

YULI'S STORY: USING EDUCATIONAL  
POLICY TO ACHIEVE CULTURAL GENOCIDE

by

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## DEDICATION

To Yuli, the reason this was achieved.

Your desire for educational equality allowed this to come to fruition.

Thank you for being a motivating factor and exceptional human being.

I cannot wait until you publish a book detailing your life experiences.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey started with a desire to obtain my doctorate and the support of an entire community of family and friends. I must start with Charles, former colleague and pseudo-brother. I had mentioned my interest in earning a doctoral degree, but had no idea my focus. He looked at me, incredulously, and said, “You’re always talking about Native education. Why don’t you do that?” And so began a voyage into late nights, endless reading, gallons of hot calming tea, and ultimately, the absolute best educational endeavor I ever chose to pursue.

I am forever grateful to my husband, Robert, for reminding me to stay focused...even when I wanted to go tubing down the river (on multiple occasions) and the number of other distractions I so easily encounter. You are my love, strength and stability.

All a girl really wants to do is please her father. I honestly do not believe my dissertation would have been focused on Native American education had you not been a nomad at heart. Thank you, Dad, for being present, interested, and a sounding board.

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This voyage through stacks of articles, books I needed to read, and words I did not know existed would not have been as meaningful without Veena and Rachel. When I was ready to call it done, Veena, you made me stay the course. Rachel, when I was so aggravated I wanted to pull out my hair, you were the voice of reason...with cocktails, of course. Thank you ladies for making me a better human!

The Quechan Indian reservation was the place I felt most at home growing up. I had never lived in any one spot long enough to make connections. To all my high school friends, thank you for making Winterhaven, California my heart home. You mean the world to me and are the reason I am so passionate about the education of Native youth. Thank you, truly, for being a significant part of a place I consider home.

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materials to peruse. I am so grateful for our common passion and that I could make you proud with an impactful final product.

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Yuli's Story: Using Educational  
Policy to Achieve Cultural Genocide

Abstract

by Katrina Johnson Leon

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2016

All children residing in the United States have the right to a quality education. At least that is our collective expectation. Through the lived experience of Yuli, a Native American woman from the Southwest, you will discover, due to her birth on a remote reservation, she was not given the same access to education you or I would expect. On Yuli's reservation, the school system is managed by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). Rather than provide K-12 schooling, the BIE operates K-8 on her reservation and then Native youth who want to go to high school must move off-reservation.

This qualitative study focuses on Yuli's experience as she traversed the educational system offered to her in order to complete eighth grade, earn her high school diploma and be accepted to college. Her narrative gives insight into what she lost, personally and culturally, as a result of the operational delinquency of a United States of America government agency tasked with one duty, providing an adequate, quality

education to Indigenous youth across America. This study explores Yuli's story, educational inopportunity, and the cultural impact of leaving the reservation to attain an education.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	13
CHAPTER	
1. Yuli's Motivation.....	14
Understanding Indigenous History.....	15
Background of the study.....	17
Clear Divide Among Educational Systems.....	20
Purpose of the Study.....	21
Research Purpose.....	22
Significance of the Study.....	22
Theoretical Framework.....	24
Lived Experience Study.....	25
2. Review of Literature.....	26
Educational Systems Operated by the United States.....	26
Indigenous History and Legislation Enacted.....	29
Native American Boarding Schools.....	32
Traditional Native American Education.....	36
Indigenous Education Provided by the United States.....	37
Choosing a Framework.....	44
Narrative inquiry.....	45
Colonization through Educational Policy.....	47
Summary.....	51

3. Research Design and Methodology.....	53
Inequity.....	53
Yuli, the Game Changer.....	54
Putting the Pieces Together.....	56
Yuli.....	56
Data Collection.....	58
Data Analysis.....	59
Restrictions.....	63
My Role.....	64
Original Thoughts and Trust.....	65
Summary.....	66
4. In Pursuit of Education.....	68
From the Beginning.....	70
Elementary Education.....	77
Back on the Reservation.....	87
Off to High School.....	90
Adulthood and Guilt.....	101
5. Experiencing the Choice of Going Off-reservation.....	107
De-culturalization through Education.....	109
Cultural Genocide through Educational “Opportunity”.....	113
Language.....	115
Traditions and culture.....	118

	12
Aftermath of Boarding School.....	120
Accepting Native identity.....	120
Education.....	122
<i>Home</i> -lessness.....	123
Tribal disconnection.....	124
Policy Implications and Future Research Considerations.....	126
K-12 educational opportunities.....	127
Eighth to ninth grade transition.....	128
Cultural <i>home</i> -lessness.....	128
Off-reservation versus on-reservation.....	129
Conclusion.....	129
6. I Am Accountable.....	131
REFERENCES.....	138
APPENDICES	
A. CONSENT FORM.....	146
B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	148

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Educational System and Student Graduation Rates.....	38
2. Education and Family K-12.....	87
3. Secondary School Living Situation.....	96
4. Boarding School Attendance, Loss of Native Language.....	116
5. Boarding School Attendance, Traditional and Cultural Loss.....	119
6. Boarding School, Embracing Native Identity.....	121
7. Boarding School, Education.....	123
8. Boarding School, Tribal Disconnection.....	125

## Chapter 1: Yuli's Motivation

*“I hope that [this research] sets the trend where we're not accepting how it is, and we are working together to push for the same opportunities for our kids. I really want to do this for that reason. I'm not trying to change the world or anything. I want my kids, and my cousins' kids, and [tribal] kids to have a chance of getting a good education, because learning is really, really awesome.”*

Neither Yuli nor I would consider ourselves activists, but when we see a wrong we both have a desire to make it right, especially when it impacts children. Initially, when Yuli and I were corresponding, I was interested in why Native children would select to attend boarding school, leaving their families and reservations. Yuli quickly corrected me. Indigenous youth were “forced” to leave if a high school diploma was the aspiration. I was floored and embarrassed. What could she possibly mean by “forced?” That was history, or so I thought.

I had attended high school on a reservation, the Quechan Indian reservation to be exact. No, I am not Native American. It was a blended family situation. The Quechan Indian reservation had a preschool, elementary, middle school, high school, and alternative school. How could a first-world country not provide K-12 education on all reservations? There was an assumption on my part that all reservations, regardless of location, would have K-12 educational systems available to their local youth. I was wrong. This situation infuriated me. The United States of America was still forcing Native American youth into boarding schools? How could that be? I had to know more and that is when Yuli and I decided telling her lived experience was so critical. This

study was done not only for Yuli and her tribal family, but for every Indigenous child on a remote reservation who does not have the same opportunity for high school as the rest of our American children.

### **Understanding Indigenous History**

To adequately understand the enormity of the current lack of educational services provided to Indigenous children across the United States, it is necessary to review the history of interaction between Native populations and the United States government since the early 1800s. In this chapter you will read about forced relocation, boarding schools, and horrendous treatment of Native youth all in the name of assimilation. Sometimes, it is necessary to go back before going forward...only to realize, what you believed was in the past is still happening.

Citizens of the United States are blissfully unaware Indigenous children are forced to leave their families, tradition, and culture, by the United States government, in order to receive a high school education. This forced relocation to attend high school is resulting in cultural genocide in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. “From the early 1900s to the 1970s Alaska Natives were taken from rural communities that lacked either primary or secondary schools and sent to boarding schools run by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)” (Hirschberg, 2008, p. 5). Presently, on reservations throughout the United States, rural reservation Native youth are not provided with the option of attending secondary school at home. When choosing whether to attend secondary school these Indigenous children have to choose education over family and culture. Our Native tribal communities value family and tradition according to Sarche and Whitesell (2012):



In many Native communities, children grow up surrounded by strong extended kin networks. They participate in traditional ceremonies from birth through adolescence that provide a sense of belonging and identity within their families, communities, and culture (p.42).

Sending children away for school goes against American cultural values, but for Indigenous children, it is encouraged by the United States federal government through educational inopportunities. Native youth are educated away from family and tradition, losing Native language, loss of traditional knowledge and tribal connectivity resulting in cultural genocide. “Central to governmental attempts to assimilate Native people into the broader society were coordinated efforts to disrupt familiar and cultural ties by removing children from their homes and communities” (Sarche and Whitesell, 2012, p. 43), unfortunately this is presently occurring. An internal conflict develops between the desire to fulfill personal educational goals and culture when Native children are forced to choose between attending secondary school off-reservation or staying home with family.

Understanding how educational policy achieves cultural genocide, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, will hopefully encourage the Bureau of Indian Education to develop programs, and change policies to support Native American education on rural reservations. That is at least the ultimate goal of this study. Native rural reservation children deserve to have the same access to education as the rest of the country. There are “2,476,000 Native Americans [who] represent some 500 different tribes, each with its own unique culture, and 200 surviving languages” (Reyhner, 2006). The federal government continues to impact this historically marginalized population and “education has been used as the primary weapon in the white man’s arsenal toward changing Indian tribal cultures” (Chiago, 2001, p. 21).

**Background of the study.** The United States initially began educating Native Americans for the purpose of assimilation. Our government wanted Indigenous populations to be like European settlers in speech, clothing, occupation, and desires. In 1824, John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War for the War Department of the United States created the Office of Indian Affairs to manage all Native policies, including reservation creation and educational matters (American Indian Education Timeline, 2014). Children were taken from their families and reservations to boarding schools to learn English, vocational skills, and be stripped, ultimately, of their Native culture (Trafzer, Keller, and Sisquoc, 2006). The focus on Native education was strictly to Americanize them. “In the boarding schools, children were punished for speaking their Native languages, observing their cultural practices, or dressing in their traditional ways” (Sarche and Whitesell, 2012, p. 43). Native youth were taken, as young as five-years-old, and many students did not return to their homes until their teenage years (Trafzer, Keller, and Sisquoc, 2006). At the point these young Natives returned home they did not know their Native language, traditions, or familial expectations. Trafzer, Keller, and Sisquoc (2006) stated:

When these children went home, some Indians met them with anger, disgust, and disdain. According to some accounts, tribal members made fun of them for their lack of language skills, dress, ideas, deportment, religious beliefs, and outspoken behavior (p. 16).

The federal government took “on a mono-cultural thrust aimed at the destruction of one cultural entity and replacing it with another” (Woodcock and Alawiya, 2001, p. 811).

Essentially, the United States wanted to scrub Indigenous populations clean, the whiter the better and the best way to do it was through education.

Over the past 200 years, most on-reservation Native education has been determined by the federal government, specifically the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). Although the name of the BIE has changed a few times, its duty has remained the same. The primary responsibility of the BIE is to provide educational opportunities to Native youth. Unfortunately, depending on the size and location of the reservation, the education offered can be limited. On large reservations or those tribes who have better economic standing, education is initiated and organized by the individual tribe. Native students lacking a K-12 educational system on-reservation are required to move off-reservation in order to earn their high school diplomas. Hirshberg stated (2008) Native children “were taken from rural communities that lacked either primary or secondary schools and sent to boarding schools run by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)” (p. 5). This practice has not ended, students residing on some rural reservations, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are still required to move off-reservation in order to receive a high school education.

Before I go any further, I know there are probably some of you wondering why the United States government even has an agency managing and operating schools for sovereign nations. Please remember, most Native populations were removed from their original homelands and placed on land chosen by the United States government. “Somewhere between wardship and sovereignty lies the hope for self-determination” (Anderson, 1995, p. xv). The government took on a role of guardian, so to speak. So, even with the sovereign nation status, the United States is still responsible for educating our Native youth. The government and tribal communities prefer self-determination, but

some tribal nations are so small with little economic base, it would be challenging, if not impossible to be able to fund their own school systems.

The BIE educates Native youth, within the confines of the United States, and graduates only 50% of the children it serves. In 2003-2004 school year, “the national graduation rate for American Indian high school students was 49.3 percent” (National Indian Education Association, 2010, p. 3). According to the Bureau of Indian Education website, “In School Year 2011-2012, the 183 Bureau-funded elementary and secondary schools, located in 23 states, served approximately 41,051 Indian students” (January 29, 2015).

The federal government is failing a population who has been mistreated, underserved, and removed from their lands since Europeans immigrated to the Americas. Sarche and Whitesell (2012) commented, “Native children are born into communities shaped by a long history of government policies designed explicitly to disrupt tribal lands, cultural practices, language, and family relationships” (p. 43). Native American students, who live on-reservation, are the only group of students removed from their homes to attend school and their graduation rates are lower than any other marginalized group in the United States. There needs to be a concerted effort on the part of the BIE to offer an equal educational opportunity to rural reservation Native youth as that received by public school students and Department of Defense military dependents as “no other group has suffered the indignities of social malfeasance, as has the American Indian (Woodcock and Alawiye, 2001, p. 810). It is necessary to discover the experience of Native youth who choose to leave the reservation to pursue a secondary education and the resulting impact on language, culture, and traditions in the Indigenous community.

## **Clear Divide Among Educational Systems**

The United States government is responsible for three large educational systems. The public school system educates children across the nation serving approximately 50,000,000 students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), which is responsible for the education of active military dependents, is fairly efficient and provides K-12 educational opportunities in the areas where students reside, even overseas (Department of Defense Education Activity, 2014). The third educational system operated by the federal government is the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). Native American children residing on rural reservations within the confines of the United States are generally required to leave their families and reservations in order to complete secondary education because the BIE limits on-reservation schooling opportunities. As a result, it is imperative boarding schools exist as they are necessary for Native youth being provided education by the BIE, due to the lack of K-12 educational services available on rural reservations.

To show the disparities in educational options based on system, there are comparisons in student populations and graduation rates. There is not a lot of research on the strengths or deficiencies of the BIE. Out of the three systems the government operates or oversees, the BIE has the fewest children to service, yet Native students do not graduate from high school at the same rate as public school students or DoDEA military children. “Ninety-seven percent of DoDEA’s seniors graduated in SY 2011–2012” (DoDEA, 2012, p. 13). The estimated national four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for public high school students was 80 percent for school year

2011–12 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). According to Dropout Nation (2013):

A mere 50 percent of BIE eighth-graders in its original Class of 2011 were promoted to senior year of high school, according to a Dropout Nation analysis of data submitted by the operator to the U.S. Department of Education. [BIE officially reports a graduation rate of 59 percent for its 2011 graduating class, according to its annual performance report; the U.S. Department of Education reports an adjusted cohort graduation rate of 61 percent for BIE schools] (p. 1).

There are currently no reliable tracking mechanisms for a true graduation rate based on the methodology being utilized, especially for Native on-reservation youth. In order to be considered part of the graduation rate a student must enroll in ninth grade. Then, based on the cohort entering ninth grade, the state determines a graduation rate. The California Department of Education (2014) stated in a News Release, “The cohort dropout rate is calculated for high school students grades nine through twelve, although some students drop out as early as middle school” (para. 7). The United States Department of Education (2012) also uses the same method of calculating high school graduation rates. Not all rural reservations have high schools so some Native students choose not to continue their education if it requires moving away from their families. Thus, students who elect to stay home after eighth grade are never included in the graduation calculation which significantly reduces the 50% graduation rate statistic.

### **Purpose of the Study**

When I started this process, I was focused on researching why Native youth left the reservation to attend boarding school. It did not make sense to me. Why would Indigenous populations willingly leave their family, culture, and reservation to attend boarding school? Yuli was the one who informed me there were no other options for

some rural reservation Native youth. It was either drop out in eighth grade or leave the reservation and attend high school elsewhere. Ultimately, Yuli changed the direction of my research.

This study seeks to understand how Native youth, who move off-reservation to attain a high school diploma, experience this reality. After identifying how Native youth are impacted it will serve to inform BIE policy designers on the educational opportunities rural reservation tribal communities should be provided. A critical review must be made in order to improve rural reservation educational opportunities for Native youth, who continue to be marginalized and neglected by the federal government.

### **Research Purpose**

1. The purpose is to understand the cultural impact of educational policy from the experiences of one Native American woman's story.

### **Significance of the Study**

The United States has a duty and responsibility to provide equal education to all children in America. "Despite the growth of the Federal role in education, the Department never strayed far from what would become its official mission: to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The frustration is that there is a huge disparity between the educational opportunities Native American children receive compared to students not being serviced by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). It is vital to understand how Yuli experienced moving off-reservation in the pursuit of education to encourage the BIE to offer K-12 educational experiences to all rural reservation children. How is this policy of educational

inopportunity, on-reservation, impacting our Indigenous populations? “Native Americans are one of the smallest ethnic minorities of the United States population, and American Indian students are among the most underrepresented groups in academe” (Tierney, 1992, p. 1). Although Tierney’s remarks were in relation to college admission, his statement still holds true 20 years later relating to Indigenous education in general (Pewewardy, C., & Frey, B., 2004). Do inadequate educational offerings impacting a marginalized ethnic group make those decisions more acceptable?

Native youth continue to have limited access to educational opportunities. Policy designers should be able to support Native students to stay on-reservation, with their families, while completing their elementary and secondary schooling. Can you imagine being forced to leave your family to attend high school? Native American students are far less academically inclined to graduate from high school than the majority population. According to a study done by Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2010) fewer than 50% of Native students graduate each year. Yet, eighty percent of public school students nationwide graduate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). A large reason this statistic holds true is the United States government is not providing access on-reservation. Many Native youth drop out of high school because they missed their families or were not ready for the rigor of schools outside of the BIE system. The United States continues to marginalize the Indigenous populations by forcing children to leave home at 13 and 14-years-old in order to complete high school.

According to the White House Education website President Obama stated, “Because economic progress and educational achievement are inextricably linked, educating every American student to graduate from high school prepared for college and



for a career is a national imperative” (May 4, 2014). Yet, the BIE does not provide high school educational opportunities on-reservation for many rural Native communities, so how could it possibly be a national imperative? Frankly, no other population in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has or would be required or forced to send their children to relatives, family friends, or boarding schools to complete their K-12 education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Originally my framework was going to be Tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit), developed by Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, as I was focused on the lack of educational services offered by the Bureau of Indian Education. Since the study started as systems-focused and ended up concentrating on Yuli’s life experience in pursuit of education, specifically, I knew the framework had to be changed to narrative inquiry. So, although my framework is narrative inquiry, I will leave in much of the writing in relation to Tribal critical race theory because it is imperative to also recognize the way policy amplifies social inequities. TribalCrit informs my perspective, but is not used to analyze the data collected.

Narrative inquiry was developed by Michael Connelly and his former student, Jean Clandinin, to examine stories of experience (Chan & Ross, 2007). “Grounded in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology, it is a form of qualitative research that involves the gathering of narratives—written, oral, visual—focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences” (Trahar, 2009, p. 2). Essentially the whole purpose of narrative inquiry is to interpret the type of narrative provided. In this study, we will understand the interview with Yuli by discovering, through theme development, the meaning of her life experience.

## **Lived Experience Study**

This narrative study focuses on the lived experience of a Native woman who was forced to leave the reservation in pursuit of a high school education. Specifically, Yuli's personal story will highlight the necessity of providing K-12 educational opportunities on all reservations, regardless of the challenges the Bureau of Indian Education faces in doing so. The information gained from the study will enable educators and governmental policy designers to better support Native students whether they are attending school on or off reservation.

The following chapters will include information related to the Bureau of Indian Education, boarding schools, Native American history and legislation enacted by the federal government, in addition to a comparison of the three main educational systems operated by the United States government. This historical background will make clear the disparities of education provided to Indigenous children and the extent that federal educational policies continue to be detrimental to an already marginalized population, ultimately resulting in the cultural genocide of Indigenous populations throughout the United States. After the literature review will be a detailed description of the methods in which the study occurred.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) is responsible for the schools and educational development of Native American students on reservations throughout the United States. The purpose of this study is to determine how one Indigenous youth experienced life when her rural reservation school, operated by the BIE, did not provide a K-12 educational opportunity on-reservation. The significance of the study allows me to determine the magnitude educational opportunity, or inopportunity, impact tribal youth. Some Native American children have to attend school off-reservation when a K-8, or even a K-6, experience is the only option on-reservation. Using narrative inquiry as the theoretical framework, this researcher seeks to understand the lived experience of a Native American youth forced off-reservation to attend high school.

### **Educational Systems Operated by the United States**

The United States operates or has oversight over three main educational systems. The public school system throughout the United States is guided by policies and legislation from the United States Department of Education; however, “the federal role in education is limited. Because of the Tenth Amendment, most education policy is decided at the state and local levels” (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). This means that although the federal government can create policies regarding education, the state and local governments have the authority to more closely monitor and make mandates about educational procedures, expectations, and how funding is allocated.

The history of education in the United States is varied and interesting. According to the Freedom Trail (2014), the “Boston Latin School, founded on April 23, 1635, is the oldest public school in America. It offered free education to boys - rich or poor - while girls attended private schools at home.” Boston was also the birth of the first high school in 1820 (Education Bug, 2014). There has been significant increase in the number of schools from the 1600s to the present. According to Ed Data Express (2013), in 2011-2012, there were 99,791 public schools in the United States and 49,974,409 students impacted by legislative decisions made at the federal level. The public school attendance count includes students of Indigenous descent as many Native families reside off-reservation. Native American school attendance reflects they “are more likely (46%) to attend rural schools than are their non-Native peers, a majority of Native students live off-reservations and an increasing number attend schools in urban areas” (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010, p. 5).

The second system the United States government has oversight for is the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). These schools were established for military families around the world. Prior to World War II military personnel within the United States, had on-base schooling for their children. After World War II, the United States had military men and women all over the world (DoDEA 2, 2014). At first, the Army, Navy, and Air Force took responsibility for operating their own schools. It became necessary to add schools on all military sites, wherever they happened to be globally. “During the 1960s, worldwide enrollment averaged 160,000. In 1976, a Joint House-Senate Conference Committee Report informed the three military departments that the Department of Defense was taking over the operation of the military dependents’

schools” (DoDEA 2, 2014, para. 5). Although the number of military dependents requiring schooling has decreased significantly, there is still an extensive network of DoDEA schools worldwide. Presently, the DoDEA operates “181 accredited schools in 14 districts located in 12 foreign countries, 7 states, Guam, and Puerto Rico” (DoDEA, 2014, para. 2). The DoDEA serves 78,000 students and states:

The DoDEA instructional program provides a comprehensive prekindergarten through 12th grade curriculum that is dedicated to attaining highest student achievement for all students. Currently 100% of DoDEA schools are accredited and in good standing with their regional accrediting agency. Students consistently achieve high scores in the National Assessment of Educational Progress and above the national average on standardized assessments. Minority students have been especially successful, scoring at or near the highest in the nation in mathematics (DoDEA, 2014, para. 6).

Effectively, the DoDEA is recognized as a quality educational organization serving a large population of American children and function all over the world.

The third educational system operated by the federal government deals specifically with Native American children residing on or near American Indian reservations. “There are 566 federally recognized American Indian tribes and Alaska Natives in the United States” (U.S. Department of Interior, 2014). The “programs administered by either Tribes or Indian Affairs through the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) include an education system consisting of 183 schools and dormitories educating approximately 42,000 elementary and secondary students and 28 tribal colleges, universities, and post-secondary schools” (U.S Department of Interior 2, 2014). The Bureau of Indian Education is responsible for educating all Native American children residing on reservations having their educational needs managed by the BIE. There are some reservations operating their own educational systems in addition to other schools

managed by the BIE (Navajo Nation Department of Dine Education, 2016). As stated by Lomawaima & McCarty (2006) regarding marginalized populations,

Schooling has been an engine of standardization, not of parental choice and control, as powerful interests within the dominant society endeavor to fit diverse Americans for their assigned places within established economic and social hierarchies (p. 5).

Student achievement of Native students in “federal schools is lower than anywhere else. In public schools on reservations [student achievement] is higher than the federal schools” (National Conference of State Legislators, 2008, p. 18). To understand the manner in which education is handled on Indigenous reservations, it is necessary to review the Native American legislative history in the United States.

### **Indigenous History and Legislation Enacted by the United States**

The concept of westward expansionism motivated white settlers to move onto land being occupied by Native populations and very quickly the idea of land ownership became a focus at the highest levels of government. However, conceptually the idea of land ownership was unfamiliar to a people who lived as one with the land, not as an object to be controlled or possessed. Cobb (1992) discussed the way in which the federal government’s role in creating reservations completely changed the in American Indian policy. She stated,

The United States had previously dealt with American Indian tribes either by making treaties or waging war, both of which were based on their recognition of each tribe as a sovereign power. The reservation system did not merely represent a change in policy; it represented a fundamental change in the government’s perception of Indian peoples. No longer would the government view Indian tribes as independent nations. Now, policymakers chose to see tribes as wards of the government, colonized peoples, and constructed policy built on that belief, thus leveling a major blow to American Indian people (p.3).

For 200 years the United States has created policies and legislation impacting Indigenous people. These policies have influenced all aspects of Native American life.

In 1824, John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War for the War Department of the United States created the Office of Indian Affairs to manage all Native policies from land acquisition and reservation creation to educational matters (American Indian Education Timeline, 2014). However, not until 1829 did the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress officially approve the Office of Indian Affairs. The following year, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act authorizing the:

President to conduct treaties to exchange Native American land east of the Mississippi River for lands west of the river. As many as 100,000 Native Americans eventually relocated in the West as a result of this Indian Removal policy. In theory, relocation was supposed to be voluntary, but in practice great pressure was put on Native American leaders to sign removal treaties (Just the Beginning Foundation, 2014).

The first legislation specifically targeting Native American education was the Indian Civilization Act, enacted in 1819 by Congress (Trafzer, Keller, & Sisquoc, 2006, p.10). The goal of this legislation was to civilize and Christianize Indigenous people by instructing them in appropriate farming techniques, reading, writing, and mathematics (Trafzer et al., 2006). The government allowed missionaries and individuals with positive morals to operate schools for Native children. Many times these good-doers were receiving payments directly from treaty money designated by the United States government to be given to the tribes. Others had a single focus of spiritual transformation without thought to the culture and traditions of the tribes' children.

The United States government's assimilationist policy regarding Native American boarding schools were opened specifically to "kill the Indian in him, and save the man"

(History Matters, 2014, para. 1). Captain Richard Pratt founded the Carlisle boarding school in 1879 (History Matters, 2014). Captain Pratt believed youth could be retrained and become civilized, whereas there was not hope for the adults. “From the early 1900s to the 1970s Alaska Natives were taken from rural communities that lacked either primary or secondary schools and sent to boarding schools run by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)” (Hirschberg, 2008). In some cases, children as young as four-years-old were enrolled in boarding schools (Dawson, 2012). The official purpose of sending Native children to boarding schools was to Americanize them and provide vocational training while destroying the tribal community through loss of language, traditions, and cultural identity. “Replicating the ideology of familial power relations, federal agents assumed the powers of parents over Native wards and stripped Native parents of choice in schooling their own children” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 45).

Many policies and legislation have been passed, over many years, to support the education of Native American children being serviced by the Bureau of Indian Education. The Office of Indian Education (2014) posted on their website:

The No Child Left Behind Act amends the Indian education programs as Title VII, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This landmark in education reform embodies four key principles: stronger accountability for results; greater flexibility in the use of federal funds; more choices for parents of children from disadvantaged backgrounds; and an emphasis on research-based instruction that works.

Despite legislation and policies enacted to support the education of Native American children it has not been enough to increase the graduation rate or provide K-12 schooling on all reservations, particularly the underserved rural reservations.



## Native American Boarding Schools

In order to do justice to the true educational experience of indigenous populations in the United States, it is imperative to discuss boarding schools as part of their history in more depth. Throughout the history of interactions and colonization efforts with indigenous tribes by the federal government there have been many times when children were removed from tribal lands and taken to schools sponsored by the government due to “the view of Indians as insensible wards” who were “characterized as willful, dangerous children” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 46).

When Captain Richard Pratt opened the Carlisle boarding school (Dawson, 2012; History Matters, 2014) he “established the new School with the presumption that Native American Indians could only survive by total assimilation into ‘civilized’ white society” (Harding, 2001, p.7). Pratt’s boarding school was the first one in the United States, but soon after they were all over the country. In *To Remain an Indian*, Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) stated,

In the late 1800s, off-reservation boarding schools were seen as the ideal facility to Americanize Native individuals. Off-reservation boarding schools included Carlisle (Pennsylvania), Chilocco (Oklahoma), Genoa (Nebraska), Haskell (Kansas), Phoenix (Arizona), Salem (later known as Chemawa) (Oregon), and Sherman (California); the federal Indian school system also included on-reservation boarding schools and day schools.

By 1887 the federal government had developed over 200 boarding schools (Cameron, 2007). These federal Native American boarding schools have a history of limited educational options, horrific treatment, and indigenous cultural annihilation, but the experience each Native student had was personal and different (Adams, 1995; Cobb, 1992; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Trafzer et al., 2006).

There were many adjustments Native children had to make once enrolled in the boarding schools. Trafzer (2006) stated, “administrators forced children to change their names from their Indian languages to English, often allowing them to select from among several Judeo-Christian names for males and females” (p. 15). Then children were required to cut their hair off and remove traditional clothing for white people clothing. As relayed in *Boarding School Blues*,

this process of taking away the child’s outward appearance as an Indian person, a sad and humiliating process for many children who took pride in their unique clothing, material objects, and long hair- connections to their home communities. (Trafzer, Keller, & Sisuoc, 2006, p. 17).

This stripping away of their Native heritage continued throughout their enrollment at the federally funded boarding schools. Students were not allowed to speak their Native languages and if they did were often punished. “Forbidding the use of native languages was a standard practice at federally run Indian boarding schools throughout the nation and had been since their inception (Cobb, 1992, p. 79). Also, once students were provided uniforms, they were not allowed to wear their traditional clothing again or they would be disciplined. The boarding schools were much more structured and prison-like than the youth’s Native communities. Trafzer (2006) discussed the boarding school environment as “schools had high fences, sometimes surrounded by barbed wire, and each school had strict rules regarding the children’s personal freedom” (p. 19). Students were constantly disciplined by boarding school officials. It seemed everyone had the authority to punish students for any and every reason possible, including normal childhood behavior (Adams, 1995). Teachers ranged “from abusive and incompetent to sympathetic and well liked” (Dawson, 2012, p. 89). According to Trafzer (2006),

When students spoke their own languages, lied, used obscene language, fought, stole, destroyed property, acted stubbornly, or misbehaved, teachers, disciplinarians, matrons, and superintendents could inflict corporal punishment or imprison the child (p. 21).

Hirshberg (2008) recorded stories of Native youth who were whipped by older, bigger students at the direction of boarding school staff members. Other times students would be forced to do extra chores, carry a ladder for hours, wear girls' clothing (if a boy), or essentially put in a type of solitary confinement (Trafzer, 2006). Students were in an institution forcing them to become more Americanized through any means necessary while imparting vocational skills for use as adults. This mistreatment of Native children was apologized for in NW Education (2004):

In 2000, the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Kevin Gover, likened BIA's past treatment of western tribes to "ethnic cleansing." He offered a formal apology on behalf of his agency for pursuing an historic goal of "destroying all things Indian." "Worst of all," he remarked, "(the BIA) committed these acts against the children entrusted to its boarding schools, brutalizing them emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually." He promised it would never happen again (p. 3).

Mr. Gover's apology made no mention of the need to improve BIE schools on reservations or offer K-12 educational opportunities on rural reservations so Native youth would not lose their tribal and familial connectivity.

There were multiple purposes for the educational design of the Native boarding schools. Harding (2001) stated the goal of the schools was to prepare:

the Indian children for assimilation into white society, and this meant that they not only had to learn the English language, but had to be taught a marketable trade. To this end, the students' working day was divided between academic instruction and manual labor (p. 10).

Vocational skills were taught based on gender. Boys would learn farming, plumbing, carpentry, tailoring, blacksmithing, and other gender-specific vocations (Slivka, 2011).

The Native girls were taught dressmaking, cooking, nursing, laundry, and housekeeping (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Trafzer, 2006). The purpose was to prepare them for complete assimilation into the white culture.

When children returned to the tribal communities after being in boarding schools, they were often ostracized and “made fun of them for their lack of language skills, dress, ideas, deportment, religious beliefs, and outspoken behavior” (Trafzer, et al, 2006, p. 16). There was a disconnection between what they had learned at school and the knowledge necessary to live as a tribal member. Some children had completely lost their Native language skills. The boys, after returning to their tribal lands, did not know how to hunt or provide in a traditional way and, in some cases, did not know their Native dances, songs, or stories. Once Native graduates left the boarding schools the vocational training they received was insufficient for Native life and they had been trained for menial labor in the “White” society. “In 1928, the Meriam Report had excoriated the off-reservation boarding schools for inadequate training and menial “drudge” work masquerading as vocational training” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 67). Essentially, Native children were being trained for jobs that were found only at the lowest echelons of society. Some vocational training for girls included cooking meals for family, sewing clothes, and other basic domestic literacy skills (Cobb, 1992) for white families. The “training was designed to prevent Native economic competition in the American workforce, just as low-level academic training precluded aspirations to professional schools or careers” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 49). The federal government, through use of boarding schools, alienated Native youth from their tribes and families then provided vocations that encouraged the Indigenous population to be subservient to white individuals.

## **Traditional Native American Education**

Traditional indigenous education focuses on imparting knowledge through stories and practical life skills. Everything Indigenous youth are taught is from elder tribal members and range from literature and biology to dance and astronomy (Trafzer et al., 2006). By attending boarding school, indigenous children lost traditional knowledge. As for most cultures, “Language is more than words and rules of usage. It is the repository of culture and identity” (Cameron, 2004, p. 14).

Many tribes realized education was important and began managing and instructing their children. “During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Muskogees, and Seminoles developed their own schools, providing public education to their Native students” (Trafzer, et al, 2006, p. 9). In these tribal schools there was a focus on teaching the tribal language, art, traditions, dance, and songs of their people. Many Native communities continue to revive the indigenous languages that are slowly being lost. The Navajo Nation is especially competent at keeping their language alive as 97% tribal members speak the language (Navajo Relief Fund, 2016). Students who learn their Native language, in addition to English, do better academically.

“Longitudinal research indicates that students who begin literacy and academic instruction in their indigenous language, as they learn English, and then transfer into English do much better academically on English tests in the upper grades,” notes Williams. (Barton, 2004, p. 18).

In tribal communities revitalizing their Native languages teaching children is beneficial for multiple generations. As Indigenous youth learn their Native language they teach other family members (Barton, 2014). The other benefit to the community is some

students share traditional songs with tribal members reigniting the familial sense of community and culture.

### **Indigenous Education Provided by the United States**

There have been few attempts to undo wrongs being done to Native youth by not providing a K-12 education on-reservation. In 1972,

The Alaska Supreme Court remanded *Hootch v. Alaska State-Operated School System*, also known as the Molly Hootch case, for trial on the claim that that state's failure to provide local high schools in Native villages constituted a pattern and practice of racial discrimination. Plaintiffs showed how predominantly non-Native communities received high schools, while Native communities—even larger ones—were required to send their children to boarding schools or homes (Hirschberg, 2008, p. 6).

After the ruling, the Alaskan government opened K-12 school systems on-reservations throughout the state (Hirschberg, 2008). Unfortunately, the BIE has not been held to the same standard as Alaska was in the 1970s. In Arizona, during the 1970s and early 1980s, there was an effort by tribes who:

opted for contracting education, there was a movement in BIA controlled schools to allow parents and community members more involvement in the education of their children. School boards made up of parents were established. The school mission was set by the parents and Title VII and Chapter I programs in these schools began to hire more teacher/teacher aides who had fluency in local language (Hirst, 1987, p. 5).

It seems the United States government only provide a more equitable education for Indigenous youth when they are forced into it and the situation becomes public knowledge.

According to Jon Reyhner (2006) of Northern Arizona University, “In the 1990s, about 40,000 Native students (10% of the total) attended some 170 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) funded schools, about 10,000 (3%) attended private schools, and over

300,000 (87%) attended public schools.” However, now there are closer to 42,000 students who attend 183 schools operated by the BIE who do not receive the same educational benefits of public school children as there is no current mandate to provide a K-12 high school experience on-reservation (National Indian Education Association, 2010, p. 3).

To clearly demonstrate the manner in which the Bureau of Indian Education is not performing to the same level as the other federally operated educational systems, please review Table 3.1. All of the data in the table has been provided in research gathered to detail the disparities in educational opportunity per system.

Table 3.1

<i>Educational System and Student Graduation Rates</i>			
	<u>DoDEA</u>	<u>BIE</u>	<u>U.S. Public Schools</u>
Population Served	Children of military personnel serving in the United States or abroad.	Native American students attending schools operated by the BIE.	Any student enrolled in a public school throughout the United States, excludes BIE and DoDEA.
Number of Students	78,000 <sup>d</sup>	42,000 <sup>b</sup>	49,974,409 <sup>c</sup>
Number of Schools	181 <sup>d</sup>	183 <sup>a</sup>	99,791 <sup>c</sup>
Foreign Countries	12 <sup>d</sup>	0	0
States	50	23 <sup>a</sup>	50
Territories	2 <sup>d</sup>	0	0
Graduation Rate	95% <sup>d</sup>	50% <sup>e</sup>	78.2% <sup>f</sup>

Source. Adapted from <sup>a</sup>National Indian Education Association, 2010, p. 3. <sup>b</sup>U.S Department of Interior 2, 2014. <sup>c</sup>Ed Data Express 2013. <sup>d</sup>DoDEA, 2014, para. 2. <sup>e</sup>National Indian Education Association, 2010, p. 3. <sup>f</sup>National Center for Education Statistics, 2014.

Comparing the three educational systems in Table 3.1 makes it extremely clear which organization appears to offer the better education. There are varying graduation requirements for each system, just as there are different graduation requirements per state. However, by just reviewing graduation statistics, the DoDEA is the most equipped to educate youth, as they are able to graduate 95% of the senior class. The DoDEA seems to be able to maintain its standards globally as it has schools in 12 foreign countries. Public schools, on the other hand, do not perform as well as the DoDEA. Yet, for serving 49 million students, the public school system graduates nearly 80% of the students it educates. The BIE serves 40,000 Native youth, within the confines of the United States and graduates only 50% of the children it serves. Essentially, the DoDEA with almost double the student population as the BIA and with schools in all 50 states and 14 foreign countries and territories provides an education which allows over 90% of their students to graduate. Yet, the BIA cannot provide the services to Native youth within the United States that is on par with the DoDEA.

There are many reasons Native students are not performing in the same way as children attending DoDEA and U.S. public schools. Rural reservations, served by the BIE, do not always provide a high school educational opportunity. There is the issue of students being away from home and the lack of familial support decreasing student success. Current research does not outline how the Bureau of Indian Education determines whether to provide K-12 on-reservation versus only operating K-8 on the rural reservations. When Hirshberg (2008) wrote about Alaskan educational atrocities, she stated:



Under the 1976 *Tobeluk v. Lind* consent decree the State of Alaska agreed to build a system of village high schools serving any community with eight or more students of high-school age (later changed to ten or more students). (p. 6)

The Bureau of Indian Education has no stated policy to determine how many students are required to open K-12 schools on-reservation to support students' educational pursuits.

Reservations across the United States are considered sovereign nations. Therefore, each nation or tribe has the choice to operate their own schools. Some tribes develop their own school systems, however others due to economic inability, depend on the BIE to fulfill the educational needs on-reservation. The Navajo Nation has its own school system, but also relies on public schools for some of the regions of the reservation that are close to small towns or cities. The Navajo Nation operates 245 schools on-reservation (Navajo Nation Department of Dine Education, 2016) which is more than the BIE and DoDEA manage, respectively. Other tribes choose to build dormitories in cities or large towns so their children can attend public schools, but maintain a sense of tradition and culture in the dormitory environment with Native house parents (Chickasaw Nation, 2016). Chickasaw Nation uses a "dormitory approach to housing students, this facility uses cottage-style housing. Each cottage houses approximately eight students and two house parents who provide guidance, support and direction" (Chickasaw Nation, 2016). These Native youth go home during breaks and summer while maintaining cultural connectivity during the school year. Still other reservations are so close in proximity to public schools, they send their children to the local public school. Ultimately, the geographical location of a reservation has a large part in how Native youth are educated and by which system, impacting the quality of the education students receive.

Those Indigenous youth who attend BIE schools have many complaints about the horrific school learning environments (Trafzer et al., 2006). Some schools are more like sheds and have rats running throughout the classrooms and these are new concerns, not from boarding school historical archives. In an article, *Separate and Unequal: Indian Schools, a Nation's Neglect*, written and published in the Star Tribune (2014) brought to light some of the disparities in schools:

Barta's classroom is housed in a rodent-infested building with a shockingly long list of problems: a roof that caves in under heavy snowfall, a failing heating system that has many students wearing coats and blankets in class as soon as the weather turns and a sewer system that backs up during extreme cold — all adding to the discomforts and indignities of an aging, metal “pole barn” that has to be evacuated when wind gusts top 40 miles per hour.

Across the United States there are schools, public and otherwise, in similar disrepair, however, many are not at the same level of need as the schools Native Americans attend. In a list of concerns from *Findings and Recommendations Prepared by the Bureau of Indian Education Study Group Submitted to the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior and Education*, a study requested by the Department of the Interior, the first concern was that “many school facilities are in poor and failing condition and not conducive to a 21st Century teaching and learning environment” (2014).

Infrastructure is a huge component of BIE school improvement. In addition to schools being overrun with rodents, roofs falling in, and general disrepair there is a need for technology. According to the National Indian Education Association (2008),

Of the 4,495 education buildings in the BIA inventory, half are more than 30 years old and more than 20% are older than fifty years. On average, BIE education buildings are 60 years old; while 40 years is the average age for public schools serving the general population. 65% of BIE school administrators report the physical condition of one or more school buildings as inadequate. Although education construction has improved a bit over the last few years, the deferred

maintenance backlog is still estimated to be over \$500 million and increases annually by \$56.5 million. As noted by the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee in its Committee Report accompanying the FY 2006 Interior appropriations bill, "much remains to be done." Of the 184 BIE schools, 1/3 of the schools are in poor condition and in need of either replacement or substantial repair (p. 8).

Throughout the United States, technology is used in and out of the classroom. State mandated testing is now computer based. *Findings and Recommendations Prepared by the Bureau of Indian Education Study Group Submitted to the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior and Education* written in 2014, detailed issues with mandated testing and technology,

Principals and teachers feel unprepared for implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and schools lack the information technology (IT) infrastructure to administer cutting-edge assessments aligned with the CCSS (p.8).

Students must have access to technology for new testing requirements, regardless of educational system. Yet, students attending BIE schools are at an increased disadvantage. Requiring schools to administer the Smarter Balanced standardized and computerized tests, Common Core State Standards tests, means Native youth, on rural reservations, need access to technology and that is a huge issue (same could be said for some public schools). According to a study done by the Department of Interior (2014), "60 percent of BIE-funded schools do not have the bandwidth or computers to administer a test 3-5 times annually (as proposed by Smarter Balanced)" (p.22). Essentially, the government is demanding schools test students, but is not providing BIE Native students with the tools necessary to be successful.

As suggested by the DOI (2014) study findings:

the technology infrastructures within the schools need improvements across the board. New wiring, switches, routers, wireless access devices, and more need to be purchased so schools have well-functioning networks. Lastly, teachers need professional development so they can effectively use the new tools and technology. (p. 22)

To further compound the problem, on some reservations access to electricity is unpredictable. The more remote the tribal lands, the more challenging it is to have a continuous flow of electrical power. There needs to be more of an effort and true belief that Native American youth, on rural reservations, deserve the same educational opportunities as provided to urban children attending schools with technology, pest free classrooms, safe buildings and the same educational offerings. *The Findings and Recommendations Prepared by the Bureau of Indian Education Study Group Submitted to the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior and Education* (2014) discussed the failings of the BIE schools in the following statement,

Although the Federal assimilation policy ended several decades ago, BIE schools – still funded and many still operated by the U.S. Government – have produced generations of American Indians who are poorly educated and unable to compete for jobs, and who have been separated for years from their tribal communities (p. 1).

In America, our Indigenous youth deserve access to an education equal to that of the DoDEA students. Neither the United States public school system nor the Department of Defense Education Activity schools require American youth to move away from home to attend high school. If the DoDEA can provide schooling for military children around the world, there are no excuses for not providing the same for Native American children. *The Findings and Recommendations Prepared by the Bureau of Indian Education Study Group Submitted to the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior and Education* (2014) document clearly detailed the difference between the DoDEA and the BIE:

Student outcomes in the two sets of schools funded by the Federal Government – the BIE and Department of Defense Educational Activity (DODEA) – are dramatically different. For instance, in 2009, DODEA 4th graders outscored their BIE counterparts by 33 points in math and by 47 points in reading on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). The DODEA 8th graders outscored BIE 8th graders by 39 points in math and 43 points in reading (p. 5).

Basically, the DoDEA is doing a fantastic job educating their military youth. In both reading and math DoDEA students are outperforming BIA Indigenous children by 33 to 47 points. A quality education provided by the United States federal government must be accessible to all students, regardless of ethnicity or geographic location.

President Obama on the White House Education website wrote, “Because economic progress and educational achievement are inextricably linked, educating every American student to graduate from high school prepared for college and for a career is a national imperative” (May 4, 2014). Unfortunately, if educational opportunities depend on policies of the Bureau of Indian Education and you happen to be a Native American child, the opportunity to be college and career ready at the end of high school are severely diminished.

### **Choosing a Framework**

When I started this study I intended to use tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit) as the theoretical framework. I was focused on the lack of educational opportunities offered on rural reservations and felt tribal critical race theory would be the ideal choice. TribalCrit recognizes that both racism and colonization are endemic to the American culture and hugely impact the policies developed by the federal government in relation to Indigenous people.

As the Iroquois, the Shawnee, and the Arapaho would eventually all discover...  
The white threat to Indians came in many forms: smallpox, missionaries,

Conestoga wagons, barbed wire, and smoking locomotives. And in the end, it came in the form of schools (Adams, 1995, p. 5).

Brayboy stated, “the basic tenet of TribalCrit emphasizes that colonization is endemic to society” (2005, p. 5). Daniels (2011) discussed how TribalCrit and education intersect and commented, “Native people have survived despite tremendous societal and governmental pressures, and the TribalCrit framework could be used to reveal both the subtle and blatant injustices that have happened and continue to occur” (p.7). TribalCrit would have been the perfect framework if Yuli had not changed the course of the research with such articulation, humbleness, and clarity.

**Narrative inquiry.** Yuli’s interview and the content she shared clearly determined the theoretical framework most fitting was narrative inquiry. Yuli did not speak to the structure or lack of services provided by BIE, she shared her life story as it related to her education. Clandinin and Connelly explained narrative inquiry in the following way,

Narrative inquiry is increasingly used in studies of educational experience. It has a long intellectual history both in and out of education. The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world (1990, p. 2).

Yuli was extremely forthcoming in her interview. She shared stories of her youth, thoughts, her hopes, and how she was impacted by moving off-reservation for high school. “People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477).

I am using narrative to make sense of Yuli’s story as “this (re)conceptualization of human beings as narrators and of their products as texts to be interpreted constitutes a

potentially critical moment” (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 161). As natural storytellers we can each share our life experiences and discover what our stories mean through interpretation and theme discovery. The narrator is “socially positioned to tell stories at given biographical and historical moments and under the influence of prevailing cultural conventions surrounding storytelling, the social context of narration” (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 162). Narrative inquiry allows Yuli to tell her life experience, in a manner comfortable to her, whether by sharing a story or explaining a situation or thought process. By doing this we are able to make sense of Yuli’s story, her educational pursuits, and the cultural disconnect as a result. We often understand and assign meaning to events retrospectively and memory is generally always selective (Polkinghorne, 1995; Trahar, 2009). By interviewing an individual and carefully listening, a researcher can ask clarifying questions to delve deeper in order to gain a better understanding of the situation or memory. This allows for a reflection for the narrator as well.

Two additional components of narrative inquiry is the idea of negotiated entry and the process of collaboration (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Although my Native connects assisted in negotiating entry and establishing contact with Yuli, the research ultimately depended on the two of us developing as partners. Each needing the other to complete the project or finish the story. By building this relationship, Yuli and I were able to empower one another through the sharing of the research process and her story needing to be told.

Narrative inquiry encourages the practice of collaboration,

involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds. In the process of beginning to live the shared story of narrative inquiry, the researcher needs to be aware of constructing a relationship in which both voices are heard. The above description emphasizes the importance of the mutual construction of the research relationship, a relationship in which both practitioners and

researchers feel cared for and have a voice with which to tell their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4).

Throughout the writing process, I often asked Yuli for clarification, or additional information. I felt compelled to provide an accurate account of Yuli's story and to alleviate any concerns about my possible motives for choosing this research topic. Ultimately, our common goal of improving the educational opportunities for Indigenous youth on remote reservations kept us moving forward and accountable to one another.

As it was necessary to switch from tribal critical race theory to narrative inquiry as I wanted an appropriate framework to make sense of the research, I feel it is equally important you understand how legislative and agency policy supports the continued marginalization of Native populations. In the following section, I highlight some tenets of TribalCrit.

### **Colonization through Educational Policy**

Colonization became a goal of the United States once it formed into 13 sovereign states (Adams, 1995). Unfortunately, the efforts of the United States federal government, in relation to education, continue to act as if colonization and assimilation is still the goal. According to Kitchen (2010), when referring to tenets of TribalCrit, "Such colonization means that Western knowledge and power structures are predominant and lead to the dismissal of Indigenous ways of knowing and living" (p. 3). This is exactly what is occurring when Native youth are forced off-reservation for school. The obvious disregard for Native American culture, traditions, and language are resulting in cultural genocide. The Indigenous peoples of the United States were here long before the Europeans, yet the United States government placed Native Americans on reservations in order to take land



from Native tribes and organize educational systems to civilize the youth (Adams, 1995; Lomawaima & McCarty 2006). Sadly, the BIE system is doing the same thing it was doing 150 years ago, which is assimilating as many Native youth as possible. A Sahnish and Hidatsa scholar, Michael Yellow Bird (2005), when speaking about the colonization in American educational systems, stated:

The U.S. educational system has been one of the most hostile and oppressive aspects of colonialism...Colonized-based educational systems contributed significantly to the destruction of cultural knowledge, and the imposition of the belief that Indigenous Peoples and their knowledge and ideas were—and remain—less than those of mainstream peoples (p. 16).

The United States has never stopped trying to colonize Indigenous peoples and furthermore have never recognized the benefit of their knowledge and teaching.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorized the government to create American Indian reservations throughout the United States (Trafzer et al., 2006). Specifically, “The Act authorized the president to negotiate with tribes to trade their land in the east for land west of the Mississippi River and appropriated \$500,000 to help tribes move west” (Carlson & Roberts, 2006, p. 487). Although the United States fought for independence from Great Britain they turned around and placed Natives on reservations in order to control and take land that benefitted the white population (Adams, 1995). Critical race theory would determine this behavior to separate and dominate was based on racism. TribalCrit theory considers the creation of policies of this type a clear indication to control and assimilate the Native population into the European ways of life. “TribalCrit can inform understandings of Aboriginal education by elaborating and legitimizing theory based on Aboriginal experiences and contributing to social change by addressing problems faced in communities” (Kitchen et al., 2010, p. 3).

The fifth tenet of Brayboy's (2006) Tribal Critical Race Theory is "The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on a new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens" (p. 430). The Indigenous populations in the United States believe knowledge is gained through stories, activity, song, and participation in daily life (McIntosh et al., 2011). For the Anishinabe Indians, education was to enhance strength, gender and age based, to prepare future leaders, and according to clan or rank (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). For instance, girls learned how to raise children, and how take care of their future husbands (Cobb, 1992). Boys received instruction by women in the early years and then were sent to older males for hunting and strength training (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). The disparity occurs when reviewing what each culture deems important. Native Americans regard family, tradition, and livelihood as the most important to their posterity (Adams, 1995; Cobb, 1992). McIntosh (2014) commented, "Traditional Indigenous education focuses on the community as a whole and is based on the assumption that individual learning is inextricably linked to communal well-being" (p. 239). The American government placed importance on land ownership, natural resources, religious reeducation, and cultural assimilation. Adams (1995) shared the difference between the two cultures, by stating, "whereas a Protestant American measured an individual's worth by his capacity to accumulate wealth, an Indian did so by what he gave away" (p. 22). In a study by Conn (2013) of a Navajo public school she came to the conclusion, regarding colonialism, while using Brayboy's TribalCrit framework, "Students and school personnel either assimilate to the educational values of national and state standards, or they face penalties and public scrutiny" (p. 13).

Brayboy's (2006) sixth tenet, "Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation" (p. 430). The Bureau of Indian Education is responsible for educating 40,000 Native children still residing on reservations, particularly the rural reservations where public schools do not exist. Yet, the policies that have been enacted do not fully support the educational needs of Native students on rural reservations. In *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, regarding public schools, racially segregated schools are inherently unequal (Logan, 2012). As demonstrated by some schools operated by the BIE that do not offer a high school experience on-reservation. Students must leave the reservation in order to earn a high school diploma. The idea that Native teenagers have to leave the reservation to attend high school at a Native boarding school, stay with friends or family and attend a public school, or forego high school altogether supports Brayboy's sixth tenet discussing the goal of assimilation by the United States government. By removing or forcing relocation for educational purposes, BIE policies impact Native children and still support assimilationist motives. Some Native American elders agree that the white man's education must be learned. In an article written by Kirk Johnson (2008) a chief of the Crow Indian tribe, Plenty Coups, stated, "Education would be the way of the future, he said — a choice to be either the "the white man's victim" or "the white man's equal." Recognizing however, it is incumbent upon the BIE servicing the Native children that the education provided must be equally rigorous and relevant to other federal systems and Indigenous youth should not have to leave the reservation to attain secondary schooling.

## Summary

Native American children residing on rural reservations and attending schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Education are not being afforded the same opportunities as American children throughout the United States attending public or DoDEA schools. This lack of opportunity creates clear educational disadvantages for Native youth attending BIE schools on-reservation. Students must move away from family and the reservation due to educational inopportunity. Narrative inquiry was selected for this study, however Tribal Crit was also reviewed. History has shown an obvious mistreatment of Indigenous populations since Europeans arrived. The colonization and assimilation efforts of Native Americans have not gone away, only become less observable. The United States continues to ignore sovereign nation status by making decisions about reservation land, bypassing common courtesy and simple communication about Native American concerns and ultimately continuing to marginalize a people who were here long before Europeans. Unless you are Native American from a rural reservation or have a connection, most Americans are unaware at the extent to which colonization through education is still occurring. If the DoDEA can properly educate and provide services for military children around the United States and world, the BIA has no excuse to not provide equally sufficient educational services within the confines of the United States boundaries.

The lack of immediate response to infrastructure and educational quality is hugely concerning and directly impacting Indigenous youth. The United States pours billions of dollars educating military children and public school children. Our Native youth are very much a part of who we are as a nation, but are continuously overlooked and undervalued.

It is the purpose of the study to understand the lived experience of individual Indigenous youth when children experience moving off-reservation in pursuit of a high school education.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

In Chapter Two I reviewed literature related to the three educational systems in the United States. Specifically, I focused on the number of students in each system, the graduation rates, and the disparity of student success compared to educational access. I wanted you to understand that despite strides the United States has made in relation to Indigenous communities there is still an enormous amount of inequity. There was also an overview of Native American history and the legislation enacted by the federal government impacting Native lands, education, and citizenship. Throughout the history of interaction and colonization efforts with indigenous tribes, there has been an effort to Americanize Native populations. This history was necessary to share so you would understand that as much as we have grown as a nation...some things do not change, or at least very much. As a result of the effort to whitewash Native peoples, boarding schools were developed and are still operated by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). This chapter explains the methodology, design, participant, data collection, and data analysis. In addition, assumptions and study limitations will be discussed.

#### **Inequity**

This study seeks to understand the experience of an Indigenous person from the experiences of one woman's story. Present BIE policies are designed requiring Native youth to move off rural reservations to attend high school. A critical review must be made in order to improve rural reservation educational opportunities for Native youth,

who continue to be marginalized and neglected, and ultimately assimilated by the white culture, when required to move off-reservation for school by the federal government. The impact of educational policy and inopportunities support cultural genocide as detailed from the experiences of Yuli, a Native American woman who knows well the damage moving off-reservation can cause.

### **Yuli, the Game Changer**

The study that is, is not the study I started out wanting to pursue. Initially, I was focused on the lack of services offered by the BIE. I wanted to hold the system accountable for doing less than they, in my opinion, are responsible. I had planned on interviewing BIE employees, including on-reservation site administrators to make sense of why they were not providing a K-12 learning environment. However, two things happened to change the course of the study. First, I realized how extremely challenging it would be to get *any* paid government employee to participate in this study and I was introduced to Yuli. She was the game changer. Once Yuli and I started corresponding I still felt like it was important to understand why the BIE did or did not do what I would expect of a governmental agency responsible for the education of an entire population. But, then Yuli and I sat down for an interview and the decision was made, this study would not be about the BIE, it had to be all about Yuli.

In order to effectively capture Yuli's story, a qualitative study was the only way to do justice to her life experience. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research "begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of the individual" (p. 70). The participant, Yuli, had a voice that clearly represented her views and experiences. Just as Creswell (2013) explained his thoughts on qualitative research,

as an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material. This fabric is not explained easily or simply. Like the loom on which fabric is woven, general assumptions and interpretive frameworks hold qualitative research together (p. 42).

This explanation made me think of the different dresses Yuli wears during her bird dancing competitions. The red, black, and white fabric throughout each dress and then the beaded shawl, in the same colors, draping her shoulders. Diamond patterns always present no matter which dress she chooses to wear. Each color, pattern, shawl design cannot exist by itself. It has to be formed into one traditional dress. Qualitative research allows for the separate pieces and colors to be woven together in many different ways. This flexibility allows for different patterns, interpretations, within the confines of a dress or qualitative design.

This qualitative study was also done with the purpose of empowering Indigenous populations in relation to educational opportunity. Yuli wanted to share her story for the sole purpose of encouraging improved on-reservation education through the BIE. Creswell shared, “We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices” (2013, p. 48). It was absolutely crucial that Yuli’s voice was heard loud and clear. Her experience requests the BIE to reconsider how they operate and the way in which education is offered on-reservation.

Creswell (2013) highlights the characteristics of narrative research thoroughly. There are eight sections and each align perfectly with this study. I am exploring the life of Yuli, she is telling her story, I am primarily using an interview as data collection resulting in data analysis, and a written report.



Once it made sense to use narrative research, I selected the biographical narrative study approach to inquiry. I was very interested in the life story of Yuli, who moved off-reservation to attend and graduate from high school. It was important to better understand, from Yuli, how the lack of high school on-reservation impacted her personally and culturally since this study was a biographical narrative study (Creswell, 2013). The key to narrative is to focus on the individual story, life experience, and what is being presented. “Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, offers researchers a way to think about and share experience” (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008, p. 19). The desire was to share Yuli’s story and determine the extent of her cultural disconnection as well as to discover how the policy of not providing K-12 on all reservations results in cultural genocide.

### **Putting the Pieces Together**

Research methods can be defined as the ways of conducting research that can involve interviews, surveys, or observation. Using my dress analogy from above, the research methods are each of the different colors of the material used to make the dress, as well as the larger sections that complete the traditional dresses, which would be the combining of the dress with the shawl. This narrative study focused on the Yuli’s story of educational inopportunity resulting forced relocation to attend high school and her related life experience. Yuli is a former BIE student and was interviewed in a location most comfortable for her, which could have included her home, a library, or other quiet public facility, but ended up being next to a river in Needles, California.

**Yuli.** Yuli was selected based on her enrollment in Bureau of Indian Education schools and the condition that she had to move off-reservation in order to attend high

school. She was the only participant interviewed for this biographical study. While describing sample and method of selection Creswell (2013) wrote,

Select one or more individuals who have stories or life experiences to tell and spend considerable time with them gathering their stories through multiple types of information (p. 74).

Yuli is from a rural reservation in the southwestern United States. She had to move off-reservation to attend high school as there was only K-8 on-reservation. As a former BIE student, now adult, she discussed her lived experiences by sharing how BIE policies impacted her schooling and choice, cultural connectivity, and personal development by forcing her to move off-reservation to earn a high school diploma. Yuli is in her mid-thirties. The age range, 18-40, was large due to the difficulty in locating and contacting former BIE students who were willing to be interviewed. The method of recruitment for this study was stressful and fortunate. The way Yuli was located was as a result of my Native American connections from high school. As a white woman I knew it would be difficult finding someone who met my criteria and would be willing to speak to me. Since I attended high school on the Quechan Indian reservation, I announced on social media a need to locate persons meeting my criteria. A former high school classmate, presently the Quechan Indian Tribal Judge, linked me to a friend of hers. He then connected me to a friend of his, and I was introduced to my future research participant, Yuli. The process of finding Yuli was approximately six weeks. The referring person was not sure that Yuli met my criteria, but thought she did. After being linked to Yuli, she did not respond for a month. I continued to search for a participant because I thought Yuli was ignoring my initial introductory message. When she finally responded, she relayed to me that she had been moving and was not checking her social media accounts. Yuli was definitely

hesitant to participate. She asked me, point blank, what my motivation was and why I was interested in Native education. I relayed my background and told her there had always been a Native theme in my life and it felt like the direction I should go.

Yuli and I primarily used social media private conversation options to get to know one another. After approximately six months we decided we appreciated one another's sense of humor and personality. It is my belief this ability to casually learn more about me, as a person and researcher, allowed Yuli to become comfortable enough to decide she would participate in the study. I am not sure someone without Native family or friends could find a willing participant as I was able to be connected to Yuli due to my high school reservation experience and Indigenous friends.

### **Data Collection**

By interviewing Yuli the study highlights the inequities occurring on rural reservations and the impact made on individual Natives and tribal communities by requiring young Native teenagers to select staying with family, on-reservation, and completing their educational career in eighth grade or moving away to attend high school. Once Yuli was selected she was required to complete a consent form in accordance with requirements of the university ethics policy. Regarding data collection, Maxwell (2013) stated, "research formulate[s] what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people to gain that understanding" (p. 101). According to Kleinman (2004), data collection requires,

the ability and willingness of the participants to relate their experiences in sufficient detail so that the researcher can consider them in the analysis. Descriptions should be as free as possible from generalisations and theoretical abstractions. The descriptions of the phenomenon are elicited through open ended, unstructured interviews, which are recorded for analysis (p. 11).

The interview was semi-structured in nature and interview questions were open-ended, however there were additional questions added based on the direction of the interview. Due to Yuli, however, and her cultural oral traditions the interview, on occasion, ended up more as short stories being told versus the more structured approach. Converse (2012) stated,

During the in-depth interviews, the participant reflectively recalls their experience with prompting of the researcher to bring to light the meaning of the experience. Each participant has a unique meaning of the lived experience of the phenomenon which the researcher gathers in order to come to understand the phenomenon (p. 31).

The interview was transcribed by a service and the school name and reservation location was not identified. This participant remained unnamed and assigned a pseudonym. During the course of data analysis, there was a need to contact the participant for clarification. Therefore, there were two data collection points, the initial interview and then the follow-up questions for clarification. Ultimately, I sought to answer “the question, ‘What is this experience like?’” (Buckmiller, 2010, p.10).

### **Data Analysis**

As participants were difficult to locate, Yuli was the sole Native American selected to participate in this study. She was selected to represent Native youth who had to leave the reservation in order to attend high school. She was not selected due to her choice in high school, the criteria only specified the Native student had to leave the reservation. She was an excellent participant due to her high school experience both attending a Bureau of Indian Education boarding school for three years and two semesters, in two different public high schools, in one year. Data collected through an

interview and follow up emails were analyzed using narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Data analysis began with the first interview. An “experienced qualitative researcher begins data analysis immediately after finishing the first interview” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 104). I began my data analysis by reading the transcripts, and listening to the interview electronic recording devices while taking notes to organize my thoughts (Maxwell, 2013). During this organization of notes and thoughts, themes or categories developed naturally and based on the original research question. Owen (2014) also organized based on themes stating, “As my coding progressed, I categorized codes that share similarities, threading them into groups that logically and intuitively fit together. Working with these categories/groups I searched for patterns and emerging themes” (p. 2) throughout my interaction with the data. This process allowed for identifying commonalities and grouping them as such. Once I separated themes based on the research questions, I then broke them into common themes.

During and immediately after the interview, I jotted down my thoughts, impressions, and determined how I would begin chunking the data. Maxwell declared,

reading and thinking about your interview transcripts and observation notes, writing memos, and developing coding categories and applying these to your data, analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships, and creating matrices and other displays are all important forms of data analysis. (2013, p. 105)

I reflected on my research question to guide the coding process. Initially, I sought ways to divide the Yuli’s life into categories and determined the best way to do that would be by grade level or chronologically by age. Based on the data, I developed three specific times of life; (1) prior to school, (2) kindergarten through eighth grade, and (3) high

school. These stages were then used as a starting point to discovering themes. For each grade level, I looked for commonalities to other grade levels and stages. The one constant throughout the process was homelessness, regardless of stage in life.

Delving into the high school stage and once again focusing on the impact of moving off-reservation for high school, there were clear cultural connectivity themes that arose. It was continuously apparent Yuli was most impacted by; (1) her loss of personal, on-reservation, tribal connectivity, (2) her expanded sense of Native-ness due to the exposure of tribes across the United States, and (3) the continued sense of homelessness. The process used for data analysis is consistent with qualitative research analysis (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).

Once categories or themes were recognized detailed descriptions were built and did “provide an interpretation in light of [the researcher] views or views of perspectives in the literature” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). This allowed the combination of thoughts, themes, and categories apparent in the data with what is known to be true in literature to create an analysis of the data. Creswell (2013) recommends narrowing down the categories to no more than six, recognizing that researchers create more categories only to narrow them down again.

Using Creswell’s (2013) data analysis approaches, the step after interpretation is presenting a “narration focusing on processes, theories, and unique and general features of the life” (p. 191). To begin, I described the rural reservation setting and Native Americans as a marginalized cultural group in order to provide context for the themes developed.

There was very much an awareness that I am an outsider to the Native American community. Historically, Native Americans are uneasy with non-Natives doing research. Considering data collection concerns, Buckmiller (2010) wrote,

There is often skepticism directed toward non-Native researchers on the part of Native Americans. Uncertainty regarding motives and the non-Native's ability to assess accurately and comprehend certain aspects of Native culture, tradition, philosophy and wisdom are reasons for apprehension (p. 10).

In fact, this skepticism occurred during my research process also. Once Yuli's tribe became aware of my research they told her not to share information about other tribal members. Yuli initially wanted me to interview her cousins as well since they all had varying high school experiences off-reservation. However, to honor the tribal connection, I did not push for that to happen. When interviewing Yuli, and due to the atrocities suffered as a result of the policies and treatment by non-Natives, there seemed to be occasional hesitancy in how Yuli answered questions, which may have impacted the data analysis. I carefully listened to her story, her answers, and actively participated by reiterating her messages so there was an understanding I accurately comprehended her life experience. According to Palmer (2014) "Since oral production requires listeners, this naturally facilitates the active engagement between two important entities without which no communication is accomplished" (p. 513). In addition, when explaining the storytelling process of the Kiowas, Palmer stated, "Without any visible sign of response or affirmation to the story, the Kiowa storyteller might be unable to continue, so necessary, indeed imperative, is it for listeners to signal a positive response for the story to move on" (p. 514).

## **Restrictions**

The study involved one participant and I relied on the initial interview to gather information about the impact of Yuli's educational experience. We initially agreed to meet for one to one and a half hours for the interview. I would have preferred to interview the participant at least twice, however due to distance and scheduling we agreed on one interview. The result was an interview that went on for two hours and twenty minutes as she wanted to be clear and provide all the information I needed for this research. Creswell emphasized, "a good interviewer is a good listener rather than a frequent speaker during an interview" (2013, p. 166). I generally listened and redirected when necessary. There were additional emails for the sake of clarification. The benefit of interviewing was the emotion and hearing the participant's life experience in her own words. With the email correspondence, she had time to be more retrospective and as a result, I felt her responses had much more depth than some parts of the interview. The accuracy of her life story is presumed to be correct and a truthful reflection of the impact of moving off-reservation as a ninth grade high school student. I was interested in her perceptions in relation to the on-going long-term effect of attending boarding school. I did not collect additional interview data as it was very challenging finding participants who met the research criteria and were willing to share their experiences. As I am an outsider to the Native populations I was interested in studying, I relied on my Native contacts from high school to help me find willing participants. Finding Yuli was a blessing and I owe my high school classmate, a Quechan Indian, for leading me to Yuli. The difficulty in locating just one willing participant made it very clear finding more than one would be extremely challenging, if not impossible in the required timespan.



Due to the fact that the participant left the reservation to attend boarding school in high school made her the ideal participant. She initially felt I should interview her cousins as they all had varied high school educational experiences, but they did not choose to participate and the tribe was also resistant for tribal members to consider involvement in the study. As a result, I carefully removed all references to Yuli's tribal name throughout this study. However, since Yuli lives and works off-reservation, she believed her story needed to be told to conceivably enhance the educational opportunities of on-reservation tribal children in the future.

### **My Role**

My role in the research process influenced both the data collected and the determination of themes. As a white female who attended high school on the Quechan Indian reservation in California, I certainly brought my own lens that differed from that of Yuli. During high school I attended an on-reservation public high school near a mid-sized city. Yuli had to move off-reservation to attend high school as the education the Bureau of Indian Education provided was from kindergarten through eighth grades only. At no point, due to location or educational options, was I forced to move away from my family in order to accomplish my secondary goals. My experiences formed my perspective, but I did not adopt the role of an insider. Her life differed from my own experiences, including ethnicity, on-reservation educational opportunities, family, culture and tribal connectivity. I attempted to account for limitations by providing ample data, including verbatim excerpts from Yuli's interview to support findings. It was critical to both Yuli and I that her words, her story, was told without being altered or watered down by inadvertently injecting my perceptions into her life story.

## **Original Thoughts and Trust**

I cannot imagine sending my ninth grader off to boarding school, or to other schools, so my initial assumption was that there must be a true desire to attend secondary school off-reservation on the part of the family and student. There was also the idea that maybe family dysfunction resulted in Native youth wanting to move away during high school. I had no idea the BIE did not offer K-12 on all rural reservations. After Yuli informed me of lack of educational opportunity I realized some of my initial assumptions were based on lack of knowledge. It was necessary to be cognizant of my limited knowledge base until I received all of the facts.

My high school experience and friendships absolutely assisted in breaking down barriers. As mentioned prior, the Quechan Indian Tribal Judge essentially negotiated entry in my connection with Yuli for this research. Without her, without a group of Native friends who trust my character, I would have never met Yuli. Once I connected with Yuli, my high school reservation experience certainly supported the sense of trustworthiness Yuli felt toward me. We were connected because of Indigenous friends and Native American awareness.

Over time Yuli had time to get to know me via social media. Never has my online image mattered so much. She had the opportunity to see what made me laugh, my random thoughts on various issues, and view my interactions with various friends and family. I also had the same opportunity on her social media account. The online presence allowed each of us to slowly get to know one another.

Trust was also built through sharing. Throughout the process I agreed to share my writing with Yuli. I wanted to make sure I was accurate and that I was being true to her

life experience. When I created a table to help me establish a better timeline, I asked Yuli to review it to make sure it was correct. In many ways, Yuli was my partner. She did not help write, but she certainly made sure I had details accurate. Creswell confirms the need to be partners rather than interviewer and interviewee, “To further de-emphasize a power relationship, we may collaborate directly with participants by having them collaborate with us during the data analysis and interpretation phases of research” (2013, p. 48). Yuli has a large stake in this research. She hopes, as do I, this joint effort will lead to K-12 educational access on all reservations. We built trust over time and honesty. Yuli was very clear with her expectations. I was honest with what I wished to accomplish. Trust was built because we were open, honest, and wished to achieve a common goal.

### **Summary**

Credibility and trustworthiness are critical when involved in research, particularly when doing qualitative research because the researcher interacts with participants. Credibility depends on experience, training, and in some cases, the status of the researcher. Fortunately, contacts within the Native community proved helpful, but did not necessarily make the process easier. If a researcher is not known to be trustworthy or a capable researcher the research itself is worthless. Another factor in maintaining credibility is the attention paid to data collection, data analysis, and ultimately data interpretation. The data collection efforts in this study was challenging, however the interview and clarifying emails provided valuable information. As a new researcher, I was cognizant of the responsibility I had when presenting new material and the impact poorly done research could have on a career and focus area. My focus was to clearly share the Yuli’s life experience so that readers understand what is still occurring in the

United States and that we have a responsibility to provide K-12 schooling on-reservation to prevent the cultural genocide of tribal communities.

#### **Chapter 4: In Pursuit of Education**

In this chapter I share the lived experience of Yuli, a Native woman from a southwestern tribe in Arizona. She is a 37-year-old married mother of three children living and working in Arizona with a Native American organization encouraging youth to attend college. Yuli and I met in Needles, California for the interview. The plan was to meet and conduct the interview in the City of Needles library; however, we quickly determined we would need to find a different location since there was not a secluded area in which the interview could take place. Outdoors was a preference for both of us so we jumped in my rental car and meandered through town until we discovered Needles Marina on the Colorado River. As it was a hot day in the southwestern desert we settled on a covered picnic table at the edge of the water. Speed boats, wave runners, and children playing on the water's edge made recording less than optimal on a few occasions, nonetheless Yuli communicated her pursuit of education.

At the beginning of the interview, and randomly throughout, Yuli would state the importance of recognizing this was her life experience and that she was not speaking for others, even if they had similar experiences. At the beginning of the interview Yuli relayed her concern:

My words cannot be transferred to the whole community. Some parts of it will be, it could be similar, but everything I say is from my own life. I wanted that to be clear so that others don't feel like I'm talking for them, or feel that they didn't have a chance to say their part.

Initially, I intended to present the research data in organized theme specific detail. However, as I listened to Yuli's interview recording several times and read and reread the transcript it became very clear I needed to present the data in her words. I chose not to dilute her life experience with my words. "Indigenous research focuses on the privileging of Indigenous voices and stories" (Geia, Hayes & Usher, 2013, p.16). True to Native tradition and culture, I chose to have Yuli tell her story. Johnson and Beamer (2013) specified,

Many indigenous cultures use storytelling as the foundation for the transmission of important cultural information. Stories passed down from generation to generation sometimes teach, record history, provide examples, or inform (p. 1369).

Presenting Yuli's interview as storytelling is a way to inform readers of her educational experience in relation to her culture and makes the story much more enriching. "Stories and narration are a means of understanding and expressing the human condition" (Johnson & Beamer, 2013, p.1369). Yuli shares her life experience through her reality and it allows each of us to hear her voice which supports the notion that "American Indian stories are organic and alive" (Cheeseman & Gapp, 2012, p. 25).

To support Indigenous storytelling and Yuli's life experience, the data will be shared with readers in block quotes. I will lead into Yuli's statements or clarify her story throughout Chapter Four, but I will not interfere with the meaning Yuli is attempting to convey. The result will be true to Native storytelling in which Yuli's oral tradition is a means of transmitting her educational and life experience. Do keep in mind that Indigenous storytelling tends to have a non-linear component to life experience (Johnson & Beamer, 2013), however I have attempted to organize the information chronologically.

Chapter Four is organized into four main sections; (1) From the Beginning, (2) Elementary Education, (3) Back on the Reservation, and (4) Off to High School.

### **From the Beginning**

To understand Yuli's life experience, we must begin with the reservation and people she was most attached to while growing up. Yuli's reservation was very remote, but despite the challenges due to inaccessibility, she spoke of her reservation with love in her almond-shaped brown eyes. Describing her reservation, Yuli shared the following:

My tribe... is approximately 700 members and about half live [on the reservation].

The reservation is inside of the Grand Canyon. There are no paved roads and one cannot drive... It consists of a beautiful village with four to five gorgeous waterfalls. During the summers, tribal members farm corn, bean, squash, and melons and also grow delicious fruit such as peaches, apples, apricots, plums, figs, grapes, pears, and pomegranates.

When detailing the tribal lands Yuli was raised on, a smile developed with memories of family, friends, love, warmth, and ultimately the connectivity of a small Native community bound together by location and culture.

The best part about growing up down there was our traditions. Because we have circle dances that was maybe set up for special days or celebrations. To me I didn't really remember those exact holidays or what we were celebrating, I remember the events and that happened frequently. It was the coolest thing to be out with the community singing and dancing. Everybody would be singing. You don't know what you'd be singing. All the adults would be singing, and the kids were dancing. It was always the best part.

Culture, family, reservation, and traditions were all tied together. One did not occur without the other.

Yuli's Native language was enhanced through songs and dance. Her needs were simple and life was wonderful with lots of love from immediate and extended family. On her reservation, she lived and connected with tribal members through music and dance.

The particular dance, the [Native language] words, we grew up learning them, we grew up studying them. There's songs that describe the community, or describe the people. It's a fun feeling, a good feeling. That was one of the best things about it. I've always felt like we didn't have to worry about money, or worry about your health. You lived within the moment, and it was the songs, and the dancing. It was that.

Yuli had family, extended family, friends, culture, Native language, and traditions while on-reservation. Her cousins and friends running to the waterfalls, dancing, and living an almost carefree life was what Yuli most missed about her youth.

Maybe during the regular days or stuff, [adults] have their regular roles of doing their stuff. Being the parents, or providing for their families, or their jobs. All that was put aside. All those things, and the dancing was a good time. That was what I remember. I remember all the good things.

As often as Yuli shared her positive childhood memories living on her remote indigenous reservation, she also faced the uncertainty of having basic services and her needs met.

In rural areas around the United States it is expected that basic services, such as running water and electricity, are available. However, Native populations, on remote reservations, are not always so fortunate. When Yuli reflected on growing up on-reservation, she stated the following:

To me it was a village. Back then, it was completely a village. Now it's still a village, because there's no paved roads. Back then only a few people had a telephone.

Maybe about three people had the few minor satellite dishes in their yard. That was it. That was the extent of technology down there.

Yuli's love for her tribal village did not erase the fact that she did not have access to the same basic utilities as other American families.

In most suburban or urban areas, we do not think twice about walking in to our homes and turning on the light switch. We have restrooms inside the house and



refrigerators are a must, but those conveniences are not available consistently on Yuli's reservation.

There was electricity. It wasn't something you could count on. It was come and go. You have to know how to cook outside. You have to know how to survive without electricity. It could go a whole week without electricity. That part hasn't changed too much. It really has not changed much.

Everybody is so used to it that they have no electricity, no lights, and even sometimes running water, restrooms. That was what we grew up with. Every house had an outhouse that they used. It's still like that even with so many changes and stuff.

The biggest things that are still lacking is electricity. It's the weather, the water, and then the plumbing. We experience floods once in a while with extreme weather, but that's normal.

Growing up on a rural reservation in the United States, Yuli was experiencing daily what many of us only experience when we choose to go camping. Not only did she live with spurts of electricity and outdoor restrooms, she also was very familiar with the realities of poverty.

On the reservation, while residing with her grandmother, Yuli was continuously in survival mode.

We're concerned about paying our bills... It was really hard being remote. Our electricity was always higher than the norm because they have to make special arrangements to provide at this remote area. Our electric bill was super high.

Anyone that had telephone service, they couldn't even make local calls because they still had to use an outside service... everything was really high.

The benefits of living on a beautiful secluded reservation were outweighed, on many accounts, by the high cost of basic services. For an indigenous people, who were already struggling, it was made worse by the overpriced costs of utilities.

Yuli recognized that her grandmother had a very difficult time meeting the needs of the grandchildren who resided with her and providing the basic necessities. It was expected that the parents contribute to the household as they were off-reservation and working. That was not always the case. Sometimes their survival was directly related to how much Social Security grandmother received.

In my community and I believe it's like that anywhere, there are certain families that have the luxuries of having two parent income, or that have a better job. Some families had cars, a few. I felt like, in this small village, there was still a separation of class. There were three. There was one that was extremely, extremely poor, even with the social programs... They wore rags.

There was a small group that was extremely poor, and then there was the regular ones where most of the majority was. We were all poor, trying to make sure we had meals for that day. Then there was a handful that either had really good jobs, or two income, or had a home that was for their family. For the most of us, the middle group, had four families in one house. It's a handful that actually had a family unit.

When on-reservation Yuli lived with her grandmother and several of her cousins. Their parents were either off-reservation or deceased. Yuli's mother was alive, but lived and worked off-reservation. She did not have a sufficient income to support Yuli and her brother.

The structure of families was very important when it came to meeting necessities and paying bills. Extended family tried to make ends meet and grandma guaranteed safety.

Because she was grandma and stuff, her kids, my mom, or my aunts and uncles worked to try to make sure she had a house. She had her house. What she provided was a safe home, and she was always there. She provided a feeling of stability and safety, and feeling loved, or special.

When Yuli discussed her grandmother and the way she was raised, with multiple cousins in one house, it was very clear she would have preferred a traditional family environment.

Yuli wanted that personal connection, the feeling of having a mom raising her, not just a place to live and survive. Yuli craved the mother-daughter bond she witnessed in the village.

At the same time, part of me, and I had shared this with my cousin, there was too many of us. There was too many grand kids. There were too many kids and cousins that needed that from her too, that I never felt I had a special relationship, or that special bond or encouragement for myself.

For my own personal growth, or personal positive person. Or as a kid, I found ways to make to work for me, in a sense that, I knew she loved me just as much as she liked everyone else, loved everyone else. I knew she counted on me a lot more than others, because I took on a caregiving role at a young age and that made me feel like I was needed. The bond that normal children have with families, or with parents or siblings, I found it in different ways. I didn't feel special but I knew I was needed. She needed me.

As much as Yuli was aware that grandma needed her and Yuli felt safe, the grandchildren were struggling to have their basic needs met.

Hunger was mentioned several times throughout the interview. Yuli often assisted her grandmother by selling burritos and other food items to the tourists coming through or local villagers. The method of getting food onto the reservation was costly and difficult. According to Yuli, family dynamics and socio-economic class impacted how often and how much a family could purchase supplies.

It might have been easier for [two income families or good jobs], the ones that could go out [off-reservation] every few weeks. For the middle group where I was at, we had to pay the higher price every day, because we didn't have the extra money to go out and get supplies and come back in.

The only time you could do that, is you actually have to have good money. In a sense, you had to be rich to go out and come back. When I describe that, most of my years, that wasn't the case. Most of the years was, we would have to sell a thing to get \$20, or at least \$5, to go buy hamburger for the day.

Yuli was hustling to provide food for the household. While Yuli's cousins were attending school or playing in the waterfalls, she was selling burritos and other food items that would allow her to buy a meat product for the day.

Many tribal households did not have refrigerators because the electricity was so unpredictable. Therefore, if meat was needed it was purchased daily at the reservation store. As a result, the cost was higher because they were purchasing on-reservation and there were no other stores.

If we didn't sell anything, my grandma would tell me or one of my cousins to go ask our older [family members], to go ask her brother for \$5 so we could get hamburger. He always gave \$10, or something, and I'd get hamburger and bigger stuff. That was our everyday thing. Each day was like that.

Imagine the burden, the stress, as a little girl just trying to earn enough money for the day to purchase needed food supplies. Yuli understood the reality of hunger and humbleness.

When the family did have enough money to go buy groceries in bulk, they had to account for the cost of gas, staying the night because it was a two day trip, and then the return fees.

Then even though when we pay for gas, even if you caught a ride, you pay for gas. When you got to the town, and you get a room, you pay for that. Those are luxuries when you're poor. Even though it's so hard, and you have to go get supplies, sometimes you're too poor that you can't.

Again, you have to have money so that you can bring it in. The helicopter, the car, cargo by mule, all of that costs money. You have to have at least \$500. You have to have \$250 for travel, and rooming, and gas, and \$250 for the supplies, and then to get you down there.

Due to the remoteness of the reservation retrieving food supplies from local cities was much more cost efficient than buying supplies daily, on-reservation. Most tribal families did not have a vehicle. So, not only did Yuli's family have to find transportation, then

they had to have enough money to pay for gas and the cost of a motel overnight. Once the food was purchased in the city, the transport back to the village was expensive. There were only three methods for getting the food into the village. They could helicopter the food in which worked better if there were perishable items, but it was costly, or they could hike in or use mules. Most of the time Yuli's family selected to send one member to retrieve food supplies and then helicopter back into the village.

Yuli's grandmother treated her as a young adult. Making her very aware of the price of survival. Yuli constantly weighed what was more important on that day. As an adult, she says she still considers every purchase she makes. Whether the item is imperative to have or just a luxury. Her early years on the reservation impact her purchases and decision making process as an adult.

You have bills. [You have to consider which is more important.] Do I pay my bills? Do I use that money to go and get some supplies? Or do I save on the traveling costs, and keep buying the high priced limited supplies [on-reservation]?

My husband was the one...he grew up on cereal and he loved it. That's a luxury for us. I gave up on cereal because cereal, one box was five dollars... The milk never made it to the mountain fresh.

You bought cereal and when you're poor, it doesn't make the most sense. You wouldn't spend \$10 on cereal and milk. You would spend it on potatoes, beans and flour.

Everything Yuli experienced as a child has impacted her life as an adult. She still weighs the importance of each purchase. Yuli is very aware of a need versus a want.

Just as Yuli experienced as a youth, Native families, on-reservation, are still experiencing the same struggles. When she visits her family on the reservation, getting food continues to be difficult. She said, "I swear, I'm 37 and every time I go home, I

starve.” As a result, Yuli always tries to take food into the village with her when she visits as she does not want to burden her family or friends.

That was one of the reasons why I left for college, I was tired of...We were going to bed hungry. Something that people don't think about is, we had to take care of our family besides going to school.

Life was a continuous struggle. Yuli’s parents were unavailable, her grandmother was responsible for multiple grandchildren with little resources. Yuli felt the pressure of adulthood as a little girl and discovered education could be her saving grace.

### **Elementary Education**

Yuli spent kindergarten through eighth grade on and off-reservation. The one common element of her childhood was the love of learning. She was very aware that without an education, she would be limited. Yuli absolutely believed education would enhance her opportunities.

If you're not exposed to it, your potential of doing a lot of good things or doing a lot of different things is limited just on education if you're not exposed to it. I'm hoping this [interview] helps our community.

Many times Yuli thought her on-reservation school, operated by the Bureau of Indian Education, was not able to meet her educational needs. When describing the size of the school, she made the following observation:

[My village] has a preschool and an elementary school, K- 8, but has no high school. Head Start and kindergarten have their own buildings or classrooms that provide proper learning and teaching environments. The grade levels first through eighth start sharing space, time, and attention from teachers and staff because some of these grades are combined.

First and second were together, third, fourth and fifth were together, sixth, seventh and eighth were together. Sometimes that will change, maybe. It hasn't changed too much. One year the eighth graders were together, because there's 10 of them.

I would say there's one, two, three, four. Four rooms for the first graders up to eight, and then the kindergarteners have their own, so five rooms. Throughout the years, I've seen them open up trailers for different things, whether it's bilingual or for other classes, special classes.

Based on the population of the school, there was a need to combine grade levels. As Yuli stated, the school has not changed much. Occasionally an additional building was needed for support services or classes.

Yuli's experience in the classroom was less than adequate. She often felt teachers were biding their time and trying to pay off student loans or receive forgiveness for school loans.

I don't know why at that young age, I somehow thought I wasn't learning enough. A lot of it was based off of these worksheets that the teachers gave us.

I felt like they didn't really interact with us, they gave us worksheets, and they were there to make sure we were quiet and behaved, did the worksheets. Those worksheets were so easy. I don't remember them describing, or telling, or teaching us.

I remember the teacher sitting at her desk while we did worksheets. A lot of times they were non-native. Us as students, I remember we'd be speaking inside the whole time. I get the work done, and if it's done, I visit...

Yuli did not feel challenged in her learning environment. The BIE teachers were unengaging, showed very little interest in students, and certainly were not attempting to educate the students they were supposed to be serving.

The benefit of being on-reservation were the Native teacher's aides. They interacted, taught, explained the lessons, and ultimately did the job of the teacher.

What I do remember, what I learned was from the Native teachers, the ones that were from our community. They were used as a teacher aides. I felt that they were the ones that stepped up and taught us. If we needed help with or worksheets, they were the ones that were helping us, but they were teaching us in our language too. Maybe that was the reason why they stepped up more was because we were learning it.

The BIE teachers were less than helpful. Yuli not only had high expectations of herself she also had the same expectations for those who were paid to teach her and her classmates. But, then Yuli graciously let them off the hook.

We were Native speakers and so when they were teaching us for us to learn, maybe they were doing it in our language and helping us understand the material. I always felt like the teacher aides that were from the community were the ones teaching us. I feel like our teacher could have taught more, done more. Maybe it was new to them.

As high as Yuli's expectations were of the BIE teachers, she continued to give them the benefit of the doubt. As a child, Yuli was very aware of right and wrong, but did not make critical judgements of the teachers. She only believed they could have done better.

In first grade, Yuli had the opportunity to move off-reservation with her uncle and attend school. Although there were many Native American students at the school, she considered it a white school, "to me, it was a public white school. That's how I saw it, even though the whole community was native, they're local community members." Yuli wanted a challenge and she got it when she moved to the public school. Her comparison between on-reservation schooling and off-reservation public school was eye-opening.

The school I really felt was challenging, to me it was the closest thing to a public school. I have a different idea about public schools. They're way advanced than ours.

I always felt like if you can hang in a public school, and get good grades, it meant you were smart because it was hard for a lot of the students down there. They had more current books than we did, where we didn't have any books.

When I refer to public schools, they're the ones that are the best education. From my perspective they were always the better ones where you learn more. It felt like a school. I was there for my first grade year. I really liked it.



Even though Yuli loved and craved a thought-provoking learning environment, with books, she was once again going to experience a housing and school change.

Yuli's educational journey took a detour because she did not feel like her Uncle's house was her rightful home. The reservation was calling to her.

I went back home, I didn't want to stay with my [Uncle's] family. I shared a room with my cousins and my mom wasn't there. Even though they were family, they were different. They had a family unit, my uncle and his wife, and the kids and they had milk at the table.

They were a good example of a Native "Brady Bunch" type. It felt awkward like I was imposing. They made me feel welcome, it was really neat, but it wasn't my home. I was in their home. I felt that at first grade when I was six years old.

As a six-year-old, in first grade, Yuli was very aware of the difference between herself and her uncle's family. The dynamics of family, her sense of homelessness, and imposing on others was very clear in her mind.

When the next year came and I had the chance to continue to stay there, I went back to [the reservation], back to the worksheets even though I knew what that schooling was like, I chose that. I knew what life was like there, but I chose that over imposing on other people.

As much as Yuli loved and appreciated her public school experience, she selected to move back to the reservation rather than interfere with a family that was already whole in her eyes.

The experience living with her uncle also made her acutely aware of the haves and have nots. Yuli knew she did not have access to some of the items most kids took for granted.

They were really serious. They lived in a family with two incomes. That was sufficient. They led a different life than what I was used to. It was a good positive life, but it made me aware of maybe that I was poor or that I was different.

When you see that my cousins had brand new Jordan's and stuff. Back home we were happy to get [basic] shoes if I even had shoes. It made me feel out of place. They didn't do anything mean or they didn't do anything crazy.

Being with her uncle, she felt different. Yuli discovered classism and the benefits of being part of a two income family. The stress of providing food or paying bills was not something her cousins, who were off-reservation and being raised by both parents, had to consider.

They really make sure I had the things I needed. They made us one of their own. It felt, again, like I was imposing. It really didn't feel comfortable. It made me feel like I stood out. It made me aware of things that I didn't really think about.

Yuli sought the comfort and familiarity of reservation life, where she did not have to consider how other family members lived and the way she felt as a result of her new awareness.

Moving back to the reservation meant living with her grandmother. Her mom was not present and school still was not meeting her educational expectations.

I went back the second time for my second, third grade year. My mom wasn't home. She had been working [off-reservation]. I went back there, back to what I was used too. Where the teachers barely interacted with us and we did worksheets. It was easy, but it also meant I could skip school.

Once Yuli was back on-reservation, residing with grandma and her cousins, she was allowed to stay home more often. School was no longer a major concern.

During that time someone needed to stay at home with my grandma, so I felt like I volunteered, but it was they let me. Maybe my dad wanted that too. I was a little more prepared to help out and do things with her.

When Yuli returned to the reservation, she was eight years old and was given the responsibility of being a caretaker for her grandmother.

School was not first priority in the eyes of the family, she attended when she could, but for the most part Yuli was more focused on taking care of her grandmother.

The year that I went to class, I didn't learn anything. I feel like I learned it on my own by reading books. I really like books. People donated, and I would go and read [books].

Books were Yuli's saving grace. She read as often as she could. In school, when she attended, and always when she was at home Yuli had a book in her hand. Yuli talked about how much hope the books brought her.

Discovering other ways of life and the adventure of being elsewhere gave her motivation and hope. Yuli was able to escape to another place and time when reading.

Or other community members brought books going out (off-reservation). My cousin's mom always had books and she would let me read hers. Borrow her books. I swear those worksheets were easy, and they didn't teach me anything. I didn't learn anything from first to my eighth grade that other students did [while attending school on-reservation].

Thankfully, Yuli enjoyed reading and when she attended school she was not behind because reading outside of school had kept her reading skills up.

The one benefit on the reservation was the Native teacher aides. They were the ones instructing students in culture, language, sharing traditional stories, and ultimately, keeping students engaged.

What I do remember really learning is the teacher aides that worked on them, they really taught us how to write in [Native language], or they taught us how to read, and do things that were cultural for our community. I remember learning that.

That's what I remember learning, our stories and things that I didn't get at home. It was stories of our traditional stories. I learned a lot from the community workers that were from there.

Yuli believed that without the Native teacher aides, she would have learned even less. She also appreciated the emphasis on traditional tribal stories and traditions that were not necessarily always explained or adhered to by family members.

At this point, Yuli was getting ready to start fourth grade. For kindergarten, second, and third grades she lived on-reservation and attended the school operated by the Bureau of Indian Education. Yuli was once again going to have an opportunity to move off-reservation.

My fourth and fifth grade year I moved away again, because my mom was living with a friend [off-reservation], and asked if me and my brother wanted to go live with her, because it was a different school. I was excited and I went.

It was different to go live with my mom. I didn't stay with her long. It was too small of a trailer. It was her friends and their whole family, and my mom had me and my brother there so she didn't have room. I ended up moving out and my brother stayed with her.

Although Yuli's stay with her mom was short-lived, she ended up being placed with a different set of relatives. Which supported, once again, her sense of homelessness even when the situation was a positive one.

When Yuli spoke of this experience she was very thankful, but also very confused at how a little girl could just be sent off to live somewhere else. She knows, as a parent, she would never send her children off to random family members.

I stayed with some relatives. They had one daughter that was close to my age. I don't know how it worked out. I'm really thankful. It seemed so odd and strange that it happened, because I'm an adult and have kids now. It seems strange that a family would take on another kid and let them move in.

I lived there for a whole school year. There were a family unit with one daughter, they went to church [locally]. They were a really good family and I went to that public school, and I did really good there.

I felt like those books that I read really helped, because I was able to jump in and learn whatever grade level I was at quickly, and I never struggled. It was easy for me to learn.

As strange as it seemed to Yuli that she was suddenly living with different relatives, she did enjoy the experience. She appreciated the church-going family atmosphere.

Yuli's ease with learning was suddenly challenged when she was presented with awareness. Yuli's Native language made it difficult for her to understand some concepts as her language did not necessarily have words for certain classroom items. She realized she was different from some of her classmates at the public school.

I realized that my language actually was a barrier to learning. Growing up with both languages, I didn't realize that there were differences and one made the other one harder to learn. I didn't know I was behind until I was actually... there were things that were from the classroom that there were no words for [in Native language].

Around fourth and fifth grade I realized I had an accent, and it was harder to say some words. I didn't ever really think that was an issue, but at that public school I realized my differences. Then the songs, we always did the [Pledge of Allegiance]. I remember it was something new and I didn't know it.

As Yuli continued through the school year, she did improve and her educational anxieties were less concerning. But, it stuck with her that her accent and language had made learning more challenging. Yuli was proud of how quickly she could adapt only to be confronted with her differences.

Yuli was a good kid. She liked school and the family she resided with treated her well. But, she did not completely understand how she could just be sent off to live with someone else.

I did okay, and I really did really good, because of the family I lived with. I never had any concerns that there was any safety issues. I'm a parent now and I cannot believe my mum let me go stay with this couple.

You never know whether they are religious or not. You never know the safety. I couldn't do that with my children, boys or girls, and let them take all the financial responsibilities too. As a parent I couldn't do that, and trust. I really had no interaction with my mum or my family when I lived with this family.

Despite not understanding how a parent could re-home her child, Yuli understands now that her mom did not have the resources to continue keeping her.

As an adult, Yuli sees the bright side of having lived with both families. She was able to recognize positive family values, benefit of a two-parent income, and learned that the dynamics of families can be different, but not necessarily bad.

It was one of the best things for me, because I saw how other families can be, and some really, really good values, family values. They provided so much, and being young, I was grateful for it. My mum didn't really have a choice. I felt like she couldn't afford to take care of me and my brother.

Recognizing that her mother could not afford to take care of both children was hard to accept, but she understood that her mom was doing the best she could at the time.

After staying with a really good stable family for a year off-reservation, Yuli was once again required to make a change in her living and schooling situation. She was moving from a very stable environment to another family for fifth grade and then another for sixth grade.

I went to another family, because at the time, the family I had been staying with, they wanted to talk to my mum. They wanted to see if she could provide financial support. They wanted to understand what [was happening].

Suddenly, I moved in and then they never heard or seen her, and they're wanting more interaction from her. I don't know what the conversation was, but it was decided that they couldn't financially support me, and they had to talk to my mum.

I moved to another family, which was a cousin of mine, an older cousin, and she was married to a white guy... He was having work on consulting and stuff. He pretty much provided at least a house for us. He had one daughter.

Although moving so often was difficult, it seemed that her living situations just kept improving. Since Yuli's mom was unable to provide a stable home, Yuli received the next best thing.

According to Yuli, this was the best living and educational environment she had lived in. She only had to concern herself with being a child. When Yuli spoke of this time in her life she was beyond happy. This time allowed her to be free of responsibility. She experienced the very best home environment she could dream of with this family.

When I was with him, I was able to go to a public school and still be really good with my sixth grade year. He was able to provide for us financially, and set house rules. He was a really good person, because he was taking us on.

He also let my cousin come stay with us too. It was me, and my younger cousin, and then his daughter. He only had one daughter, so whatever his reasons for letting us, he would probably prefer that I would stay connected with family in this community, because he had raised her away from [the tribe].

It was good, he was really good. I did that one year and I felt like a kid, and that's with no qualms that I was there. I felt like a kid, and I was different from being on the reservation and going to school down there. I went to school... I felt like I was a fifth grader, I felt like I was a fourth grader.

Yuli was allowed to be a child while living off-reservation. Free from adult responsibilities, she did not have to worry about selling food to have enough money to buy supplies or watch cousins and take care of grandma.

The freedom of being a child soon ended and Yuli went back to the reservation. It was time for Yuli to go back to the reservation and the school that taught her nothing.

I always went home for the summer, and after my sixth grade year, I didn't want to come back. My grandma was getting older, and school was still not school to me, but I always took the positive from it with the community and from the tribal teacher (when on-reservation).

Yuli made the adult decision of staying on-reservation with grandma so that she could help care for her. Although this was done with the best of intentions and no regret, she was making adult decisions as a child.

According to Yuli, see Table 4.1, she attended school on-reservation only three years from kindergarten through sixth grade. At the end of sixth grade she was unwilling to move off-reservation once again with yet another family. Yuli selected to stay with her grandmother during seventh and eighth grades. By the end of eighth grade Yuli had spent five years attending on-reservation Bureau of Indian Education schools and four years enrolled in off-reservation public schools.

Table 4.1

Education and Family K-8

Grade Level	OFF-reservation	ON-reservation	Family Unit
Kindergarten		X	Grandmother and cousins
First	X		Uncle
Second		X	Grandmother and cousins
Third		X	Grandmother and cousins
Fourth	X		Mom at first, then family friend with young daughter
Fifth	X		Family friend with young daughter
Sixth	X		Older cousin with white husband and daughter
Seventh		X	Grandmother and cousins
Eighth		X	Grandmother and cousins

### Back on the Reservation

The pursuit of education was at odds with the reality of Yuli's life situation. Yuli needed to be able to feed the family and take care of grandmother and as a result, her



education was not a priority. Grandma was getting older and Yuli's mother was still living and working off-reservation. It became Yuli's responsibility to make sure her grandmother, brother, and cousins were cared for to the best of her ability.

By that time, [school] wasn't important, but I wasn't struggling with [school work] and I enjoyed it. I did what I did. It was cool for me. The main thing was being there for my grandma.

I stayed mostly with her and I never went to school, on and off, but I felt like I didn't have to, and by that time there was a new principal who I got to know in the community, because I would go talk to him. I had conversations with that principal.

When grades came out after the school year, I heard the teachers say that I wasn't going to graduate with the class, because I never go to school, and I didn't. I don't know how many months that I [attended school]. Then eighth grade, I barely went. Me and my younger cousin would take turns [with grandma]. He would go to school some days, and then the other days he'll stay at home, and I'll go to school maybe once a week, and things like that.

Missing school was the norm for Yuli and one of her cousins. They would often switch off and on to help grandma during the day rather than attend school. These children were taking on adult responsibilities, but to the detriment of their futures.

Attending school was not a big deal until Yuli was told she would not graduate from eighth grade. That was one of her main goals. It forced Yuli to be bold and fight for her educational future.

I was sitting still until they told me I couldn't graduate. That was important to me, because I needed to go to ninth grade, and I can't go to ninth grade unless I graduate eighth grade.

A couple of days before graduation, I went to the principal and I said, "I want to graduate, I need to graduate."

He said, "But there's no grades for you. There's no any information on you that you even come to school."

And I said, "But I came. I came once a week or once every two weeks I was here."

He said, "Well, I do know that if I ever leave the school business, or stop being a principal and start my own company, I want you there." [laughs] "I want you there, because I know that you are a good people person, and I swear you can sell paper bags or [anything]."

He said, "If I ever start my own company, I would have hired you." He said, "OK, you can graduate with your class. You don't have to do anything, and I ended up walking a couple days later with my class, graduating class, and I got a diploma and that's what I needed."

He gave it to me. He said I didn't have records with him. They are always so informal, I never felt like it was a school. I don't know if there was a kind of test that people take, or that requires to finish eighth grade, but I graduated with a diploma.

This BIE principal was very gracious. In the public school system, Yuli would not have been able to graduate. Yet, she was able to move forward.

Yuli graduated with a class of ten students from eighth grade. There were no records of grades or positive attendance, but by speaking with the principal she walked with her class. Since Yuli knew she wanted to attend high school and with zero high school educational opportunities on-reservation, it was necessary for these new graduates to decide on how they would proceed with their futures. According to Yuli, each family approached the process a bit differently.

[My village] has a preschool and an elementary school, K- 8, but has no high school. The three main options, for children [from my reservation], are to dropout at 8<sup>th</sup> grade, ask a family friend, or relative that lives outside of the community to live with them to go to the high school in their town, or attend a boarding school. Some families paid for private schools that offered dormitory and other families relocated to nearby towns and cities to allow their children to attend public schools.

I graduated from eighth grade, with nine other students, so a total ten of us graduated from elementary that year. Eight of us started high school that August. Seven of the eight [who] went chose to attend boarding schools.

As a result of the BIE not providing a high school on-reservation, two students immediately ended their academic pursuits after eighth grade graduation. Out of ten, 20% of the graduates selected to stay on-reservation and not attend high school.

### **Off to High School**

The only way Yuli could attend high school was leaving her community, her tribe, her culture, her traditions and language, and her support. Yuli selected to attend boarding school in the southwestern part of the United States because there were “no other educational opportunities [on-reservation].” She did not necessarily believe there was a choice to attend boarding school. In her case, she was motivated to attend high school, so boarding school was her best option, but “I was scared because I had never been to a boarding school and I had no idea what to expect.” Yuli clearly relates her feelings:

My reservation is in the [southwest]. We have no high school. Our choices are to drop out at 8th grade, (a popular one because we are kids, why would we want to leave what we know), or attend boarding schools. For me, I see it as still being forced to go to boarding schools, even if it is not as you imagine "being forced" into boarding school.

The best way I can describe [boarding schools] is, although jail or juvenile detention centers offer warm beds, meals, and a roof no one chooses to go there, but sometimes it's better to be there than at home for the three reasons above. The government is not forcing us to go to boarding schools. My time in boarding schools was positive and I am thankful and very grateful that it was an available option. I believe we are still being forced to attend boarding schools. And the main driving force is poverty, at home, in the community, and at school. Being a parent, I don't believe the age group that is "choosing" to attend boarding schools is an actual positive choice they make. If this age group and population had the same lifestyle and childhood as most American families; one single family home, own bedroom, and good safe neighborhoods, [Native youth] would choose to remain at home and attend their own in town high school.

Most who choose boarding schools come from reservations. I love my reservation and cannot judge other reservations, but in my opinion, there's this underlying invisible coat of years of oppression that lingers, which makes it difficult to compare those communities to other mainstream communities, even though the outside appearance can be similar or so close that you can't distinguish a difference.

It is important to point out Yuli's dilemma in the pursuit of her education. She had no interest in leaving her family, tribe, and reservation to attend high school. Except that it was the only option in order to receive a high school education.

The Bureau of Indian Education provided kindergarten through eighth grade on-reservation, but in order to attend secondary school Native rural reservation youth had to (and still have to) move off-reservation. In order to eventually attend college, Yuli moved off-reservation to enroll in high school. Many of her classmates attending boarding school were otherwise motivated.

Some [boarding school] classmates chose to attend boarding schools because they were also from remote areas that didn't offer nearby elementary or high schools. Some kids had trouble in their school, home, or trouble with classmates. Sometimes, students chose boarding schools because they offered better quality of education than their local small tribal school. I believe some students chose boarding schools because other family members, friends, or classmates were going or because other family members encouraged them with positive stories of their experiences and opportunities. There were also a group of students that chose boarding schools because their parents were employed there.

Some boarding schools are located in regions close to tribes and may have been established for those and surrounding tribes, so it is possible, students chose those schools because they offered curriculum geared to teach tribal students their language and culture.

Despite the multitude of reasons Indigenous youth ended up leaving the reservation to attend high school, they were losing their cultural tribal connectivity and language skills when off-reservation.

No matter where Native students who enrolled in boarding school attended it was much different than living together in a family unit at home. There were teachers and there were dorm staff, but ultimately, they were present because it was their job.

Attending boarding school, according to Yuli:

Was new to me, but also happened right after my grandma had passed. It was hard. It's not like going away to college, but it was during a time when I lost my grandma. It felt like everything was new, I didn't have family, or was separated from family.

[Dormitory staff] were there to make sure we were safe. They were really nice, but they had to stay at their desks. They had duties where they stayed in one area, and every hour they walked around the room, that sort of thing.

I was at boarding school, and we were kids there. We had no parents. It was the weirdest thing for me. The classes were really good. I was really happy about that, because they were challenging. They were taught by professional teachers that met the requirements.

It was different. I really learned a lot. That's one thing I remember about boarding school, too, it was as good as the public school, from what I had set my standards for. That was for a short period. They had us for the class time.

Then, out of a 24 hour period, you're left by yourself. You're with an adult for the class time, for that eight hours, whatever school is, seven hours. There was no adult interaction. We were left on our own.

Although the classes were challenging, the teachers competent, and the school was a decent environment, the boarding school environment allowed for little supervision outside of the school day.

Imagine being fourteen to eighteen years old and having no true parental oversight, just employees making sure nothing egregious occurred during their shift. Teenagers making decisions that could impact the rest of their lives. This was the boarding school experience Yuli had. Every minute of every day she had the opportunity and stress of making decisions and choices that best benefitted her.

You could choose extracurricular activities to do sports, or join any club, or nothing. I mean you were left on your own, pretty much. There was a curfew time or a time to be in your room, and then they checked every hour to make sure you were there, and make sure you're safe.

There were so many hours where there was no adult supervision. You have to make the right choices. I wasn't doing drugs or alcohol, and that was a personal choice of mine. I know that it was there and available.

I know that other students were bullied, or there were people fighting, or things. I kept to myself. It was like you were responsible for your own safety. You were responsible for your own educational needs. It was up to me if I wanted to go to class, and how well I did in it, and what I took from it.

Yuli was focused. Essentially, she kept her head down and stayed out of the way of those who were bullies or a distraction from her future goals.

Yuli knew college admission was her ultimate objective, but she also had to make sure she did what was necessary to meet the requirements. There was no one person she could lean on or a person who fulfilled the family support component she missed.

I had nobody there to support or encourage, or make sure I went. It was like that with all the students. It was different.

Based on how my whole high school years, it was me pursuing it, me wanting certain things for myself, and staying away from certain things for myself. When I finished my ninth grade year, I had been going to the Indian club.

Even though it was mostly with Navajos in a different tribe from me, the person, the sponsor that did that, he really liked [my] culture. He really liked it. He really liked that I was a part of the club. As a club, they would perform in Long Beach, California and Telluride, Colorado.

They took some trips. I really liked it because I was able to see these other areas, but it also made me feel insecure and funny, because it felt like that stigma of Indians performing. You know, that olden stuff. That olden stuff we're still doing, because when we went to Long Beach and performed, it was with a white community, but it was mixed.

Even though I was able to enjoy being part of the Native American club, it gave me experiences of things that made me feel like maybe I shouldn't enjoy it. But overall, it gave me the chance to get away from the boarding school, from the

[dormitory] on weekends, and be around, and be involved in a group activity, doing something. It was positive. We didn't just go perform. A lot of things we did was, we went to cultural things too that was local.

We went to [local] church meetings. We helped out, and were a part of [multiple Native] cultures from different areas that I was really thankful for, that I didn't get in my community.

Moving away from the reservation allowed Yuli to gain an understanding of who she was and allowing her to get a better sense of how she fit into the greater Native culture. She enjoyed the Indian Club, but it also gave her a sense that they were perpetuating stereotypes by performing for non-Native people. It was aggravating, but she appreciated the overall experience.

Yuli bonded with Indigenous students from other regions and learned about their cultures and traditions. It was eye opening in the sense that she was not focused on survival at home, but realizing she was truly part of something greater than herself and her reservation.

The most important benefit for me from attending a boarding school was that I learned how to accept myself as being Native. I was around peers and faculty that accepted me and made me feel special. The teachers, staff, and administrators were friendly and talked with me about life and that interaction made [me] feel like they cared, I belonged, and I was normal. Being around people that supported me helped me build strong confidence and self-esteem, which helped my self-identity and made me feel proud to be Native. When my “self” was secure, safe, and happy, I was able to really learn the school material and excel.

I would emphasize the point of being and feeling “normal” here. All the years I have spent in public mainstream schools, filled mostly with Caucasian students, staff, faculty, and administration, I learned that I was different. I was not like them. Even if they were nice and friendly, it seemed a little fake, like saying hi to an acquaintance. I have never felt like I belonged at public schools, because I was treated differently. I saw how sincere interactions with other students were, but their interactions with me were brief and about the weather.

Although Yuli had to go off-reservation for high school, she found that sense of connectivity through sharing of culture and traditions while attending boarding school while it highlighted the lack of sincerity with non-Natives in the public schools she attended. Her ongoing focus was the pursuit of her education.

Yuli benefitted by attending boarding schools by receiving a good education, enhanced cultural knowledge and connectivity, and ultimately the opportunity to go to college.

Native boarding schools have provided me educational opportunities that were not available to me. My experience in a boarding school was positive, so as a result, I feel boarding schools provide a safe positive, stable learning environment that is culturally sensitive. For me boarding schools gave access to education.

Students have the chance to share their culture with other students. By doing so, the students learn other cultures, but also build strong self-identities because the sharing reinforces positive feelings of acceptance of themselves. It builds close connections and relationships among tribes.

During my time in boarding schools, I really felt like I was receiving quality education. The teachers were sincere, compassionate, and culturally sensitive, which made for excellent learning because it created an environment of mutual respect and acceptance. The boarding schools offered opportunities for sports, clubs, and Native themed extracurricular activities that expanded my learning experience.

The Native staff, faculty and administration provided the most valuable educational experience for me. They shared with everyone their tribal singing and dancing and their cultural skills, crafts, art, and traditional foods.

Boarding school allowed Yuli to connect to her larger Native community while reinforcing her personal sense of Native status. There was a sense of self-worth that was enhanced during high school.

Yuli attended boarding school for ninth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. In tenth grade, missing a sense of family and belongingness, she attended public school. Table



4.2, on the next page, clearly identifies Yuli's transition from one school to another and with whom she resided. Although she craved a sense of family, Yuli ultimately decided boarding school was her best option. She was determined to complete her educational endeavors.

Table 4.2

## Secondary School Living Situation

Grade Level	OFF-reservation	ON-reservation	Type of High School	Family Unit
Ninth	X		Boarding School	Dormitory
Tenth Fall Semester	X		Public High School	Bounced around with two cousins at their homes in Fall semester.
Tenth Spring Semester	X		Public High School	Spring semester was with mom at her cousin's house.
Eleventh	X		Boarding School	Dormitory
Twelfth	X		Boarding School	Dormitory

*Note.* Throughout high school Yuli lived off-reservation.

Yuli explained the benefit of attending boarding school versus a public high school in the following way:

One year, out of my four years of high school, I went to a local public school. The high school was enormous. The learning environment was terrible. Classrooms were packed with students. The teacher called out roll, but never looked up to identify the student with the name. The hallways were crowded and it smelled nasty. I didn't interact or engage with the staff, faculty, or administration because they did not feel approachable. I switched to a smaller public school mid-year. The school was good, but because I experienced both public and Native boarding schools, I have a view of what benefits come from attending a boarding school versus a local public school.

If boarding schools were unavailable I believe I would have struggled more with my education due to lack of housing. I would have lived with other families trying

to adapt to their family dynamic and it would have affected my concentration on my studies. I would have struggled more emotionally because living with other families emphasizes the realization that they are not my family, that I may possibly be a financial burden, and the awareness that I am homeless. It would be hard to remain positive, optimistic, and perform well in school.

However, I do not believe my present situation would be different. Education is important to me, but I also love learning, therefore I would have kept struggling through my housing situation, but finished high school. I would have endured and found a way to make my situation work. High school took only four years of my life.

Even though it was a year or two here and there that I got public school education; that was enough to educate me, to have the skill to keep pushing forward until the next year.

In retrospect, Yuli knows she would have completed high school and college regardless of the hurdles and challenges. She also recognizes that the BIE could have made it easier for her to attain her high school diploma and stay on-reservation.

Missing family and the reservation were hard, in addition to securing basic necessities like shoes and clothing for boarding school was difficult. Yuli was reminded over and over again that her situation at her grandmother's home was challenging, but so was going off-reservation to school.

For my high school years being away at boarding school, family was an out of sight, out of mind kind of deal. Where it feels like they probably miss you, but you feel so separated, isolated. My experience, again would be different from my cousin's, because they had family that puts in the money.

Or before they got dropped off, they went and had a shopping spree. I never had a pair of shoes, did I ever [have a pair of shoes]? Then I realized that throughout the whole summer I lost that pair of shoes, the whole summer without no shoes.

When I went to school for my freshman year, my mom couldn't afford to get me school clothes to go to school. I had to find clothes that I could fit to go, or you try to get hand me downs clothes to give me, to take to that boarding school. I remember searching and trying to find my pair of shoes. I knew... They were small or I was happy that I found them. I knew that that was a cheap brand and stuff. I knew that the big kids would tease about it or whatever.

I was not barefoot, because I'd spent the whole summer being barefoot. I had to stay thankful and ignore, if the kids had made any remarks. There were remarks, but for the most part I always blew it off. Because I was thankful I had it, and I knew I couldn't do more. They hurt my pride and ego, but overall my personality, and being positive, and being a good, nice person, they wouldn't tease so much or pick on me. If the remarks were made, or they (shoes) were noticed. They were noticed, I knew they were noticed. They didn't bring it out and make me feel worse or anything.

It seemed that over and over, Yuli kept being made aware of all the things she did not have compared to other students. Searching for her shoes, finding clothes that fit, and being forced to leave family was immensely impactful.

The greatest loss Yuli experienced by going off-reservation for high school was the loss of familial connections. The immediate family, tribal family, and reservation lands were suddenly untouchable, completely out of reach.

I knew I wanted my education. I knew I couldn't go on unless I graduated. But the thing is this, when my grandma died, when anybody dies, you should still try to maintain family connections, any connection to help you grieve. Suddenly, I felt abandoned, one, by her because she died, but also from my family that even though my mom wasn't there, I always knew that I had a mom. I knew that she was my mom, but I also knew that I had uncles and aunts. I also knew that I had community members that were family. Going away to boarding school, you really get separated from the community.

It's a forced separation, because there wasn't high school [on-reservation]. There wasn't any other options. It's a forced separation, and the timing wasn't great because my grandma had also left. The forced separation is hard on anyone, on our young ones, but then also there's no time to grieve on their own. It's hard. It wasn't just me, we were all abandoned at that point.

I have two cousins that they lost their mom, when they were one and three, so my grandma was their mom. She had taken on the guardianship, like she was their mom. When she left, [the tribe] didn't know what to do with them.

They were abandoned from not just the family they knew, but the whole community. Because the whole community becomes your family. I see that so much more now as an adult, living away from living in a community for [Native] people, that the community members back home were family. They weren't

related. They were all in this small little area, and we interacted with each other. We did things together. Went to the dance campaigns, we danced and sang together. They were family. When you're in the boarding school, you actually get away from your immediate family, and then the community, which is a bigger family. All of us that went to boarding school get separated from them.

Losing her grandmother right before she left for high school was devastating. The lack of mother daughter relationship impacted Yuli as well. The loss did not have to be as great had the BIE provided a high school on-reservation.

Regaining the connection to the tribal members, immediate family and cousins has never truly happened. Especially once Yuli selected earning her bachelor's degree over returning to the reservation after high school. She had other responsibilities to consider.

For myself, I didn't [regain my relationships]. There's so much I want to say. Because I had younger cousins. When I left they were babies, one or two, or weren't even born yet, that grew up in the community when I was away. When I come home, after or during high school, some of them, they're like, "Who is she?" They're like, "Oh, that's [Rona's] daughter." When you leave to go to high school, that we have to, you really get the separation of people that live there, or born there.

You're not a part of the community in their eyes. You're someone different, or you're a visitor. I was never able to regain that. Others have. Others that were are able to. Because there are still people there that know you, and still welcome you home. You build that reconnection quickly. It might take some time, but they do welcome you home.

For me, the reason I wasn't able to reconnect is, one, I separated myself. I was separated, but during that separation I learned how to live away from them. Because I learned that I could do that, each year I kept distancing myself further because, again, I knew that I could live out here and survive. I could be successful in a way that you don't know... for adults that never went away for high school and stuff, the ones that are there, don't know if they can do it.

Every year that Yuli was away it made it easier to stay away. She was making it off-reservation without the help of family. It was hard to acknowledge, but she realized she had to take care of herself first.

By being forced off-reservation to attend high school, Yuli discovered she could be successful and independent away from her tribe, but that came at a cost to her sense of self.

It seems intimidating to have to find a job, and know that you have to find a job that is probably going to be labor work. Hard work, low pay, and then, you have to pay rent every month. Then, you have to deal with the school system that are stricter with truancy, or with different things. Those that didn't move away aren't equal to it, might have that fear. For me, each school year that I was away taught me that I could stay away from my family and still be OK. I could make it out here. There's positives to that, but there's also negatives.

I felt really disconnected and I [blamed] myself. It was terrible, because it felt like I kept losing a piece of myself each time, or each year that passed. It was weird because I grew up strong. Even though I grew up with all the poverty, or grew up with all the adult responsibilities, I grew up so sure of myself.

Being capable and independent was very rewarding, but the loss of tribal connection hurt Yuli enormously. She missed her family.

The lack of continuous contact with family and tribal members played on Yuli's emotions as she was more than just a woman. Yuli was a Native American woman who had responsibilities to her tribe. Yet, as the years passed it was easier to be away, but more painful as she recognized connectivity to tribe and family had decreased.

I was [Native]. I was Indian. Even though I was light skinned, I was a part of that community. I was so sure of who I was, and that was being [Native]. Each year that I was away I felt like I was losing peace within myself each year that I didn't make it home when my aunt, or my uncles, or my cousins passed away. Or even my grandma's sister in law, my grandpa's sister and her husband that stayed with our family the longest, like they lived into almost their 90s when they passed on, I didn't go home. Each time I didn't go, it hurt because it felt like I wasn't a part of the community. I didn't grieve with them.

It was heartbreaking when they died, but I didn't grieve or see them get buried, or be a part of the ceremony, or be there with family, that I still somehow found a way to be OK with it.

It kind of separated me from the community. Even though my family still think of me as their niece, or their cousin, or their daughter, or part of the community, I'm sure they've in the back of their mind to them I'm not. I didn't come home for that. I want to say it's in my mind, but at the same time, they have to think that.

Because I didn't pay my respect to them, I somehow took it personally that it somehow made me less a part of the community. It went on, and on, I swear. I was doing my [program at the university], and I'm trying to do my paper, so I'm studying for my exams.

Yuli's choice to attend college enhanced the feelings of family and tribal separatism. She was trying to earn her bachelor's degree, but felt pulled in two directions. When family passed away, she wanted to go back to the reservation. Reality and responsibilities did not allow for it.

### **Adulthood and Guilt**

When Yuli successfully earned her high school diploma she was granted admission to a college in the Midwest. While in college she met and married a Native American man from a tribe in Oklahoma. The reality of missing her tribe, being married, and a full-time college student with toddlers further impacted her connection to family on her reservation.

All of a sudden I was providing for my family, for my two little ones. I have two little ones. I couldn't share the grief or my loss with anyone. My husband didn't know the person that died. My friends, they didn't know them. Saying that, "Oh, I just lost my cousin," it didn't mean anything to anybody else. In a way I stopped saying that. I stopped sharing with my husband that I lost a close family member, or I lost a close family friend.

Even though it was personal things that I had to do and deal with on my own, it was still something that the pressures of being a tribal member...I still felt that pressure that I should have gone home, from my mom, from a parent, telling me,

"Your family died. You need to come home." I got the pressure from them, and from my aunts, and uncles that, "You need to come home. Your family now. Your mom needs you, we need you. You need to come home."

Yuli was challenged to balance the demands of being a wife, mother, college student, and tribal member. Often Yuli sensed she was failing her tribe miserably.

Yuli was frequently forced to make difficult decisions and most of the time her on-reservation family and tribal members became the lesser priority. She had immediate concerns related to her life off-reservation.

I was still pursuing education, and you can't take time off to go to those things. I was going home every week. How was I going to make up time when you have to be in class? Sometimes, even though my uncles or my family didn't say, I got the feeling that, "Sometimes you're choosing this white life over being [Native]. You should come home. You have responsibilities as being a part of this community." Then, my mom would always say she was hurt by my choices, a lot.

Whatever her reasons for, and why she felt like that, her daughter needs to come. She would be the main one using words that, "You're not [Native] anymore. You've turned in to a white person, because you don't feel the need, or you don't have that in you, that you need to come home. That you want to come home." Or that, "If you were still [Native], you would have found a way to make sure you came home for these things." Or, when they asked for money knowing what kind of situations they found themselves in, when they were broke and needing money for food and things.

Yuli felt the pressure of not being part of her tribal community due to distance and schooling, but she was also ridiculed for not being able to help provide for those left on-reservation.

Yuli understood the hardships back home on the reservation. They were hungry or had bills to pay. Yet, she was going to school, married with small children, trying to pay her own bills and still expected to help provide for those back home.

In the village, they would ask me for money. I'm young, and I have two little ones, and I have to pay rent and more things. I have a job while I'm doing the schooling, and it is eight dollars an hour. I don't have the money, but somehow I was still supposed to provide that financial support.

I kept saying "No," and every time I said no, "You are not just Indian anymore. You are not [Native] anymore." They were hurtful words, but in a sense she meant, one, she's hurt by my choices and my decisions to say no. What that meant I felt is that, when you're part of a community, you do take care of each other and that's financially, and for whatever reason why they need that support. One, maybe they're not making enough. Or that they over spent, or they didn't budget, that I had to learn to do over here.

You still help. You find ways to help. I always had to say no, because a lot of the times I had to make sure I had rent money. That was a big deal, that I'm not part of the community anymore.

It was obvious during the interview that Yuli continues to be greatly impacted by the perceived thoughts of tribal members and the actual comments made by her family when she was not able to send money or go home when a tribal member had passed away. Just as many young adults, Yuli was faced with competing responsibilities. Unfortunately, the tribe did not understand Yuli's yearning for education.

Now that Yuli is a college graduate and mother of three she still has lingering concerns about where she fits into her family and tribe. She was asked to explain what she feels her role is now. She has not resided on-reservation since she went away for college after graduating from boarding school.

Without thinking about being [Native], without thinking about being a wife, or being a citizen, or a woman, or a social worker. Without thinking about any of those things, what I am, is I'm a mom. I'm going to have to hope that my community members, or people understand that my choices are based off of me being a mom, and that's all that was. When I said no, and I couldn't come home, or when I couldn't lend money, that they never gave back, because I did...I still tried. I still did. I found other ways to still do and try to help.

The biggest goal, the biggest thing was I chose to have kids, and that was what kept me from giving them money, was I needed to pay rent so that my kids had a house. I needed to keep going to school for my kids, because I need to get paid higher so that I can keep providing a house.



Because providing that house, I was providing stability and safety, and I was providing a home. Because when I paid rent for that one bedroom apartment, or when I paid rent for when I lived in the house, four bedroom apartment. I was providing safety to my little ones where I didn't have to live with other families, and having them...The main thing was keeping my kids safe, and that was a way to do it, was giving them a home.

Yuli still yearns to return to the community, the Native reservation, she was raised on.

But, there still are not the educational opportunities she wants for her children and there is a lack of housing.

Economic instability and educational inopportunity prevent Yuli from living on-reservation and working as a social worker. Her tribe has offered her a job, but she has more than herself to consider.

That's the issue I'm dealing with now, and I have been once I graduated and got my diploma. The biggest thing was, "OK, you left our community for higher education. You got the diploma now. Aren't you going to come back and help us now? That's kind of what we wished for. Don't you want to come back and help us now that you have this diploma?" What prevents me from doing that is, I can't take care of my kids down there because there's no house that I can keep them safe with me. There's no home. There's no housing down there.

I have to live with other people, and when you live with other people, they might not do anything bad to them, but when you're in that environment, it's their house, too, so you're real more lenient to how you parent your kid. When I'm here with my kids, I know exactly where they are.

But when you're [on the reservation] and there's no housing, and you have to live with other households, actually, I've always felt homeless in a sense that... I don't have an actual bed that's mine or anything. The times I visit, I'm letting my kids go swim without me when I should be with them. I'm a little more lenient in how I take care of them down there.

When you don't have a place of your own, you expose your kids to more risks. When I've been pressured and been asked about, "Why aren't you coming home to work? We really need a social worker." I've actually been licensed, and I actually have degrees and graduate school, my biggest thing has been I need to keep my kids safe. My son is in ninth grade now. They don't have ninth grade. I cannot work for you, because I am not going to send my kid to boarding school.

Although Yuli would absolutely love to give back and reconnect with her tribe, she is hampered by the lack of housing on-reservation and the fact that no secondary school options for Native youth exist. Lack of resources on-reservation prevent Yuli from returning to her tribe. However, if a job offer was made and housing happened to be available, Yuli would consider living on-reservation as she has an idea how her children could still receive a decent education.

Yuli wants to be on-reservation. She wants her children to have the same tribal connectivity she had as a child. But, she's a mom now and has to consider educational opportunities for her children.

The thing would keep me from being [on-reservation] is, I don't think the curriculum has changed, and they still do worksheets, and there's no real learning.

[The southwest] has the biggest package around, for homeschooling. It's huge, and with the internet being available down there now, I would actually bring it with me, and my kids.

If they did offer me a good salary and a house, I would seriously consider it being an option. Because they will learn a lot of different things that they missed out on being around cousins and things.

Yuli continues to be impacted by the requirement she move off-reservation to attend high school. She greatly benefitted from doing so, however she lost familial, tribal connectivity as a result of her desire to pursue her education. Also, important to note, Yuli did not make mention throughout the interview or correspondence about spirituality. When considering Native American culture there is an expectation of faith that works in cohesion. Yet, spirituality or religion was not a topic of conversation.

She made the following statement regarding the ten students who she graduated from eighth grade with on-reservation:

Five of the ten graduated from high school four years later. Four out of the five graduated from a Native Boarding school. There is still no high school in [my village] and there are no new opportunities for high school at home.

Sadly, the very reason Yuli left her reservation is the reason she has not returned to use her education to benefit her tribe. There is no high school, limited housing, and she has realized that she can be successful off-reservation even though it means she and her children continue to miss out on tribal connections, traditions, and Native language acquisition. However, by moving off-reservation she gained a larger sense of self through connections with other tribes and Native cultures through her time spent at boarding school.

Yuli wants to be very clear that this is her life and her experience. She is not speaking of any life experience other than her own, “remember this is from me, and from my life.”

## **Chapter 5: Experiencing the Choice of Going Off-reservation**

*“The most important benefit for me from attending a boarding school was that I learned how to accept myself as being Native,” Yuli explained.*

The lived experiences presented in the previous chapter offered a glimpse into the educational path of Yuli and the experience attending boarding school had on her relationship with her tribal community and her connection to Natives as a whole. Yuli’s entire goal growing up was attending high school in order to gain admission to college, but the Bureau of Indian Education did not offer secondary school on-reservation forcing her to enroll in boarding school. This decision to leave the reservation and attend high school caused disconnection from her tribal community. Not only was Yuli far from her family and reservation, she no longer heard her Native language or songs, participated in traditional ceremonies, or had the ability to go home when she felt the need to. Yuli, however, believes she developed a greater sense of who she was as a Native American and the realization that the Native population continues to be marginalized in the United States. Yuli had limited contact with other tribes while on-reservation, but once she went to boarding school she was introduced to many Native students from all over the United States. She also came to the conclusion that the United States government, through the policies of the BIE, were effectually supporting assimilation efforts. Many Native students, while attending boarding school, were losing their individual tribal language,

culture, and traditions. This forced removal, through lack of secondary education on-reservation, also enhanced Yuli's sense of homelessness.

Although I focus on the impact of moving off-reservation in this chapter, additional points are worth noting. Yuli did not define herself only by her Native American heritage. Once she became a mom, Yuli stated that "parent" was her primary identity. However, all of her emotion, job choices, and attempts at community involvement relate to the Native population and the guilt she feels by earning her education and leaving the reservation. Frequently, Yuli considered herself to be homeless due to her considerable moves during elementary and her lack of a home, both residential and cultural, once her grandmother died at the end of eighth grade. It also became very evident that the Bureau of Indian Education schooling system was less than adequate and overly permissive.

This study grew out of the desire to better understand how Native American youth experience being forced off-reservation in the pursuit of education. The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) is responsible for the education of tribal youth who need schooling, yet the BIE does not provide secondary educational opportunities on all reservations they serve. The United States recognizes Native American reservations as sovereign nations. Essentially, when Indigenous populations were originally forced to relocate the government agreed to be responsible for some of their needs. One of those on-reservation needs related to education. Basically, if the tribe does not have the resources to manage and operate their own schools then it is incumbent upon the BIE to step in and provide the resources (buildings, materials, human resources) to operate schools for Native youth, but not necessarily on-reservation, as Yuli so clearly relayed.

I sought to understand how Native youth and their families negotiated the maintenance of tribal connectivity, the increase in Native identity and, in Yuli's situation, the continued displacement when forced to move from residence to residence. Current research on Native youth moving off-reservation to attend high school has not been found. The research that was found was directly related to Native students in boarding schools and their mistreatment. This fact-finding study provided an opportunity to identify how Native youth are impacted by the decision to move off-reservation in the pursuit of an education, specifically a high school diploma. The purpose of this study was not to determine the righteousness of equal educational opportunities on reservations, but the BIE system was explored and critiqued.

I return to narrative inquiry to make sense of the data. Delving into the interview, additional correspondence for clarity, there were several key themes that became obvious. Also, as stated, tribal critical race theory was reviewed "considering the effects of history, notions of colonization and assimilation become prominent aspects that continue to impact Indigenous peoples" (Garcia, 2014, p. 63). Native youth continuously deal with the realities of colonization through schooling opportunities, or lack of, and loss of tribal connectivity. Themes relevant to this narrative study are discussed in the remaining sections. Then I turn to the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

### **De-culturalization through Education**

Yuli was raised on a Native American reservation in the Southwestern United States, minus the sporadic four years she attended school off-reservation. The on-reservation school was operated by the Bureau of Indian Education. As there was not a high school on Yuli's reservation, there are no graduation rates for high school and the

United States Department of Education does not track eighth grade completion. Any youth living on-reservation and selecting to attend high school were required to move off-reservation to attend either a public high school, private high school or a Bureau of Indian Education sponsored boarding school. In Chapter Two I detailed the educational opportunities and disparities for American youth by comparing the public school system, the Department of Defense Education Activity kindergarten through high school, and the Bureau of Indian Education schools. In the section that follows, I review data from the current study and demonstrate the correlation between the data, themes, the use of narrative inquiry as my framework and tribal critical race theory as it relates to policy, before returning to the research question.

Nowhere is an attempt at colonization more evident than the Bureau of Indian Education's systematic lack of educational opportunities for Native youth on rural reservations. By denying rural Native youth K-12 educational opportunities, on-reservation, children, like Yuli, are forced away from their families and tribal communities in order to attend secondary school. Those who stay off-reservation after high school generally lose their Native language abilities, connections with tribal members, and a loss of cultural identity. Since leaving for high school, Yuli has never resided on-reservation. Her Native language skills have gone from fluent to hesitant about her word choices when she speaks.

Those Indigenous populations, who survived the onslaught of the "new" Americans and Manifest Destiny, were forced onto different lands—reservations. "In 1871, Congress officially confirmed the altered status of Indians: they were now deemed to be wards of the government, a colonized people" (Wallace Adams, 1995, p. 7). Then

they were required to send their children to boarding schools, as young as five-years-old, in an attempt to kill the Indian and save the man (Churchill, 2004; Lomawaima, 2000). The desired goal was the complete destruction of the Native cultures and traditions and replaced with the European ways of life, culture, and education (Battiste, 2005). If this sounds familiar it is because the United States is still making attempts at colonization through education. Federal Indigenous boarding schools “were built to be places that would utterly transform Indian people. They were designed to obliterate tribal identity, to destroy Native languages, [and] to eradicate Native religions” (Child & Lomawaima, 2000, p. 116). It seems there are still policy makers, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, who believe by exposing Native youth to life beyond the reservation might actually be better for them. Possibly believing this exposure will lead to a stable middle class standing in society and an exodus from the reservation. As progressive as we would like to think of ourselves as a nation, we are still attempting to colonize the Indigenous peoples residing in the United States resulting in the cultural genocide of these populations.

By requiring a non-white cultural group to conform to the ideals, values, educational norms, and cultural expectations of the white populace we devalue the traditions and knowledge of the marginalized groups. “Within cultural imperialism, the dominating group’s experience is elevated, sanctioned, and universalized; it becomes the norm that all others are obligated to accommodate” (Haynes Writer, 2008, p. 6). Why, in this country, when we have gone from using the idiom “melting pot” to “mixed salad” are we still forcing Indigenous populations to conform to the white ideal? Melting pot suggested we all become one united culture, whereas mixed salad advocates for the



appreciation and recognition of the cultural nuances of all races and ethnicities within the United States.

This study confirms narrative inquiry as the framework and a way in which I analyze the data, but tribal critical race theory is referred to as it informs my perspective by supporting the notion that colonization continues to occur through the educational opportunities, or lack thereof, as provided by the Bureau of Indian Education. Not all Native youth have the opportunity to stay on-reservation supported by the tribal communities they belong to. Yuli, in her own words talked about how she felt she was forced off-reservation. She was not given an opportunity to stay with her family on-reservation. Native youth are forced to attend off-reservation boarding schools for secondary school and lose tribal connectivity, language, and traditions. “The young Native Americans who left their homes to attend boarding school were not only leaving their families, they were also leaving a way of life” (Cooper, 1999, p. 11). Just as Yuli was required to in the pursuit of education.

There are presently over 40,000 Native students receiving their education from the Bureau of Indian Education (U.S Department of Interior 2, 2014) on-reservation or by attending a boarding school. Many of these Native children are required to move away from their tribes and family in order to receive a secondary education. This results in loss of tribal connectivity, culture, and language. Yuli (2015) addressed colonization in the following way,

I believe we are still being forced to attend boarding schools. And the main driving force is poverty, at home, in the community, and at school. Being a parent, I don't believe the age group that is "choosing" to attend boarding schools is an actual positive choice they make. If this age group and population had the same lifestyle and childhood as most American families; one single family home,

own bedroom, and good safe neighborhoods, [Native youth] would choose to remain at home and attend their own in town high school.

Unfortunately, the BIE does not provide a high school education on many reservation.

The government may not be forcibly removing children the way they did originally, but the effect is the same. “Boarding schools were designed to create a new kind of American Indian person: detribalized, fluent and literate in English, economically self-sufficient, hardworking, and self-disciplined” (Child & Lomawaima, 2000, p.56). Any government not providing K-12 educational opportunities within the confines of an established community, like a reservation, is attempting to colonize those affected by demoralization, loss of tribal connectivity, and loss of Native language and culture. “The latent effect of this assimilation policy on the current overwhelming presence of English has become evident now as one native language after another disappears” (Martin, 1996, p.23).

### **Cultural Genocide through Educational “Opportunity”**

The United States, through the Bureau of Indian Education, systematically supports the cultural annihilation of Indigenous populations across America by not providing K-12 educational opportunities, on-reservation, to Native youth. Lack of on-reservation educational opportunities for Native American youth frames the findings presented below. Yuli desired to attend high school. Therefore, she was required to leave her tribe and reservation. The qualitative narrative study design allowed me to be flexible in how I gathered the data and the way in which I ultimately determined themes. Viewing Yuli’s experiences as pre-secondary and secondary aided in determining themes. I return to the research question next.

The research question sought to understand educational policy from the experiences of one Native woman's story. Although Yuli benefitted by earning her high school diploma and then graduating from college, she has had significant tribal and cultural disconnection from her reservation as a result. Citizens of the United States should not be required to lose cultural identity in order to attain an education or provide financial stability for their families. There can and should be a balanced solution for Native youth. The loss Yuli experienced by moving off-reservation was substantial and has had long lasting impacting her traditional awareness, Native language abilities, and tribal familial connections. Yuli was stripped of her identity in a traumatic and disorienting way. Her pursuit of education led to the loss of her sense of self. Children should not be forced to choose between furthering their education and living with their families in 21<sup>st</sup> Century in America. The following sections and tables detail Yuli's thoughts on the loss of language, culture, and tradition.

In the case of Native education, history is not repeating itself, because the attempt at colonization never stopped. Reminder, we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in a first-world country, and Native youth not having access to K-12 schooling on-reservation is not only unacceptable, it's unconscionable! American idealism prefers we not talk about the injustices still occurring across the United States to Indigenous populations. This lack of conversation enables American society to believe we have progressed past the point of stripping tribal communities of their identity, rightful ownership, and educational opportunity. We have not progressed. It seems same ol', same ol' works just fine when dealing with Indigenous populations. Haynes Writer declared, "Schools served Christian interests, manifesting their ideologies and philosophies not only to legitimize white

Christian privilege, but to reproduce it at the expense of the colonized Native People—traditional ceremonies were labeled as pagan and outlawed” (2008, p. 6).

Yuli acknowledged her loss of Native linguistic ability in Chapter Four. She is no longer at ease with her own Native language. Her children do not know their Native language and have not lived in a reservation environment like the one she came from.

The sense of being marginalized as a community was very real for Yuli:

In my opinion, there's this underlying invisible coat of years of oppression that lingers, which makes it difficult to compare those communities to other mainstream communities, even though the outside appearance can be similar or so close that you can't distinguish a difference.

Yuli's experience highlights the process our government uses strip Indigenous populations of their identities. The United States has determined it makes more sense to force cultural genocide through the use of educational inopportunity. This process leads to distancing of children from tribal cultures, traditions, and land. One child at a time leaves for high school and eventually entire tribal communities no longer exist.

**Language.** Yuli still does not reside on-reservation and the likelihood of regaining her Native language fluency would depend on increased interactions with family and tribal members, most of whom live on-reservation. But, like many Native Americans who attended boarding school in the past, it is “not easy to go back home” (Cooper, 1999, p. 83) to retain language and cultural ties. The loss of language ability concerns Yuli enough that she will not teach her children until she becomes more comfortable with the language. She has one teenager, an elementary age child, and a middle schooler. The reality is Yuli's children most likely will not share her Native language unless they move back to the reservation while they are still young. Being

forced off-reservation has created a ripple effect in which Native youth and their future off-spring may not recover language or cultural ties. In Table 5.1 Yuli expresses her Native language ability after attending boarding school and being away from her family and tribe. She clearly articulates her loss of linguistic ability and how she does not feel comfortable even speaking her Native language to her children. There is a clear devastation in that acknowledgement. She has lost part of who she is through loss of her tribal language.

As distressing as not feeling comfortable with your tribal language is the realization that future generations will most likely never speak Yuli's tribal tongue either. Yuli has three children, none of whom speak her tribal language. It is unlikely, due to the pressures of everyday living and location, Yuli's children will never learn her Native language. She is the generation who lives, works, and raises her children off-reservation. Yuli is the generation responsible for the stripping of her culture and of no fault of her own. She is doing exactly what she needs to as a mother and provider. Regrettably, Yuli's children will not even realize cultural annexation has occurred. Slowly, one by one, Indigenous youth leave the reservation and the culture is lost.

Table 5.1  
*Boarding School Attendance, Loss of Native Language*

Theme	Narrative from Interview
Tribal	I don't speak it as much anymore. I can understand it fluently.
Language	I don't use it often, it's unfamiliar to me. It feels funny or I feel it's a little different than what I remember.  There are times that I am insecure, then I hesitate to say it or think I'm saying it wrong. I still know the language a little bit.  When I become a speaker again, and be comfortable with it I will teach my kids.

The challenge is to determine how common it is for Native youth to leave the reservation for high school and return only to visit. How many Natives forced off-reservation for school retain their language as adults? With small rural reservations, how soon will their languages take to vanish if the BIE continues with their current policies? All over the United States there are tribes in danger of losing their tribal languages because the elders are passing away, some youth are uninterested in learning, and there are a limited number of tribes providing Native language classes.

Beyond Yuli and her reduced Native language fluency, there is a need to hold the United States government, specifically the Bureau of Indian Education, accountable for lack of services to rural reservation youth. As a government and country we continue to disenfranchise a marginalized population keeping our government from taking responsibility for our painful history. What does it say about us as a nation when we continue to wrong Indigenous populations while having the ability to provide educational opportunities on-reservation? The United States federal government often speaks of encouraging post-secondary pursuits, but fails to recognize they are overlooking the rural reservation Native youth and need the basics, like K-12 schooling on-reservation. That way fewer Indigenous youth would drop out of school at the end of eighth grade, possibly encouraging Native students to continue on to secondary school...if offered at home. The lack of educational options on remote reservations supports the belief that Native populations continue to be colonized by forcing this marginalized population into schools away from home.

**Traditions and culture.** Loss of cultural knowledge and tribal connectedness greatly impacted Yuli as a result of moving off-reservation for secondary school. The things she had learned as a young girl were lost once she left the reservation. The greatest loss, however, was family connectedness and a continued sense of *home*-lessness. Yuli experienced more than residential instability, her sense of what home meant was completely stripped away. Yuli's grasp of home was related to where her heart resided, which was where her tribal lands and people were located. Table 5.2 allows Yuli to share her thoughts on her loss of traditional and cultural connectivity. The only way I can adequately describe Yuli's loss, as I watched her expressions change throughout the interview, was imagine your mom disappeared. Prior to the disappearance you had a loving, close relationship and you could never even consider life without mom. Then one day, the day she disappeared you thought for sure she would reappear, but she stayed away and you only heard about how she was doing. This is the depth of Yuli's loss. It is felt daily. It is ungraspable daily. She remembers the family on-reservation, she recalls the warmth of the earth, and now she experiences the void in her chest daily because what she wants, what she needs, is to be on-reservation with her family, friends, cultural traditions, language, and environment. Yuli's heart, her soul is always on her tribal reservation no matter how close she lives because being close is not good enough.

Table 5.2

*Boarding School Attendance, Traditional and Cultural Loss*

Theme	Narrative from Interview
Traditions	<p>The best part about growing up down there was our traditions. Because we have circle dances that was maybe set up for special days or celebrations.</p> <p>I didn't really remember those exact holidays or what we were celebrating, I remember the events and that happened frequently. It was the coolest thing to be out with the community singing and dancing. Everybody would be singing.</p> <p>The particular dance, the [Native] words, we grew up learning them, we grew up studying them. There's songs that describe the community, or describe the people.</p> <p>You lived within the moment, and it was the songs, and the dancing. It was that.</p>
Culture	<p>It was just us. Cousins, uncles, the chairmen, council people. It was everybody. The whole community becomes your family.</p> <p>[The on-reservation teacher aides] really taught us how to write in [our language], or they taught us how to read, and do things that were culturally for our community</p> <p>When you're in the boarding school, you actually get away from your immediate family, and then the community, which is a bigger family. All of us that went to boarding school get separated from them.</p>

The challenge Yuli faced was balancing reality with her loss. How do you stay connected to a group, a tribe, when you are geographically separated? As an adult, Yuli participates in traditional Native dancing competitions at powwows and other Native American organized events to reclaim a part of her culture she feels so separated from. But, it really does not fulfill her need to be on her reservation, with her tribe. She seeks to be involved in Native environments and events because she is trying to reconnect with what she lost. Yet those personal tribal connections are distant.

The traditions, songs, and dancing that Yuli so appreciated about her tribe has not passed down to her children. Her children have never lived on her reservation. They do



not know the language and other than identifying with ‘Native American’ on a form, attending powwows, occasionally visiting the reservation or watching their mother dance at competitions, Yuli’s children do not truly share her culture. The BIE is responsible for stealing her sense of belongingness and, through restrictive policies preventing K-12 on all reservations, denying her children the cultural connectivity Yuli felt as a child.

### **Aftermath of Boarding School**

The dichotomy of moving off-reservation for high school was embracing her Native identity as a whole indigenous community, but then again feeling disconnected from her tribe. As much as Yuli learned about her Native-ness as a culture she was devastated by the loss of family and tribal connectivity. The education she received, however, was appreciated and desired. Table 5.3 details her specific thoughts regarding embracing her Native culture, her boarding school education, and then the devastating tribal disconnection as a result of moving off-reservation.

**Accepting Native identity.** Yuli experienced the same phenomenon other boarding school students have experienced over history. She realized that outside of her reservation, there were many more tribes across the nation with varying languages and traditions. So, rather than focus on what she was losing, she started learning from her classmates and instructors. Yuli’s acceptance of Native American identity as a whole was the only identity she could grasp as her tribal identity was slowly slipping away. Yuli’s understanding of her Native identity was due in large part to her involvement in the Indian club while enrolled at boarding school. Table 5.3 allows Yuli to express the inclusiveness she felt.

Table 5.3  
*Boarding School, Embracing Native Identity*

Theme	Narrative from Interview
Native Identity	<p>When I finished my ninth grade year, I had been going to the Indian club.</p> <p>Even though it was mostly with Navajos in a different tribe from me, the person, the sponsor that did that, he really liked [my] culture. He really liked it. He really liked that I was a part of the club.</p> <p>A lot of things we did was, we went to cultural things too that was local.</p>

Notice in Table 5.3 the inclusiveness she felt, her Native identity, was wrapped up in the Indian club. She shared her experiences and that her sponsor really liked her. Yuli enjoyed the Indian club because it got her out in the community. But, she did not speak about her peers, or long-term lasting friendships from her boarding school experience. Her Native identity is based on the Indian club and the cultural events she attended. Yuli learned more about other Indigenous populations, participated in cultural dances, however there is little mention of long-lasting friendships with other tribal members and visitation to other tribal reservations. She discusses her loss of tribal connection and a vague sense of Native identity.

The challenge Yuli battles now is longing for her tribal identity. Yuli has limited tribal language ability, does not know many of the younger generation on-reservation, and has not taught her tribal heritage to her children. Yet, she tends to seek out and work for Native organizations and dances in Indigenous competitions at various functions. She is attempting to claim her tribal identity, but is unable to hold onto what she lost by deciding over and over to stay away from the reservation for the sake of education. Her

sense *home*-lessness will last as long as she lives off-reservation. Yuli's sense of being is directly correlated to her tribal connections. Her tribe makes her feel whole. She will always search to be connected and participate in Native events in order to feel a semblance of how she felt as a child, dancing and singing with her tribal community.

This study has highlighted the burden Native youth face when forced to choose education over family. It is also why some rural reservation youth choose to end their educational pursuits after eighth grade graduation. Just as Yuli stayed off-reservation in the pursuit of education, she now keeps her children off-reservation, so that she can raise her children, rather than an educational institution.

**Education.** From first grade on, every time Yuli had a chance to pursue a better more challenging education, she went off-reservation. Through books she realized there were more options for her than staying on-reservation and following the footsteps of her mother and extended family members. Yuli wanted more in her life than limited educational opportunities, poverty, hunger and *home*-lessness. With as much as she missed her family while off-reservation, she truly appreciated the education she received from boarding school and the opportunities presented. The challenges she was presented with on a daily basis in boarding school are in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4  
*Boarding School, Education*

Theme	Narrative from Interview
Boarding School Education	<p>The classes were really good. I was really happy about that, because they were challenging. They were taught by professional teachers that met the requirements.</p> <p>I really learned a lot. That's one thing I remember about boarding school, too, was as good as the public school, from what I had set my standards for.</p> <p>You could choose extracurricular activities to do sports, or join any club, or nothing. I mean you were left on your own, pretty much.</p> <p>You were responsible for your own educational needs. It was up to me if I wanted to go to class, and how well I did in it, and what I took from it.</p> <p>It was nobody there to support or encourage, or make sure I went. It was like that with all the students.</p>

The challenge for Yuli was being able to balance education, tribal culture and expectations. She had always made the stay or go decision in regards to education. From first grade on she was given the option of staying on-reservation or going off in the pursuit of education. As a result of Yuli's educational desires her relationship with family and community suffered.

**Home-lessness.** High school compounded the issue of *home*-lessness, both in terms of residential instability and disconnection with tribal location and relationships. On the reservation, she had lived with grandma. Although grandma's home was her home, in her mind a home consisted of a mom, dad, and sibling. She did not picture a home where grandma was present, mom was somewhere else, and a bunch of cousins were like siblings. That was her reality though. In Yuli's mind, she was *home*-less. Every

time she left the reservation Yuli lived with a different set of adults, she was *home*-less. Even though the adults were kind to her and she experienced a different home environment, it was not her *home*, with her parents, and her sibling. Then when she initially went to boarding school it was an institution with little comfort. Yuli felt homeless again because she could not walk *home* after class each day and be greeted by her mom and dad. She did not have her brother close. *Home*-lessness lingers to this day because the only place she considers home is on-reservation, running her household with her children. The feeling is tangible and real.

There continues to be a *home*-less struggle as an adult and mother. Yuli feels the loss of tribe so deeply, yet she stays off-reservation so that her children have the opportunity to attend better schools and have a home they can call their own. She was so affected by moving from house to house as a child, she is compelled to provide what she did not have in her childhood. In all likelihood, Yuli will never reside on-reservation again. By the time her children are raised and have families of their own, the reservation would be too remote for continuous contact with future grandchildren.

**Tribal disconnection.** The loss of tribal and family connection began when Yuli moved off-reservation to attend secondary school at boarding school. Yuli was constantly reminded she was separate from the tribal community in which she grew up and at one point, believed the reservation was the place she would always live. The separation continued to grow the longer Yuli stayed away from the reservation.

Table 5.5

*Boarding School, Tribal Disconnection*

Theme	Narrative from Interview
Tribal Disconnection	<p>When I come home, after or during high school, some of them, they're like, "Who is she?"</p> <p>When you leave to go to high school, that we have to, you really get the separation of people that live there, or born there. You're not a part of the community in their eyes. You're someone different, or you're a visitor. I was never able to regain that. I felt really disconnected... It was terrible, because it felt like I kept losing a piece of myself each time, or each year that passed. Each year that I was away I felt like I was losing peace within myself each year that I didn't make it home when my aunt, or my uncles, or my cousins passed away. Each time I didn't go, it hurt because it felt like I wasn't a part of the community. Even though my family still think of me as their niece, or their cousin, or their daughter, or part of the community, I'm sure they've... in the back of their mind...to them I'm not. Sometimes, even though my uncles or my family didn't say, I got the feeling that, "Sometimes you're choosing this white life over being [Native]. You should come home. You have responsibilities as being a part of this community."</p> <p>[My mom] would be the main one using words that, "You're not [Native] anymore. You've turned in to a white person, because you don't feel the need, or you don't have that in you, that you need to come home. That you want to come home."</p>

The best demonstration, as it related to Yuli's connection to her tribe, is in her own words and the turmoil she suffers is substantial. Table 5.5 her tribal disconnection over time very clearly and painfully. Little on-reservation tribal children asking others who Yuli was or her mom telling her she was becoming white because she had responsibilities off-reservation. These were painful comments, hurtful comments and

further solidified the fact that Yuli is disconnected from her tribal culture, family, and community.

Yuli benefitted from her off-reservation boarding school attendance. She was able to attain her educational goals. Yuli lost her “peace within.” Yuli’s mom was telling her she was no longer Native and she felt like she was to blame because she had made the decision to leave the reservation to pursue her education. Each time someone passed away and she could not attend the traditional ceremonies she felt more and more disconnected. Yuli has not been able to regain the connection she lost by moving off-reservation for school. Native youth, like Yuli, should not have to choose between attending school and family. The United States government and the BIE are successfully, if not purposely, achieving cultural genocide. One Indigenous person at a time...pretty soon the cultures, traditions, and languages are extinct.

The United States government supports the public school system, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and the education of Native American youth through the Bureau of Indian Education. It is time for more equity across educational systems. In the section that follows, I present recommendations for policy evaluations and future research considerations based upon the findings.

### **Policy Implications and Future Research Considerations**

This study resulted in essential policies requiring evaluation and suggestions for future research. Critical to tribal cultural maintenance is the restructuring of current educational opportunities offered to on-reservation Native youth so as to prevent the decimation of tribal communities across the United States. Findings from this study suggest there also needs to be a system of determining the number of on-reservation

eight graders transitioning to ninth grade. In the following sections, I further detail the need for policy changes and research considerations.

**K-12 educational opportunities.** The current study provides impetus to develop kindergarten through high school opportunities and policies that support keeping Native American children on-reservation. Given that Native youth are at an educational disadvantage, programs and services need to be designed to provide Native youth with the option of staying on-reservation while attending kindergarten through high school. There is absolutely no justification for having K-12 educational systems all over the world for military children, but not provide the same option for on-reservation Native youth who are within the confines of the United States geographical boundaries.

When the Bureau of Indian Education evaluates their programs they need to reflect on the loss of cultural connection when children are forced to move off-reservation. Better yet, an outside agency needs to evaluate the effectiveness of BIE educational services, mission, and vision. (I volunteer.) A common practice in the public school system is to provide homeschool opportunities, which can include online curriculum. However, some reservations do not have continuous, therefore a textbook based system would be most beneficial to those Native youth. Funding for solar electricity systems would be beneficial on rural reservation school sites and it would allow for continuous online curriculum options. Limited additional staffing would be necessary, but providing on-reservation high school curriculum would allow students to earn their high school diplomas who otherwise would not pursue a secondary education.



**Eighth to ninth grade transition.** There is not a method for determining the true dropout rate for Native youth who graduate from eighth grade, on-reservation, and then choose not to attend secondary school. Statistics in the United States of Native youth, who graduate from high school, range from fifty to seventy percent. Unfortunately, an indirect result of this study was the realization that the Native graduation rate is much lower than recorded. Out of Yuli's eighth grade graduation cohort only seven of ten students went on to high school. Therefore, when accounting for the high school dropout rate, Yuli's classmates, who did not attend secondary school, were not included in the dropout statistics. As a result, the Native dropout rates are artificially inflated.

The Bureau of Indian Education needs to begin tracking the number of on-reservation students graduating from eighth grade and moving into secondary school. This will allow the Bureau of Indian Education to better evaluate educational policies and services in order to enhance services to students who are not attending secondary school, as well as lead to a more accurate dropout rate.

**Cultural *home*-lessness.** The idea of home and how educational pursuits caused a conflict is a really important point. Yuli has never returned to that sense of cultural "*home*" that would have tied her to tribal ancestry and tradition. First, she was forced off-reservation in the pursuit of education. As a mother, she is now responsible for the education of her children and will not move on-reservation due to lack of educational services. She also has to make sure her earnings are sufficient to support her family and there are fewer on-reservation career options for her on-reservation. Yuli is an example of an individual who has become "other" both on-reservation and off. She no longer totally fits anywhere. Her identity as Native is more solid than her identity as a tribal member

due to her inability to reconnect in the way she most desires, by living on her tribal lands, surrounded by family, culture, and traditions. I should not have to state the critical nature of this topic. If the United States does not rectify an ineffective, culture-killing educational system we will lose the greatest cultures, traditions, and languages in modern history. Have we forgotten the Navajos are the ones who ultimately saved us in World War II? How can our Indigenous cultures and languages be of so little value?

**Off-reservation versus on-reservation considerations.** As much as this study has reinforced the necessity to review Bureau of Indian Education policies, I decline to propose the closing of Native boarding schools. There are Native youth, like Yuli, who benefitted from her off-reservation secondary education. I am not suggesting Native students should be forced off reservation. They should have the option of attending secondary school, on-reservation or off-reservation, provided by the Bureau of Indian Education. Some children leave the reservation due to poverty, family structure, or some form of neglect. Others choose to leave the reservation specifically due to the Native connections they can make with students at the boarding schools. There is not one good answer, other than provide more options for Native youth so there is never the feeling of being “forced” to move away from the reservation to attend school. Bureaucracies do not consider the human element when designing policy. The least expensive is generally the default and with children that decision-making process should not be allowed.

### **Conclusion**

The lives of Native American youth, who live on-reservation, are not provided the same educational opportunities of American youth residing throughout the United States. While enhancing Native students’ sense of self by interacting with other tribes in

boarding schools, these same youth lose tribal connectivity, language, and culture by being forced off-reservation to attend high school. Yuli knew from an early age she wanted to attend high school and then go onto college. She did as required to accomplish her educational goals, but she should have never had to leave her reservation to attend high school.

Further study is warranted to understand the complexities of leaving entire populations without the option of attending high school at home, on-reservation, with the support of their families, tribe, language, and cultural traditions. I appreciate a section in Wallace Adams book in which he stated, “The white threat to Indians came in many forms: smallpox, missionaries, Conestoga wagons, barbed wire, and smoking locomotives. And in the end, it came in the form of schools” (1995, p. 5). It is critical to remember why Yuli chose to participate in this study. She believes in the power of education, “your potential of doing a lot of good things or doing a lot of different things is limited just on education if you're not exposed to it. I'm hoping this helps our community.” While Yuli hopes for an educational solution on-reservation, the United States government supports, through inaction, the cultural genocide of Indigenous tribes all over America.

## Chapter 6: I Am Accountable

“The trouble is that once you see it, you can't unsee it. And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out. There's no innocence. Either way, you're accountable.” — Arundhati Roy

I started this research process concerned by low high school graduation rates of Indigenous youth in the United States. Not realizing I would eventually meet Yuli and she would share her story with me. Her educational experience completely changed the direction of my research. I was given insight into her life, experiences, and became completely disappointed with the country we live in, the country I have always believed to be the best in the world.

How could American children not have access to K-12 education near their homes? As a human, mom, educator, and American citizen it is unconscionable that Indigenous youth in the “greatest country on earth” are denied educational opportunities my children have readily available. White privilege has never been so obvious to me and it is devastating. How can our president and United States Department of Education speak of college readiness programs for Indigenous youth and at the same time not provide K-12 schooling on all reservations throughout the nation? I am appalled at the double speak of our government.

As a nation we spend billions warring against other countries, sending millions in humanitarian aid around the world, and providing housing, money, and educational opportunity to refugees entering the United States. Yet, we do not provide K-12

schooling for our Native American rural reservation tribal children. The Indigenous tribes, and their traditions and languages, should be protected and honored as national treasures. It astonishes me that local, state, and the national governments designate Victorian homes and parks as endangered or historical, but the very people who should be recognized and appreciated are continually disrespected and mistreated by all levels and departments of the United States government. Why are we not supporting tribes in reviving their soon-to-be extinct languages and encouraging cultural and traditional revitalization? These people, these cultures, these languages are national treasures.

Disparities and inequities in services have been evident throughout history, but I never quite understood the enormity of discrimination until I heard Yuli's story. I was one of those individuals who never believed my government, the United States of America, would perpetuate the continued marginalization of Native populations (or any group). To realize children are being denied educational opportunities and it is being done so blatantly only supports the notion of cultural genocide as the Bureau of Indian Education is not held accountable for lack of services. It seems it would be easier for the United States if all sovereign nations eventually disappeared and then the United States government would be absolved of responsibility and, I do not doubt, land and property would quickly be sold. Ultimately, United States history would overlook the fact that Natives were Americans long before the rest of us.

Yuli changed my perception of our country and those who lead. I was once so proud to be an American. Now I am more judgmental of legislative policies and decision-making. I distrust the motives of those who make educational policy. The United States is arrogant and bigoted and so focused on portraying itself as a first world country that does

everything right, yet forces children to leave their families in attainment of education. No one is having that conversation! It blows me away. How can we be first-world as a country while rural reservations struggle to maintain electricity? American citizens are uninformed and blissfully so.

Yuli made me very aware that Native populations are not treated equally. Intuitively, I knew this to be true. Living on the reservation and having non-white family members I have witnessed discrimination on occasions and was angered by it, but often countered it mentally by considering those individuals who discriminate as racists. However, when I realized the discrimination was systematic and designed by a government agency this knowledge impacted me in a different way. The fashion in which educational services are provided to my children and are not being provided for our Native rural reservation youth made me wonder the true intention of our government.

My heart hurts for the children who have had to leave home to attend secondary school. Yuli should have never been required to choose between school and leaving her family and tribe, losing her language abilities and cultural connectivity, ultimately impacting Native language acquisition of her children. Since the Department of Defense Education Activity provides K-12 education all over the world, there is absolutely zero excuse not to offer K-12 for Native rural reservation youth.

I have an obligation to do right by Yuli and Indigenous youth. She decided to share her story with me and it was emotional, honest, real, and heartfelt. I do not know if our government understands the impact lack of educational services has on Native youth or they do, and they just do not care. I would like to believe those in charge of making educational policies at the Bureau of Indian Education are just uninformed, but I know

better. As a principal of a high school, it is my duty to provide the very best academic environment possible within the budgetary and district constraints placed on my site. I truly believe I should provide the same education to my students as I would expect for my own children. My greatest disappointment has been the realization that a group of Bureau of Indian Education government officials are making horrific educational decisions resulting in the cultural genocide of tribal populations throughout the United States. What are they thinking? How do they justify limiting the educational opportunities of children? It is their job to provide education. Why aren't they doing it?

I did not realize the impact Yuli would make on me prior to actually meeting and participating in the interview. When I met her I immediately sensed her inner strength and determination. Yuli was smiling, yet direct. Her eyes were friendly, but guarded. As much as we had corresponded over the previous year, I could tell she was still deciding whether I measured up and could be trusted. It is difficult sharing feelings and life experiences with those you love most, much less an individual you have never met in person.

While Yuli was evaluating me, I felt instantly protective of her. The thing is, she does not need my protection, but to this day when I picture Yuli, I feel the same way I do with my three younger sisters. I want to put out my arm and tuck her into a safe spot. I even hesitate writing I feel protective because I do not want people reading this and thinking I am just another white person trying to do good for a marginalized population because of some sense of guilt or white savior mentality. Yuli is strong, intelligent, and quite capable of handling her business. I admire Yuli as a human being, a mom trying to do it right (whatever that means to each of us), and a fellow seeker of knowledge.

The struggles Yuli endured as a result of educational inopportunity on-reservation infuriates me. Since I attended high school on the Quechan Indian reservation, it floored me when I learned the same opportunity was not available across all reservations. My Native friends were not required to leave their families and culture. I was dumbfounded when Yuli first explained she was forced off-reservation for high school because it was not an option on her reservation.

I have a constant loop playing in my head. It goes something like this...I grow up believing I live in this great first-world country, the United States of America. I find out a population I care very deeply about does not have the same educational opportunities as other American children. I question the motivations of the government. I question the decision-making process of the BIE. I wonder why Indigenous populations are not appreciated for their cultures, traditions, and languages. I consider the number of refugees and immigrants coming to the United States and realize their children will have greater access to K-12 schooling than our Native reservation youth. I think about my role as a high school principal and wonder if BIE administrators, on-reservation, are pushing for high school opportunities. Then I circle back around to, is this really a first-world country if we do not provide K-12 access to ALL children regardless of where they live and the challenges in making it happen?

My heart hurts and I am furious at our government for putting children in a position where they have to choose whether to quit school in eighth grade to stay with their families or leave the reservation to attend high school. We can provide K-12 access on-reservation. Our government has not made their education a priority. Simply, I am



devastated Native American youth are not privy to the same educational opportunities as fifty million children living and attending school off-reservation.

Aware that many Americans do not realize rural reservation youth do not have K-12 options, I started emailing the White House (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact>) informing them of the disservice and hoping to enact change. My husband is fairly confident I am on a “watch list” because every time I learn something new and am frustrated by lack of services for Native Americans, I send an email. The only result of my emails is now my personal email account has constant mail regarding education in the United States...none of the emails stated the White House has heard my concerns and are working to rectify the situation.

When I enrolled in graduate school I did it for my career. I was motivated to get a doctoral degree so I could move up in my chosen field. Certainly, in the first two years, I never thought my dissertation topic would change my career goals. However, once I discovered there were still Native American boarding schools in the United States, and it was 2016, I was intrigued. Then I asked the question, why are Indigenous youth attending boarding schools? United States of America. 2016. Native youth are forced off-reservation to attend high school due to educational inopportunity. It makes me teary. Can you imagine being a 14-year-old and choosing between family and education? It is unfathomable.

Where am I now? I am accountable. I have never felt compelled to enact change on a large scale. Yet, now I want to work for the BIE and force educational equity from within the organization. At the beginning of this chapter, I put a quote by (Suzanna) Arundhati Roy. She is an author and human rights activist. Her quote so perfectly

captures exactly how I feel. “The trouble is that once you see it, you can’t unsee it.” I am fully cognizant of educational inopportunities on rural reservations. “And once you’ve seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out.” I must speak. This situation is unconscionable. “There’s no innocence.” Those who work for the BIE and the United States government are sanctioning the cultural genocide of Native American tribes by inaction. There is no excuse. We are all accountable.

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## APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

University of the Pacific  
Benerd School of Education

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

You are invited to participate in a research study which will involve interviews of Native Americans who were required to attend high school off-reservation. My name is Katrina Johnson Leon, and I am a graduate student at the University of the Pacific, Benerd College of Education. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are Native American, between the ages of 18 and 45, and attended high school off-reservation because there was only K-8 on your reservation.

The purpose of this research is to give voice to Native Americans who were forced to move off-reservation for high school. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to share your story with me as it relates to your education and how moving off-reservation affected you. Your participation in this study will last during the time in which it takes to interview you and ask follow-up questions for clarification.

There are some possible risks involved for participants. You may feel high anxiety as a result of the interview, which is classified as more than minimal psychological risk. It is also possible you could experience minimal sociological risk, which is how your community may perceive you after you participate in this study. Loss of confidentiality is always a risk, although minimal in this study. You have the option of choosing to be participate in the interview or not. There are some benefits to this research, particularly you will be able to share your story and how moving away from your family and culture, at such a young age, has impacted you. Many Americans are unaware that the Bureau of Indian Education does not provide a K-12 education on all reservations.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at (209) 639-2081. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Research & Graduate Studies Office, University of the Pacific (209) 946-7367. In the event of a research-related injury, please advise us, and then contact your regular medical provider and bill through your normal insurance carrier.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to insure your confidentiality are using a pseudonym, not identifying your school for K-8 or high school, and not identifying your particular tribe (only the region of the United States in which your tribe resides). The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time with out penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

You will be offered a copy of this signed form to keep.

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Signature

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Date

## APPENDIX B: BIE FORMER STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Current Situation:

1. Tell me about you and where you now live, work.
2. How did you get to where you are now?
3. What is your tie to the Native community?

### Childhood History:

4. Tell me about where you grew up.
5. How many were in your family, siblings? Who did you live with?
6. What are some of your great memories or challenging memories?

### Educational History:

7. Please tell me about your educational experience from kindergarten through eighth grade.
8. What did you really enjoy or was frustrated by during K-8?
9. Tell me about high school. Where did you attend high school? Why?
10. Describe a time in school when you felt proud of an accomplishment.
11. Was there someone at the school who motivated you? Who? Can you give me an example of a positive interaction?

### Educational Perceptions and Goals:

12. How did you feel that you had to move off-reservation to attend high school?
13. Where did you attend high school?
14. How did you choose where to attend?
15. Was your decision to attend high school a family decision or personal decision?
16. How do you feel now knowing Native students still have to move off-reservation to attend high school?
17. If you would have had the opportunity to take online classes or independent study classes to complete high school, would you have stayed on-reservation?

Protective Factors:

18. Tell me about your relationship with your parents. (Description of each)
19. Tell me about someone that you looked up to and why.
20. Tell me something that is important to you that I forgot to ask about.