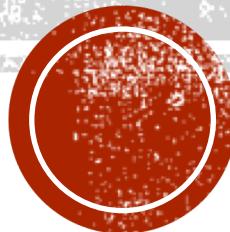


THE POWERFUL INFLUENCE OF SENSE OF BELONGING AMONG NATIVE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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SENSE OF BELONGING

- Sense of belonging means, “*the perceived social support of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group or others on campus*” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3)
- Affects students’ experiences which in turn affects students’ intention to persist and graduate
- **Recognition and incorporation of cultural integrity** contribute to Native students’ sense of belonging
- Cultural integrity defined as, “*the ability to maintain a strong cultural identity through engaging one’s culture as an anchor*” (Oxendine, 2015, p. 11).
- Relationships w/peers that showed respect for their culture, having Native friends, seeing friends as family on campus, and **staff support (including Native staff) contributed to students’ sense of belonging**

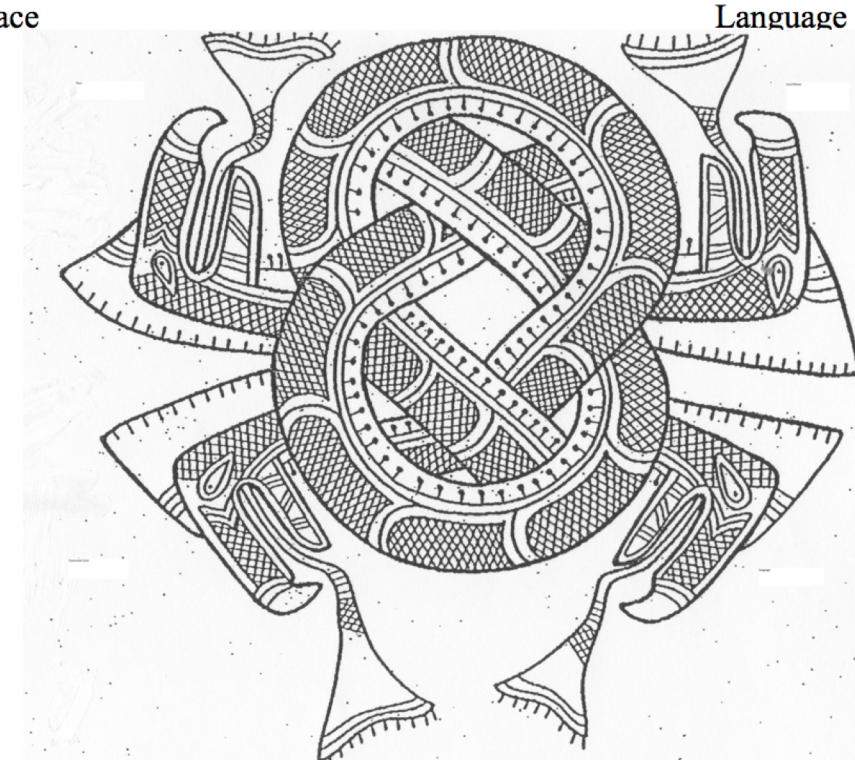


PEOPLEHOOD MODEL

- Peoplehood matrix is a holistic framework that addresses four intertwining factors including **language, sacred history, ceremonial cycle, and land** (Holm & , 2003)
- Peoplehood is derived from the concept of "**persistent peoples**" acknowledging the **first people's survival despite past and present colonization** (Vizenor, 2008)

PEOPLEHOOD

Place



Ceremonial Cycle

Sacred History

From the intertwined bodies symbolizing the four aspects of peoplehood are derived:

- Political and Cultural Sovereignty (statehood)
- Group Identity (nationality)
- Individual Well-being (mental and spiritual health)



- **Shared history** - acknowledges a shared understanding of where Native people come from and presents the concept of kinship, one's ancestral relationship with others.
- **Land** – provides a view into the important connection and dimensions between Native identity and their environment.
 - Belonging has a particular meaning to “place” as Native philosophy is centered on “to be of a place.”
 - Within college campuses, Native students may often feel “out of” or “in search of/creating place.”
- **Language** – shared language that sets a group apart by way of nuances, references, and grammar.
 - Language is not only based on spoken words, but includes ways of knowing, ways of socializing, and other nonverbal communication.
- **Ceremonial cycle** - profound role of spirituality on Native peoples' livelihood that is linked by way of language, sacred history, and place.



METHODOLOGY

- Sharing circles: An Indigenous methodological research approach was employed.
- 24 Native (15 female and 9 male) students from Hopi, Navajo, and Pascua Yaqui nations participated in sharing circles.
- Each sharing circle was transcribed verbatim
- Using a holistic, interpretative analysis of “coming to know,” patterns were compared to other patterns within and across stories in relation to the context of sense of belonging (Cajete, 1999)
- A draft of findings was shared to all who participated in the sharing circles as a way to reach “mutual thinking” to achieve consensual understanding of their experiences (Lightning, 1992).



ISOLATION AND FAMILIAL SEPARATION



- "I didn't know who to talk to. And you get in your dorm a couple days before school actually starts so I didn't know what to do. I didn't know where to go. I didn't know where to go get food. I didn't talk to anybody really. I would go see my friends from high school who I knew also had a dorm on campus and I think that's the only people that I talked to. I didn't know what the hell was going on... I was really lonely just because I didn't know what to do all day. Normally I would just be with my family but I didn't know what to do. That was a lonely time. "



■ “When things start going bad I call home or say I want to go home or **I don’t want to be here**. ... When things start stressing out or when something bad happens and there is no one here, like no family and it gets hard and I want to go home or you feel lonely. **I still feel like I don’t belong, but then it’s kind of like you just kind of have to deal with it**... Just like during finals week or when you start stressing, like now. When you do bad on a test or something or when you have to pull all-nighters and when you have no money.”



DISCONNECTION: SEPARATION FROM CULTURAL TRADITIONS



■ “I'm so used to being around my horses and my grandparents and everything like that even **squaw dances** you brought that up like those things I'm used to **and not doing them here is like you know, why?** Like why don't you have it here?”



MARGINALIZATION: RACIALIZED ENCOUNTERS



■ “My friends were talking about SU Confessions, and I was like let’s see what this is all about. One of the things I remember seeing was, ‘Wow, Native Americans have it so easy. They have everything handed – they’re waited on hand and foot.’ And I was just like, ‘You guys don’t know how hard we had to bust our asses to be here [college]. And you just make it seem like we’re just taking the government’s money. What money are we getting? I don’t see any of that anywhere.’”



CREATING A “HOME AWAY FROM HOME” FAMILY AFFIRMATIONS FROM AFAR



■ “I believe, I think it's just that **the feeling of belonging here [campus] was coming from, probably from my family's point of view** saying like, “**We're proud of you. You're actually doing, you're going to college, you're going to college at the SU, in [state's city].**” That's a huge, big thing to my family. It's just the feeling that **I belonged here knowing that [I am] making my family back home proud.** That was, that made me feel happy here with everything.”



- “I felt like I belonged here because I already knew the campus and I knew that my sister was going to be there so I was excited about going to the same school with my sister, living in the same city as my sister. So I felt like I belonged here.”



CULTURAL AFFIRMATION: NATIVE STUDENT CENTER



■ “[Native center] is where all the Natives hang out and that’s where everything got easier. I **could be myself there**. I could laugh and joke around **like how I would be at home** so [Native Center] really helped me to transition.”



■ “I feel like when I go to [state’s Native center name]... I hear a lot... **things said behind my back**... I feel like I want to cry because they say really bad things about me. It hurts me... I guess you could say because **I get that backlash from like my own Native community and I get backlash for being gay** and it's all these other stuff and I'm like uhhhh... I don't know, it's just like a million things run through my head and at the end of the day I'm just like, just sleep on it, go to sleep, tomorrow is a new day.”



IMPLICATIONS

- Isolation is more than simply loneliness, but rather, it is separation Native students from who they are.
- The university functioned as a site of both interpersonal and structural people *invalidation*
- Taking on an intersectionality approach, focusing on multiple forms of oppression as opposed to an analysis of difference
- Sense of belonging was contingent upon support and validation of a *peoplehood sense of belonging*



DISCUSSION

- In our mentoring work, what activities/approaches might we consider that builds a personhood sense of belonging for students?

