon their families if they could not keep up. Hundreds died en route, while several

thousand took refuge in the extreme west and northwest of the Navajo homeland (Dinetah) and avoided the Long Walk altogether (Reyner, 2020). Navajo oral history tells of the weak and young who could not keep up with the others who were taken behind hills and shot. Some drowned crossing the Rio Grande. While at the camp in Bosque Redondo, Navajos starved from the lack of food provided by the government. A lack of food and clothing, along with a shortage of wood to keep their hogans warm during the winters, kept the Diné in a state of constant misery (Acrey, 2005).

After a few years at Bosque Redondo, Barbancito, a Navajo leader, began to advocate for Navajos to return to the reservation. Treaty negotiations began on May 28, and a treaty was signed on June 1, 1868, allowing the surviving Navajos with their remaining horses, mules, and sheep to walk home in a 10-mile-long column with their children wagons. On July 6, 1868, the column of returning Navajos crossed the Rio Grande, and they were again in Dinetah, never to leave again (Reyner, 2020). The treaty, patterned after other Indian treaties, called for the end of all warfare, the compulsory schooling for Navajo children, and the provision of farm implements to heads of families willing to take 160 acres of land for raising crops. The treaty had made provisions for rations to be continued for ten years through 1878, while the Navajos were re-establishing themselves (Acrey, 2005). The effects of the Navajo Long Walk continued to harm the Navajos years after. Acrey (2005) states that:

Living conditions on the reservation had changed little since the People's return from Fort Sumner. Few Navajos living in the early 1900s would realize that the Navajo tribe entered a century of unbelievable progress. This century would present staggering problems to the people, issues which they would overcome and which would make them a wiser and stronger people for having done so. (p. 157)

## **Theoretical Framework**

The literature framework focuses on the Native Reliance theory, the Indigenous Psychology theory of resilience, and the Social Ecology of resilience. These theories provide support for this study of Navajo resilience and educational achievement. Native reliance theory focuses on the three qualities of the holistic worldview model, and the three qualities include being responsible, disciplined, and confident. Indigenous psychology theory of resilience focuses on the positive relationship between a person and the environment around them. The social ecology of resilience is the positive interaction with school, family, community, and culture.

### **Native Reliance Theory**

Native Reliance is conceptualized as a continuous yet all-encompassing process representing the holistic worldview of Native American ways of knowing and being, cultural identity, health perspectives, and well-being (Wimbish-Cirilo et al., 2020). Native Americans have a rich history that is expressed through culture, traditions, and language. Native Reliance is a holistic approach to viewing things as a whole or circle. The cultural themes of "seeking truth" and "making connections" cut across being responsible, disciplined, and confident (Lowe et al., 2019). Circular and connecting patterns so there is knowing the spirit is in everything, including each person, allowing connections to emerge and become known in all aspects of their lives (Lowe, Kelley, & Hong, 2019). Native Reliance theory describes holistic worldviews as beliefs, values, and behaviors. Native Reliance includes the qualities of (a) being responsible, (b) being disciplined, and (c) being confident (Lowe et al., 2019). In Native Reliance, being responsible is caring and asking for assistance when needed. Being responsible also refers to providing for others by respecting others, being present and accountable, and calling on the Creator through speaking the traditional Native language and honoring the Creator through the ceremony (Lowe



et al., 2019). Being confident in making the right decisions and standing by those decisions. Being confident refers to having a sense of identity by being proud of one's Native heritage and accepting Native or tribal beliefs and values (Lowe et al., 2019). Being disciplined is being culturally aware and accepting traditional beliefs and values. Three internally linked circles and cultural themes (core qualities) of being responsible, being confident, and being disciplined embody the interrelationship between the overarching cultural domains of seeking truth and making connections (Wimbish-Cirilo et al. 2020).

### **Indigenous Psychology Theory of Resilience**

Indigenous Psychology questions knowledge hegemony and focuses on the cultural context in which psychological phenomena occur to help people promote well-being by dealing with problems in a culturally relevant and efficient manner through the use of alternative ways of knowing (Ebersohn et al., 2018). Indigenous psychology theory of resilience is perceived as central to life. The relationship-resourced resilience theory provides evidence that there is value in understanding how, from an indigenous, sociocultural perspective, values and practices regarding interdependence are leveraged as a cultural resource during resilience-enabling socio-ecological processes (Ebersohn, 2019). Resilience in Indigenous Psychology Theory is positive interactions between a person and their environment, called flocking. Flocking is a manifestation of (collective) self-regulation where the given ecology (of challenge and collectivist culture) prescribes the pro-social regulation of emotions and behavior (Ebersohn, 2019). There are four developmental stages of Indigenous Psychology theory: the pioneer period, introductory and modeling level, indigenization, and integration level. The "pioneer period," as the first phase, represents the acknowledgment by intellectual pioneers that psychology (including mental health services) is relevant to a certain culture (Ebersohn et al., 2018). "Introductory and modeling

level” is the second phase in which western psychology is introduced. The third phase, namely, "indigenization," refers to adaptive mainstream psychology theories, concepts, and methods (Ebersohn et al., 2018). The fourth phase is the "integration level," Indigenous Psychology is based on indigenous knowledge systems. This indigenous psychology aims to promote increased diversity in social life and expand the possibilities of human experience while committing to the ethical implications of cultural innovations (Guimaraes, 2020).

### **Social Ecology of Resilience**

Resilience is a shared quality of the individual and the individuals’ social ecology, with the social ecology likely more important than individual factors to recovery and sustainable well-being for populations under stress (Ungar, 2011). Social ecology is the study of individuals and their interaction with the environment around them. As individuals change and their environment changes, individuals have to be able to adapt and become resilient. The resilient individual might be unable to sustain their high resilience every day in each stage of their life. Other individuals may be resilient despite a lack of community or environmentally supportive resources (Marie et al., 2018). Resilience depends on factors such as the individual, social factors, environment, and relational factors. Resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social-cultural, and physical resources that build and sustain their well-being (Ungar, 2011). Resilience is a process rather than a trait, and it continues throughout a lifespan. The method of resilience occurs before, during, or after adversity. A social-ecological perspective on resilience that evolves from this interactional perspective focuses on the social and physical environment as the locus of resources for personal growth (Ungar, 2011). Social ecology determined that it can culturally embed resilience in individuals' physical and social ecologies.

Additionally, resilience embedded through culture and traditions enables individuals to overcome adversities and barriers around them. Resilience means an interactive concept in which the presence of resilience has to be inferred from individual variations in outcome in individuals who have experienced significant major stress or adversity (Marie et al., 2018). Positive influences provide ample opportunities for individuals that were taught resilience through culture. Success and responsibility are taught through culture and traditions.

### **Disparity among Navajos**

#### **Suicide**

The Navajo Nation Reservation is the most significant Native American reservation in the United States; it lies in New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah. Although the Navajo reservation is rich in language or culture, it faces many social and economic challenges. The Navajo Nation has provided adequate health and financial resources; however, almost half the reservation population lives below poverty. This is significantly higher than the US population overall but approximately the same as the overall American Indian and Alaska Native population (Navajo Epidemiology Center, 2016).

Suicide attempts result in the person surviving. Risk for Suicide can result from violence or abuse in any form. Family support and access to mental health care can decrease suicide risk; thus, the Navajo culture can be a protective factor by providing strong family support and cultural identity facilitating positive self-image development in children and adolescents (Navajo Epidemiology Center, 2016). Additionally, Suicide is the seventh leading cause of death for Navajo (both genders) at 17.48 per 100,000 (age-adjusted) (Navajo Epidemiology Center, 2016). It is considered taboo for Navajos to speak about death or Suicide. It can be challenging for Navajos to talk about emotions or thoughts because of the negative impact on the family. Suicide

is the fifth leading cause of death for males in Navajo at 31.41 per 100,000 (age-adjusted) (Navajo Epidemiology Center, 2016). Schools and communities have increased suicide awareness on the Navajo reservation over the past few years. Although suicide awareness has increased in schools, students are not taking advantage of these services. Suicide is the 15th leading cause of death for females in Navajo at 4.62 per 100,000 (age-adjusted) (Navajo Epidemiology Center, 2016).

### **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is another issue and setback that Navajos have to endure while trying to complete their education. Violence in any form has been a concern recently on Navajo Nation Reservation. Laws relating to violence against a family member and cyberbullying are punishable by the Navajo Courts. However, enforcement is a challenge due to limited law enforcement capacity across the rural reservation. Support services for domestic violence and abuse face difficulties in funding and providing access across the reservation (Navajo Epidemiology Center, 2016). The lifetime prevalence rate of violence, which included sexual assault, physical violence, or psychological aggression from an intimate partner, and stalking, was an astounding 84.3% (Fotheringham et al., 2021). Although more facilities provide counseling and interventions for domestic violence, they are not all being utilized. There is a high lack of awareness of services or knowledge as to whether a battered woman's shelter could provide emergency transport. Rural populations are generally not large enough to support specialized services, and transportation is a perennial problem. Regarding physical violence from an intimate partner alone, 55.5% of American Indian and Alaska Native women had experienced it compared with 34.5% non-Hispanic, White-only women, a rate 1.6 times greater (Fotheringham et al., 2021).

## **Substance abuse**

Substance abuse among the Navajos has created many difficult hardships among families. Alcohol and drug abuse have plagued the Navajo Nation for several years, creating an epidemic among the Navajo people. For tobacco use, about six percent reported smoking either every day (2.1%) or some days (3.4%), while 10.3% had quit. For chewing tobacco, 5.8% reported having chewed tobacco either every day (2.3%) or some days (3.5%), though most reported not chewing at all (94.2%) (Navajo Epidemiology Center, 2016). Garrity (2000) states that Alcohol and substance abuse embody an intense personal crisis for individuals who suffer and a situation that threatens the Navajo people. It would be safe to say that almost all Navajo people have been affected by this crisis in some way, through their suffering with alcohol and drugs or that of a family member, or as innocent victims of alcohol-related accidents or violence. Despite the hardship and effects of substance abuse, many Navajos overcome the barriers through resilience. Alternatively, for many Navajos overcoming obstacles can be difficult, and their life turns into a disaster. American Indians tend to engage in more binge drinking (Smith, 2007). Their higher levels of binge drinking likely contribute to the higher levels of alcohol-related problems they experience. Substance abuse is another contributing risk factor limiting Navajos; these risk factors provide barriers that are often difficult to overcome without resilience. These negative experiences can make it difficult for Navajos to build resilience, especially if substance abuse runs in the family and no mental health services are utilized. Substance use and abuse remain an ongoing issue on the Navajo Nation Reservation. Culturally appropriate and adequate treatment centers are available; however, funding and other strategies to keep Navajo people from abusing substances are challenging (Navajo Epidemiology Center, 2016).

## **Poverty**

Poverty is often defined as lacking the financial resources to meet a set of basic needs (Wolff, 2019). Navajos who live in the reservation's rural areas deal with the lack of running water, electricity, unpaved roads, and basic living needs. Many Indian reservations are plagued by high rates of poverty, along with substandard housing, poor health, crime, and other social ills (Carpenter and Riley, 2019). The problems of Indian poverty and living conditions on reservations have inspired various explanations. Some Navajos living in rural areas have to travel a distance to purchase the necessities. Increased unemployment remains a serious problem on the reservation, and the per capita income for Navajos remains well below the national average (Acrey, 2005). Area hospitals are not easily accessible; Navajos have to travel to bigger cities for quality health care services.

## **Job Loss**

Additionally, jobs on the reservation are scarce, causing more Navajos to be under the poverty line. Local jobs that are vacant receive more than one applicant, making it difficult for Navajos to get a position on the reservation. In recent years, the increased economic activity on the reservation has helped provide needed employment opportunities for many Navajos (Acrey, 2005). Poverty is a contributing factor that highly affects Navajos to complete higher education. Children and adolescents from low-income families now comprise a majority of public school students nationally. As the number of students from low-income backgrounds increases, the achievement gap between them and their wealthier peers (Williams et al., 2019).

## **Navajo Culture and Tradition**

The Navajo have long had a deep-rooted and abiding faith in nature and their place within the universe. In their language, they have no word for “religion,” but their world is

permeated with a sense of the supernatural. The Navajo culture embraces the world around them, seeking life and fortitude in nature (Rickard and Bial, 2016). Navajos were taught to respect the world around them, which is also a part of the culture. Traditional Navajo religion thus reconnects individuals to their home within the four sacred mountains, their history as Navajos, their families, and the traditional way of life (Lewton, 2000). The Navajo culture is focused on the Navajo creation story and the Holy People. When the Navajo came into this world, the holy people taught them right away to conduct themselves- how to provide for themselves, how to build a hogan, be a good husband or wife, and meet the myriad demands of life (Rickard and Bial, 2016).

### **Navajo Traditions and Culture**

Navajo traditions and culture are significant and unique; to understand these teachings, you have to hear the stories from the beginning, starting with the first world. Traditional Navajo families teach their children these stories, culture, and traditions. These teachings are believed to make an individual humble, resilient and knowledgeable. Diné elders are the ideal role models; Diné elders have both received the ancient instructions of Hózhó and have had a lifetime of experience in working toward attaining Hózhó (Kahn-John and Koithan, 2015). Navajo elders provide the younger generation with knowledge about the culture and traditions. These teachings are the foundation of the Navajo culture; each story has its instructions. People living consistently with Hózhó ideas are humble; intelligent; patient; respectful and thoughtful (demonstrated in speech, actions, relationships); soft-spoken; good and attentive listeners; disciplined, hardworking, physically fit, and strong; generous; supportive, caring, and empathetic; positive in thought, speech, and behaviors; spiritual; loyal and reliable; honest;

creative and artistic; peaceful and harmonious; perceptive, understanding, and wise; confident; calm; deliberate in actions; gentle yet firm; and self-controlled (Kahn-John and Kothan, 2015).

### **The Four Worlds**

Navajo culture and traditions are centered on the creation story, in which people gradually emerged from deep within the earth, changing from insect-like people to earth people as they ascended through the different worlds (Rickard and Bial, 2016). The creation story provides a better understanding of the world and life around us. The first teachings begin with the creation story and tell about the four different worlds. Elders tell how the holy people shaped many other animals out of precious jewels, such as white shells, turquoise, abalone, and jet (McPherson, 2012).

In the beginning, there was only the Black World, a small place like a floating island in the center of the dark sea where the holy people lived. In this world, there were no humans but rather spirits (Rickard and Bial, 2016). In this world, the first man and first woman were created, and in this world lived several different types of insect beings. The black world became unbearable for the insect people to live in, so they searched for another place to live. In search of a better place to make their homes, every living creature moved like a cloud, rising through an opening in the east into the Blue World. In this world, they found bluebirds, blue jays, blue hawks, and other different types of insects (Rickard and Bial, 2016). After the Blue World came to the Yellow World, men and women were allowed to live together in this world. Spider people and many animals, including squirrels, chipmunks, turkeys, lizards, and snakes, lived in the Yellow World (Rickard and Bial, 2016). Creatures from the Black and Blue world entered the Yellow World but were not defined and had no color. In this world, Coyote was a trickster and always played tricks on everyone. Coyote then took the white shell to a whirlpool and found that



it could make the water rise and fall like ocean tides (Rickard and Bial, 2016). Coyote then snatched the Water Monster baby, which caused flooding. The first man then planted a male cedar tree that was not tall enough to reach the next world, so he planted the female cedar tree, which was tall enough to get the fourth world.

The animals had entered the fourth and final world, which is also known as the Glittering World. In the Glittering World, First Man and First Woman created the four sacred mountains from the earth that First Man had collected in the Yellow World (Rickard and Bial, 2016). The world began to form; stars, sun, and moon were placed in the sky. Night and day were created, as well as the four seasons. In the Glittering World, some monsters habited the world. Changing woman, daughter of First Man and First Woman, gave birth to Monster Slayer and Born for Water. They were destined to kill the monster as they traveled to kill the different monsters. Because of the knowledge of Spider-Woman and the courage of Changing woman's sons, the Glittering World, at last, became safe for the Navajo people, who to this day live in its sacred land (Rickard and Bial, 2016). The Navajo creation brings more reasoning and clarification about the world we live in today. These stories are told to the younger generation by medicine men and elders.

### **Navajo Oral Traditions**

The Navajo had no written language for centuries, so their history has been passed down and interpreted through these tales (Rickard and Bial, 2016). Navajo teachings have been traditionally passed down from generation to generation. Navajo teachings are taught through storytelling, and these teachings begin at an early age. Generally, the stories are told by medicine men or elders, and these stories are utilized to teach the younger generation about the history of

the Navajos. They relay ancient stories to future generations, continue to care for the land around them and seek to educate others about their beliefs, practices, and languages (Eder, 2007).

To many Diné who embrace traditional values, storytelling is a core practice to teach children the important principles necessary to live well (Eder, 2007). These Navajo traditional stories provide life lessons; the levels range from Coyote stories to season stories and are unique. Stories are told to teach children how to live well, which means understanding the Navajo worldview, which means understanding one's purpose in life, which further leads to-as part of that purpose-continuing to tell stories to children (Eder, 2007). Navajo traditional storytelling continues today among certain families. Elders continue to teach the younger generation through storytelling; each story is unique and provides different teachings. These teachings help mold a young child into being a responsible, caring, and independent individual. These teachings also include taboos; taboos are the "dos and don'ts" of the Navajo culture. Fearful of the holy people, whom they believe have power over their destinies, the Navajo observe taboos to avoid offending them (Rickard and Bial, 2016). Teachings of taboo are also unique because they also help mold a person; traditional Navajos continue to teach taboos today.

### **Navajo Healing and Ceremonies**

Navajos that struggle with mental, emotional, or physical issues turn to traditional healing and ceremonies to overcome challenging barriers. In the Navajo culture, it is taught that the Navajo traditional ceremonies are used for both bad and good. Navajos that practice the dark rituals (witchcraft) use different tools to harm another individual, causing them to be sick emotionally or physically. Navajos often believe that someone is using witchcraft to break them, so they seek healing ceremonies from a medicine man. Ceremonies called sings or chant ways

are held not only to heal or liberate a person from an evil spirit but to encourage rain, bring good fortune, and mark key events in a person or family (Rickard and Bial, 2016).

A traditional ceremony usually requires considerable familial resources, including food for all the participants for the duration of the ceremony and payment for the traditional healer, or hataali (Lewton, 2000). Navajo healing ceremonies are traditionally done in the hogan. Hogans are sacred to Navajos because there are teachings behind them. When a hogan is built, it is made to the east, allowing the holy people to enter the hogan during ceremonies and let them know about the individual part of the ceremony. In Navajo belief, the original hogan was built by First Man and First Woman, its poles made of jewels: white shell, abalone, turquoise, and jet (Rickard and Bial, 2016).

The first ceremony that Navajo girls go through is the puberty ceremony, also known as a kinaalda. The Navajo female puberty ceremony involves four days of public ritual, followed by a further four days of private teachings and rituals (Paper, 2010). During a Kinaalda, an older mentor is selected for the young female to tie her hair and to teach her different skills. A Navajo cake is made during the last two days of the ceremony, and the Navajo cake determines the type of woman the female will become and the attitude she will have. The effect of the ritual is to last a lifetime and influence every aspect of a woman's life, hoping to ensure a positive understanding of oneself physically, spiritually, socially, and mentally (Rickard and Bial, 2016).

Navajo healing rituals vary and are conducted at certain times of the day and year. There are two significant rites: the Blessing way, which keeps people on the path of happiness and wisdom, and the Enemy way, intended to dispel ghosts and discourage evil spirits (Rickard and Bial, 2016). The Blessing way ceremony is held in the morning and provides the individual good health and a promising future. This ceremony can be done when an individual seeks a path of

happiness and success while attending school. Individuals that have the blessing way ceremony find themselves in good health and continue to move in a good direction in life. The enemy way ceremony can be held any part of the day, and this ceremony is held to help individuals suffering from mental, emotional, or physical hardship. Other healing rituals include night way chant ceremony, squaw dance ceremony, and yeí'bí'cheíí ceremony, just to name a few. The ye-i are identical with the xa-s'eh dine'e, "failed-to-speak people." who are now visualized in the masked impersonators (Haile, 1938). These Navajo rituals help individuals overcome many barriers; in some instances, they also help maintain their focus on education. These traditional healing rituals allow the individuals to heal and help them get back on track in life. The rituals are used to help Navajos positively to help guide them in the right direction. The healing rituals are all sacred and conducted in the Navajo Hogan; these rituals are private, so only family members can attend. Traditional medicine men use these rituals as teaching tools and utilize storytelling as part of their teaching tools.

### **Navajo Family and Lifestyle**

A strength of the Navajo culture is the value placed on family, and the role of parents guiding and disciplining their children, to cultivate expected behavior. These include gender, positive self-esteem, and an active engagement in one's culture at the individual level. At the family level, these would consist of family structure and parental support. The significantly increased likelihood of resilience with higher levels of maternal warmth suggests that the support of a parent can serve as a protective factor for youth (LaFromboise et al., 2006). There is an increase in negative external factors among Navajo families that might contribute to barriers and other hardships. However, family support for Navajo children can help alleviate those negative external factors. Social and emotional demands among Navajo children have significantly

increased as well. Parent support has been shown to dramatically decrease negative behaviors among children and feed their social and emotional needs. Parental consent can help motivate children to excel in all aspects of their education and help create a strong foundation. The implications of parental encouragement and support for education and parental aspirations are rather straightforward: The more parents encourage and support their children's efforts in education, and the higher the parents' educational aspirations, the greater the academic achievement of their children (Willeto, 1999). Family support for Navajos is essential; it can be difficult for individuals to achieve without family support. Navajos that have family support throughout their lives are most likely to succeed in all aspects of their lives. Adolescents who made better grades and were strongly committed to school generally identified with their mothers (Willeto, 1999). Family support begins with the elders through their teachings and continues with parents. Navajo families that do not have individuals using a substance or not engaging in abuse can provide the most support.

There are both positive community supports and risk factors at the community level, such as poverty and discrimination (LaFromboise et al., 2006). Community support is just as essential as family support. Navajos that do not have family support at home community support can come from schools, churches, or chapter houses. When an American Indian family cannot instill moral values and provide guidance and support for children, the community must take responsibility for ensuring that the family is supported in ways that improve its care for children (LaFromboise et al. 2006). Due to the many external factors that can contribute to an individual's increase in developing problems. Navajos generally face more adversity because of other external factors or issues they may deal with. Without community support, Navajos may find it more challenging to handle challenging situations alone. When Navajos are left to handle

difficult situations alone, they may lose self-confidence, feel hopeless, and lose resilience. Community support from different aspects can help Navajos overcome difficult conditions, but getting emotional, social, or mental support. There are also risk factors within the community context. One is poverty and the lack of employment opportunities on the reservations (LaFromboise et al. 2006). These risk factors include substance use, poverty, abuse, problem behaviors, or academic disengagement. Community support can alleviate a lot of Navajos' problems and help find solutions to the issues.

### **Navajo Education and Educational Achievement**

Educational achievement is defined as a student attaining their educational goals such as high school diploma, Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees. Many challenges can limit educational achievement among students, such as financial, academic, family, mental and emotional struggles. Achievement goal orientations are viewed as the purpose or cognitive-dynamic focus of competence-relevant behavior. Broadly defined, achievement goals reflect the desire to develop, attain, or demonstrate competence at an activity (Jowkar, 2014).

According to the Navajo Nation Census County Division, New Mexico (2019), 40.7% of Navajos graduate from high school or GED, 19% of Navajos have less than high school education, 31% of Navajos have some college or associates degree, 7% have a bachelor's degree or higher and 3% have no schooling. Navajo students are more likely to be at-risk for school failure due to the many harmful external factors. Some of the factors identified for at-risk Native American students are single-parent families, low parental education, limited English proficiency, low family income, high incidence of sibling dropout, and being home alone more than three hours on weekdays (Wiseman, 2000).

Based on the study by Navajo Nation CCD New Mexico (2019), 30.9% of American Indian students over the age of 25 have some college or Associate's degree, and 5.6% of American Indian students over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher. This study compared White students over the age of 25 with a bachelor's degree or higher at 52.5% and Black students at 60.0%. Educational achievement among Navajo students is low, and perhaps the harmful external factors contribute to the low percentage of Navajo students achieving academically in higher education. Despite Navajos continuing to pursue higher education after high school, there are disadvantages, whether local colleges or more prominent universities. Although Native American enrollment in higher education seems to be rising, over half of Native American college students drop out during their first year (Wiseman, 2000). Motivation for Navajo students to achieve and attain a college degree is another consideration for academic achievement. External and internal motivation to finish school and get a good job can contribute to Navajo students achieving academically.

### **Assimilation to Boarding Schools**

Native Americans were first introduced to Western education through the boarding school system with the intention of assimilation (Fish, and Syed, 2018). Many Navajos were relocated to schools across the United States. They were expected to adopt Christian values and were surrender their identity as Navajo. The impact of boarding schools was similar to that of the Long Walk. Medin (2014) states that:

One could argue that the United States, until the self-determination era, fluctuated between policies set on terminating Indian peoples' sovereign status, for example, through termination and relocation policies which included educational opportunity as a feature of relocation, and policies set on assimilating Native Americans into the

mainstream, for instance through boarding schools or mass removal of children (sometimes referred to as the "Lost Bird era"). (p. 169)

American boarding schools had a severe negative impact on two of the most important aspects of American Indian Cultures: language and spirituality (Sanchez, and Stuckey, 1999). When the approach removed children from their homes and sent them to boarding school, most children lost their identity and cultural connection to the Navajo. The removal of children sent Native youth into predominately white foster homes in the 1960s and 1970s as the mere American Indian culture was considered abusive. Many Navajo children ran away from boarding schools, while others remained in school until they were finally allowed to leave (Medin, 2014).

The children forced into this system were permanently scarred by the experience, yet illustrated resiliency that has sustained subsequent generations for Native people. Navajo children that attended boarding schools share their experiences, such as having their haircut, being forced to wear school uniforms, and no longer being allowed to speak the Navajo language or practice their traditional culture (Gregory, 2011).

The academic culture of public education in the United States is postured to acculturate and assimilate its American Indian students (Sanchez, and Stuckey, 1999). American Indian children are treated as a problem, which resides in the approaches, assumptions, attitudes, and curricula that define the American educational system (Sanchez, and Stuckey, 1999).

Eventually, Indian activists and lobbyists called enough attention to these practices that a new law, the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, was created to stop the massive removal of Indian children from Indian communities. Although the new act was enforced, the damage was already done to Navajo children (Medin, 2014).



## **Barriers to Academic Success**

Many barriers to academic success include achievement gap, poverty, lack of culturally relevant education, mental health barriers, and cultural disconnect. These barriers can also be defined as risk factors, and these barriers place limitations on pursuing higher education. Some Navajo students struggle with overcoming these barriers, making it challenging to achieve academically.

### **Achievement Gap**

The Navajo Nation is the largest reservation in the United States, encompassing nearly 24,000 square miles of remote high desert and approximately 250,000 persons (Grytdal et al., 2018). The Navajo Nation is located within three states, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona. According to the Navajo Nation Profile (2016), the average household income is \$37,801. The number of Navajos on food stamps is 14,321. The number of Navajo with no insurance is 9,274. The Navajo Nation has many individuals on financial assistance such as food stamps, food distribution, and TANF. Families are more dependent on government financial assistance for various reasons. Navajo families struggle with providing necessities such as food and hygiene products.

### **Poverty**

The problems of Indian poverty and living conditions on reservations have inspired various explanations (Carpenter and Riley, 2019). The Navajo reservation has several issues of poverty and living conditions uncommon to the rest of the country. Some parts of the reservation have no running water, electricity, or paved roads. These barriers make it difficult for students to succeed academically. Socio-economic barriers on the Navajo reservation continue to influence higher education, graduation rates, and academic achievement. Low-SES students face barriers

far before they enter higher education (Jury, 2017). The obstacles that Navajo students face make it difficult for them to achieve academically, and the barriers that are brought forth to Navajo students are often difficult to overcome. In higher education, low-SES students' emotional experiences are pretty different from high-SES students' emotional experiences. Low-SES students are more likely to feel and express greater emotional distress than high-SES students (Jury, 2017). Navajo students who attend schools on the reservation face more adversities than students in urban areas.

### **Lack of Culturally Relevant Education**

The main goal of critical multicultural education is to contribute to the transformation of society and to improve social justice and equality in society (Arsal, 2019). Culturally relevant education in the Navajo Nation is slowly progressing. Teachers that come to the reservation may find it challenging teaching Navajo students and teaching culturally relevant materials. The lack of culturally relevant education is another barrier that Navajo students face. Content related to ethnic and cultural diversity must first be integrated into the program before knowledge construction, and prejudice reduction can be achieved (Arsal, 2019).

Navajo students that attend schools on the reservation face many adversities. Culturally relevant education provides opportunities for Navajo students and a better chance of succeeding academically. The consequences of the resulting lack of culturally appropriate education are both clear and depressing (Sanchez and Stuckey, 1999). Navajo students have a disadvantage in education; teachers who come to the reservation have a high turnover rate. It is also challenging to find teachers to retain in rural areas, making it harder for Navajo students. Disconnect between teachers and students when it comes to culturally relevant education is vital. Navajo students are unable to comprehend information taught by teachers and struggle to learn. Teachers that come

to teach on the Navajo reservation find it challenging to grasp the concept of the Navajo culture and traditions. Teachers have negative attitudes toward teaching children with racial and ethnic diversity because of some reasons, including racial prejudices, anxiety about lack of knowledge of ethnic and cultural diversity, and pedagogical knowledge and skills for multicultural education (Arsal, 2019).

### **Cultural Disconnect**

Over the past years, Navajo youth have started to lose their cultural identity. The Navajo language has slowly decreased among the youth and is hardly spoken, only by elders. Many youths described a lack of knowledge of their culture, and a few expressed a lack of interest in their American Indian/American Native roots (Brown et al., 2016). Navajo youth do not understand the Navajo culture anymore, and some no longer associate themselves with the traditions. The cultural disconnect among Navajo has been increasing over the past few years. Some Navajos on the reservation are not traditional but rather identify with other religions. Navajo cultural identity has been defined as including three key components: family, spirituality, and environment (Deyhle, 2004).

### **Mental Health Barriers**

Mental health care on the Navajo reservation faces many challenges, making it difficult to provide adequate services. Rural communities face challenges in accessing mental health care, and according to these respondents and to the extant literature, rural therapists face challenges providing it, too (Mendenhall, 2020). The Navajo Nation lacks the services to provide adequate mental health services in the communities. However, other challenges present mental health barriers in the Navajo Nation. Rural areas are frequently marked by heightened poverty levels, and many individuals and families do not have comprehensive health insurance (Mendenhall,

2020). However, despite the challenges in the Navajo Nation, many Navajos can overcome mental health barriers. Navajos that seek mental health services find the help they need through the school system, church, or the hospital. It has been much easier to find services over the phone and through online services in the past few years.

Even if services exist in rural areas, potential clients may encounter barriers of accessibility to reach them. Cost, transportation, and distance to providers were all reportedly prohibitive (Mendenhall, 2020). Several parts of the Navajo Nation face many challenges when accessing mental health services, such as limited transportation, the distance of the services provided, and the lack of paved roads for traveling. These limitations create a more significant challenge to receive adequate mental health services. Structural barriers, such as lack of federal mental health funding for tribal members, appear to play a significant role in the lack of mental healthcare seeking for AI/AN youth (Garcia, 2020). Despite the barriers, Navajos find ways to find the mental health services they need. Students may face many obstacles, challenges, and obstacles if they continue to pursue higher education. These obstacles set limitations on students that are planning on pursuing higher education. Navajo students go through many adversities in life, and they struggle with poverty, negative family situations, mental/emotional hardships, and other negative impacts. The hardships they face can limit their ability or motivation to continue their education (Garcia, 2020).

### **Potential Protective Factors**

Protective factors are characteristics that help reduce adverse outcomes and help a person strengthen their protective factors. Navajos that have multiple risk factors have a greater chance of developing unhealthy coping skills. Navajos with numerous protective factors have a greater

chance of reducing risks. Resilience, grit, and emotional regulation are characteristics of protective factors which strengthen positive self-image, self-control, and social competence.

### **Resiliency**

For Navajo people, resiliency is a concept used to describe the survival of Diné (Navajo) through adversities forced upon them by colonization and assimilation. This is instilled and seen through the passing down and practice of Navajo cultural customs and teachings (Navajo Epidemiology Center, 2016). Resilience thinking is an approach to environmental stewardship that includes several interrelated concepts and has strong foundations in systemic thinking (Fazey, 2010). Resiliency is the ability to overcome difficult conditions and trauma. Academic resilience is much more related to learners achieving good educational outcomes despite adversity. Both benefit from a 'whole-school approach' and represent a link between individual resilience and efforts connected to the wider community of teachers, parents, and school leaders (Capstick, 2018).

In the Navajo culture, resilience is taught through the teachings and stories from the elders. Native elders are the keepers of the sacred ways. They are protectors, mentors, teachers, and support givers. Native communities honor their elders as the “Keepers of the Wisdom,” recognizing their lifetime’s worth of knowledge and experience (Garrett et al., 2014). Navajo elders have faced many hardships, and they continued to feel the Long Walk from their ancestors and the adverse effects of boarding schools. Despite the difficulties, Navajo elders overcame difficult situations and continued with their lives. They progressed and began to live better lives. Through Navajo teachings, they could use resiliency to overcome barriers. Most Navajos are taught resilience through their culture and traditions. While most Navajos no longer have elders as mentors or leaders often do not have resilience. Resilience is attributed to individuals who

beat the odds, bounce back, or avoid the negative trajectories associated with risks even though exposed to risk factors (Brown, 2016).

Resilience plays a vital role when transitioning to higher education. Resilience is the capacity to overcome life adversities in a positive and constructive manner (Gonçalves et al., 2017). Transitioning to higher education can be difficult for Navajos, especially if they are leaving the reservation. Resilient students develop coping skills, adapt quickly to environmental conditions, and have positive self-concepts. These students can bounce back and move on (Thornton et al., 2006). Navajo students who overcome barriers and continue pursuing higher education develop the protective factors they need to build resilience. Resilient students have the capacity to overcome personal weaknesses and negative environmental conditions—they have the ability to succeed under adverse conditions (Thornton et al., 2006). Despite the disadvantages that Navajo students face, most continue to pursue higher education.

### **Grit**

Grit is defined as passion and perseverance for achieving long-term goals and consists of two proposed subcomponents: consistency of interests and perseverance of effort (Morrell et al. 2020). Along with resiliency is grit; grit has the mental toughness and courage to overcome barriers or setbacks. Individuals are not born with grit, but it is a personality trait and can be learned over time. Passion involves consistency of interest over time and commitment to long-term goals; perseverance involves steadfastness and dedication to working toward those goals over time (Munro & Hope, 2019). Some Navajos face many hardships and barriers throughout their life. There can be many reasons for Navajos to quit and to give up on their goals. However, some Navajos that establish resiliency in their life can overcome those hardships and barriers. Commitment combined with perseverance and grit can help Navajos overcome those barriers and

difficult situations. Academically achieving can be difficult, especially not having the proper support or not having the right mindset. Passion is the bedrock of grit, while perseverance gives grit its staying power (Munro & Hope, 2019).

Grit, the tendency to pursue especially long-term goals with passion and perseverance, has been shown to predict high achievement in various individual performance domains (Southwick et al., 2019). High academic achievement is possible for anyone, it may take much work, but it can be possible. Navajos that face difficult situations cannot consistently achieve academically. Through years of hardships, obstacles, and barriers, Navajos may have a difficult time accomplishing goals. However, combining family, community support, self-motivation, and grit, achieving goals can become possible. Emotion is a basic phenomenon of human functioning, normally having an adaptive value-enhancing our effectiveness in pursuing our goals in the broadest sense (Nyklíček, 2010). Every day people face positive and negative emotion-provoking situations and actions that trigger those emotions.

### **Emotional Regulation**

Emotional regulation can be defined by positive and negative emotions and how those emotions can be used or controlled. Positive emotions may be comprised of any number of discrete pleasant-valenced emotions, such as joy, pride, contentment, or love, or a more undifferentiated state of positivity (Carl et al., 2013). Emotional regulation plays an essential role in academic achievement and overcoming barriers. These emotions include happiness, pride, gratitude, challenge/determination, hope, and compassion. Emotions such as happiness, pride, hope, and challenge/determination, can have a significant role in someone's life by providing that emotional stability. Like happiness, pride is a benefit-related emotion that arises in response to a success; thus, it is evoked by appraisals that the situation is both personally relevant and goal

conducive (Tugade et al., 2014). Navajos that have emotional regulation and that have positive emotions have a better chance of succeeding academically. Positive emotions can be linked to grit and self-motivation to achieve long-term and short-term goals. Emotional regulation can help individuals cope with negative emotions and boost self-confidence. The functional benefits of pride, grit, hope, and the cluster of admiration/inspiration seem to derive from their ability to increase individuals' long-term social value (and, consequently, their stability within a social group) by contributing to their perceived competence (Tugade et al. 2014).

### **Success in Higher Education**

Higher education plays a pivotal role in society today and contributes to an individual's academic achievements. On the Navajo reservation, higher education presents many challenges and barriers. Demand for higher education has increased over the years, which requires higher levels of skills and knowledge. Higher education provides more opportunities for students on the Navajo reservation.

### **Transitions to Higher education**

The United States had 12% of people 25 years of age or older who either have no schooling at all or dropped out of school before being able to complete high school while the Navajo Nation had 22% who dropped out of a school of which is the third most of all other places in the greater region (Navajo Nation CCD New Mexico, 2019). Although Native American enrollment in higher education seems to be rising, over half of Native American college students drop out during their first year (Wiseman, 2000). Navajo students face more challenges and have a more significant disadvantage when it comes to pursuing higher education. Despite these challenges, most Navajo continue to make the transition to higher education. Besides economic and educational barriers, there are many social barriers to American Indians as



they pursue goals of enrollment in higher education programs and degree completion (Shields, 2004). Navajo students faced educational obstacles while attending boarding schools, and education at those schools did not help students make progress academically.

Navajo students who attend high school on the Navajo reservation may have difficulty transitioning to higher education because of the number of students who participate in high school in rural areas. Due to culture shock, students who attend schools on the reservation may have trouble transitioning to higher education. Transitioning to a higher education degree confronts students with several personal, social, and academic challenges that might condition their adaptation process by enhancing their vulnerability and testing their resilience (Gonçalves et al., 2017). Tribal colleges on the Navajo reservation help to alleviate the barriers that Navajo students may face. Despite the socio-economic barriers and funding issues, Tribal Colleges are doing an effective job of educating their students (Shields, 2004). Tribal colleges support Navajo students when they attend colleges outside of the reservation. Tribal Colleges are emerging as an effective answer to the needs of Indigenous higher education students and communities (Shields, 2004).

### **Motivation**

Individuals with high academic motivation can be expected to have high academic self-efficacy, while individuals with low motivation have low academic self-efficacy beliefs (Yüner, 2020). A high sense of academic self-efficacy increases the effort spent on learning and speeds up the recovery process in the face of a negative result (Yüner, 2020). The journey to achieve academic goals can be challenging, especially with the different barriers that are placed.

Individuals with self-motivation can come both intrinsically or extrinsically. Intrinsic motivation comes from inside an individual and their internal factors. Individuals with intrinsic motivation

are moved to act for joy or a challenge rather than for external rewards or pressures (Cheng, 2019). Extrinsic motivation is motivated by external factors such as family and community support. Individuals with extrinsic motivation are moved to act due to external sources (Cheng, 2019). Everyone has different external factors to motivate them to achieve goals, and the limitations are limitless. Negative beliefs can appear at any point in life, and these beliefs can cause individuals to fail and cause setbacks.

### **Self-Motivation**

Self-motivation can be self-driven to pursue goals and complete tasks. Many people set long-term and short-term goals, in these goals are accomplishing higher education. Self-motivation requires persistence and discipline to face challenges that may surface. These goals are achievable for most people, but often it can get overwhelming for others to achieve. Self-Motivation has the determination to reach even the most complex objectives. Navajos that have family and community support have a tremendous amount of self-motivation. They are self-driven to accomplish their goals despite setbacks. Navajos that have self-motivation to succeed can make positive life changes without giving up on themselves. Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in his ability to learn at a certain level (Yüner, 2020).

### **Summary**

It is crucial Navajo students receive cultural knowledge and accurate historical information to develop a cultural identity to help them navigate life (Navajo Epidemiology Center, 2016). Navajos who have endured disparity, hardships, trauma, or barriers, may have experienced limitations to their academic success. Resiliency is taught through Navajo culture and traditions. The foundation of resiliency begins with instilling the Navajo stories, traditions, and culture. The teachings help Navajos develop the ability to cope, adapt, problem solve, and

have a positive outcome in life. This study's purpose is to illuminate the resiliency factors within Navajo culture and traditions that support academic success and personal accomplishments. This study adds to the existing literature and the connection between teaching resiliency and pursuing higher education among Navajos.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The qualitative heuristic phenomenological research study examines how resilience inherent to the Navajo culture impacts educational goal achievement among Navajo. This chapter describes the design that steers the study, including the setting, sampling approach for research participants, procedures, trustworthiness, data collection, and analysis. My role as the researcher is postured and a heuristic processed method. The research questions and interview questions are presented. Strategies to ensure the study's trustworthiness are illustrated, and ethical considerations examine to ensure that confidentiality and autonomy are protected.

### **Design**

This is a qualitative heuristic phenomenological study using semi-structured interviews to produce descriptive narrative data. The goal of the design is to capture content-rich narratives of the research participants as they communicate their experiences as Navajo students of higher education. Navajos commonly use storytelling to pass on history, traditions, and culture; therefore, the qualitative approach is fitting as the research design (Cypress, 2018). To gain a better perspective of Navajo resiliency and how it influences educational achievement, interviews capture the participants' journey through their educational endeavors and generate more profound insights into the influence that cultural traditions and customs have on success and how those can be used to support students in their academic careers.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this qualitative narrative study:

RQ1: How are the traditions, values, and cultural identity of the Navajo experienced as resilience factors that contribute to educational goal achievement?

RQ2: How does the investment from family and community contribute to personal success?

RQ3: How are barriers to success mitigated to avoid the impact on academic achievement?

### **Setting**

The setting of the study is Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. The Navajo Nation is predominantly rural areas, with populations less than 2,000 in most towns. Participants in the study will not be compensated for their time in the study. Participants volunteered their time to share their experiences and stories. Due to the constraints of the Navajo Nation, Human Research Review Board participants of this study will either be living off the reservation or around the reservation. Tribal Institutional Review Boards (TIRBs) in the United States assert their rights within sovereign nations by developing ethical research processes that align with tribal values to protect indigenous knowledge systems and their community from cultural appropriation, exploitation, misuse, and harm (Kuhn et al., 2020). Interviews will be conducted via zoom, Microsoft teams, or face to face, depending on access to participants based on COVID restrictions.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study are enrolled members of the Navajo Nation. They currently have a Certificate of Indian Blood on file with the Navajo Nation. Indian blood is a bureaucratic instrument because it does not exist independently of bureaucratic practices such as the establishment of a base roll, the storage of birth certificates, the filing and evaluation of membership applications, and the mathematical calculation of the degree of Indian blood (blood quantum) (Lambert, 2019). The pool of this study is participants from Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. The sampling procedure will be a mixed method of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling will be used to recruit participants who are easily

accessible through recruitment materials. Convenience sampling focuses on enlisting those who are willing to partake in a study by dissemination of recruitment materials to individuals in close proximity physically or through means of communication that are easily established (Scholtz, 2021). Snowball sampling allows individuals to identify other potential research participants through word of mouth or by sharing recruitment materials with other eligible participants (Leighton et al., 2021). The intended sample size is twelve to fifteen participants to create data saturation and form meaningful themes.

Criteria for the participants are as follows:

- An enrolled member of the Navajo tribe.
- Over the age of 21 or older at the time of the study.
- Have lived on the Navajo reservation and attended a school on the Navajo reservation from K-12.
- Have completed or are in the process of completing a college degree.

### **Procedures**

Recruitment takes place by disseminating information through email, phone, or social media. Participants will be provided details about the nature of the study, informed consent regarding confidentiality, autonomy, and how to opt-out of the study at any time.

Participants who complete the informed consent document, meet eligibility criteria, and are willing to be interviewed are asked to participate in the study. The interviews are audio recorded, in a private location, or through video conferencing with security features that ensure confidentiality. The audio files are stored in a safe and secure place at the researcher's residence. Ideally, interviews are conducted face-to-face, but video conferencing is an option depending on

current COVID-19 restrictions. Data analysis is performed using NVIVO to develop themes that represent the shared experiences of the participants.

### **The Researcher's Role**

My role as a researcher is to be active throughout the interview process. I will engage in practices that bracket my own experiences not to influence the participants' responses. I will serve as the interviewer, asking open-ended questions without bias or sharing my own experiences. My role as a researcher will include the following skills:

- Explaining the study without biasing the potential participants.
- Conducting interviews properly, according to the design.
- Making appropriate field observations.
- Selecting appropriate artifacts, images, journal portions, and so on.
- Handling data per design.
- Analyzing and interpreting the data per the design.

### **Heuristic Approaches**

The heuristic inquiry starts with the main researcher attempting to understand an intense and often complex personal experience, a phenomenon that is not well understood (Mihalache, 2019). The three heuristic approaches, initial engagement, immersion, and intuition will be utilized in the study. Intuition, using perception and observation to sense and infer an experience (Sultan, 2020). Intuition is the process of understanding the whole and knowledge of the phase. The immersion approach is putting fullness into the study. True to its definition, immersion involves constantly delving into the topic from an internal frame of reference (Shelburne et al., 2020). The initial engagement phase refers to the main question of the related study and the research's self-searching process. In the initial engagement phase, researchers begin to unearth

their passion for or deep connection to a particular phenomenon in their experience (Shelburne et al., 2020).

### **Data Collection**

Data collection begins by collecting demographic information about potential participants to determine eligibility based on recruitment criteria. Semi-structured interviews serve as the basis of data collection for the study. Other methods of triangulation are detailed to protect the authenticity and accuracy of the research process.

### **Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with individual participants, which allow for follow-up questions when clarification or more detail are needed; this design offers control over the interview's pacing and will enable clients to process and develop descriptive responses. It is anticipated that each interview does not last beyond one hour, depending on the extent of detail and reflection that the participant provides. The collective interview questions seek to capture Navajo students' unique, personalized stories, with a keen interest in their resiliency journey. Document analysis is used should participants allude to content that can be further understood by examining existing sources, such as government reports, personal documents, articles in newspapers, and books.

### **Interview Questions/Guide**

1. Tell me a little about yourself, including your clan, upbringing, and where you attended school?
2. Describe the decisions making process and events that happened as you transitioned from the reservation to college?



3. Describe the individuals and the role they served as you decided to leave the reservation and attend college.
4. Talk about your mindset as you transitioned into college and through your college experiences?
5. Reflecting on your college experience, what values from the Navajo culture contributed to your success?
6. When you think about resilience, defined as the capacity to recover from difficulties, can you discuss any resilience factors during your college experience?
7. How have the traditions and values of the Navajo culture helped you navigate through difficult experiences?
8. How would you describe the connection between your identity as Navajo and your academic journey?
9. Describe the theme of your journey from, as a Navajo through your college experiences?

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis includes interpreting narrative data using NVivo to organize, analyze and discover insights and themes. NVivo is a software developed by QSR International for qualitative data analysis, such as content analysis and narrative analysis. The software provides a workspace for researchers to store, manage, query, and analyze unstructured data, including text, images, audio, video, and other data types (Phillips et al., 2018). Open coding helps organize data into themes such as pride, internal and extrinsic, and spiritual/cultural connections. As one of the most powerful computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, NVivo allows researchers to analyze open-ended responses to survey and/or interview questions, as well as other text data like reflective writing, image, and videos (Feng et al., 2019). After transcribing

and interpreting the Navajo language to English, each participant transcription will be loaded into NVivo to create codes and themes. Analyzing the data will ensure no other themes and ensure each theme is put into the correct section. The following technique is narrative research analysis. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that data collected in narrative study need to be analyzed for the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness addresses credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Multiple strategies are used to ensure that the best practices of safeguarding the integrity of this qualitative study. Triangulation ensures the accuracy of the narratives and employs the research participants as reviewers. An expert reviewer is used as well as memoing as additional data sources. These approaches ensure that fundamental biases arising from the use of a single method or a single observer are addressed and mitigated (Noble and Heale, 2019).

### **Credibility**

Credibility offers assurance that the data is properly collected and interpreted and that the findings and conclusions correctly reflect and represent the phenomenon studied (Noble and Heale, 2019). Member checking allows the study participants to review their transcripts for accuracy and then review the interpretations, findings, and conclusions to assess credibility. If the data or interview transcript is incorrect, changes can be made before the data analysis process. Participants can offer insight and extended recommendations to the themes and findings of the study.

The structured procedure of this study also serves as a safeguard to the integrity of the methods. Oversight from the dissertation chair offers expert insight to implementing the research

study. The university's IRB process provides another layer of accountability, certifying that the recruitment process, interview procedures, and data analysis are ethical and sound. Using NVIVO to organize, code, manage the data, develop the themes, analyze the data, and create memos offer additional credibility. This process will also allow that each participant has answered each question in-depth. NVivo will enable users to complete multiple qualitative analysis functions on the platform, including sorting and filtering raw data, discovering and building relationships among data, assigning and defining themes and categories for data, visualizing data analysis results, and creating reports (Phillips et al., 2018). Memoing is specifically used to record notes such as expanding definitions of unique terms, documenting questions that arise through the interview process, recording unforeseen insights of relevant variables or attributes. Memoing adds another layer to substantiate the study (Smith, 2018; Daniel & Hartland, 2017).

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability ensures that the research process can be replicated based on documentation and descriptive procedures. It confirms that the research questions are answered through data collection, analysis, and results (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). To ensure dependability, an audit trail will be utilized to ensure replication based on documentation. An audit trail in qualitative research is a record of how a qualitative study was carried out and how researchers arrived at conclusions (Carcary, 2020). The purpose of using the audit trail is to clarify the reasoning and the decisions made to show the path of the participant's narratives. An audit trail is a strategy that keeps track of data analysis's decision-making and explains how the study was conducted in more straightforward terms. The audit trail documentation and reflexive journal help ensure a

clear trail of evidence throughout the research study, demonstrating how specific events lead to the emergent findings (Carcary, 2020).

Confirmability ensures that the results represent the narrative data of the participants and clarity about how conclusions are established. It allows the subjective nature of the study to be acknowledged and to explore potential biases in the data interpretation process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The initial engagement phase allows the researcher to have a deeper connection to the study. They reach deep within, reflecting on experiences of the self, generating a deeper awareness of their autobiography, and, from that point, generating an intuitively informed question (Shelburne et al., 2020). Immersion determines the researcher's full engagement in the study. As the theme of inquiry emerges and solidifies, it becomes essential for the researcher to immerse himself or herself fully in the topic (Shelburne et al., 2020). Member checking increases the validity of the research. Member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, is a technique for exploring the credibility of results (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking will be utilized at the end of the data to ensure the transcripts are accurate. Active participation throughout the study will increase the confirmability of the data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

One ethical concern is translating and interpreting analyzing Navajo language into English correctly. As a researcher, I am fluent in the Navajo language and can interpret any data that might become impacted. To avoid the data from incorrectly interpreting, member checking will be used to determine an accurate representation of the transcript. Participants know English well enough to audit their transcript.

Providing details to each of the participants about the research will limit any potential negative risks. Informed consent, which is ethically essential in most clinical research, respects

persons' rights to decide whether participation in the research is compatible with their interests, including their interests in protection from exploitation and harm (Grady et al., 2017). The informed consent process provides the participants an opportunity to ask questions they do not understand. The informed consent also includes information on the research and obtaining permission from the participant to continue participating.

The Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board is required to conduct any study within the reservation. However, the research will not need the NNHRRB because the research will be done outside the reservation. The mission of the Navajo Nation Research Program is to support research that promotes and enhances the interests and the visions of the Navajo people: to encourage a mutual and beneficial partnership between the Navajo people and researchers; and to create an interface where different cultures, lifestyles, disciplines, and ideologies can come together in a way that improves, promotes, and strengthens the health of the Navajo people (Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board, 2021). The role of the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board is to regulate, monitor, and control all research that is conducted within the Navajo reservation boundaries. To respect the NNHRRB and their guidelines, all participants will be selected and interviewed off the reservation.

All materials, data, and recordings will be kept safe in a locked file cabinet. All documents will not require any names or locations while keeping safe. Additionally, digital data will be stored in password-protected online storage, which will keep identity and data safe. The location of the storage will be discreet for privacy purposes. Pseudo names will be given to each participant to protect identity.

## Summary

The qualitative research design captures the rich features of each participant's experiences, and the researcher shares her heuristic journey through the study. Several techniques are employed to create a narrative that gives a voice to the phenomenon that lacks transparency. The participants in this study are Navajo students that spent their life growing up on the Navajo reservation; they endured hardships, poverty, and trauma throughout their lives. They have spent countless hours listening to Navajo stories, practiced Navajo culture and traditions, which instilled a sense of resilience. Participants overcame barriers and achieved academic success. The connection between enriching Navajo culture and traditions has not been adequately examined to account for the protective factors and strength of enduring challenges as they live the protection of the reservation and pursue higher education. The participants in this study are respected and acknowledged for their active participation in this study.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

### **Overview**

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of the interviews with the ten participants. Each participant was asked several open-ended questions, and each answer went through data analysis. This chapter provides a brief description of each participant and their degree. Data analysis is provided about each of the questions asked during the interview. The themes from the interviews ranged from educational achievement to protective factors. The themes presented were discovered in the discussions of the participants.

### **Participants**

The participants interviewed for this study represent various age groups and various degrees obtained. The ten participants are all Navajo; they grew up and attended school on the Navajo reservation. Most of the participants interviewed no longer reside on the Navajo reservation. Participants in this study shared their unique stories of growing up on the Navajo reservation; they talked about their hardships and shared their success stories.

#### **Steve**

Steve is a 38-year-old Navajo man that currently resides and works in Arizona. He grew up in a traditional household with his parents and grandparents. Steve grew up without running water, electricity, and herding sheep. Steve currently works as an Athletic Director for a local college and coaching cross country. He attended Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, and later, he transferred to the University of Kansas. While attending the University of Kansas, Steve enlisted in the Marines. Steve returned to New Mexico and began working at Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute. He attended the University of New Mexico, where he received his bachelor's in Business administration. During our interview, Steve spoke highly

about his grandparents and growing up on the reservation. He talked about how things were difficult growing up but managing to overcome barriers.

### **Vince**

Vince is a 75-year-old Navajo man who has many life experiences and stories. Vince attended various schools growing up but never finished high school. He grew up with supportive solid parents that wanted him to finish school. He attended a school in Roswell, where he received his GED. Vince joined the Army, and after getting out, he attended school in Utah. He realized quickly that his degree in Mechanics wasn't going to support his wife and kids. He returned to school and received his bachelor's degree from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. He also received his master's in Counseling from Western New Mexico University and a Master's in Educational Leadership from Arizona State University. Due to financial struggles, it was difficult for him to obtain his master's degree. Despite the efforts, he managed to pursue his education. Vince is now a middle school counselor and continues to inspire students where he works.

### **Jane**

Jane is a 45-year-old caring mother of three and is happily married. Jane resides on the Navajo reservation and currently works at the Indian Health Services. She has three sisters and two brothers and grew up with both parents. Jane grew up on the Navajo reservation without running water or electricity. She grew up with a firm foundation of hard work and determination by helping with chores and raising livestock. Growing up, Jane was responsible for helping her parents and grandparents, and she spent most of her childhood helping her grandparents with the livestock. Jane's parents were not educated; her mom only attended school up to 7th grade, and her father finished school up to 8th grade. Her family relied on federal assistance programs



growing up. Jane only knew Navajo growing up, and she had to learn the English language in school and often struggled in school.

Jane lost her father in high school, which changed her plans after high school. Jane planned to join the military like her older sister. But after her father died, she had to rethink her plans. She decided to attend Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, because it was closer to home. Fort Lewis provided a home for her after her father's death, and through self-determination, she finished school. Jane received her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice.

### **Don**

Don is a 55-year-old Navajo; he is married and has three kids. He is currently an assistant principal at one of the largest school districts in New Mexico. His grandparents and parents raised Don on the Navajo reservation. He was raised without running water or electricity and was responsible for helping take care of livestock. Don was raised in the Navajo traditional culture and spoke predominately Navajo growing up. Don learned at an early age that education was important because educators raised him. Don received his bachelor's degree in Arts from the New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico. His inspiration to become an educator can come from his grandparents and parents and a previous teacher in high school. Don spent many years coaching football and track, inspiring him to become a Navajo Language Culture Teacher eventually. He received his master's in Educational Leadership from Western New Mexico University. Don is currently working on his Ph.D. through New Mexico State University.

### **Andy**

Andy is a 50-year-old; he grew up in the Eastern part of the Navajo reservation. His grandparents and parents raised Andy in the Navajo traditional ways. He grew up raising

livestock and working his family's ranch. Growing up, his parents instilled in him the importance of education and always seeking the best opportunities. Andy joined the military, where he realized he was undereducated, and decided to go back to school once he left the military. He started school at Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He later transferred to Central New Mexico and then to the University of New Mexico. He received his bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of New Mexico. During our interview, Andy told me a story about his decision to pursue a chemical engineering degree. He talked about the support from his family and employees to finish his degree. Right now, Andy is still deciding on continuing his education.

### **Tony**

Tony currently resides in Arizona; he grew up on the western part of the Navajo reservation. His parents raised Tony in a household without running water, electricity, and no paved roads. He grew up tending to the cornfields and livestock. Tony attended boarding schools and stayed in the dormitories throughout his elementary, middle school, and high school for his associate degree. During his time in college, he experienced racism on the basketball team. Although it was something he had never experienced before, he overcame those barriers. His academic journey began in high school when he became determined to attend college. He knew the only way to attend college was on a scholarship. It was with self-realization and empowerment that Tony was able to finish school.

### **Sandy**

Sandy is a 27-year-old artist that currently resides in Phoenix, Arizona. Sandy grew up with her two supportive parents and older sister. Sandy was also raised by her grandparents, who taught her so much, including Navajo weaving. After Sandy graduated from high school, she

attended school at Arizona State University. She received her bachelor's in Secondary education and taught AP High School English for a few years. She received her master's degree in Educational Policy. She now works at a museum, where she gets to teach art to various Native American tribes. One of the unique things about Sandy is her artistic ability; she is a very creative person and displays that in her Navajo weaving skills. Her creative skills are also shown in various baskets made from yucca and willow.

### **Emma**

Emma is an energetic 45-year-old Navajo woman with many life experiences. She has one son that is 19 years old and is currently in college. Emma grew up in the rural area of the Navajo reservation. She was raised by her grandparents and parents and attended Christian schools until she was in 8th grade. She attended college in Central New Mexico and transferred to the University of New Mexico, where she received her bachelor's in Business Administration, Entrepreneurial Studies, and Organizational management. Emma opened her own business, which she had for several years. She went back to school and received her master's degree in Public Administration. She now works for a Native American-owned company that she enjoys very much. During her time in college, she experienced racism which did not stop her from accomplishing her goals.

### **Roy**

Roy is a high school art teacher; he resides near Continental Divide, where he was born and raised. Roy grew up with strong parents that instilled in him the importance of responsibility and education. He grew up raising livestock and tending to his horses. Roy first attended the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico but received his bachelor's in Art from Fort Lewis College and his master's in American Indian Studies from the University of

Arizona. During our interview, Roy had a lot of self-confidence and direction in life. He has much insight into his traditional teachings growing up from his parents and grandparents. Roy was successful in education and was an actor, starring in a hit movie based on the Navajo Code Talkers. Roy is very active in teaching art and coaching sports at high school.

### **Verna**

Verna was fun to interview because she was so passionate about the stories she was told. She is a 65-year-old Navajo woman raised in Cuba, New Mexico. Verna talked about her rich cultural background and being raised by her grandparents and parents. She spoke about the hardships she faced after her parents divorced and cared for her younger siblings. She attended the University of New Mexico but dropped out to take care of her siblings. She attended Central New Mexico and later attended Dine College. She received her bachelor's degree in secondary education from the University of New Mexico. She taught high school English and Math for a few years, and now she teaches Face Adult Education. Verna is currently working on her master's degree.

### **Theme Development**

The themes developed from the Nvivo data analysis were based on each interview question. Each of the themes was based on the reoccurrence of words and phrases. Six of the 10 participants mentioned resilience, 7 of 10 mentioned self-determination, and 6 of 10 mentioned motivation. The category of educational achievement was six themes, including three for barriers. Eight of 10 mentioned family support, 6 of 10 said community support, 9 of 10 said Navajo culture, 2 of 10 mentioned racism as a barrier, and 4 of 10 mentioned poverty as a barrier.

### **Protective Factors**

Protective factors are strengths and support from family members, community members, and various sources. These sources provide the favorable conditions that promote resilience, self-determination, and motivation. Resilience, self-determination, and motivation are the protective factors that participants mentioned that helped their educational goals. Resilience, self-determination, and motivation were instilled in the participants growing up and were acquired after dealing with hardships. This framework helped the participants to overcome barriers and obtain their degrees.

### **Resilience**

Resilience was defined as having the capacity to overcome hardships and barriers. Participants shared stories about grief, financial difficulties, and academic struggles. The challenges that participants faced helped them develop resilience through the efforts they experienced. Resilience was developed over time and helped participants accomplish their educational goals. Jane mentioned that she had many barriers in her life but developed resilience when she reflected on living without her father. She stated:

One of those resilience factors is learning that goes in with grief because I believe that was a big one. Learning that you know that I'm going to live without my father for the rest of my life was tough. And I wouldn't say overcoming issues, adapting to that grief, I think, and learning how to find that self-help tools and how to be understanding yourself through something like that, I think that was to me that's resilience because I had to think about my life, and I had to come to terms with how am I going to live? You see, I don't have my dad anymore. You know, it's just my mom and, at a young age at, you know, age 18, understanding that it was like, you know, I had to grow and be responsible. And I

had to think that I would not have both of my parents as before. It will be one of my parents, and I can't depend on her anymore.

When Jane's father died, she went through grief, and she realized that she would be living without him. She understood that she had to grow up quickly and take more responsibility for her new life without her father. Her resilience became evident when she realized that she had to become more independent and be able to depend on her mother anymore.

Verna spoke about her struggles as well but building resilience through her experience in college and struggling to make desired grades:

Like I said the first time around, I failed, flunked out. And like I said, I've taken English 101 three times until I finally passed it. So, the first time around, I felt that I went back by taking classes here and there, and I never had to take another course. I always hoped and prayed and worked hard to get A's, but I think I got two or three C's, and I would work even harder. So, was it, you know, about grades? And then during those the last two years of getting my bachelor's degree, it was straight A's, except for one B, and that was Bible as literature and. And I think it was just because you have the whole religion thing. Even though the class was about religion, it was about reading the Bible. I still had to struggle with that.

She found resilience through failure. She quit the first time in college, and the second time she knew that she could not quit. So instead of failing again, she did her best to pass her classes. Her mindset was different the second time around, and she knew that she would be successful with hard work.

Don also spoke about resilience after losing his grandmother and worrying about his grandfather when he left for college. He stated:

Like I said. With my first time going to college, I was away from home. So, the one thing that I missed the most was my Nali lady; she was my primary caregiver. She influenced me because she was educated, too, and she had just passed away, so it was hard for me to leave Mariano Lake and Crownpoint and then go to Las Cruces so that there was a resiliency developed just because I knew she wasn't there, but my Nali man was still there, and I had I worried about him and who was helping him take care of sheep and feeding the goats.

Resilience was developed after losing his grandmother and having to leave his grandfather for college. He worried about leaving his grandfather and helping him take care of the livestock. But his grandfather reassured him that he would be okay. His influence to further his education came from his grandmother, so he understood that he had to leave for college to finish school.

Andy grew up with the Navajo traditional teachings. He used one phrase from the Navajo teachings to help him build resilience and achieve his goals:

We say Taa hwo aji t'eego. Be self-reliant; nobody is going to do anything for you. Just one word encompasses everything you would want to try and be later in life through school. You know your goals, the ambitions. My parents never elaborated on that one word, but we understood it.

He reminded himself every day in school that he had to be self-reliant to finish school. He struggled a lot in school because of being undereducated. His parents had instilled in him the values of the Navajo culture and teachings. He used those teachings to build resilience because he knew what he was capable of. Resilience helped him achieve his degree in Chemical Engineering, which might be the most challenging degree to obtain for some people.

Resilience as a protective factor is the ability to overcome barriers even in the most challenging situations. Participants shared that they wouldn't have been able to develop resilience without the hardships and barriers. They believed that hardships and barriers made them stronger and more determined to further their education. Resilience provided participants the ability to accomplish educational goals and the ability to thrive in other life endeavors. Participants have a strong background of resilience which allowed them to overcome hardships and barriers.

### **Self-determination**

Self-determination was a protective factor that was important to participants to build confidence through their academic journey. They found that self-determination through struggles and hardships they experienced. Through their own will and drive, they understood that to move forward from the hardships was to have self-determination. Participants that shared their hardships and struggles knew that they wouldn't be able to fail. Education was important to the participants, and they knew that the only way to get a degree was through self-determination.

Andy had the self-determination to finish his degree in Chemical Engineering. He knew that he could not give up on himself and was determined not to fail. He stated:

Even if you fail, you can always get back up and try it again. That was instilled in me. And that's what I used to take in college. That's what helped me when I came from difficult times I would seek out.

Self-determination helped him through the tough times in school. He knew that he could not fail, and he would continue to get back up and move forward. His desire to finish school came during difficult times, and he would remind himself that "he can do it."



Tony mentioned that he was able to receive a sports scholarship through self-determination. He knew that he would be able to play sports in college with determination. He mentioned:

I didn't have anyone to help me. Everything was all on my own. I had made up my mind, and I would continue somehow. When I was a sophomore, I decided that I would take a chance on sports in high school. Somehow, someway, maybe that could help. Maybe. You never know; you might get a scholarship. I had to think for myself. That is how I ended up with a basketball scholarship.

Self-determination helped him because no one provided him with the support he needed in high school. He was on his own and knew that he had to go to college. He was determined to go to college on a basketball scholarship. He understood that he had to leave the reservation and attend college whether he had a scholarship.

Emma mentioned that she could finish school through self-determination despite having a part-time job, owning a business, and going to school. She stated:

When I was working on both of my degrees, I always worked, I was always a full-time employee, and I was running a business when I was working on my master's degree. I had a seven-year-old son working part-time for an insurance company. So, and then also running a household. So, there were all these different tasks that I was doing, but I needed to get them done every day. I had a strict schedule. I still have a demanding schedule, and I'm, you know, getting things done and, you know, following what I need to do to make sure that all my obligations are met.

She had the self-determination to be successful in education. She was successful in owning her own business and attending college. But with the right mindset and skills, she put

herself on a strict schedule to get things done daily. Self-determination played a role in her life, and she completed her master's degree.

Steve's self-determination comes from a Navajo phrase, and he used the term to pursue his educational achievement. He stated:

I think the theme of Taa hwo aji t'eego is probably what best fits might. Educational endeavors. It pushes me to refocus and reconvene. And re-approach. What my goals are as I reach my goal as far as obtaining a bachelor's degree.

The Navajo phrase meaning being self-reliant and depending on yourself helped him achieve his goals. The Navajo meaning is taught through traditional teachings to help yourself and do things independently without relying on anyone else. A simple Navajo phrase is self-determination to reach his goals. Self-determination helped him through his educational endeavors and helped him become successful.

Participants knew the importance and value of education. They understood that they wouldn't have been able to obtain their educational goals without self-determination. Though participants faced struggles and hardships, they understood that it was an intrinsic desire they needed to help them achieve their goals. Self-determination can be translated into different forms, but all have the same meaning.

### **Motivation**

Motivation is a driving force to achieve goals; it comes from external and internal sources. Motivation is a crucial factor when obtaining educational goals. It is a self-desire to do the impossible and achieve self-fulfilling goals. Motivation is a key factor; in participants' academic journey because it is essential to the individuals. There are many influences on motivation; they can come from failure and the hardships individuals face. Andy mentioned that

his motivation came from his professors and their encouraging words. He talked about having to motivate himself in college because failing was not an option:

Some of my professors gave us lectures on their life lessons; teachings are what they were teaching us. So back on those us from what drove me and motivated me to finish so. I think it all depends on the person. Whether they want to listen or not, and basically down to a person like I want to get a degree, I want to finish.

Life lessons and support from teachers helped him become a better student. He knew that everyone that had gone through college struggled at some point in life, but they were able to accomplish their goals. His motivation came from external sources, which became internal. He was self-motivated to finish school and knew that he was the person to do that.

Emma talked about her the motivation she received from her father before he died and the influence it had on her to accomplish her goals:

The one thing that has always got me through challenging times is, you know, hearing my dad, my late dad and pray for me and always telling me that he loves me, and he would always say, and I love you from your feet to your hair and you as a being. So basically, encompasses every part of me, and he loves me. And that's precisely how he would pray for me. And so, I think that has always helped me through any of my difficult times. I mean, even now, as an adult.

The support from a family member helped her through the most challenging times. Her father provided her with the support she needed and used that to motivate her. She knew that even though the most challenging times of her life, her father's love would be that protective factor she needed to thrive. She continues to use the words from her late father even today.

Jane struggled in high school when she lost her father. It was a massive change in life and left her in grief. She did not understand grief at the time, but she knew she had to overcome it:

And but I lost my dad when I was going to be a senior. So that made another significant change for us where I could not rely on my mom because she was more worried about my younger siblings. And she was more she was grieving a lot, so I had to do it on my own. So that was the part that I think was a significant twist to my life and too quickly. How would I say this to quickly becoming an adult? And I couldn't miss my opportunities. I knew that I had to push harder every day and not waste time because one of the things that my parents always told us was not to.

Grief was an overwhelming emotion for her to overcome. She lost her father in high school, and it impacted her life. She knew that she could no longer depend on her mom because her mom was also going through grief. Grief eventually turned into motivation to finish school. She struggled at the time but did not miss any opportunities. She pushed herself every day and motivated herself.

Vince had difficult times when finishing school. He was a father and a husband. He traveled hundreds of miles from Arizona to New Mexico every weekend to finish school. His family became his motivation to finish school. He stated:

You know, a lot of it is a kind of self-motivation. One needs to be resilient. They need to have solid goals, dreams, that sort of thing, and pursue them. When I was in high school, this teacher, a Navajo teacher, talked to us and told us his story and stuff. And he said to us that his philosophy was that once the mind becomes genuinely interested, there could be no stopping it. And I always remembered that I thought about that. I just like found

much truth because we must like to self-motivate ourselves and we must, you know, we have to learn to have self-motivation.

The positive influence of others and the Navajo teachings became his motivation to finish school. Sometimes a self-reminder can impact someone, and constant self-motivation can positively influence. Vince had solid goals and dreams that he wanted to achieve. His Navajo teacher reminded him through stories and philosophy that allowed him the ability to push through difficult times.

Verna also shared her story about motivation and having to finish school for her siblings. Her inspiration came from her parent's divorce and having to support her two siblings:

I believe it was. Because my parents were divorced, I was tasked with raising my younger brother and my younger sister. So, it. It was always about survival. How am I? How am I going to survive? What can I do to help my brother and sister not starve and ensure they have clothes? So, it was all about survival. So that decision process was just, you know, you got to make money, you've got to make money. What can I do? What can I do to make money? And it was all, like you said, survival and. I mean, that's one reason why I dropped out of college: when you're in college, you're not making money to support two children. So, it was all about survival.

The struggles of her parent's divorce and the struggles to support her siblings helped her realize her strength. The decision to help support her family became her motivation to finish school. She dropped out of high school to support her family but eventually realized that it wouldn't be enough. Verna's struggles also became her strength.

The motivation was the driving force for each of the participants. Participants shared their stories of grief, hardship, and family struggles. Those struggles became the internal desire to

fight harder through difficult times. It was essential for the participants to continue their education despite the setbacks they experienced. But those setbacks gave them the motivation and determination to overcome the struggles.

### **Educational Achievement**

The focus of this study was educational achievement among the participants. Each participant interviewed obtained a degree, and others were still pursuing higher degrees. There were three themes related to academic achievement, family support, community support, and Navajo culture. Barriers to educational achievement included racism, poverty, and the achievement gap.

#### **Family support**

Educational achievement among the participants came from various external sources. Family support played a vital role in each participant's educational journey. Family support and education were essential to the participants. A strong family support system was evident for the participants. The family support came from parents, grandparents, and extended family members. Andy talked about the support he received from his father and the value of education that was instilled in him:

I think that's what helped me, and my dad was. Valued education a lot, so that's why. I stayed with my whole family in school and finished high school. One of the least of our parents must value education, and that education is precious. So. That just my experience in the military was reinforced with those values.

Growing up in poverty allowed him to value the importance of education. His parents provided him with the support to finish high school and college. His dad reinforced the

importance of getting an education growing up. And while in the military, those values of the importance of education were reinforced.

Emma talked about her most significant influence coming from her grandparents and extended family members. The importance of education was instilled in her:

So, she always instilled in us that we needed to get our education and then be able to survive on our own without having, you know, significant other partners, whomever you know, because she was like, one day you might end up alone with your kids, you know, you are never. And no one can take your education from you. And so that was pretty much how, you know, she influenced me. And then also my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, and my aunts all had education, and my grandmother was taught head start and preschool for years. And then my aunt did the same thing, too. So, I mean, those were probably my biggest influencers. And I always, you know, am thankful for them for showing me that. The about that that education was crucial. And then also my paternal grandfather and my paternal grandmother. They would always pray for me and then have a ceremony to complete my education. So, they were also a big part of influencing me and my educational journey.

She knew the importance of education and being independent. Her grandmother played an essential role in her life because they were her first teachers growing up. Her grandfather provided the support she needed through the Navajo traditions, such as ceremonies and prayers. The family support she received was necessary because of the positive influence.

Roy came from a strong family support system. His parents provided the support he needed to have a strong work ethic:

It must go back with the influential parents. And probably it is the work ethic because growing up; we're constantly tending to the livestock on the land and always upkeeping the fence and little construction jobs here and there that you must do almost daily when you have the responsibility to look after some of the livestock. So as my father would always say, I think he ingrained this in us, and we have grown up with this whole concept. If he can't handle it, don't do it. It puts you into that position, like if you want to go to college.

Growing up with strong values and work ethic provided him the tools to succeed. He tended to the livestock and had daily responsibilities. His father ingrained in him the importance of having a strong mindset and being responsible. Strong family support and a strong Navajo background allowed him to finish school.

Steve comes from a strong family support system. His influence to finish school came from his mother:

I think at the time; my mom was in the process of getting her bachelor's degree; how up to this day, she still needs one class and three credits to obtain her bachelor's degree, but she was taking classes at one of the local junior colleges at Dine college. And I think that sort of influenced me to continue to pursue higher education.

A positive role model can help set higher academic goals. An individual attending college can significantly impact her own educational goals. It can help build the support you are missing to overcome barriers to obtaining your degree. Steve's mother is a positive influence in helping him pursue an education and be a positive role model in his life.

Vince spoke about the family support he received from his parents and brother. He had a clear expectation about finishing school, and they were his biggest influence. He stated:



I guess the most powerful influence would be what my parents, first, always expected that all of us finish school and go to college and at least learn some sort of trade or occupation and stuff. But I think when I got back from the service and military stuff, it was, I think, it was my older brother that had more of a heavy influence on me because he had gone through it. He returned from the military after the Vietnam War, and he was using his GI Bill and stuff. And so, you know, he kind of told me, you know what, what steps to take and that sort of thing. And so, I think that was the most significant influence.

His older brother was his influence to join the military to receive a GI Bill for school. He used the experience from his older brother to set goals for himself. His family support was evident from his parents, and they had expectations for him to finish school. "I knew what was expected of me to finish school," he stated. He accomplished his goals by receiving his master's degree.

Verna talked about the support she received from her father to pursue higher education because everyone on her father's side of the family had an education. She mentioned that:

My dad was always. My dad always told me that I was going to go to college. He saw he saw the potential in me. So, he always spoke to me about attending college. He told me about it, but you know, because he wasn't a college graduate, and he didn't know that much about it. But my dad and my dad's side of the family, there's a lot of doctors and engineers and like my uncle is an engineer, so they're more educated, I guess you could say. Whereas my mom's side of the family, I'm the first to graduate from high school. I'm the first to graduate from college. I'll be the second to get a master's degree. So. My dad just said, no, you're going to college.

There was a significant amount of family support that was given to Verna. The family support showed on her dad's side of the family, with the number of educated family members. Her dad had always told her that she would go to college because of her potential. He wanted more for his daughter because of the lack of education he had.

Family support is essential when it comes to academics. They provide that protective factor, motivation, and determination needed during difficult times. Family members' most significant influence can come from encouraging words and unfailing love. In the Navajo culture, family is everything. Each participant talked about the tremendous support from family members and finishing school. The most significant influence came from family members.

### **Community support**

Community support provides another protective factor that individuals need to succeed. It is essential to receive community support, and it shows that they are invested in you as an individual. Community support was a theme found in the interviews; the support came from various external sources. It had a huge impact on participants' success in higher education. The community support in the interviews provided the participants with the support they might have been lacking. Don was among the participants that received support from his former coach and teacher from high school. His former coach/teacher was the role model he needed to motivate himself. He stated:

So, he was always encouraging me through athletics to become a coach. And I admired his ability to teach students and follow his coaching path. He was a model, a good role model for me to look up to become a coach and then become a teacher. So. And now he's; we still have communication; he asks me how I'm doing as far as school is going

and how work is going, and then he encourages me to keep going so that motivation comes from a teacher besides my family.

A former coach/teacher was the role model he needed to finish school. The role model that continued to push him even after high school. He gave him the encouragement and motivation to continue his education. He was given support from others besides his family.

Tony also mentioned that his former coach in high school influenced his decision to attend college. He used sports to get his college education for free:

There was my high school basketball coach. He came into the picture until my senior year. He was a motivator. He helped a bit. I got a basketball scholarship; I went to college. If I didn't, I was still going.

His basketball coach became a mentor and motivator to help him receive a basketball scholarship. He was already determined to attend college with or without a scholarship. He used sports as an outlet to help him academically and motivated him to receive a scholarship. Although education was essential to him, he wanted to pursue his basketball journey in college.

Sandy also mentioned her teacher from high school encouraging her to pursue higher education and having an influence on her:

I think some of my teachers, like some of my teachers in high school, specifically the communications teacher at the time, were really into what I wanted to do, and she would. I still talk to her now, but she would push me to continue my education. I wanted to do that.

Sandy received her support from a former high school teacher. She gave that extra support that she needed to decide where to attend college. She encouraged her to continue her

education, "I think it helped me decide where to go to college with her support." The teacher provided the additional support that she was lacking.

On the other hand, Jane talked about the support she got from her college programs. She received encouragement from the Native American center at her college during the times she was struggling:

And then also having like a Native American program, and I think that was helpful because I had some counselors there that helped me, especially when I was, you know, when I needed help, I would go to that, that center, and they would help me or talk to me, you know, kind of just more debrief. And then I remember one point I was just so fed up, and I was just ready to give up. I was glad to go home, and my counselor and the Native American center, I went to her, and I was talking to her, and she was telling me, So, you know, one question she asked me was, so how are you going to benefit and better yourself by doing that? And I think that was one of the big questions that I had to face, and I had to answer her, and I had to answer my question. You know what? My actions, because I was like, it is true. You know, what would it be? How am I going to better myself? If I do go home and how? What is my plan? And. And I was already part of the way to completing my undergraduate school. So, it was an eye-opener.

In college, she struggled and thought about giving up. She turned to the Native American program for guidance; they were able to help her succeed. She had to question herself and her mental state at the time. But with some reassurance from her counselors, she realized that she couldn't give up. She was provided the tools to continue and to help her finish school.

Andy discussed his employer supporting him to further his education and going into chemical engineering. He stated:

My supervisor was a chemical engineer. I worked under him and sometimes worked under the electrical engineer. The manager were chemists, and there were some materials engineers. The owners were all chemists, so they took the chance to hire me, and I worked for them, and that's how I started school. I got them. I asked them if I could attend school. They altered my work schedule so I could attend school in the mornings and work in the afternoons. I wanted to do chemical engineering, and it's one of the most challenging degrees to obtain, too, and that's why I took it, because I know it was hard.

The company he worked for invested in him because they had seen the potential. They took a chance on him and hired him without an educational background. He worked with his employer to make time for school. He attended school in the afternoons and eventually received his chemical engineering degree. He received tremendous support from his employers, which helped him further his education.

Verna also mentioned that her employer at the time had made a significant impact on her decision to continue with school. She mentioned that:

I was still working, and my boss was the one that inspired me, but she really made me more responsible, and I stopped working and went back to school. I started at Dine college. I lived on campus and in Tsaille for one semester, and then I was able to re-enroll at UNM.

After quitting school for the first time, she was more determined to finish school. Her supervisor provided her with the support and encouragement she needed to go back to school. She started at Dine college, a smaller institution, and returned to UNM to finish school. She had to work harder academically to return to UNM. She made it her responsibility to go back to school and finish school.

Community support played an important role for the participants to continue their education. They received much support from other individuals besides their family members. Participants shared their stories of community support they received to continue their education. The support they received made a significant impact on their educational journey. Participants wouldn't have made it without the help of employers, colleagues, and former teachers.

### **Navajo culture**

The Navajo culture had a significant impact on the success of the participants. The Navajo culture has teachings and traditions passed down from generation to generation. They provided stories, ceremonies, and prayers to help individuals overcome barriers and set them up for success. Participants shared their stories of growing up traditional and being taught the values of the Navajo culture. They used the teachings as protective factors and overcame barriers. Don talked about the Navajo philosophy and its influence on furthering his education. He stated:

But the second time when I went back to school, it helped me to understand the process of learning, you know, with our directions and our mountains and Nishakaas (thinking), Nahata(planning), Iina (life), and Sihasin. And then, you use your language to understand how that process works. And then, it helped me gain more knowledge about myself to use those ideas and philosophies to ensure that I stay.

He continues to state:

So, as I said, we always talk about Nisahkaas, where we've got to make sure that we plan our way, think about our journey, and plan Nahataa. So that's the south direction. And then we do it; we implement everything, and Sihasiin, reevaluate, and assess to the north. And so, those kinds of foundations have helped me identify my goals and reestablish the process I need to take to accomplish my goals.

He uses the four Navajo directions to explain the learning process. The four directions align with the four sacred mountains. He described that those foundations were instilled in him growing up. He used the foundations to accomplish his goals. When he went to college the second time, he used the process and realized his learning process.

Emma talked about growing up in a traditional household and its impact on pursuing her education and using traditional values to overcome barriers. She stated:

Prayer helped me; I think that's the only thing that has helped me through every situation in my life, especially with my education and career. I'm thankful for the job I have, the work I do, and the contributions I make to my community. And, I'm proud of my work because I put my everything into it. I think that that's one of the best ways that my traditional and cultural values guide me and help me in my daily life and everything that I do, and I instill that in my child. And making sure that he's, you know, he's aware of that and knows that he can lean on that.

Prayer helped her overcome difficult situations and when she needed that extra support. She is thankful for all her accomplishments and her current success. She used prayer to help guide her in the right direction and leaned on her prayers for support. She instilled those traditional values in her child, and he is aware that he needs to use prayer as guidance.

Jane also discussed the positive role of Navajo culture and traditions in her success. She states that:

During my upbringing, my parents only spoke Navajo; they talked to us Navajo. They shared stories. They shared the teachings. And to me, that's normal, you know, getting up early in the morning, that's my daily life and getting up early in the morning, exercising and starting your day, making breakfast early before the sun comes up. By the time the

sun comes up, you should be outside doing your chores and or herding sheep; to me, I thought that was the average life of anybody, but going to college and being there it was, it was in every. It wasn't in everybody's life; it was me.

She grew up on the Navajo teachings and used those teachings in college. She did not grow up like everyone else; she grew up on the Navajo reservation, which meant waking up early and doing chores. In college, she realized that she was raised differently but always valued and appreciated how she was raised.

Steve grew up in a traditional Navajo home with his grandparents; they taught him the Navajo culture and traditions values. He used those values to help him further his education. He stated that:

And in our culture, we have the Nitsahakees. We also have Nahat'a. And we also have Iina, and we have Sihasin. Nitsahakees is thinking. So, we it's. It is a roadmap for our own individual lives. It's also a roadmap for our well-being where people say that. The Nitsahakees are associated with birth, Nahat'a is associated with childhood, Iina is associated with adulthood, and Sihasin is associated with being and an elder year. So, with me in Nitsahakees, thinking about education. It helps me to apply the techniques of reasoning. And it is being creative. And then Nahat'a in planning. And it allows me to develop quality communicative skills. It helps me in the organization. I think that that is a significant factor when it comes to education.

He used the Navajo philosophy of learning as a roadmap to help him develop his skills. He used the philosophy to get an education, to help his mental stability and organizational skills. The Navajo culture teachings that he received helped him, and he continues to use those teachings in so many ways.



The Navajo culture and teachings guided the participants. They all valued the traditional teachings and culture they learned growing up. During the interviews, the participants all shared that the Navajo teachings played a considerable role in their education and when they had to deal with hardships and struggles.

### **Barriers-Racism**

Racism was an unexpected factor during the interviews. Participants felt strong about the subject because they experienced it during college. It was essential to include racism because of the negative and positive impact on the participants. Racism helped participants build resilience and motivation to further their education. Racism became a barrier for participants, but they felt it was important to share their stories. Tony talked about his own experience with racism in college. He dealt with racism from a teammate on his college basketball team. He stated:

Deciding to go to college was my personal choice. Whatever I encountered, I had to deal with. Racism was one factor. I experienced it firsthand. I never had to deal with anything like it. I learned fast that specific individuals do not appreciate diverse ethnicities. It came from a teammate. It shook me, but not off my foundation. I knew I was grounded in who I was and where I came from.

Racism can hurt individuals. Tony left the reservation to attend college and play basketball. However, he experienced racism because of his background. Before leaving the reservation, Tony had a strong foundation in the Navajo culture. He was still able to overcome racism and finish school.

Emma shared her experience with racism while attending college when she was younger. She talked about how the experience made her feel and how it molded her into today's person.

She didn't realize the impact it would leave on her as an adult and the lessons she learned from those experiences. She stated:

That was all a challenge for me when I went to school at San Juan. I was straight off the reservation, and then, you know, I sat in a class in an English class that I was in and the professor, and there was like an honors English class. I was a freshman, and many of the students there were white, and some were older. Older students and I remember the professor coming up to my desk, and she was like, I don't know what the question was or what the topic of conversation was. But she asked me what I thought about how we were considered are Native Americans were called dirty natives, you know, dirty, dirty Indians. And I told her, I said, well, you know, it's funny because I said, when? When? When the settlers came, I told you guys were the ones that were the dirty people. I said that the Native Americans taught you how to bathe and take care of yourself, especially the women. And I said even showing them how to shave their legs and all that kind of stuff. And she was upset with me for telling her that. But I was like, well, you asked me that question, and she singled me out. So, I guess from that point forward, I was a little more aware of the cultural differences. And then also, you know, kind of the stereotypes that that. I guess that we must face it.

She experienced racism in her English class in college. This was an unexpected event for her; she dealt with the situation as best as possible. She did not like the racial remarks and comments about being a Native American. But this was something that she faced growing up, and she knew that racism was something she had to deal with. She used the racial stereotypes as motivation to pursue her education.

Navajos have experienced some type of discrimination or stereotype. Participants strongly felt like racism was essential to share in their stories because of the negative effect on them in college. Though certain situations it was unexpected, they did their best to deal with the situation at the time. Through racism and discrimination, resilience was built and the determination to finish college. Participants willingly shared their stories and their stories of resilience to overcome those barriers.

### **Poverty**

All the participants were born and raised on the Navajo reservation. Nine of the ten participants experienced the hardships of poverty growing up. Most participants grew up with no running water or electricity on the Navajo reservation. And through that, they developed resilience and the concept of hard work. Poverty is common on the Navajo reservation due to the lack of employment and being such a rural area. Jane shared her experiences growing up on the reservation and the difficulties she faced. She stated:

Maybe I would say that there was no running water starting my elementary years before that. There was no electricity. So, I would say the latter part of those years, probably the beginning of the 90s. That's when many of them, you know, the electricity and the running water started.

She grew up with no running water and electricity in the early years of her life. Her family eventually got electricity and running water in the 90s. Jane had no issues growing up with the lack of resources because it was common. However, despite having running water and electricity, her family was still below the poverty line.

Steve also shared his story about growing up on the reservation and how some Navajos still live today. These hardships are standard on the Navajo reservation even today. He stated:

We still have families that do not have electricity, and the rest take that for granted. And here on the Navajo reservation, we have people still drinking from wells, untreated wells drinking from ponds, and melting snow. We still have families with unstructured homes and adobe structures living in log cabins and burning dried-out brush to keep their abodes warm.

He also described how he grew up:

Up until 2000 and 12, 2013, we received electricity and water. So, before that, we had outhouses. We used to go to town to wash our clothes. I grew up doing homework next to a kerosene lamp. And I think that would be part of my answer to where we made do with what we had. Although most of my classmates had electricity in high school, they had running water, but we had an oil lamp. We had to sharpen our pencils with a knife because we didn't have a pencil sharpener.

Before getting electricity and running water, he grew up on kerosene lamps, outhouses, and washing clothes in town. These challenges are still faced today, with no paved roads, no electricity, or running water. However, despite these challenges and barriers, he could still finish school. He felt that with this challenge came great strengths.

Poverty was a hardship that most of the participants experienced. Growing up on the Navajo reservation was challenging because there was no electricity or running water in some parts. Navajos still lived in Hogans, and no paved roads. This made traveling for food and necessities difficult. The participants used hardship to develop resilience and overcome other barriers. Most participants enjoyed growing up without running water, electricity, and livestock care. They believed that helped them develop their ability to work harder in school.

## Achievement Gap

The achievement gap on the Navajo reservation limited most of the participants when they first attended college. The achievement gap made school more difficult for the participants because they felt undereducated and had to work harder than their peers in college. Some participants found it difficult because they had to repeat certain classes in college. Andy shared his experience in the military about his lack of education. He stated:

Because of, I would say, trying to learn personally, I wanted to do something, and my goal was to just go into the military and retire from the military, but I got injured in the military, and I found that I had to leave the military and then end up being in the military, I found that I was undereducated. And by interacting with my peers and my unit, I found out that I lacked a lot and the education standards. And that's when I decided to go back to school.

He learned in the military that he was undereducated and needed to relearn the basics of math and English. After leaving the military due to an injury, he decided to go back to college to close the achievement gap. Growing up, he only spoke Navajo and English was his second language. He understood that there was a language barrier in school. This was the cause of his being undereducated.

Don struggled in college and experienced being undereducated as well. He learned in college that he had to take remedial classes. He stated:

I went down to Las Cruces, and I had to start with, you know how you start your classes in the hundred levels and go to 200 levels 300, and then eventually you graduate? Well, I started with the 90 levels; I didn't have enough background in English. Being in first-year orientation, English, and I also had to start in math 50 because I didn't have a foundation

for completing math, so I started in those remedial courses on learning how to write, speak, and then solve problems solve in math.

He struggled academically in college because of his remedial classes. After high school, he had to relearn his writing, speaking, and math skills. Beginning the lower-level college classes can negatively affect individuals and taking lower-level classes can prolong the time spent in college.

Steve also had struggled in college with remedial classes and had difficulty making that transition from high school to college. He mentioned that:

But academically, the transition was difficult. The education system on the Navajo reservation is not up to par with other educational systems off the Navajo reservation. For instance, some of our GPAs on the Navajo reservation are based on a curve. So, when our students leave the reservation to get a higher education, they're stuck with remedial classes. And that's what I did in high school. I had a 3.5 GPA, but when I went to Haskell, I was put in remedial classes, which I didn't need to. But it was just to help me relearn some of the things that I've learned in high school.

Transitioning from high school to college can be difficult, but academically it can leave a strain on undereducated individuals in high school. There is a gap that needs to fill before college. Steve learned that he was undereducated in college; he maintained a good GPA in high school and was among the top students in his graduating class. He realized that he needed remedial courses in college and had to relearn things from high school. He could still overcome the educational barrier, but it did take him some time.

Vince talked about his struggles in math in college. He was undereducated because he dropped out of college. He stated that:

But I found out quickly as I got into the first-second year and stuff that I was a little. I was low in math, and that's part of the price I paid for, you know, dropping out of high school and stuff. I didn't get the math background I needed, but I managed to get by. That was one of my biggest struggles as I went through college and stuff.

Dropping out of high school made him realize that he was below the achievement gap. He had difficulty with math but always managed to get by in his classes. Although academically he struggled, he was always determined to finish college.

Jane talked about only speaking Navajo and having difficulty doing homework when she was younger. She depended on her sister to translate her homework:

So, when I was going to school and during my head start days, my first language was Navajo. So, you know, we talk Navajo all the time at home. As I remember, there was never a time that we spoke English. So, in my head start years, I spoke Navajo, my kindergarten years, I spoke Navajo, and until I remember, like in maybe half of my first-grade year, I started to speak English a little bit. I remember that I wasn't comprehending my teacher when they spoke English, so I would go home, take my homework home, and talk with my older sister, and she would have to explain it to me, like translate everything into Navajo. And then and then she would help me with the English part. So, most of the time, my older sister did a lot of that translation and helped me understand my schoolwork. So that was what I kind of remember doing that. And then and then maybe half of my first-grade year, I started understanding things a little bit and becoming evident.

Navajo was her primary language growing up, and she had to learn to speak English. Her sister had to translate her homework because she did not understand her work. She had to

translate her homework from Navajo to English and back to Navajo. She eventually learned to speak English and didn't need her sister to translate.

The achievement gap was an issue that the participants openly spoke about. They felt that the achievement gap on the reservation made it difficult for them to learn when they got to college. Though they struggled in school, they used their experiences to excel in college and helped them learn to become better students. The participants that struggled in school academically found ways to persevere and achieve academically in college. They were all determined to finish their degree despite the achievement gap they experienced in school.

### **Research Question Results**

The following questions guided this qualitative heuristic phenomenological research study that produced narrative data. This research examined how resilience impacted educational achievement goals for Navajos. Resilience was developed through community support, family support, and Navajo culture.

*RQ1: How are the traditions, values, and cultural identity of the Navajo experienced as resilience factors that contribute to educational goal achievement?*

Don stated that the Navajo culture and resilience factors helped him finish school. He used the traditions, values, and cultural identity to help him finish school.

I am going to college to become a teacher. And being a Navajo Culture Teacher helped me understand how students learn, and then when I was teaching students in the Navajo language to speak Navajo and then about the culture, I learned a lot about how I learned. So going into college, when I first went down it, it wasn't as significant to me to know my language or culture. But the second time I went back to school, it helped me understand the learning process, with our directions and our mountains and Nishakaas



(thinking), Nahata(planning), Iina, and Sihasin. And then, you use your language to understand how that process works. And then, it helped me gain more knowledge about myself to use those ideas and philosophies to make sure that I stay in a mindset where I can complete. Because it's a different situation when you go to college, you must be well-versed in English. But I also know what I'm trying to do; I must know. How will students think, especially in our culture now, and how we're so far removed from our foundations and trying to compete and do better in our lives? Having that foundation in their will and your culture from my grandparents helped me become a better educator, I think. But I still don't know a lot. I am still trying to learn.

The Navajo culture has many oral teachings; these teachings are passed down from generation to generation. These cultural teachings are significant to Don because those teachings came from his grandparents. He had the right mindset coming into college and had a strong foundation to accomplish his goals.

Steve believed that the Navajo traditions and culture were the roadmap for his success. He uses the teachings from the culture to help him further his education. He stated:

And in our culture, we have the Nitsahakees. We also have Nahat'a. And we also have Iina, and we have Sihasin. Nitsahakees is thinking. So, we it's. It is a roadmap for our own individual lives. It's also a roadmap for our well-being where people say that. The Nitsahakees are associated with birth, Nahat'a is associated with childhood, Iina is associated with adulthood, and Sihasin is associated with being an elder year. So, with me in Nitsahakees, thinking about education. It helps me to apply the techniques of reasoning. And it is being creative. And then Nahat'a in planning. And it allows me to develop quality communicative skills. It helps me in the organization. I think that that is a

significant factor when it comes to education. And then in which is to implement to do it. And. That's where my values come in—my moral standards in society. The inflammation process occurs, and then the Sihasin (reflection) helps me.

The roadmap that was used were Nitsahakees (thinking), Nahat'a (planning), Sihasin (reflection), and Iina (life) in his life. He used this as a guide and helped him reorganize his thoughts and priorities. These are the values he learned from the Navajo culture; he uses these values to help him accomplish his goals.

Verna talked about the Navajo traditional ceremonies and the importance of those ceremonies. She explained the significance of the traditional ceremonies and their role for her in completing her degree.

I think about the ceremonies. When you're in a ceremony, it's much work, and sometimes you don't know. Well, most of the time, you don't even know what you're supposed to do next, and then you have elders or other people laughing about you while you're trying to do something at the ceremony. And but you, you continue, and you get it done, and you, you finish being in the ceremony. So, to me, that's like just like how I fumbled through my bachelor's degree. It was like I already went through that, and I survived it, and I know I can do it. So now I'm going to continue to do that. So, it's not so much like the culture or the Navajo, the culture itself. I think it's more like that. The actions that you go through when you're doing a ceremony because, you know, I don't know about you, but you know, I'm never going to know all the songs, but just hearing it and recognizing it, that helps. And then, as far as the actual ceremonies I do, I do have great faith in my culture and the ceremonies, and I know that when I'm participating, it does give me great,

great, tremendous comfort, which gives me the energy and the confidence in knowing that I can get my degree. And finish my second one.

She uses traditional ceremonies to help her during the most difficult times of her life.

Traditional ceremonies provide her the comfort that is needed. After the ceremony, she became more energized and confident to complete her degree.

*RQ2: How does the investment from family and community contribute to personal success?*

Don stated that the support from his grandfather helped him to finish school. His grandfather became a huge influence in his life after his grandmother passed. But without family support, he wouldn't have been able to finish school.

But my Nali man always reassured me that he was okay. And then he would come to visit me in Las Cruces with my dad and my mom. So, there was that connection that I still had. So that helped me become more resilient to, you know, when Navajos, I think it's hard for them to adjust to that when they leave families. So, I guess I just did well.

Because he used to come and see me, and I would see him, and there was that reassurance that he was fine. And then, the second time I became a teacher, I fell into a process where I needed to make sure that Navajo students were learning. So, any time I would get discouraged and feel like I couldn't do something, I always had my family, wife, and kids to reassure me to keep going and make sure that I stayed on track to graduate and become a full-fledged teacher. So those kinds of support built a strong resistance against stopping or quitting or are not finishing the education that I have so far.

Coming from a supportive family helped him complete school. Don came from a family of educators who instilled in his education's importance. Every time he became discouraged, he

would turn to his family for support, and they always reassured him that he needed to stay on track and continue with school.

Emma talked about how her mother and grandparents impacted her life growing up, which contributed to her success in school. She stated.

For the most part, my mom ended up being a single mother towards the end of my high school education. From the time I was a freshman until I graduated high school, she always instilled in us because we're all girls that, you know, you need to get an education. You need to. She had a good job, but she didn't have a college education. She just had her high school education. But she also had the experience because she worked at the health center there in Cuba, and we lived there. So, she always instilled in us that we needed to get our education and then be able to survive on our own without having, you know, significant other partners, whomever you know, because she was like, one day you might end up alone with your kids, you know, you are never. And no one can take your education from you. And so that was pretty much how, you know, she influenced me. And then also my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, and my aunts all had education, and my grandmother was taught head start and preschool for years. And then my aunt did the same thing, too. So, I mean, those were probably my biggest influencers. And I always, you know, am thankful for them for showing me that. The about that that education was important. And then also my paternal grandfather and my paternal grandmother. They would always pray for me and then have a ceremony to complete my education. So, they were also a big part of influencing me and my educational journey.

Her mother always encouraged her to finish school and get a good education. Her mother reminded her that a degree is more valuable than anything and was her positive influence. Her

grandparents were also her biggest supporters; they made sure she had ceremonies to help her education.

Jane talked about the support she received from her parents. They always supported her and her siblings when it came to education. They valued education because they knew it was the key to success. She stated that:

I knew that I had to push harder every day and not waste time because one of the things that my parents always told us was not to waste time. And even though my parents didn't finish high school, they were very proactive in education. And I always remember my dad telling us, you know, education's the key. And you know, one of these days, you're buying your water. You're not going to, you know, you're not going to be living the same way that we're living now. You're not going to rely on people. You're not going to depend on assistance. You're going to pay for your meals, and you'll have to work independently. So, it was an eye-opener. So that's why I think I look back, and it's just comparing contrasts. There were many responsibilities that they put on my parents and, you know, and with this education, me and just thinking about that, my parents pushed us too to our limits to continue with even though they never finished with their education.

Her dad reminded her and her siblings that education "is the key." It was not only to become independent but for Jane and her siblings not to rely on others for support. The support she received from her parents helped her overcome barriers, and it was a constant reminder that there are no limits when it comes to finishing her education.

*RQ3: How are barriers to success mitigated to avoid impacting academic achievement?*

Emma shared her story about the struggles she faced when finishing school. She used prayer to help her through the difficult times in her life.

Prayer helped me; I think that's the only thing that has helped me through every situation in my life, especially with my education and career. I'm thankful for the job I have, the work I do, and the contributions I make to my community. And, I'm proud of my work because I put my everything into it. I think that that's one of the best ways that my traditional and cultural values guide me and help me in my daily life and everything that I do, and I instill that in my child. And making sure that he's, you know, he's aware of that and knows that he can lean on that.

She used the Navajo traditions and culture to help her overcome difficult situations in her life. Prayer was also a considerable influence in her life because it helped her avoid barriers and helped her academic achievement.

Roy talked about his father and his teachings. His father reminded him that he needed to have a plan and see things through once they started. He stated:

So as my father would always say, I think he ingrained this in us; we were grown up with this whole concept. If he can't handle it, don't do it. It puts you into that position, like if you want to go to college. He's saying. If you can't do it, just don't do it. Do something else. So back then. So today, if you tell someone if you can't handle it, don't do it. And we just stop it at that. So, what my father was implying was if you're going to do something. You must come up with a plan step by step plan. And if you can't do those things. You're not going to be able to achieve whatever goal you have. So. It is within the framework of if you can't handle it, just don't do it, don't do it. So, within that framework, there are a lot of different teachings. And then the other teaching that I think is instilled in us was.

Teachings coming from a father have a lot of value and life lessons. These lessons can help motivate someone to accomplish their goals or help someone avoid barriers. These teachings were instilled in Roy growing up, which helped him avoid obstacles and struggles.

Steve talked about the best solution that he used to help him avoid barriers. He spoke about having the self-motivation and determination to pursue his goals.

I think the. This answer shouldn't be complicated, but many aspects assist me, including my upbringing. So, I think the best solution to this, of course, will be Navajo. It is You must do it on your own. Where in English, you must be ambitious; you must be the person to do it. No one's going to do anything for you. So, I think you must do it on your slogan, is it probably what? Help me anywhere; I self-initiated—my desire to fulfill my educational needs.

He accredited his upbringing for his success and impacting his academic achievement. It was self-determination and his ambitions that led him to success. His success was self-initiated, and he knew the only person that had to accomplish his goals was through the desire to help himself.

### **Summary**

After the data analysis, two categories were discovered: educational achievement and protective factors. This chapter answers the three research questions and presents the themes found in the interviews. The narratives answered the three research questions to confirm that resilience, family support, community support, and Navajo culture positively influence educational achievement. Similarly, the narratives ensure that barriers to educational attainment develop resiliency.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

### **Overview**

This phenomenological study examined Navajo life experiences, which foster resilience and contribute to educational achievement. This chapter is an overview of the summary of findings, a discussion of the results, implications of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study and topics for future research. The findings in this study can help educators, families, college professors, and Navajo students on ways to be academically successful and protective factors that is needed to succeed. The results in this study will add to the literature review, which verifies the correlation between the resiliency and barriers to success poverty and achievement gap.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study consisted of ten participants; they shared their stories about growing up on the Navajo reservation, their hardships, and the journey of completing their college degrees. The findings answered three research questions about the Navajo traditions and culture and how it contributes to educational achievement. The first research question asked how are the traditions, values, and cultural identity of the Navajo experienced resilience factors that contribute to educational goal achievement? The second question asks how family and community investment contributes to personal success? And the third question asks how are barriers to success mitigated to avoid the impact on academic achievement?

Two main themes were discovered, protective factors and educational achievement. Protective factors included resilience, self-determination, and motivation. These sub-themes were mentioned among participants as intrinsic support. The following central theme is academic achievement. The sub-themes for educational achievement included family support, community



support, and Navajo culture. These sub-themes provided the extrinsic support that participants needed for motivation. Family and community support were among the common themes among participants. The Navajo culture was the theme that was the most common among participants. Each participant shared their stories about Navajo culture and its positive role in their lives. Participants mentioned that barriers were racism, poverty, and the achievement gap. Poverty was among the top themes that were mentioned during the interviews. Racism and the achievement gap were not among the highest themes, but they were essential to the study. These themes became one of the essential factors in the study.

### **Discussion**

This study confirmed the real-world implications that are supported in the literature review. These implications align with two significant themes of the study, (a) potential protective factors-resiliency, and (b) barriers to academic success- achievement gap and poverty.

#### **Potential Protective Factors-Resiliency**

All resilience definitions include the capacity to face challenges and to become somehow more capable despite adverse experiences (LaFromboise et al., 2006). In this study, the participants shared their stories of resilience and the positive effects on them. They struggled with various adversities and overcame those adversities. Resilience as a protective factor helped participants learn to cope with hardships. Resiliency implies characteristics of individuals that enable them to cope with difficult events and respond appropriately under pressure (Thornton et al., 2006). The participants faced many challenges, but they learned coping skills and became stronger when dealing with challenges. All of their experiences are viewed as educational because they contribute to one's growth in ability to deal with future problems (LaFromboise et al., 2006).

Baldwin et al. (2020) state that adversity is the soil in which resilience grows. For some students, adversity comes primarily by way of academically challenging coursework. For others, the financial cost of their education threatens to derail them. Still, others face significant interpersonal pain as they navigate mental or physical health issues, the death of a loved one, or challenging family situations that occur during college. Participants shared their challenges and adversities. These challenges and adversities were all unique but defined each participant. These challenges molded the participants into stronger individuals. Resilience is a process and not a trait; moreover, it operates throughout the lifespan – before, during, and after adverse experiences (Ungar, 2011). Participants who went through challenges and adversities knew how to overcome other challenges. They were more prepared on how to handle other adversities and challenges. Because resilience unfolds over time in a developing individual, it is essential to adopt a developmental perspective to understand the processes underlying effective functioning in the face of adversity (Ungar, 2011).

This study confirmed that resiliency used as a protective factor helped participants overcome barriers and challenges. Resiliency is an important factor in this study. This study shows that despite facing adversities and challenges, participants learn skills and coping techniques to help them develop resilience.

### **Barriers to Academic Success- Achievement Gap**

The term “achievement gap” is regularly used to describe between-group differences in educational outcomes (Quinn et al., 2019). Participants shared stories of achievement gaps when they attended college. Navajo youths fare poorly in formal schooling, and a key explanation has been sought in their cultural investment in the Navajo way of life (Willeto, 1999). While attending school on the Navajo reservation, participants met academic standards and excelled.

Once leaving the reservation, participants realized that academically they failed to meet the standards of the college. They found themselves taking remedial classes or starting classes from the lower levels. Wiseman (2000) states that

They are less likely than public schools to offer academic enrichment programs for gifted and talented students. In other words, the federal funding going to Native American schools often goes toward specific remedial and other federally specified programs rather than the larger schooling environment.

Willeto (1999) stated that it has generally been assumed that for the Navajo child to achieve academically, all that is inherently Navajo about that child must be eliminated and replaced with mainstream beliefs and lifestyles. Although this mainstream view has dominated the education of American Indian populations, the question must be raised as to whether this is the correct perspective for understanding the underlying failure of Navajo youths in education. Participants shared their struggles when attending college; they found adjusting to the learning environment difficult. Sanchez & Stuckey (1999) states that

In the last twenty-five years, tribal schools on American Indian reservations have been growing steadily, and now the power to make curricular decisions has been transferred from the state to the tribes. This growth, while steady, is also slow, and in 1998 most American Indian children remain in non-Indian controlled public schools and are taught by non-Indian teachers.

The achievement gap is evident among the participants; most had to study harder and longer to keep up with peers. Participants struggled to grasp the academic materials taught in college for various reasons. Sanchez & Stuckey (1999) added that American Indian children believe themselves to be of less than average intelligence more than members of any other group.

Participants that experienced academic barriers worked twice as hard in college; they overcame those challenges by applying themselves more in their academic coursework.

### **Barriers to Academic Success-Poverty**

Wolff (2019) states that poverty is often defined as lacking the financial resources to meet basic needs. Poverty is experienced throughout the Navajo reservation. These hardships restrict academic success in higher education and increase significant emotional distress. "In the context of higher education, low-SES students' emotional experiences are quite different from the emotional experiences of high-SES students, such that low-SES students are more likely to feel and express greater emotional distress than high-SES students" (Jury et al., 2017, pg. 26). Participants shared their experiences growing up on the Navajo reservation without running water, electricity, and paved roads. Carpenter & Riley (2019) explained that many Indian reservations are plagued by high poverty rates, substandard housing, poor health, crime, and other social ills. The problems of Indian poverty and living conditions on reservations have inspired various explanations.

### **Implications**

The implications of the present study have meaning for educators, educational programs, students going to college, and college professors. This study can help understand Navajo students on the reservation and those who encounter these students. The implications for each of these stakeholders are in the following recommendations:

#### **Educators**

In this study, participants mentioned their teachers' significant impact on their education. These teachers invested their time helping these students and provided encouraging words to their students. Educators, including teachers, principals, and school counselors, can use this

study to help them understand how to work with Navajo students. This study includes an overview of historical trauma, assimilation to boarding schools, and barriers to academic success. They can use this study to help them better understand and better prepare students for higher education. This study can help school counselors create better programs in high schools to help students prepare for college and perhaps teach resilience within the classrooms. Educators new to the Navajo reservation can use this study to help them better understand Navajo students and their cultural identity. Stakeholders can also use this study to help close the achievement gap among Navajo students and improve schools' programs to help with interventions and remedial classes.

### **Families**

This study mentioned that family support had a significant impact on academic success. Participants who succeeded in college said that they could accomplish their goals with family support. They relied on family support throughout college and family support when they were going through hardships. Parents or family members absent in a student's life can have negative impacts. It can be more difficult for students to be more successful in academics than students with family support. Families can use this study to help support their students attending college or planning on attending college. Families can better understand the importance of support and the positive influence it can have on individuals. Encouraging students to accomplish their educational goals

### **College professors**

In this study, participants mentioned the achievement gap they faced in high school and college. They discussed the educational barriers in college and having to take remedial classes. Participants also shared the struggles they faced in college when studying and working harder

than their peers. College professors can use this study to learn how to work with Navajo college students. They can use this study to understand the life of a Navajo student that grew up on the reservation. Colleges can use this as a guide to increase more Native American support groups on campus and provide better support. Additionally, they can use this study to work with local reservation schools to offer enrichment courses during the summer or school year to help close the achievement gap.

### **Navajo students**

This study focused on Navajos that accomplished their educational goals and received their college degrees. Participants took pride in their accomplishments and the struggles they faced in college. They used those struggles to gain resilience and better prepare for other hardships they might face. This study can help Navajo students prepare mentally and emotionally for college or leave the reservation. Navajo students can use this study to understand that resilience, family support, and community support is essential in college. They can find support from Native American programs at college to help them in their first year of school. Students in high school preparing for college can use this study to help them prepare for college and learn to be successful in academics.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The original sample size for the study is between twelve to fifteen participants. However, after several months of finding participants who matched the criteria, finding participants willing to interview for this study was challenging. Modifications to the number of participants were reduced to ten because of the difficulty of recruiting.

A delimitation is the intended specific group in this study; the criteria for this study are Navajo over the age of 21 who received a degree or are completed a degree. This study cannot be

transferred to other groups because this is focused on Navajos. Another delimitation was receiving school board approval to recruit potential candidates for this study. It was difficult to recruit potential candidates for this study, as stated before. Recruiting outside of the Navajo reservation was difficult, so recruiting within a school district because it required approval. There was no school board approval for this study, but candidates were recruited outside the school district and Navajo Nation.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are recommendations for future research, expanding the study to other reservations in the United States, comparing education, traditional culture and values, and historical trauma as possible root causes for poor academic performance in college, and replicating this study to other reservation communities comparing the results. This would provide clarification and a better understanding of working with Native American students.

Another recommendation would be to narrow down the potential candidates and the criteria for the study. In this study, the criteria were that candidates had to be 21 years or older, be an enrolled member of the Navajo tribe, attend school on the Navajo reservation, and complete a degree or are completing a degree. The next study could include more specific details about the candidates, demographic status, religious preference, and growing up in a two-family household. These details can help enrich the study more, and this would provide more substantial research on whether two-family homes, religious preference, and demographic status have to do with resilience and educational achievement.

One recommendation would be to replicate this study and compare females and males in education. Studying female candidates and comparing them to male candidates and their backgrounds and looking at the similarity and differences in how they were raised and their

aspirations for academic achievement. This will clarify if there's a difference between female academic achievement and male academic achievement. This would provide programs in schools with more information on academics in schools and enrichment programs that can help students.

### **Summary**

Resiliency is a significant protective factor when it comes to academic achievement among Navajos. The findings from this study will help Navajo students overcome barriers and to navigate through challenges or adversities. This study will help individuals that are working with Navajo students including educators, educational programs, and college professors. They will have a better understanding of the hardships that Navajo students face and protective factors that can mitigate those barriers. Further research is needed to whether two-family homes, religious preference, and demographic status have to do with resilience and educational achievement.



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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### Interview Questions/Guide

1. Tell me a little about yourself, including your clan, upbringing, and where you attended school?
2. Describe the decisions making process and events that happened as you transitioned from the reservation to college?
3. Describe the individuals and the role they served as you decided to leave the reservation and attend college.
4. Talk about your mindset as you transitioned into college and through your college experiences?
5. Reflecting on your college experience, what values from the Navajo culture contributed to your success?
6. When you think about resilience, defined as the capacity to recover from difficulties, can you discuss any resilience factors during your college experience?
7. How have the traditions and values of the Navajo culture helped you navigate through difficult experiences?
8. As we end the interview, can you create a visual description of the connection between Navajo and your academic journey?
9. Do you have a theme, analogy, description that paints a visual representation of your journey as a Navajo through your college experience?

## Appendix B: Informed Consent

### Consent

The Educational Goal Achievement among Diné (Navajo) and Their Resiliency

LaWanda Nodestine-Henry  
Liberty University  
Department of Community Care and Counseling/School of Behavioral Sciences

You are invited to be in a research study on educational goal achievement and resiliency among Diné (Navajo). You were selected as a possible participant because you are an enrolled member of the Navajo tribe, 21 years of age or older, completed schooling (K-12) on the Navajo reservation, and have achieved or are in the process of completing a college degree. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to explore resiliency factors within Navajo culture and traditions that support academic success and personal accomplishments.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an interview. This will take approximately 30 minutes to an hour to complete and will be audio recorded.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

The researcher is a mandatory reporter and is required to report to the appropriate authorities any statements made that imply harm to self or others and/or abuse of a minor, elderly or dependent adult.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include the use of this study to inform future research and Navajo educational programs.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will be kept confidential through the use of an assigned pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed by a computer software program. Audio will be sent with your name redacted. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph and let her know that you wish to withdraw. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is LaWanda Nodestine-Henry. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED] and/or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Jackie Craft, at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations.*

*The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Consent:**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Printed Subject Name

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Signature of Participant

Date



### Appendix C: Recruitment Script

Hello [Potential Participant],

My name is LaWanda Nodestine-Henry

I was referred to you by [name of individual who recommended this participant]. I am a graduate student in the Department of Community Care and Counseling in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, and I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of my research is to illuminate the resiliency factors within Navajo culture and traditions that support academic success and personal accomplishments, and I am contacting you to invite you to participate in my study.

Participants must be 21 years old or older, enrolled members of the Navajo tribe, have lived and attended school on the Navajo reservation (K-12), and have completed or are in the process of completing an associate's, bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree. [Confirm that individuals meet the criteria by asking or having them complete the screening survey.]

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in an interview within the next couple of weeks. This will take approximately 30 minutes to an hour to complete and will be audio recorded.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Is this something you would like participate in?

**If yes:** I appreciate your time and consideration for this study. When would be a good time for me to interview you? Also, could I get your email address?

A consent document will be provided via email. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview or before the interview via email.

**Undecided:** Please some time to think about your decision. If you decide whether or not you would like to participate please contact me at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED]

**If no:** I understand. Thank you for your time.

Do you have any questions?

**Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 7, 2022

Lawanda Nodestine  
Jackie Craft

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY21-22-334 THE EDUCATIONAL GOAL ACHIEVEMENT AMONG DINÉ (NAVAJO) AND THEIR RESILIENCY

Dear Lawanda Nodestine, Jackie Craft,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: February 7, 2022. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**Research Ethics Office**