Transculturation Theory
A Framework for Understanding Tribal Identity and Academic Success[1]

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Dr. Huffman recounts what he has learned researching American Indian education for more than three decades. He discusses cultural discontinuity theory, structural inequality theory, and critical race theory that have proved useful analytical tools for achieving understanding on the complexities of Native American education and describes. He then gives evidence for tranculturation theory, which refers to the process by which Native student can journey through mainstream-dominant educational institution while building on his/her tribal identity and heritage and simultaneously learning the cultural nuances necessary to thrive and succeed. During the transculturation process students come to rely on and expand upon a strong tribal identity to anchor their personal values, direction, and goals.

It was 30 years ago, and I was just beginning my first year as a college professor, fresh out of doctoral work. I was approached by the leadership of the campus Native American student organization with the idea of conducting research on factors associated with the persistence and attrition of Native students attending our predominately non-Native college. Interestingly, the student leaders already held a pretty clear understanding on the important dynamics that serve to assist some Native students through to graduation and what issues work against them. However, they wanted to have "play-it-by-the-numbers" social science research to document the various experiences. Thus, they came to me for help. What was originally designed as a single year research project turned into five years of fascinating personal interviews with an incredibly large number of participants for qualitative research. Over the span of those five years, 69 Native American students agreed to discuss their personal life journeys, including their academic and cultural higher educational experiences and reflections on what constitutes (and facilitates) success. As one can imagine, those interviews produced richly nuanced and textured insights, but one in particular stands out for what it illustrates.

A young man was wrestling to find a way to make me understand his experiences and his passion. He was a bright, promising, and thoroughly likable college junior from South Dakota's Cheyenne River reservation. From the beginning college had been a struggle. He had been plagued with feelings of isolation and disconnection. On a number of occasions he had nearly left college. Yet, he persevered, found a sense of purpose in his studies, and located a meaningful direction for his future. After careful thought, he said,

> I am proud of being Indian. I am proud of our traditions and our ways. I want to help my people. And I felt like college was important so I could do that.... I am Indian but I can also be here. I guess you can say that I am here because I am Indian.... It's like my Indianness is a mask, a cultural mask. I put it on for all to see. (Huffman, 2008, p. 2)

This young man held his tribal identity as crucially important. When he described his tribal identity as a cultural mask, he did not mean it was something he was hiding behind. Rather, his tribal identity was something he deliberately embraced and projected in order to anchor his personal identity and purpose at college and in life. Indeed, after the initial challenges he encountered, the young man discovered he could not only academically excel in higher education but culturally thrive. He eventually completed college and the last I heard, this young man returned to the reservation of his birth and was engaged in service to the community. The interview with this young Lakota, and so many others similar to him, reveal a critical element in the higher educational experiences of countless Native students. Namely, the importance of tribal identity in facilitating their persistence through the academic, social, personal, and cultural rigors of mainstream-dominant higher education. It is the fundamental importance of tribal identity that lies at the heart of this chapter's subject—transculturation theory.

Transculturation theory is distinct from other theoretical perspectives on Native American education found in the literature in at least two important ways. First, this theory specifically developed as a way to understand Native American educational experiences, especially academic success in mainstream-dominant educational institutions. In other words, transculturation theory was not designed to examine the educational experiences of other minority groups and subsequently applied to Native American students. Rather, transculturation theory evolved as an attempt to examine the manner in which Native students encounter and engage mainstream-dominant educational settings. Second, transculturation theory attempts to explain why Native American students persist and succeed rather than why they do not. This is an important distinction as scholars have heavily focused on the factors associated with the lack of academic success among Native students.

Transculturation is the key concept found in this theoretical perspective and refers to the process by which a Native student journeys through a mainstream-dominant educational institution while building on his/her tribal identity and heritage and simultaneously learning the cultural nuances necessary to thrive and succeed. During the transculturation process, the individual comes to rely on and expand upon a strong tribal identity to anchor his/her personal values, direction, and goals.

I will offer fuller discussion on the fundamental premise and essential assumptions of transculturation theory later. However, before launching into an examination of transculturation theory, it is useful to outline other leading theoretical perspectives on Native American education commonly found in the literature.

Leading Theoretical Perspectives on Native American Education

For decades scholars and educators have lamented the lack of educational achievement among Native students. Yet, many Native American students experience tremendous educational accomplishments and go on to make significant contributions. These mixed outcomes raise the following questions: Why do some Native American students experience educational success and so many others encounter deliberating frustration that leads them not to flourish? Is there something uniquely different about the educational experiences of Native students that separate them from the educational experiences of other American minority students? What factors serve to inhibit academic success for Native students? Conversely, what are the key factors that facilitate educational achievement? Questions such as these persist in the Native American education literature. In the attempt to answer such questions scholars have frequently relied upon four well established theoretical perspectives for guidance. These theoretical perspectives include cultural discontinuity theory (the most dominant framework found in Native American education scholarship), structural inequality theory and critical race theory (two very similar theoretical frameworks), and transculturation theory (unique in the fact that it developed specifically as a framework to explain Native American educational experiences). Each of these perspectives contains a different premise and set of assumptions. Just as importantly, each perspective leads to different conclusions about the reasons for academic success and lack of success among Native students. They share in common the attempt to unravel the intricacies of educational outcomes for Native American students.

Cultural discontinuity theory is the most commonly used theoretical perspective found in Native American education studies (Huffman, 2010). Like so many other theoretical frameworks employed by Native American education scholars, cultural discontinuity theory did not originate as a way to explain Native educational outcomes. Rather it developed as a means to account for the academic experiences of U.S. minority students in general. Nevertheless, scholars quickly employed it in the campaign to understand factors associated with Native educational achievement and, more commonly, the absence of achievement. Essentially, cultural discontinuity theory attributes the lack of general educational success as due to differences in communication and interactional styles distinctly found in Native homes and those expected in formal classrooms of mainstream-dominant schools. As leading cultural discontinuity theorist Kathryn Au explains, "the theory of cultural discontinuity centers on a possible mismatch between the culture of the school and the culture of the home, which results in misunderstandings between teachers and students in the classroom (1993, p. 8). Simply put, when it comes to ways of communicating (e.g., talking, listening, and responding) and anticipated normative behavior (e.g., eye contact, self-assertive demonstrations) Native parents and their children employ fundamentally different styles and inclinations as those used by mainstream-dominant school teachers and administrators. The result of such incongruence is predictable—Native students are placed at a distinct disadvantage. Thus, academic achievement for Native students lags behind students whose previous socialization have prepared them

to be more culturally congruent with the communication and interaction patterns prevailing in the mainstream-dominant institution.

Cultural discontinuity researchers have produced a host of scholarship. Susan Philips' work of over thirty years ago on Oregon's Warm Springs reservation represents the most well-known research from the cultural discontinuity perspective. Her ethnographic study of classroom dynamics of four elementary classrooms (two enrolling all Native students on a reservation and two enrolling predominately non-Native students at a nearby off-reservation community) resulted in the widely cited book *The Invisible Culture: Communication and Community on the Warm Springs Reservation* (1983), and scholars acknowledge it as an exemplar of the cultural discontinuity tradition (Huffman, 2010; Ledlow, 1992). Philips argued communication and interaction patterns are learned before Native students enter school and are established by age six. As a result, Native American children enter mainstream-dominant classrooms as culturally foreign to the expectations held by most, if not all, of their teachers. This disadvantage, she points out, is not shared by white children. According to Philips, cultural misunderstandings emerge virtually immediately and only compound as the school year (and presumably, school years ahead) continue. The consequences for Native students and families are serious. She concludes:

> Warm Springs Indian children learn socially appropriate ways of conveying attention and regulating turns at talk in their homes and their community before they come to school. . . . And they are deliberately socialized so that they acquire skills in the use of visual and auditory channels of communication in culturally distinctive ways. Thus in regard to both the structuring of attention and the allocation of turns at talk, Warm Springs Indian children learn culturally distinctive systems for socially appropriate communication.
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> At the age of six, the Indian children enter a classroom where the organization of interaction is Anglo in its hierarchical structure, and in the control of talk that one individual exercises. The relative use of the visual and auditory channels and the organization of participant structures for the presentation of curriculum have been developed for the Anglo middle-class child. The organization of classroom interaction at the first-grade level is designed to fit with or build on the interactional skills the Anglo children have acquired during their first six years of life. That organization does not, however, completely fit or build on the interactional skills acquired by the Warm Springs Indian children. . . . Those differences contribute to the general uncertainty Indian children experience as they find they do not understand the teacher, and the teacher does not understand them. (Philips, 1983, pp. 126-127)

Since Philips' groundbreaking study, cultural discontinuity theorists have gone on to identify a myriad of cultural misunderstandings plaguing Native students in mainstream-dominant classrooms. For instance, cultural incongru-

ence leads to confusion over cultural proclivities regarding cooperation as opposed to competitiveness (Amerman, 2007; Deyhle & LeCompte, 1994), tribal preference for personal reticence and aversion to self-assertiveness (Garrett, 1995; Little Soldier, 1997), and even discrepancies in learning styles between Native and non-Native students (Ingalls, Hammond, Dupoux, & Baeza, 2006; Pewewardy, 2002). For cultural discontinuity thinkers, cultural dissonance is actually a form of cultural conflict that eats away at the self-esteem, self-worth, and even sense of purpose and identity of Native students (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Sanders, 1987). Ultimately, the cultural conflict resulting from cultural incongruence is the leading reason for the lack of academic achievement among Native American students at all levels of the educational system (Reyhner, 1992; Romero-Little, 2010; Ward, 2005). Indeed, leading Native American education scholar Jon Reyhner (1992) in unflinching criticism of schools serving Native children has argued,

> Academically capable American Indian students often drop out of school because their needs are not being met. Others are pushed out because they protest, in a variety of ways, how they are being treated.... American schools are not providing an appropriate education for Indian students who are put in large, factory-like schools. Indian students are denied teachers with special training in Indian education, denied a curriculum that includes their heritage, and denied culturally appropriate assessment. Their parents are also denied a voice in the education of their children. (p. 37)

For cultural discontinuity scholars, in order to correct the lack of educational success, schools must adopt culturally responsive approaches to education, most notably culturally appropriate pedagogy and relevant curriculum (Demmert, 2011; Gregory, 2013; Van Hamme, 1996). Lovelace and Wheeler (2006) go so far to argue that teachers need to recognize the responsibility to bridge cultures for their Native students and become cultural mediators. Further, they must proactively create cultural continuity between the learning that occurs in the homes of minority students and the learning that takes place in their classrooms. They must adopt flexible teaching techniques that allow for the ebb and flow of communication styles and patterns among all the students in the classroom. Unfortunately, strict curricular and pedagogical requirements resulting mandated standardized testing and common curriculum frustrate such teaching agility suggested by Lovelace and Wheeler. Further, the lack of teacher training required to recognize, understand, and work with cultural diverse learners constitutes a serious problem (Moeller, Anderson & Grosz, 2012; Morgan, 2009).

Both structural inequality theory and critical race theory contrast sharply to cultural discontinuity theory. Traditionally, scholars consider these two theories as distinct (owing to an important difference); yet, they also share a similar premise and set of assumptions. Structural inequality theory has a longer history in Native American education studies compared to critical race theory. As such, a

larger body of research produced by structural inequality scholars is found in the Native American education literature. Indeed, perhaps because of its longer history, critical race scholars frequently cite the work of earlier structural inequality theorists. Nevertheless, today scholars appear to prefer the basic tenets of critical race theory and, thus, it is rapidly becoming the more dominant perspective of the two frameworks in Native American educational studies (Huffman, 2010).

For structural inequality theorists, the lack of educational success among many minority students is not due to cultural differences between the home and the classroom that work against them; rather the very way in which society is structured is the true barrier to academic achievement. Essentially, societies, such as the United States, are organized in such a manner that inherently provide unequal access to resources and opportunities to different social groups (Au, 1993; Ogbu, 1978, 1987). As a result, over time, those who have been granted greater access to those resources and opportunities gain larger advantages compared to those who have historically been denied access (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Building on this fundamental premise, Native American education studies scholars, working out of the structural inequality tradition, regard historically produced social structural conditions as barriers to academic success. They point to such powerful structural factors as the decades of assimilationist education policies that left behind a legacy of dispiritedness and suspicion about mainstream-dominant education among reservation peoples (Nagel, 1996; Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996; Wood & Clay, 1996), the inefficient and misguided management of Native education resulting in a disjoined patchwork of different types of schools serving Native children (Wilkinson, 2005), and inadequate funding of reservation schools which frequently places Native American students at a distinct advantage compared to non-Native students attending better funded systems (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Senese, 1991). Even current standardized assessment techniques are culturally slanted in favor of mainstream-dominant students (Forbes, 2000). For structural inequality theorists, the net result is that education operates primarily to serve the interests of the most powerful and dominant in society at the expense of Native American students. Thus, correcting cultural discontinuities in the classroom will do nothing to erase basic inequalities structured into society itself (Ogbu, 1982). Given these formidable obstacles, little wonder Native American academic achievement falters behind non-Natives (Ledlow, 1992; St. Germaine, 1995; Wood & Clay, 1996).

Like structural inequality theorists, critical race theorists reject the notion that discrepancies in linguistic and behavioral styles found in the classroom account for the gap in educational achievement between Native and non-Native students. Critical race theorists too accept the premise that larger social arrangements powerfully determine the social conditions of people's lives. The fundamental difference between structural inequality theory and critical race theory is their departure over the basis for the social inequalities that continue to exist in society. For structural inequality theorists, social inequalities derive from prevailing economic and political conditions that powerfully separate people into social classes and determine much of their opportunities for success—academic and

otherwise (Au, 1993; Wood & Clay, 1996). Thus, entrenched reservation and urban poverty is the result of capitalist forces that operate to the advantage of those with political power and economic leverage and against tribal nations. For critical race theorists, however, race is the most powerful factor in separating people into social groups. Indeed according to these scholars, race is even more powerful than economic standing (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theorists regard racism as a normative state in society and is not a social aberration. As a result, racial group membership provides inherent privileges to some and denies them to others. In effect, wealth is no guarantee against discriminatory attitudes and behaviors when racial status trumps economic status. Thus, an important implication is race does matter in all levels of public policy (including educational policy) and notions of "color-blind" objectivity are both unrealistic as well as potentially harmful (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Critical race theorists regard established cultural norms and standards as written by the mainstream-dominant group for their benefit and designed to perpetuate their hegemony in society. Essentially, white Americans have written the cultural narratives organizing society and for decades these narratives have largely gone unchallenged. As a result, "white privilege" serves to powerfully benefit white people by providing subtle and frequently unrecognized advantages including higher social status as well as greater economic and educational opportunities (McIntosh, 2006; Rothenberg, 2005). Significantly, white privilege also involves a generalized acceptance of white Americans' experiences, especially concerning equal opportunity, as normal and universal to all others in society (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Martin-McDonald & McCarthy, 2008). Thus, a major task facing critical race scholars is to provide "counternarratives" to expose the fallacies and inconsistencies contained in the prevailing narratives that serve to protect white privilege (Laughter, Baker, Williams, Cearley, & Milner, 2006; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). These counternarratives tell the social and personal stories of minority members and ensure their experiential knowledge is revealed (Chandler & McKnight, 2008; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical race theory has splintered into a variety of perspectives each attempting to account for the specific experiences of different racial and ethnic groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). For instance, the scholarly literature now contains Asian critical race theory and Latino/a critical race theory. This separation into specific theoretical strands makes sense. If race is the primary factor in determining social location, circumstances, and opportunities, it is also logical to assume each racial group has its own unique history and personal narratives which require specific treatment. Brayboy (2005) introduced such a variety of critical race theory as a means to examine and document Native American experiences—tribal critical race theory.

As the name implies, tribal critical race theory (or as Brayboy refers to it "TribalCrit") attempts to present the counternarratives unique among Native peoples. At the heart of tribal critical race theory is the notion that Eurocentric cultural and political colonialization has and continues to dominate the lives of

Native nations and individuals (Rain, 2002). Thus, in order to understand the complexities of Native lives, one must begin to appreciate the overwhelming nature of this colonial domination. Brayboy relates, "The primary tenet of TribalCrit is the notion that colonization is endemic to society. By colonization, I mean that European American thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate present-day society in the United States . . . In this way the goal sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, on interactions between the dominant U.S. society and American Indians has been to change ('colonize' or 'civilize') us to be more like those who hold power in the dominant society" (2005, p. 430).

A review of the literature reveals tribal critical race theory is frequently used in three ways: To frame the dynamics of community responses to racially charged situations and contentions over tribal sovereignty rights; examine how Native students experience mainstream education; and to explore ways in which teachers can better respond to the unique personal histories of Native American students (Rains, 2003).

Fletcher (2008) used tribal critical race theory to demonstrate how injudicious educational policy decisions led to disastrous consequences for a Native community. The counternarratives contained in his work provide a way to understand the experiences of Native people facing a complex legal struggle over autonomy of local schools. They include accounts of resistance to directives regarded as erosive to tribal cultural integrity. Fletcher's effort illustrates how tribal critical race theory can be used to explore how a Native American community responded to what the residents regarded as unfair treatment and threat to tribal sovereignty.

Scholars have also applied tribal critical race theory to examine the educational experiences of Native students (Cueva, 2013). Using tribal critical race theory as a framework to examine the educational experiences of Native American female teacher candidates in the Southwestern United States, Haynes Writer and Oesterreich (2011) tell the stories of the students' "struggles with and resistance to institutional inequality and oppression" (p. 509). Their work documents how these individuals, rather than being "at-risk" regarded themselves as women "with strength." The researchers along with their participants used their findings "to challenge and transform the higher education institution to secure a reality of degreed community-based educators" (Haynes Writer & Oesterreich, 2011, p. 509).

Tribal critical race theory also helps inform educators on appropriate ways to teach Native American students (Grande, 2004; Roithmayr, 1999). Chandler (2011) outlined ways in which educators can use critical race theory to teach Native American tribal histories and, thereby, achieve a different (and frequently hidden) understanding of Native nations within the United States. Scholarly offerings such as these reveal how tribal critical race theory can be used to broaden the viewpoints of students and lead to fuller appreciation of Native/U.S. history than provided in traditional educational perspectives.

Cultural discontinuity theory, structural inequality theory, and critical race theory have all proved useful analytical tools for achieving understanding on

the complexities of Native American education. However, as useful as these theories are, transculturation theory is also commonly employed by Native American education scholars. While this theory has been most widely applied to Native American higher education, its usefulness as a theoretical perspective to understand the experiences among students in other levels is tremendous (Huffman, 2005).

Premise of Transculturation Theory

In a speech to the Club Atenas in Havana during the winter of 1942, Cuban writer and ethnographer Fernando Ortíz (1995) introduced the concept of transculturation. For Ortíz, transculturation involves a process by which racial minorities could overcome cultural barriers in order to operate effectively in a majority dominated society (Allatson, 2007). Of immediate concern to him were the racial/cultural conflicts common to Cuban society at the time. In an attempt to understand the resolutions he believed possible, Ortíz suggested a three stage transculturation process whereby racial minorities eventually gained status in Cuban society: Rebellion, compromise, and adjustment. What is significant for current transculturation theory is that Oritz argued transculturation is a process of cultural learning and expansion. Thus, he introduced the key concept that eventually found its way into today's transculturation theory. Namely, transculturation is a socialization process that involves the accumulation of ever-increasing cultural skills and knowledge. The notion of transculturation would be modified by American social scientists Irving Hallowell, Maurice Sill, and myself in the coming decades. However, Ortíz's basic conception that a transculturational process would lead to positive cultural expansion has remained unaltered and represents a critical cornerstone of the transculturation theoretical perspective.

In the early 1970s, anthropologist Irving Hallowell (1972) conceptualized transculturation as "the process whereby individuals under a variety of circumstances are temporarily or permanently detached from one group, enter the web of social relations that constitute another society, and come under the influence of its customs, ideas, and values to a greater or lesser degree" (p. 206). Over thirty years later, I offered a similar definition but with an important extension to Hallowell's conceptualization. I described transculturation as "the process by which an individual can enter and interact in the milieu of another culture without loss of the person's native cultural identity and ways" (Huffman, 2008a, p. 147).

Taken together, these conceptualizations suggest three underlying assumptions central to transculturation theory: First, transculturation is a type of socialization. It is a cultural process in which an individual learns to function in a new cultural setting. Second, possessing a strong tribal identity empowers a Native student to engage in new cultural learning without the fear of loss of his/her tribal heritage. Third, the process of transculturation facilitates academic persistence and success in mainstream-dominant educational institutions.

As such, the basic premise of Native American transculturation theory can be specifically stated. Transculturation theory asserts that Native American students engage in the process of learning the cultural nuances found in mainstream-

dominant educational settings while retaining and relying upon their tribal heritage to forge a strong tribal identity and sense of purpose. Transculturation theory fundamentally focuses on the manner in which a Native person experiences the transition to mainstream-dominant cultural arrangements and situations while relying upon the grounding provided by their tribal heritage and identity for strength and direction.

Assumption #1: Transculturation is a Socialization Process of Learning to Learn an Old and New Culture

Transculturation is the process by which individuals build upon their tribal identity and heritage in order to successfully navigate vicissitudes of the mainstream-dominant society's institutions. Essentially, transculturation is a type of socialization and, thus, is a continual process of cultural learning and relearning. Transculturation includes the exchanges between cultures whereby an individual continually learns and expands cultural understanding and skills. Moreover, the notion of transculturation emphasizes the ability for individuals to build on preexisting cultural knowledge with limitless capacity for cultural growth.

Transculturation is similar to the more commonly used concept of biculturation. However, it is important to make a distinction between transculturation and biculturation. The notion of biculturation is frequently conceptualized as the process by which a person retains elements of his/her cultural heritage while adopting elements of the mainstream culture. The result of biculturation is the development of a dual cultural identity, one oriented to Native cultural ways and another oriented toward the mainstream society (Garrett, 1996).

A close consideration of this definition reveals that biculturation is a form of acculturation. Acculturation is conceptualized as the exchange of cultural elements between two distinct ethnic groups (Abramson, 1980). However, acculturation itself is a softer, less harsh version of assimilation, the notion that one group culturally dominates another group and requires the less powerful group adopt its culture. Schwartz, Zamboanga, Rodriguez and Wang (2007) put the matter in blunt terms. They explain that, "assimilation refers to adopting the receiving culture while discarding the heritage culture" (Schwartz et al., 2007, p. 160).

There is good reason why acculturation is considered a form of assimilation. In its typical usage in the scholarly literature, acculturation is rarely conceived as an equal process (Cheung-Blunden & Juang, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2007). Minority group members typically hold less power and status in society. As a result, minority individuals generally experience greater pressure to assume the culture of the dominant society compared to majority individuals who likely experience little compulsion to acculturate with the minority culture (Berry, 2003).

Thus, as a form of acculturation, the concept of biculturation generally leads scholars to conceptualize a dynamic in which minority members ultimately experience some degree of cultural loss. In this regard, the concept of biculturalism implies an acculturated end-product. Scholars typically regard biculturation as working something like a mathematical equation. An individual adds some

elements from the majority culture while relinquishing aspects of his/her native culture. The end result of the adding and subtracting process is a sort of cultural hybrid in which the person has acquired the skills to more or less operate in two cultural worlds (Garrett, 1996).

However, this is not the conception of transculturation. Transculturation theory does not accept the notion that cultural exchanges necessarily leads to cultural loss. On the contrary, the reflective and rational individual is capable of selecting to retain tribal ways, views, and beliefs while learning the ways, views, and beliefs located with the mainstream-dominant culture. The point is, the transculturation process does not require the relinquishing of former cultural ways to make room for new ones as implied by the notion of biculturation.

Transculturation is an ongoing process of cultural encounters, emergent understandings, and resultant realignments (Sill, 1967). Like any form of socialization, the transculturation process never ceases. Therefore, in a cross-cultural experience, the transculturated individual does not achieve a bicultural, hybrid end-product. Rather, transculturation is analogous to a person on an international journey experiencing a variety of cultural encounters, some of which he/she can relate to, while other encounters the person cannot. At first, the disoriented traveler finds little with which to relate. This is the time of first awareness. Each cultural element needs to be tested and evaluated. In time, the traveler learns to relate to the new culture on its own terms. This does not mean, however, that the individual has surrendered his/her native cultural heritage.

When the individual returns to his/her native cultural environment, former ways have not been lost. Experience and skills are certainly broadened but not at the expense of native knowledge and skills (as implied in biculturalism). An international sojourner typically returns with a widened cultural perspective and worldview. The individual, nevertheless, is still the cultural product of his/her society. This is the notion of transculturation.

Maurice Sill (1967) applied the concept of transculturation to the cross-cultural experiences of Peace Corps workers in India and Pakistan. Sill reported that middle-class Americans engaged in two-year Peace Corps service undergo a transformation in their cross-cultural abilities. To be a successful village-level volunteer required the Peace Corps worker to learn, incorporate, and employ the norms, values, and perspectives of the host people. However, in the process the volunteer did not forego his/her former cultural identity and ways. Rather, Sill argued the Peace Corps experience resulted in the broadening of the volunteers' cultural abilities and skills.

When the cross-cultural experience involves members of co-cultures within a larger society, the same transculturation process can occur. Here too, journeys into the mainstream-dominant culture can result in an expanded worldview. The important point is that the native cultural heritage remains intact; however, new options emerge. Among Native Americans, there is even evidence to suggest such journeys into the mainstream-dominant educational institution frequently results in an enriched appreciation of their tribal heritage (Huffman, 2008b; Huffman & Ferguson, 2007).

Transculturation is a process of exploring evermore deeply into a cultural context, testing out another culture, realigning with what is learned, and transitioning into additional discovery. Therefore, it is also a journey into one's own culture. Each new discovery about a novel culture leads to a revelation about the complexities of one's own cultural milieu. The notion of transculturation conceives a person as a social actor who is learning how to learn a new and old culture in a continual lifelong process.

The difference in the use of transculturation and biculturalism is more than a mere matter of semantics. It is a matter of important theoretical and practical implications. The concept of transculturation reduces the subtlety of assimilation frequently disguised in common usages of biculturalism. Further, the use of transculturation attempts to give recognition to the resilience, integrity, and strength of tribal peoples. If middle-class Peace Corps workers can become transculturated (and by implication retain their native identity and heritage while enriching their cultural repertoire), then there is no reason to believe the same phenomenon cannot occur for those possessing a unique culture operating within the mainstream-dominant culture of the United States. Put bluntly, if middle-class Americans engaged in the Peace Corps service can experience a transculturation transformation in their cultural orientation (resulting in broadening and not lessening cultural skills), then it is just as easy to conceive of a similar process occurring in the lives of Native Americans enrolled in mainstream-dominant educational institutions.

However, the transculturation process is hardly easy. Indeed, research has provided evidence on the extreme complexity and difficulty associated with the process of transculturation for many Native students (Davis, 1992; Glatzmaier, Myers & Bordogna, 2000). As I related earlier, over a five year period, I engaged 69 American Indian college students in personal interviews on their higher educational experiences (Huffman, 2001, 2008a). A significant number of individuals closely aligned with tribal values and worldviews (especially those from reservation communities) left the university well before graduation. Indeed, many departed within weeks of entering college. However, a significant number persisted and ultimately were academically successful.

Significantly, these same individuals also continued to embrace traditional tribal cultural ways and beliefs. Biculturation does not adequately explain their experiences. After seriously difficult personal, social, academic, and cultural struggles, these students persisted. The key, however, was that they drew strength and purpose from their tribal identity and heritage. These individuals did not become less Native American in their cultural orientation. Rather, many of them actually became more closely aligned to the tribal traditions, history and language of their people. In so doing they discovered ways to effectively function in the mainstream-dominant cultural environment of the university.

Assumption #2: A Strong Tribal Identity is Fundamental to the Transculturation Process

Tribal identity for Native youth is especially critical as it serves to personalize an individual's ethnicity and locates him/her socially, culturally, emotionally, and perhaps even spiritually. For a Native young person it is hard to conceive of any aspect of the maturation process more powerful than the development of one's very identity (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Stiffman, Brown, Freedenthal, House, Ostmann & Yu, 2007; Werito, 2013).

The development of a tribal identity for Native youth can be enormously complex. Native youth are increasingly required to locate their identities in a local-tribal context, a national context, as well as part of Indigenous peoples of the world and, thus, a global context. In fact, Markstrom (2010) asserts tribal identity must be understood as forming and operating within at least three conceptual levels: the local level, national level, and global level. She argues that any conceptualization of tribal identity which ignores the intricate emotional, social, cultural, political complexity which contextualizes its development is seriously misguided. As such, she identifies three salient levels that provide a framework of understanding tribal identity development among today's Native American adolescents:

> The local level...encompasses, in part, knowledge and understanding of one's group, experience, actions, and choices. The often neglected topic of historical and culturally embedded identity constructions specific to a group.... There are currently 564 federally recognized tribes and numerous other bands and tribes encompassing an array of languages and customs. Therefore, more general themes apparent across various cultures are addressed, but specific illustrations are interspersed to bring substance and specificity. In addition of identity formation at the local level, American Indian adolescents must negotiate the complexities of living in the broader and influential national context of U.S. society . . . Social contextual influences on identity also occur according to the less physically proximal global level.... [G]lobalization has contributed to growing indigenous rights and identity movements that bridge across first-peoples worldwide. Hence, the global level is centered on indigenous youth of the world. (2010, p. 520)

This complicated process may be filled with tremendously beneficial rewards and opportunities but it also froth with perplexing challenges. Indeed, Werito (2013) refers to the process by which Native youth must establish and maintain a tribal identity as "negotiating the multiple and contested terrain of identity" (p. 58). Regardless to its complexity, tribal identity is vital to the sense of security, emotional wellbeing, and healthy growth for Native youth. Research evidence demonstrates that a strong tribal identity is connected to positive self-esteem, feelings of belonging, a sense of purpose in life, and a lesser chance of substance use and abuse (Herman-Stahl, Spencer, Aaroe & Duncan, 2003; Huffman, 2011;

Kenyon & Carter, 2011; Kulis, Napoli & Marsiglia, 2002; Marsiglia, Kulis & Hecht, 2004). Moreover, a number of studies also report that the spirituality derived from one's tribal identity is an especially salient factor in preventing suicide attempts among Native American young people (Garoutte et al., 2003; Hill, 2009; Johnson & Tomren, 1999). Notable in this regard is the sense of community and a feeling of belonging associated with a strong tribal identity (Kenyon & Carter, 2011).

Transculturation theory asserts a strong tribal identity combined with a salient value system grounded in tribal worldviews and cultures provide the confidence necessary to navigate through mainstream-dominant educational institutions. For example, White Shield (2009) used transculturation theory to explore the higher educational experiences of eight tribally traditional Native American undergraduate and graduate women. She found four significant experiences shared by the women in her study. First, spirituality played a highly instrumental role in helping the women traverse the demands of higher education. Second, they used the tribal traditions and wisdom of their people as sources of inspiration and guidance. Third, the individuals found tremendous sustaining power in the traditional roles for women. Although those roles varied according to distinct tribal traditions, they, nevertheless, discovered a sense of purpose and commitment resulting from their Native womanhood. Fourth, strengths derived from their family was crucial to their educational success. Their academic accomplishments were not regarded as individual achievements but rather a success shared by the entire family.

White Shield's work demonstrates the critical importance of tribal strengths, specifically tribal identity, in the academic pursuits of the Native American women of her study. She documented specific ways in which tribal identity work to the advantage of Native individuals. In summarizing her findings, White Shield concludes:

> [T]he results of this study showed that the cultural and spiritual strengths of Native women completing a higher education experience were grounded in their sense of reliance on a power or power greater than themselves. These strengths manifested themselves in forms that were tribally congruent with Native value systems and definitions of reality. Utilization of these strengths was the core and primary means whereby the participants achieved their goals. Congruent with Huffman's transculturation theory, this sense of "Indianness" was not transferred into them by external sources, but was a result of self-discovery within a Native cultural context. Throughout the process of completing a higher educational experience, the participant's sense of purpose was a commitment to their Nations, their people, and their families. This sense of love for their people, and for their families enabled them to move beyond the "odds" and make the impossible possible. (2009, p. 62)

I too was able to document the powerful role a strong tribal identity performs in the higher educational experiences of many Native students. The results of the five year study on the cultural journeys of Native students clearly revealed a strong tribal identity was essential for success in college (Huffman, 2001; 2008a). This was especially the case for those with a tribally traditional orientation. What is particularly important is that virtually all of these students experienced extremely difficult introductions to college. Many struggled for years with bouts of cultural conflict, depression, academic difficulties, and a variety of personal hardships. Yet, a strong tribal identity assisted in finding a sense of purpose in their academic pursuits and proved critical in sustaining them through the demands of mainstream-dominant higher education. Certainly other factors, such as the strength derived from family, contributed to their persistence. Nevertheless, their tribal strengths in the form of values and worldview combined with a strong tribal identity provided the means for persistence and eventual college graduation.

As White Shield notes, transculturation is internally derived. It emerges within an individual and not a cultural transformation imposed by external forces. Essentially, the decision to use one's tribal identity as an anchor is a personal choice. My research with transculturated Native college students revealed that most students arrived a specific point in which they made a deliberate, personal choice to use their ethnicity to frame values and guide their behaviors. I referred to this point in their cultural journey as the "transculturated threshold" (Huffman, 2001, 2008a). This point of decision frequently came with a great deal of personal, social, and cultural anguish. Nevertheless, the transculturation threshold was crucial as it allowed the Native student to consciously and methodically use his/her tribal identity to engage and succeed in a mainstream-dominant educational setting. A strong tribal identity prevailed for them and proved to be a fundamental factor in the transculturation process. Thus, they became transculturated individuals equipped for complex cultural journeys.

Assumption #3: A Strong Tribal Identity Facilitates Academic Success

Transculturation theory rejects the notion that Native American students must undergo some form of cultural assimilation in order to succeed academically in mainstream-dominant education. Rather, many Native individuals successfully negotiate the rigors of an academic endeavor in a non-Native cultural setting. However, the crucial question is how is this possible? An important assumption found in this theoretical perspective is that a strong tribal identity plays a critical role in facilitating academic persistence and achievement.

A strong tribal identity serves as an emotional and cultural anchor. Individuals gain self-assuredness, self-worth, even a sense of purpose from their tribal ethnicity. By forging a strong tribal identity, individuals develop the confidence to explore a new culture and not be intimated by the mainstream-dominant surroundings. Essentially, a strong tribal identity allows individuals to understand who they are and why they are engaged in a mainstream-dominant education. Reflecting on the vital importance of Native American tribal identity and con-

sciousness, Horse (2005) argues, "Ultimately, identity as an American Indian is highly personal. It is a particular way one feels about oneself and one's experiences as an American Indian or tribal person. The principles or moral values that guide an individual's actions is that person's consciousness, and groups of people sharing common ethics can also be understood to have a collective consciousness" (p. 65).

Horse (2005) also contends that five important influences shape the tribal identity for Native American people. First is the degree of an individual's grounding in Native language and culture. Second is the validity of the person's American Indian genealogy. Third is the extent a person adheres to traditional Native general philosophy and worldview, most specifically those values emphasizing balance and spirituality. Fourth is an individual's self-concept as a Native person. The final influence is the enrollment in a tribe.

Research investigations over the last several decades provide ample evidence for the connection between a strong tribal identify and Native American educational achievement. Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben and LaFromboise (2001) explored a variety of factors associated with educational success among nearly 200 Native American children from three reservations located in the Upper Plains. These researchers found that identification with traditional culture is positively related to success in school. Similarly, Vadas (1995) reported the identification with tribal language, culture, and traditions is associated with a number of positive educational outcomes among a sample of Diné middle and high school students. Consistent with transculturation theory, Vadas concludes that a strong tribal identity likely enhances self-esteem and a sense of personal purpose.

Similar to these studies, using survey research with 240 urban Native American students, Powers (2006) too found an important link between positive educational outcomes and tribal identity. She examined the relationship between culturally based educational practices including efforts to affirm the tribal identity and heritage of Native students and educational outcomes. Powers found that culture-based educational programs are associated with the perception of a safe, secure school environment, greater parental involvement, and the perception of instructional quality. Summarizing her findings, Powers notes,

> The results of this study suggest that culture-based programs influence urban American Indian students' educational outcomes by enhancing those educational conditions that promote school success for all students…some American Indian students may benefit more than others from educational practices grounded in Native culture. Cultural programming was found to be more strongly associated with the school outcomes of students who most strongly identified with their Native culture. (2006, pp. 42-43)

However, the more compelling evidence on the importance of a strong tribal identity comes from research on the higher educational experiences of Native students. In the mid-1980s, Maurice Sill, Martin Brokenleg and I found that

strong identification with Native culture was associated with academic success among a sample of South Dakota Native American college students. At that time we reported:

> Success in college for Sioux students…seems to be related more to their cultural identity. The crucial contributing factor for the likelihood of college achievement for the Sioux students in this study is the retention of their traditional cultural identity and heritage. Indeed, it is likely that this factor is instrumental in facilitating a strong sense of personal self-identity and confidence in these students. Thus, traditional Sioux students seem to have a better chance for achievement in college than their non-traditional counterparts. (Huffman, Sill & Brokenleg, 1986, p. 37)

Schiller and Gaseoma (1993) also found the attachment to Native culture assists in achieving greater educational success among a sample of Native American college students. Significantly, the majority of individuals in their study reported serious cultural conflict while in college. However, the personal confidence and purpose derived from strong tribal identification served to provide effective strategies to remain in school and engage the collegiate setting.

In a quantitative study comparing Native American college students and white college students, Okagaki, Helling and Bingham (2009) reported a number of important findings. The centerpiece of this study is the relationship between attitudes toward ethnic identity and perceptions about education among the Native American participants. Notably, this suggests that a strong Native American tribal identity is associated with the view of the instrumental importance of education. Moreover, the researchers connect the results and theoretical implications of their study to transculturation theory. In so doing, these authors supply quantitative research support for the theory of transculturation's assumption that a strong tribal identity is vital to the persistence of Native students in mainstream-dominant educational institutions:

> [O]ur results appear to corroborate Huffman's (2001) findings that students who have a strong identification for their American Indian culture and an openness (but not assimilationist view) to the majority culture appear to have positive education related beliefs and experiences. Huffman (2001) termed such students transculturated as a result of their ability to interact simultaneously with two cultures and found this to be important to college persistence. The findings from our study appear to support Huffman's (2001) findings and suggest that students who believe that they can be true to their ethnic identity and draw strength from it while facing the challenges of campus life may be more likely to succeed in their academic pursuits than students who do not have a strong sense of bicultural efficacy. (Okagaki, Helling & Bingham, 2009, p. 172)

Conclusion

Transculturation theory asserts that a specific socialization process occurs for many tribally oriented Native students. This process of transculturation involves the use of a strong tribal identity to traverse the cultural challenges found in a mainstream-dominant educational setting. For many Native students this process requires a specific point, a transculturation threshold, in which they deliberately elect to use their tribal identity as a personal and cultural mooring.

Realizing the crucial importance of a strong tribal identity for Native Americans, a growing number of scholars and practitioners are working toward ways in which students can utilize their tribal strengths and tribal identity as a means to gain educational success. A good example of this is the Success Academy created as a joint effort by the Flandreau Indian School of Flandreau, South Dakota and South Dakota State University. Essentially Success Academy was designed to introduce Native students to the world of higher education. It held as a goal the preparation of, not some, but all its students for postsecondary education (Lee, 2013). But the initiative did not stop there. It also sought to educate the academy, in this case South Dakota State University, on the unique needs of Native students. A major focus of the effort included ways in which the university and its staff would reorient itself in order to honor and affirm the tribal identities of Native students. MaryJo Benton Lee of South Dakota State University, one of the primary founders of Success Academy, offers this description of the initiative, "What occurred through the birth of Success Academy was a reorganization of the culture of schooling at two institutions. What occurred was systematic change. At the Flandreau Indian School that has meant the adoption of a comprehensive school reform model aimed at preparing all students for postsecondary education. At South Dakota State University this reorganization has involved developing ways in which American Indian identity is affirmed, honored, and incorporated into the institution's culture" (Lee, 2013, p. 30).

According to Lee, the combined efforts of the Flandreau Indian School and South Dakota State University has met with impressive success. After twelve years of cooperation, the program could count among its accomplishments a greatly enhanced high school graduation rate, a general boost in high school academic achievement, increased number of students enrolling in college, building the capacity of South Dakota State University's effectiveness in serving Native American students, creating a more diverse university campus, and strengthening the Native American community at South Dakota State University. Lee also reports the effort served to affirm and honor Native American identity into all aspects of the university. She contends, "Programs like Success Academy are a way for the institution to rethink how best to work with American Indians. To succeed, Native students should not have to leave their identities parked outside the university gates. Rather the university needs to develop a broad range of programs, activities, events, and curricula that celebrate Indian ways of life" (2013, p. 155).

Not coincidentally, the mission and goals of Success Academy were informed in part by the premise and assumptions found in transculturation theory. Ap-

plications such as this are promising to say the least. Indeed, this theoretical perspective, established as a means to understand academic achievement among Native American students, ultimately may provide a way to regard educational success for other North American co-cultural groups as well.

Note

[1]This chapter includes some material previously found in my books *Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education* (AltaMira, 2010) and *Tribal Strengths and Native Education* (University of Massachusetts, 2018).

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