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A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING ATTACHMENT THROUGH THE
CONTEXT OF *INDIAN* BOARDING SCHOOLS

by

Melissa D. Olson (Zephier)

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
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Major: Human Sciences
(Global Family Health and Wellbeing & Ethnic Studies)

Under the Supervision of Professor Cody S. Hollist, LIMHP

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING ATTACHMENT THROUGH THE
CONTEXT OF *INDIAN* BOARDING SCHOOLS

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University of Nebraska, 2020

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This is a qualitative phenomenological exploration looking at how *Indian* boarding schools impacted Indigenous families and indicators of how their attachment was affected. Thirty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 individuals who attended *Indian* boarding schools and 13 descendants of those who attended these schools. The interviews were conducted on a Northern Plains reservation where approval was obtained from that tribal college and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Results indicate knowledge sharers in both groups, individuals who attended boarding schools and those who descended from these individuals experienced critical impacts to their ability to form intergenerational attachments with subsequent generations due to the possibly negative caregiving they received in the boarding schools. Survivors indicated issues of trauma they experienced at the boarding schools through abuse, family separation, abandonment and extreme loneliness. These traumatic processes then implicated difficulty in forming a strong and safe base for an attachment to form with others in their lives. The individuals who went to boarding schools had difficulty in how they survived their difficult times through being independent and focusing on protecting themselves and this often-involved emotional suppression. Survivors taught their descendants that emotion was not important and independent survival was the priority.

Furthermore, knowledge sharers indicated that overwhelmingly, while in survival mode, those emotions seemed less important. In suppressing the negative emotions, many knowledge sharers engaged in harmful coping methods like substances and impulsive behavior. Conversely, knowledge sharers were able to hold onto their culture and through attachments with grandparents, they were able to learn their language and participate in ceremonies. These discoveries emphasize the need for further research on attachment indicators like building trust, encouraging emotional regulation, and teaching positive coping methods with Indigenous families impacted by *Indian* boarding schools.

DEDICATION

This is for Bertha Brown and her mother, Eva, a strong survivor of a boarding school, who recently walked on to the spirit world to be with her family and ancestors. Also, I dedicate this to my family, ancestors and knowledge sharers that helped me with their stories and experiences for this important educational journey.

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This life-changing educational journey has never been an independent pursuit. I definitely would not have been able to accomplish this without so many important and special people in my life. I am thankful for the incredibly unconditional supporters throughout it all. When I met Dr. Cody Hollist, I somehow knew that he would be so important in this journey. He handed me a brochure about this doctoral program and told me to think about the possibilities. He said he saw potential in my skills as a researcher even in my undergraduate days. These words and his unwavering support paved the way for this amazing voyage. Cody, I was always so inspired by who you are as a person; you are someone I was always glad to have in my corner. Thank you Dr. Hollist, I would not be here had you not believed that I could, so many years ago.

I need to recognize that there are people who are my heroes; they are my foundation every day. First, Jake, from the moment we met, you always gave me confidence even though it wavered at times. When I thought I could not, you told me, yes you can, and you will. You always did what you could to help me. There were times when you picked me up when I fell. So many times, you may not have known what to say, you were just there. Jake, your love has helped me get through life's many challenges. It was like you helped me find my strength when I could not see it. You have always helped me pursue my dreams whether it is by making my comfort food or building me a desk. You are my hero. I love you Jake.

Mom, I realized that our family has changed so much over the past ten years, but I've never loved you any less. I realized through it all that you truly were a powerful

strength in our family. Like Grandma Bea, you showed us that women are strong and profoundly determined to help their children and grandchildren. You never said no when I needed help with my babies. You love me and my family so much and I've never taken that for granted. I've been motivated to work hard because of what you and your siblings experienced at the boarding schools and in your own family. Mom, you always supported me, I love you.

Connor and Alexis, I knew the moment I saw you both that I wanted and needed to be a positive and loving mom for you. I wanted you both to see that when you love something that helps others, you work hard to pursue it. Your hugs, pictures, sweetness and silliness have kept me smiling when I needed it the most. Thank you for choosing me to be your mom, I will always be there for you and love you so much.

So many others have believed in me, they saw something I struggle to understand. My beautiful grandmothers supported me with their love, support and prayers. I will always be your takoja (granddaughter). Dad, deep down you have always been a motivating force in my life. You are the one I want to call and tell those proud moments. I have never loved you less. Are you proud of me?

At a conference in Montana, I met a beautiful and strong Indigenous woman, Bertha Brown, who would become a new sister in my life. I am certain that our ancestors put each other in our lives to pursue this extremely special and profound journey together. I admire your commitment to help your people and those who are struggling with historical trauma. I thank you and honor you every day. Alexandra Martin, I am so thankful I found you along the way. I know I became stronger and more positive knowing

you. You have been the best and greatest friend I have ever known. You are a special part of my family and I am so grateful for you in my life.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	5
THE PROCESS OF COLONIZATION	5
<i>INDIAN</i> BOARDING SCHOOL SYSTEM.....	8
ATTACHMENT THEORY.....	12
<i>ATTACHMENT ORGANIZATION AND DISORGANIZATION</i>	14
<i>ATTACHMENT AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT</i>	17
<i>ATTACHMENT AND STRESS PHYSIOLOGY</i>	18
<i>ATTACHMENT AND CULTURE</i>	20
<i>ATTACHMENT AND TRAUMA</i>	22
IMPACT OF <i>INDIAN</i> BOARDING SCHOOL SYSTEM	26
SIGNIFICANCE	32
MY FAMILY’S STORY.....	39
<i>RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY</i>	43
CHAPTER 3: METHODS	47
PARTICIPANTS	50
PROCEDURES	54
ANALYSIS.....	56
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	60
ABANDONMENT AND TRAUMA	60
SURVIVORS’ DATA.....	61
DESCENDANTS’ DATA.....	65
ABANDONMENT AND TRAUMA SUMMARY	67
INDIVIDUAL COPING THROUGH EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION	67
SURVIVORS’ DATA.....	68
DESCENDANTS’ DATA.....	75
FINDING FAMILY IN CHAOS	78
SURVIVORS’ DATA.....	78

DESCENDANTS' DATA.....	82
SELF-WORTH.....	84
SURVIVORS' DATA.....	84
DESCENDANTS' DATA.....	86
PERSONAL STRENGTH OF KNOWLEDGE SHARERS.....	88
SURVIVORS' DATA.....	89
DESCENDANTS' DATA.....	90
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION	92
RESEARCH QUESTION 1	93
RESEARCH QUESTION 2	96
RESEARCH QUESTION 3	100
IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS	105
MY DISSERTATION JOURNEY	110
LIMITATIONS AND CONTEXT.....	112
CONCLUSIONS.....	114
REFERENCES.....	118
APPENDIX 1: QUALITATIVE SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS.....	132

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“It was always like waiting to be rescued and nobody ever came. It was always having to think about, you know, I have to go with, just go with whatever is going on...like being condemned.” These were the words of an honored Indigenous elder, interviewed for this study, who remembered feeling this way frequently in the *Indian* boarding school dormitory where she was sent during much of her childhood. The greatest gift children can receive from their caregivers is attention and attuned responses to their needs (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1988; Cassidy and Shaver, 2016). This quality is instinctual, not dependent on age or stage in life and is called attachment (Bowlby, 1988). As human beings, we need to know that we have someone who cares for our wellbeing and how we experience life through all its ups and downs. When we have that secure bond with someone, we learn to understand our emotions (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1988). When we do not have that bond, we experience distress when faced with stressful experiences and no caregiver is there to help regulate negative emotions (Bowlby, 1973). Knowing this, how does the *Indian* boarding school system which affected hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children, like the elder who spoke those profound words, impact this critical and developmental bond?

During the 19th and 20th centuries, thousands of Indigenous children were taken from their families and tribes and placed in boarding schools, this system was called by the U.S. government *Indian* boarding schools (Adams, 1995). In an effort to assimilate these children to Euro American ideals, many Indigenous children lost the safe and secure bonds with their families (Duran & Duran, 1995). They went to an environment where no one was there to comfort them and breaking rules, i.e. speaking their own

language, often led to physical and emotional abuse (Adams, 1995; Churchill, 2004; Trafzer, Sisquoc, & Keller, 2006). Many experienced horrifying traumas in their formative years and as a result, they are referred to in the literature as boarding school survivors. (National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, 2012). The term is also denoted from what Vizenor (2008) calls “survivance,” where these courageous Indigenous people have managed to hold onto their cultural and spiritual beliefs despite the effects of colonization. The trauma they may have experienced during these early years of development impacted their self-concept and how they perceived others in that context (Levy & Orlans, 2016; Johnson, 2002). This happened for many groups of Indigenous people in the United States. Haskell and Randall (2009) theorize that often traumatized children develop in a maladaptive manner and if their trauma goes untreated, they then grow up to become traumatized parents. As such, it seems that understanding this should be a priority of social science.

This leads me to an important question that until now has been unexplored through social science research: what was the impact of the *Indian* boarding school experience on Indigenous family attachment? This dissertation will explore impacts of *Indian* boarding schools on family attachment from the perspective of those who attended the boarding schools and those who were raised by someone who attended the boarding schools on a reservation located in the Northern Plains. Family relationships historically were and continue to be considered sacred to many Indigenous American communities, so did *Indian* boarding schools impact that in any way? I will also provide a background on the intentional process of colonization through *Indian* boarding schools and the potential implications this assimilation policy has for Indigenous American attachment.

An extensive look into the attachment theory will be provided to contextualize the need for a focus on Indigenous family attachment and *Indian* Boarding Schools. To date, social science research has not considered the importance of attachment relationships for children who attended *Indian* boarding schools. There is limited knowledge of the impact of attachment ruptures for Indigenous children. The intent of this dissertation is to explore what exists in social science literature and historical testimonies and the need for further research on the impact of boarding schools on traditional family relationships of Indigenous families.

I blended qualitative phenomenological and Indigenous research methodology to explore the experiences of *Indian* boarding school survivors and their perception of how those experiences impacted their attachment behaviors. I am a first-generation student, not a first-generation student to go to college, but a first-generation student not to attend *Indian* Boarding Schools. Thus, I am a descendant of generations of forced assimilation. I experienced different things than others in my social context possibly related to the fact that my mother and her siblings and grandfather all attended boarding schools. It is for this reason, I utilized an intergenerational focus to fully explore the transmission of those attachment behaviors. The purpose of this study is to conduct an exploration of *Indian* boarding school experiences while focusing on family dynamics and relationships.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that the word *Indian* is italicized to emphasize that it is a word of the past and is historically inaccurate as it was a word used incorrectly to describe the Indigenous people that were met on the coasts of America by European explorers. Additionally, the *Indian* boarding school system was applied to the entirety of this assimilation forced upon Indigenous families. Also, in accordance with the National

Native American Boarding Healing Coalition (NNABS) (2012), all Indigenous adults who have attended an *Indian* boarding school are survivors and their children and grandchildren are descendants. “We support each other as relatives as we heal from the collective, profound trauma of U.S. *Indian* boarding schools” (NNABS, boardingschoolhealing.org, 2012). Thus, I will be referring to these knowledge sharers as survivors and descendants when speaking about their generational group specifically.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I am going to review the literature on colonization, the *Indian* boarding school system and attachment theory to examine the impact this system had on families. This evaluation will demonstrate that these processes are possible links to understanding Indigenous peoples' struggles. I will then coalesce both concepts in identifying what research exists on trauma and attachment. This will align with the intent of exploring the impact of historical trauma on one's ability to form attachments with others in their life.

The Process of Colonization

The United States of America was created with the common ideal of opportunity, expansion, and freedom; however, Indigenous American culture was sacrificed in the pursuit of this *American dream*. This was often depicted by the portrait entitled, "American progress," where an angel-like woman is seen leading the way towards the west. Indigenous people are seen in the west, being pushed there by settlers, trains, and agriculture. The pursuit of this dream is labeled as the Manifest Destiny of European Americans (Adams, 1995). "The past five hundred years have been devastating to our communities; the effects of this systematic genocide are currently being felt by our people," (Duran and Duran, 1995, p.6). The horrific trauma of colonization created a group of people afraid to be who they were—Sioux, Seminole, Arikara, Creek, Cherokee, etc.—because they were told that they did not matter. They were equated to a savage and inferior class of people that did not deserve basic humanity. Indigenous Americans were told repeatedly to trust the United States treaty officials and that the documents they established would create security, alliances, and monetary resources for the Indigenous

Americans. Denetdale (2015) calls these harmful methods a basic violation of human rights; however, in the historical context, they were acceptable.

Indigenous Americans approached early contact with Europeans with a sense of caution; however, they were agreeable to sharing land, resources and knowledge. It was often confusing for Indigenous Americans to “sell” land to the Europeans because from their perception, no one truly owned the land. The people belonged to the land and it could not be sold. Many tribes tell stories of how they were united in their duty to honor the land that their creator bestowed onto them. “Once they [the Lakota] reached the Hills and made them their home, they saw their arrival as prophetic fulfillment. The Black Hills in Black Elk’s words, was a ‘promised land.’ As such, in the decades to come, Lakotas would fight for it with all they had,” (Ostler, 2010, p. 27). Craft (2013) also supports this by stating that “the Anishinabe do not own the land. ‘We belong to the land.’ Others say, we are made of the land,” (p. 96). Indigenous Americans would have shared the land with the Europeans, but as I stated before, the US had different visions for the land. It is also important to remember that gifts, storytelling, and peacemaking were often involved in the initial encounters between the Indigenous Americans and the Europeans (Calloway, 2013).

Europeans created treaties with Indigenous Americans to gain possession of land for resources and offered verbal agreement of protection for the tribes. While Europeans may not have thought that Indigenous Americans were civilized enough to understand the words in the treaty, the Indigenous Americans understood them. When Europeans did not abide by the agreements, they began to distrust those words and became more cautious and suspicious of those agreements. It was a betrayal of trust when Europeans did not

follow those treaty agreements and instead utilized dishonest methods to acquire the land from them.

“Damaging as treaties were, *Indian* people focused their anger on the breach and disregard of treaties more often than on the treaties themselves. After all, treaties recognized tribal sovereignty and established important rights; it was military action, legislation, and judicial decisions that negated that status and those rights,” (Calloway, 2013, p. 239)

Additionally, Europeans labeled Indigenous Americans with harsh words like savage, inferior, dirty and stupid which only helped to foster the contentious relationship.

As a part of those treaty agreements, Europeans stipulated tracts of land that were meant to serve as *reservations* for the Indigenous Americans to create their new home. Often these relocations were necessary to utilize resource-rich land that was more useful to Europeans—from their perception. The Europeans did not know that Indigenous Americans’ identities are tied to the lands that they inhabited. “The oceans, the lakes, the rivers, it’s similar to a blood vein in your body. It’s like that. It’s like the water on earth is its blood and the plants like hair. Also, the ground is the same as your flesh,” (Craft, 2013, p. 96). Land was given to Indigenous Americans in allotments often in remote states under extreme coercion. Tragic and traumatic incidences of forced relocation further instilled the sense of distrust and hatred for Europeans. Thousands of Indigenous people were killed in the process and entire tribes were lost as a result in the historically traumatic events like the *Trail of Tears*, *Tragedy of Bosque Redondo*, *Massacre at Wounded Knee*, for example.

Indian Boarding School System

The methods of eradication, relocation and providing land allotments to the Indigenous Americans proved to be unsuccessful to the US officials intent on their visions for manifest destiny. Consequently, the US considered education as a means of assimilation (Trafzer, Keller, & Sisquoc, 2006; Adams, 1995). "There was only one way for the *Indians* to survive the onslaught of progress; they would have to be swallowed up in the rushing tide of American life and institutions. That was the only solution," (Adams, 1995, p. 38). This was the vision for United States Army Captain Richard Henry Pratt. as he started the first federal government-funded *Indian* boarding school in our history. Churchill (2004) contends that Pratt wanted to create *Indian* boarding schools with these principles:

1. The need for inculcation of individualism among Indigenous people.
2. *Indians* should be universally educated to hold Euro western beliefs.
3. All *Indians*, educated and individualized, should be absorbed as citizens in the US body politic (p. xvii).

These ideals would prove to change the appearance, feelings and lives of all involved forever. Today's context would view the *Indian* Boarding School assimilation as cruel and inhumane; however, times were much different then. Duran and Duran (1995) conjecture that the process of assimilation through the mask of education inflicted a wound on the soul of every Indigenous American that were in attendance. Sandy White Hawk (personal communication, 2019) emphasized at the second annual Boarding School Healing Coalition Conference that, "Historical trauma meant that the education

was a source which caused pain, but we're using education to heal the historical trauma now.”

Indian boarding schools, established in 1879, operated under the motto, “Kill the *Indian*, save the man,” (Trafzer, et. al, 2006). There were over three hundred boarding schools during this glossed-over time in our history (Lajimodiere, 2017). While there are no exact numbers of how many Indigenous American children were forced to attend these schools, the United States government made it a federal policy for all Indigenous American children. In 1887, nearly 95% of school-age children were recorded as attending residential schools throughout the United States (Superintendent of *Indian* Schools, 1887). In 1926, 83% of school-aged Indigenous children were attending *Indian* boarding schools (Lajimodiere, 2017). Generations of Indigenous Americans were taken from their homes and required to abandon their tribal ways in order to learn how to be “American.” Communication with parents and family members were forbidden because the teachers viewed any connection with children’s family and culture as regression (Adams, 1995).

There were two types of boarding schools—government-operated and secular schools. Historical testimonies indicate that the priorities of school officials differed in the beginning of the assimilative experience. In its early stages, after Pratt opened Carlisle *Indian* Industrial School and other government-funded schools around the US, the focus of the curriculum was heavy with trade-related skills rather than academic pursuits. Pratt emphasized to the government that this would be successful because not only would schools take away their tribal ways, they would also produce individuals who were able to support the prosperous ideals of the US. Along with this system of

civilization, school officials neglected the physical and emotional needs of the children. Religious schools pushed trade skills along with their religious-centered ways of learning. Additionally, the geographical location of each school is important to identify when exploring each child's experiences. The schools located in the Northern plains were often placed intentionally by bodies of water to prevent children from running away. Also, the geographical location was intended to be far from their tribal homeland to prevent regression or family visits.

The Meriam report in 1928 revealed the actual conditions of those schools for Indigenous children. According to the report, "the boarding schools provided poor diet, were overcrowded, did not provide sufficient medical services, were supported by student labor, and relied on a uniform curriculum rather than raising teacher standards," (Meriam, 1928). Following this report, poor conditions and education curriculum were expected to improve among the *Indian* boarding schools.

The *Indian* Education Act of 1972 focused attention to the cultural needs of each American *Indian* and Alaska Native student. Each boarding school was expected to provide a more culturally appropriate education to their students and abandon all assimilative policies (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005). The type of experience a child had in their boarding school is directly relevant to the time period, geographical location and type of school they attended. Schools prior to 1928 may have provided their students outrageously deficient educational experiences full of physical labor, rigid rules and inhumane discipline based on historical testimonies and the aforementioned Meriam Report (Trafzer, et al, 2006; Knockwood, 2015). Tragically, numerous schools had unsanitary conditions producing many sick and dying children.

The social psychological implications of the assimilation process of the boarding schools were profound. School officials may not have recognized that by severing critical relationships between parents and children, they were not only eliminating culture but also obliterating familial relationships (Duran & Duran, 1995). By eradicating those family relationships, the parental attachment is impacted and this affects how all people emotionally develop and learn (Bowlby, 1988). Additionally, *Indian* boarding school officials took away vital cultural dynamics that define identity and sense of wellbeing—with critical implications for students' ability to cope with the very traumas they were inflicting—both at the time and as these children grew to adulthood. In response, Indigenous American children suffered a dual loss of identity and family connection (Duran & Duran, 1995). The impact of the historical trauma experienced at these harshly assimilative educational residential schools is not yet fully understood.

What we do know is that Indigenous American children were forcibly taken from their families and everything they knew was taken from them including their language, name, long hair, clothes, concepts of spirituality, etc. (Adams, 1995; Trafzer, et. al, 2006; Lajimodiere, 2019). Many special cultural identity features were taken from Indigenous American children who attended *Indian* boarding schools. “One of the most devastating policies implemented by the government were boarding schools, which were primarily designed to destroy the fabric of Native American life—the family unit,” (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 33). Children were taught that anything tribal was forbidden and bad, making re-entry in their family extremely difficult. Boarding schools were allowed to run for over 100 years and created generations of children with tribal and cultural identity struggles, thus impacting their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and so on.

Intergenerational trauma is felt by the individual and then experienced through guilt, shame, hopelessness, and overall cultural identity loss which then transmits to subsequent generations (Brave Heart, 1998). Duran and Duran (1995) conjecture that intergenerational posttraumatic stress disorder perpetuates the continuation of colonialism if social researchers and mental health professionals do not help. Indigenous Americans families are still experiencing and possibly operating under the traumatic processes they endured through the pursuit of their education. This then makes that trauma part of their parenting and intergenerational family patterns if they have not been taught otherwise. Levy and Orlans (2016) support this with the following statement, “It is not, however, the specific traumatic events in parents’ childhoods that cause disorganized attachment in the child. Rather, it is the parent’s mental and emotional representation for prior attachment experiences that are most important,” (p. 100).

Attachment Theory

It is essential to continue this discussion with the centrality of the attachment theory in our lives. At its core, the attachment theory research has shown that every human, regardless of geographical location or cultural belief, has the instinctual wiring to depend on a primary caregiver to provide a secure base of comfort and security (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1969/1982). The way that we come to rely on that person for safety and security lays the foundation for the way that we relate to them and other people in our lives. In the context of attachment relationships, we learn to see ourselves, family, culture, and even how to regulate our emotions by our caregiver(s). Furthermore, attachment researchers explain that our internal working model is the way that our mind interprets how attachments with others will look and how we behave in those

relationships (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). This internal working model created through attachment behavior is exhibited through how we perceive others. That model shows how we can expect others to be towards us in our lives. It shows in how we perceive interactions with others and what we expect of others in those exchanges (Lovenheim, 2018). In other words, we form perceptions or expectations of how our caregiver and/or others will communicate with us and, if and how they will be dependable in our stressful moments. Attachment difficulties may arise when information and experiences are perceived differently than what the internal working model has created in our mind (Bowlby, 1973/1988).

As we form our attachment to our caregiver, we learn how to relate to others and how others will relate to us. The way that the caregiver responds to a child's emotional needs provides that secure bond to show that he/she can form their own relationships based on that bond they formed early in life (Bowlby, 1969; Posada, Gao, Wu, Posada, Tascon, Schöelmerich, Sagi, Kondo-Ikemura, Haaland, & Synnevaag, 1995). That bond shows how we will relate to others in our relationships—working, friendship, romantic and future parenting. The attachment we form shows us that we will behave in a way that should support relating to others and how those interactions will go. A secure person generally knows how to manage difficult emotions and interactions in their relationships (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016).

Conversely, an anxious-resistant person has experienced inconsistent patterns of responsiveness from their caregivers so they are not sure if they will be helped in their moments of distress (Bowlby, 1988). This will often show in clinginess with a caregiver or other relationship where they feel like they need to try harder to get their needs met

(Lovenheim, 2018). The anxious-avoidant person has been taught that they do not have someone to help them forcing them to rely on their system of survival to get through the difficult times. As a result, they may push anyone away that gets too close to them because it makes them uncomfortable. Lastly, insecure or disorganized attachment is indicative of children who have not received assistance from their caregiver because their priorities were not on the child. There may be histories of abuse or trauma to the parent which shows confusing and possibly harmful messages to their child as they may not have had a positive attachment with their caregivers (Levy & Orlans, 2016). The child might show atypical responses like freezing, apprehension, or avoidance with their caregiver. Researchers indicate that this attachment type is predictive of how future relationships might look (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016; Levy & Orlans, 2016; Lovenheim, 2018).

Attachment Organization and Disorganization

The attachment theory describes the core tenets for understanding the many behaviors that guide our interactions with relationships. That premise is simply: do I deserve and can I rely on someone I trust to be there when I need care and comfort? That person who provides that emotional availability is that secure base for that child. In facilitating that secure base, they are also sensitive and responsive to that child's feelings. Will they be helpful to that child to understand their emotions and teach them how to create healthy coping strategies? "When young children have no emotionally available caregiver to depend on, they must face anxiety and stress alone," (Levy & Orlans, 2016, p. 330) thus providing a precarious base for that child. Johnson (2002) adds that the secure base offers a child to explore their world knowing that their caregiver will help

them in that process, and this presents the ability to update their mental model of their self and world. The child can then activate a secure-base script to increase their sense of secure attachment by thinking, “If I encounter an obstacle and/or become distressed, then I can approach a significant other for help; he or she is likely to be available and supportive; I will experience relief and comfort as a result of proximity to this person; I can then return to other activities,” (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016, p. 511).

Ainsworth (1967), a founder of attachment theory, identified three types of attachment behavior: secure, anxious-resistant, and anxious-avoidant. If a caregiver is able to provide consistent care and responsiveness, the child is said to have a secure attachment. With this foundation they are more prepared to explore independently and regulate their emotions based on the comfort of their caregiver should they need it. An anxious-avoidant attachment style would be characterized by a caregiver not helping their child in frightful moments thus communicating to the child that they have to figure it out themselves most of the time. Anxious-resistant attachment was evident when a parent provided inconsistent care for their child thus showing the child that they could not rely on that person.

Bowlby (1969/1982; 1988), another founder of attachment theory, recognized that attachment disorders can develop when a child is separated from their parents. Interestingly, he was separated from his parents as a child during his formative years where he was sent to a boarding school, albeit for a different purpose than that of *Indian* boarding schools. These attachment behaviors show in insecure or disorganized attachment where they have no idea of who to rely on for safety and emotional support. Bowlby (1988) recognizes that, “the child, and later the adult, becomes afraid to allow

himself to become attached to anyone, for fear of a further rejection with all the agony, the anxiety, and the anger to which that would lead,” (p. 55). Levy and Orlans (2016) observe that children with the insecure or disorganized attachment may be afraid of their caregiver due to neglect or abuse. Their internal working model might sound like, “Expect pain from parent; I’m bad, worthless, unlovable; I never feel safe,” (Levy & Orlans, 2016, p. 261). Research shows that the insecure or disorganized attachment is often indicative of psychological difficulties and disorders (Johnson, 2002). Additionally, children can respond in erratic ways like fear, reliance, or simply deactivating their emotions.

Research has considered circumstances which can impact a child’s attachment like loss, separation, adoption, or institutionalization. These events are traumatic for children to comprehend because it is a sudden and undesirable change in their lives. Research indicates that the stronger the attachment bond is with their biological caregiver, the harder it is for them to acknowledge that loss (Levy & Orlans, 2016). It was discovered that maltreated and institutionalized children have difficulty with this internal mental capacity and produced a multitude of these behaviors like antisocial personality disorder, depression, PTSD, and drug and alcohol abuse. “Institutionalization is perceived by young people as an undesirable event, causing, at an early stage, a sense of loss that may condition their emotional development,” (Mota & Matos, 2015, p. 210). It is difficult to know the type of attachment bond an Indigenous child had as it may have been different prior to going to the boarding school. The loss that an indigenous child must have experienced is profound to comprehend.

Attachment and Emotional Development

Many of our emotionally responsive behaviors are influenced by the type of attachment that we acquire through our primary or network of caregivers. Those behaviors help guide us through interactional, cultural, and emotional moments in our lives. Our primary caregiver(s) gives us guidance to how we respond in stressful situations. For each instance where we must decide how we respond to that new distressing and possibly confusing time, we have that caregiver to model the way (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1969/1982, Lovenheim, 2018). That caregiver shows us how to respond in accordance to how they were taught in their family and culture (Keller & Bard, 2017). For example, a parent may show their child that it is okay to feel frustrated when things do not go the way they desire. In this moment, a secure child might have been taught to shift their focus onto something else to avoid those frustrating feelings. An anxious or avoidant child with inconsistent availability and responsiveness might focus on that frustration and get angry. The insecure child who experienced their caregiver being unavailable to help them through those frustrating feelings might develop a core belief that no one will be there for them. They may experience this belief in every stressful situation- "*nothing ever goes right* for me" so, how do I protect myself from being hurt?

This core belief can lead to a distressing behavior in managing stressful situations and how we cope with those negative feelings, interactions and situations (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016; Bowlby, 1969/1982). A coping method is a strategy which helps us make

sense of that difficult thing. For instance, if we get teased at school by a classmate, what method do we choose to cope with that negative situation? A secure child may respond in a positive and productive manner to quickly get through the incident as their caregiver has helped them understand the emotions they would feel in that scenario. An anxious-avoidant child might have difficulty in reaching out to a parent or teacher or, as an anxious-resistant child, they could respond in highly emotional ways and ruminate on the incident. Lastly, an insecure child might resolve the incident negatively and aggressively since they may be unable to regulate their emotions when faced with a distressful occurrence (Levy & Orlans, 2016). This then shows that the response we have to any distressing situation can go many different ways dependent on the attachment that we have experienced with our caregiver(s).

Attachment and Stress Physiology

Research has examined the relationship between attachment and the stress response system in brain development (Johnson, 2002; Cassidy & Shaver, 2016; Haskell & Randall, 2009). “In order to survive their overwhelming experiences, children are compelled to make complex adaptations. Indeed, this point can hardly be overstated, because a traumatized child’s very survival requires it,” (Haskell & Randall, 2009, p. 65). Stress is a natural physical response to any upsetting experience we encounter. In our brain, the stress activates different processes in our neurobiology. Specific chemicals like epinephrine, dopamine, serotonin, and catecholamines are activated once a stress is received and processed. These then creates new memories in our amygdala which serves as a center for processing emotions and memories. Levy and Orlans (2016) explain that the amygdala is present at birth and each emotional memory is stored therein. Without

the assistance of a caregiver to process stressful experiences, the child then activates their own way to manage the stressor. It will then “result in a dysfunctional and maladaptive set of brain activities...persistent threat can ‘redefine’ the baseline level of the central nervous system, resulting in hypervigilance and hyperarousal,” (Levy & Orlans, 2016, p. 127).

Schore (2001) observes that caregivers’ responsiveness supports development of self-regulatory behaviors in infants. If infants have these capacities, they can handle new stressful situations because self-regulation allows them to tolerate and adapt to change. Thus, parents provide support and encouragement to infants which helps their brain adapt to cope with times of new change and stress. Conversely, when infants do not experience responsiveness to their emotional needs, “the infant has to become self-reliant at a much earlier stage and learns to shut down attachment behavior in order to protect the self from repeated experiences of rejection,” (Atwool, 2006, p. 319). This implies that further research would need to be explored on the existing attachment an Indigenous American child had before and after going to the boarding school.

Additionally, children who are insecurely attached show difficulty in processing the information in a stressful situation as their fear or avoidance might preempt their perception (Johnson, 2002). Difficulty with emotional regulation increases the risk for substance abuse (Reinert & Edwards, 2009). At its core, the substance addiction serves as a way to manage the insecurity, fear, and trauma they experience (Hazarika & Bhagabati, 2017). In a study, it was found that insecurely attached people used alcohol or drugs to cope with poor emotional self-regulation and then exhibited a fear of intimacy and differentiation of self (Hazarika & Bhagabati, 2017). It is possible that a person develops

a sense of consistency and availability with that negative substance in substitution for the absence of a person to develop that reliable bond (Downs, Seedall, Taylor, & Downs, 2015). A study compared substance use among Indigenous students who resided at boarding schools and Indigenous students who attended public school and resided at their home. It showed that students who resided in the boarding school exhibited higher levels of alcohol intake than the students who went to public school (Baldwin, Brown, & Wayment, 2011). The results of this study should show that the impact of being away from one's parents and family led to increased substance use.

Attachment and Culture

I also want to take this a step further by pointing out that the behavior of attachment is heavily shaped by the way the culture translates methods of parenting, especially affection. Any parent or caregiver has their own cultural identity which may have taught ways to manage emotions, learning and beliefs in accordance with that culture and how they experienced their own attachment (Posada, et al, 1995). A cultural belief might show in how we respond to stress by healing ourselves in certain ways. The knowledge of that culture is taught through the way that our caregiver models to us. We grow and learn based on the way that the culture prescribes for our family. Chisholm (2017) emphasizes that “while the attachment cycle is universal, the beliefs that infants construct are inherently specific to their culture,” (p. 286). For example, in a stressful time for a Lakota Sioux individual, they might pray to the creator and burn sage to cleanse the negativity from their surroundings. They may have been taught by an elder in their family that they will feel better after completing this process. The culture then is taught through the attachment we have with the caregivers in our lives.

One's culture also shows them how to form relationships. To that end, the language becomes an important way to portray the attachment messages. This may also show in how we receive the culturally influenced approval from our parents for marriage. The security of that culture will help shape that child's sense of self and it may give them strength and identity in their family and, this will also dictate the network of caregivers for a child (Keller and Bard, 2017). This would then imply that someone who has not been taught their culture has to find alternate ways of healing and managing emotions; as such, they may be unable to teach culture to their future children.

A study conducted by Bornstein, Putnick, Heslington, Gini, Suwalsky, Venuti, de Falco, Giusti and de Galperin (2008) investigated attachment and emotional availability in the context of three different cultures. Argentina, Italy and the United States all had different responsive behaviors of the mother to the child. For example, Argentina fosters a dependent and obedient relationship of the child in the family while the US usually encourages individualism and autonomy in children (Bornstein, et al., 2008). This then implies the importance of understanding the societal constructs of culture on attachment. Another study was completed in the Columbian cultural context with an ethnographic and quantitative focus (Posada, Carbonell, Alzate & Plata, 2004). The aim was to compare or contrast the link between mother-child responsiveness and attachment behavior in the Columbian culture with research already conducted in western middle-class samples. There were similar results indicating that mother-child dyads experienced comparable types of attachment based on the existence or limitation of maternal responsiveness. Studies linking attachment and culture show the importance of examining this further with Indigenous American historical trauma. This also implies the need for culture as a

context for our development as it serves as the foundation for how we learn and experience our emotions, so this further reinforces that. For purposes of this discussion, please remember that since Indigenous Americans were taken from their parents, they did not receive that cultural context to base their own development and learning. The simple fact that in that cultural genocide, tribes who were able to hold on to their culture and beliefs exhibit tremendous strength and admiration.

Attachment and Trauma

In trauma, a victim will go through the following symptoms: intrusive re-experiencing, numbing and avoidance, and hyperarousal symptoms which may impact their daily functioning (Johnson, 2002; Levy and Orlans, 2016). This trauma then alters an individual's mental model of attachment as they expect or fear certain things in their lives or avoid people or places which cause them to remember the trauma (Haskell & Randall, 2009). The hypervigilance will keep them expecting problems and the need to protect themselves. There are extensive implications in this ideology as it relates to Indigenous American experience.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognize the implications of insecure attachments since we know that not everyone will be able to form secure attachments. Diamond, Diamond, and Levy (2014) recognize that the insecure attachment forms when caregivers are not able to provide that secure base for their child. It may be due to a caregiver's own attachment difficulties in their own childhood like physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, abandonment, depression, etc. Currently, three million children in the US suffer some kind of trauma through maltreatment, neglect, or in any of the previously mentioned methods of abuse (Levy and Orlans, 2016). Through this, 81% of the abuse was

perpetrated by their caregiver and to this end, 90% of those children develop anxious or disorganized attachments towards their caregivers and others in their lives as a result (Johnson, 2005). As discussed previously, many of the children in *Indian* residential schools experienced many forms of abuse and neglect from the school officials. This presented itself through the historical trauma these children experienced in the pursuit of colonization. It is also important to remember that the patterns of trauma are intergenerational. Van Ijzendoorn and Bakerman-Kranenburg (1997) recognize that the intergenerational pattern related to trauma and how it presents itself shows through this context of attachment relationships in the family:

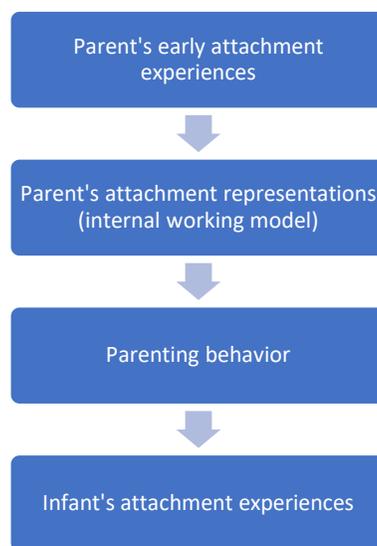


Figure 1: Chart of Cyclical Intergenerational Trauma

Thus, this emphasizes the cyclical nature of trauma and attachment and prioritizes this area of research and current exploration.

It is hard to identify the circumstances and contexts which each Indigenous child faced in the boarding schools. I am not implying that all children have horrific stories from their boarding school education, but evidence exists of traumatic treatment in the

schools. One Catholic *Indian* mission school in Canada rationalized the abuse the nuns and priests perpetrated on Indigenous children with reasons of “disobedience, insolence and simple human nature”. They went on to rationalize the inhumane treatment by claiming they did it in the name of God and bettering the children’s lives. Death often occurred throughout Canada and the US boarding schools and while the unsanitary conditions played a factor, abuse and neglect were cited more often in the testimonies (Adams, 1995; Knockwood, 2015; Trafzer, et. al, 2006). It was always explained through other reasons like illness or the child’s own doing. Another account from an elder recalls his experiences:

The part that was the hardest, they caught us speaking our language. 8-10 of us were still speaking *Indian*, they gave the teachers, maintenance men, all the white people at the school. They gave them a big leather strap. They made us run through it. Nobody to comfort us. I always said, what did we do that was so bad for them to treat us like this? We were just little guys with little skinny legs. That’s why I don’t speak the language no more, it was really effective. So, when we came home in the springtime and my uncle, that man in the picture, and my grandparents said, what’s wrong with this guy? Why doesn’t he speak it no more? Well, that was the reason why, they knocked the hell out of us. It’s up there but it doesn’t come out. That was the reason why we stopped speaking *Indian* and that really stands out to me.

Research has reported the punitive discipline and abuse in the boarding schools could be legitimately causal of a Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Churchill, 2004; Duran & Duran, 1995; Reyner & Eder, 2004). There is currently no official medical or

psychological classification for historical trauma. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee, a group that focuses on reparation and healing for Indigenous Canadians who attended *Indian* boarding schools has pushed to officially recognize a disorder for individuals who grew up in boarding schools—Residential School Syndrome (Churchill, 2004). At present, the US Diagnostic and Statistical Manual recognizes that trauma is defined as a “threat that overwhelms coping resources and evokes subjective responses of intense terror, helplessness, and horror....understanding that neither we nor the world will ever be the same,” (Johnson, p. 14, 2002). This implies the need for further research and reconciliation in the US.

Elias, Mignone, Hall, Hong, Hart, and Sareen (2012) conducted a study to discover the link between Indigenous people who had attended a boarding school and the at-home occurrence of abuse, suicidal thoughts and suicidal attempts. Descendants of the boarding school survivors were also interviewed during this study. It was found that the survivors experienced abuse 32% of the time, had suicidal thoughts 22.7%, and 10.5% had actually attempted suicide. Accordingly, descendants of these survivors experienced abuse 52.1%, had suicidal ideation 22% of the time, and attempted suicide 16.8% in their lives (Elias, et al., 2012). This indicates that the abuse for descendants of those boarding school survivors endured abuse in some form at a higher frequency than that of survivors implying direct intergenerational impact. Furthermore, distressing incidences may become trauma for a child because they experience some kind of loss to their self and identity. That child could not rely on their safe and secure base to help them in that moment. In the face of attachment, that strong and secure base is our buffer against experiences of fear and loss (Johnson, 2002) so the fact that they were not there or

experienced abuse becomes the trauma that a child continuously recalls and feels powerless against.

Impact of *Indian Boarding Schools*

Researchers recognized that traditional parenting was greatly affected by the cultural loss and forced separations of boarding school (Chase, 2011; Adams, 1995; Churchill, 2004; Trafzer, et al, 2006; Fear-Segal, 2007). Historical literature shows that many students were taught how to follow rules and regiments through a physically abusive discipline (Adams, 1995). This pattern continued into the next generation rather than passing on ways to raise their child in a positive and supportive manner. Further, they may not have been able to continue Indigenous ways of parenting where they were raised to foster a sacred bond with their parent and other important caregivers in their lives. Historically, children were the “center of tribal life, provided with love, guidance, spirituality and ceremony,” (Sarche, Croy, Big Crow, Mitchell, & Spicer, 2009, p. 324).

Additionally, researchers observe that others may view the Indigenous way of parenting as lax and permissive in comparison to the authoritarian type of parenting which many Americans adhered to in the nuclear style of families (Baumrind, 1991). In this sense, researchers allude to the possibility that historical trauma negatively affected the traditional mother-child bond (Sarche, et al., 2009). Radin, Kutz, La Marr, Vendiola, Wilbur, Thomas, & Donovan, (2015) continues this argument by observing that the close bond between Indigenous American caregivers and children seemed to be less important and often created family conflicts and absences. Much of the literature indicates that Indigenous American fathers had a limited role in their children’s lives because of the

distress they experienced from historical trauma (Neault, Mullaney, Powers, Coho-Mescal, Parker, Walkup, & Barlow, 2012). It was found that many of these fathers lived in the *Indian* boarding schools and were unable to become a positive parent and role model for their children leading to a distressing absence from their family. This then decreased the presence of a positive male role model in the life of an Indigenous American child (Neault, et al., 2012). These researchers showed that youth might be more susceptible to substance use and high-risk behaviors as a result of not having a father figure in their lives to teach them how to be an Indigenous American male. Conversely, Indigenous American women experienced higher levels of family loss due to their own or their partner's incarceration and lower levels of education (Stevens, Andrade, Korchmaros, & Sharron, 2015).

This idea that family discord of Indigenous American families creates more difficulty in facing stressful times as a family unit warrants further research. They might exhibit an increased difficulty in developing positive strategies to handle adverse times (Stevens, et al, 2015) if they have never been taught how to positively unite through problems. The messages that colonization impressed upon Indigenous Americans were never about collective family healing. Rather, it was more about self-preservation. Additionally, "historical trauma may have counteracted these traditions causing less positive family socialization," (Urbaeva, Booth, & Wei, 2017, p. 2691) thus creating higher prevalence of family discord among Indigenous American groups.

Indigenous Americans who resided in boarding schools often experienced a host of pathological symptoms termed as Residential School Syndrome (RSS) discussed earlier (Churchill, 2004). While Canadian Psychologists have identified RSS as a real

disorder, the United States has yet to recognize this for Indigenous Americans. The symptoms that one experiences have detrimental effects on their sense of self and emotional wellbeing: conflicted self-concept, lowered self-esteem, emotional numbing, inability to trust or form lasting bonds, alcoholism/drug addiction, suicidality, depression, anxiety, and heightened irritability. Those with RSS are “deculturated to the point of being unable to participate fully in their own societies (at least their own minds), and congenitally barred by the race codes upon which North America’s settler societies continue to function from fitting into them either, such people are trapped in a perpetual limbo of conflicted identity, personal unfulfillment and despair” (Churchill, 2004, p. 71).

Many Indigenous Americans may experience confused feelings of where they should live after leaving the boarding school. They may not be embraced by their own family because they are perceived as being different, but they may not feel comfortable living away from their family. Indigenous Americans experience a higher prevalence for high risk behaviors than other cultural groups—three times higher to attempt suicide (Kahn, Reinschmidt, Teufel-Shone, Oré, Henson, & Attakai, 2016). Americans assimilated Indigenous Americans in attempts to *make their life better* but failed to recognize the impact of this horrific process. “Indigenous Americans have been one of the most neglected groups of people in this country in education, health and mental health”, (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 24). Sociohistorical factors have impacted Indigenous Americans on levels that continue to affect their wellbeing and cultural identity.

This literature analysis emphasizes the need to help Indigenous American families experiencing historical trauma from colonization and boarding schools by making this more critical in the field of family studies. While boarding schools have not been a recent

expectation among Indigenous Americans, it leads me to wonder if there is a relationship between boarding schools and family relationship quality. Why do Indigenous Americans experience such pull towards negative and impulsive behaviors?

These impulsive behaviors become evident in the way that an individual copes with the negative and distressing times in their lives. Existing research looks at the links between attachment and maladaptive coping methods like suicidality and substance use. Fonagy (1991) observes that a person must be able to reflect upon themselves in context of the situations they face and people they interact with. This might then lead to impulsive behaviors to help them navigate through their daily lives (Zaccagnino, Cussino, Preziosa, Veglia, & Carassa, 2015). Research has yet to realize how insecurely attached people's reflection of their concept of self is relative to impulsive behaviors.

Further, it was identified through research that the unimaginable grief felt by many tribal nations was profound for historical trauma experienced by Indigenous Americans who were forced to attend *Indian* boarding schools. Brave Heart (1998) defines historical trauma as the grief occurring over the last 400 years experienced by Indigenous Americans and it is typically unresolved. This causes a feeling that one cannot handle the grief they experience from losing their culture and being forced to assimilate. This inability to cope with the unresolved grief then transmits itself across generations creating a group of people in great need of psychological healing. Morgan and Freeman (2009) recognize that these symptoms from the unresolved grief is visible through loss of culture, self-esteem, self-determination, and a lowered sense of well-being. It is then speculated that this grief may be indicative of the higher rates of substance use among Indigenous Americans (Lane & Simmons, 2011; Radin, et al., 2015;

Neault, et al, 2012; Nutton & Fast, 2015; Morgan & Freeman, 2009). Neault, et al (2012) emphasize the need for healing from this unresolved grief and should be at the forefront of research with this population. If we continue to neglect their needs for healing, we are furthering the presence of psychological distress thus creating harmful coping methods for generations of Indigenous American families. The psychological distress then is discussed as a critical issue of concern.

The research by Ghosh Ippen (2009) indicates that in examining collective groups impacted by historical trauma, there needs to be a focus on “the family’s history, current situation, and future goals” which is entirely shaped by their cultural identity. “We must first understand where we come from and how our internal reactions, interpretation of events, and interventions are affected by the contexts in which we developed and function” (Ghosh Ippen, 2009, p. 105). Thus, the focus in helping Indigenous groups must incorporate the Attachment, Culture, and Trauma Model. Ghosh Ippen (2009) encourages these three constructs of an individual to really help if they are struggling with trauma:

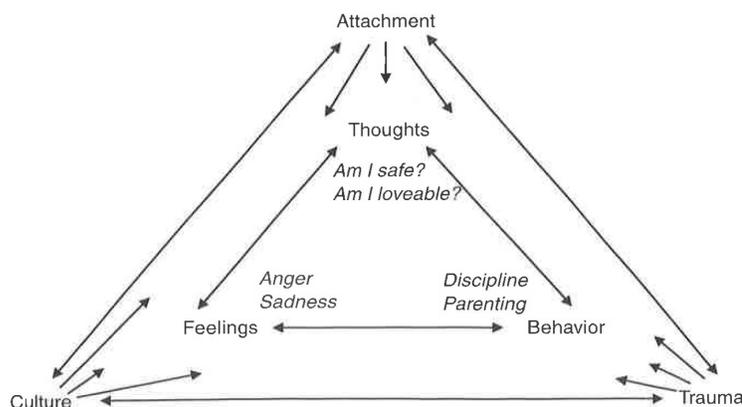


Figure 2: The Attachment, Culture and Trauma Model (Ghosh Ippen, 2009)

It is my thinking that the boarding school abuse and punishment combined with no one to comfort them is paramount in our understanding of Indigenous people. I have come to recognize that the historical trauma of *Indian* boarding schools must be integrated into our understanding of emotional wellbeing for Indigenous groups. Ghosh Ippen (2009) reinforces that “culture influences every aspect of human development,” (p. 109). For decades, social science researchers have alluded to family difficulties among Indigenous populations and distressing public health concerns; however, only a few have recognized that the separation of families from the boarding schools should have higher importance of causal factors to those public health issues.

Additionally, the source of their attachment (the school officials) was also the source of fear and trauma. Recognizing these facts and implications, makes Duran’s statement profound: “When Native American people internalize the oppressor which is merely a caricature of the power actually taken from Native American people. At this point, the self-worth of the individual and/or group has sunk to a level of despair tantamount to self-hatred,” (Duran and Duran, 1995, p. 29). How do we help those Indigenous children who built their lives upon this kind of trauma? My own mother told me that she got through those times where she wished for someone to help her by crying silently to herself. She never wanted anyone else to hear. For those children like my mother, how do we classify their attachment when we do not consider the source of the trauma, the historical trauma?

Significance

What does the literature and historical documentation mean for the importance of this dissertation study? Why should this be a priority for Indigenous and social science research? This leads me to explore the current impact of the historical trauma that some may have experienced. Radin, et al (2015) emphasize that children will learn the behaviors that parent's model and this can be highly concerning if that consists of high-risk behaviors and negative coping methods. Additionally, many researchers observe that the psychologically distressing symptoms experienced at the *Indian* boarding schools often impacted an individual's ability to parent (Haskell & Randall, 2009). If a parent shows their child the negative ways they are handling their psychological distress, the child will learn those ways. Thus, negative behaviors like substance using, depressive, and anxious behaviors repeat themselves in subsequent generations. "They become the parents of the future, devoid of traditional understanding of what it meant to be Indigenous and what the responsibilities were for being a parent. They demonstrated these limitations by becoming parents without guidance and without direction," (Morgan & Freeman, 2009, p. 86).

Negative influences of substance use become a huge area of concern in recognizing the impact of family relationships on substance use. Parental use of substances and childhood trauma are associated with higher rates of substance use among Indigenous American youth (Lane & Simmons, 2011; Radin, et al, 2015; Brown, Dickerson, & D'Amico, 2016; Spear, Crevecoeur-Macphail, Denering, Dickerson, & Brecht, 2013; Barlow, Mullaney, Neault, Compton, Carter, Hastings, Billy, Coho-Mescal, Lorenzo, & Walkup, 2013; Cwik, Barlow, Tingey, Goklish, Lorzelere-Hinton, & Craig,

2015, Lonczak, Fernandez, Austin, Marlatt, & Donovan, 2007). Brown, et al, (2016) suspects that many Indigenous American parents feel so impacted by historical trauma that “they feel trapped in the negative stereotype [of consistent substance use] and accept the victimization thus a hopeless existence,” (p. 858). If this is true, so many Indigenous American parents find themselves repeating the cycle of abuse, substance use, and confusion of cultural identity thus, they continue to teach this to their children. The question still remains, how, if at all, are these struggles related to attachment injury caused by boarding school family separation?

From a theoretical perspective, researchers consider how parenting practices would impact the use of substance use for a youth. Existing research has only considered how the social learning theory dictates that “individuals’ behavior is shaped through their interactions with others in their personal social networks. Social learning theory predicts that an individual’s substance use behavior develops as a result of their interactions with family and friends who model substance use behaviors,” (Spear, et al, 2013, p. 331). As such, youth will learn how to handle stressful situations through the use of alcohol and other high-risk behaviors rather than through traditional and cultural ways of healing. This then may explain the prevalence of substance use in Indigenous American populations. Tragessar, Beauvais, Burnside, & Jumper-Thurman (2010) further emphasize the importance of socialization in a parent-child context by exploring the sanctions that may or may not exist in Indigenous American families. Are the parents imparting their negative views of alcohol or drugs upon their children? Krauthamer Ewing, Diamond and Levy (2015) answers this by stating that “parenting that is rejecting, intrusive, emotionally unresponsive, or inconsistent puts children at greater risk for

insecure attachment [and then show] emotional avoidance, dysfunctional anger, and over-personalization,” (p. 139).

Because Indigenous Americans suffered intense historical trauma in the boarding schools, it is essential to consider the relationship of attachment theory with trauma. Studies have looked at the impact of trauma on attachment. Goodcase, Love and Ladson (2015) recognize how one feels after experiencing a traumatic event—lost, alone and unsure of their surroundings. Studies also indicate that trauma will not be repaired until one can establish some kind of secure attachment with someone else that they can trust. This may have been difficult to achieve in the boarding school. Ringel (2005) theorizes that intergenerational trauma impacts subsequent generations if those attachment losses are never realized and processed therapeutically. Parents will transmit their insecure attachment into the way that they parent their child thus creating similar unhealthy attachment behavior. As was discussed, Indigenous American children suffer such intensely negative traumatic losses in being separated from their parents and then not having the ability to attach to anyone in their lives. Additionally, they encounter feelings of abandonment and disillusion when they return to their homes. It is also important to remember that Indigenous American children are raised to assimilate into the American culture and forget tribal beliefs and customs. I would surmise this made it difficult to find any way to relate to their parents after they have been away from them for so long.

Parents’ responsiveness and assistance in recognizing the disturbing emotions from new situations also leads to the identification of the child’s culture. How then does Bowlby conceptualize the link between attachment and cultural identity? One’s culture is based on how a group of people share a set of ideals, beliefs, practices, resources, and

geographical location (Tudge, Doucet, Otero, Sperb, Piccinini, & Lopes, 2006). Miller (2016) contends that cultural development proves important in identifying the way a child develops in their own culture. This then indicates a strong link between how parents from different cultures define how attachment behavior is created as discussed above. This will vary across cultures. The fact that Indigenous American children were stripped of tribal aspects, they may have never had that cultural context to define their attachment behavior. As such, the loss of culture and attachment becomes an important distinction in this analysis.

As discussed, Indigenous Americans have been a population drawn to addiction-creating behaviors like substance use, gambling, or negative relationship dynamics. Schechter and Francis (2010) feel that our attachment relationship has a direct link to future relationship choices which leads to an effect on our choices and development. Our past relationships determine our future relationships. As such, Indigenous Americans' negative or insecure relationships made during their time in the boarding school can have a result on their future relationships. Thus, from an attachment theory perspective, those traumatic attachment relationships will undoubtedly create negative relationships with others in their futures.

Existing research has heavily focused on substance use studies for Indigenous populations. Many of the articles found a heavy presence of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms as a result of attending *Indian* boarding schools. The post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) are present when someone experiences severe trauma which shows individuals who are unable to handle these experiences through negative symptoms like anxiety, depression, grief, negative risk-taking behaviors, etc. (DSM, 2013). Gryczynski

and Johnson (2011) relate much of the substance use behaviors with Indigenous Americans who were experiencing distressing symptoms from the methods of colonization perpetrated upon them, most specifically in the *Indian* boarding schools.

Secondly, many Indigenous Americans who attended *Indian* boarding schools were unable to comply with strict forms of discipline, shame, and the many forms of abuse they experienced to then develop PTSD symptoms to manage their distressing feelings (Nutton & Fast, 2015). It seemed as though the forced assimilation in the boarding schools created a group of people unable to heal themselves psychologically in traditional ways. These stressful symptoms were then indicative of alcohol and substance use methods of treatment. The traditional methods of treatment become an area of intense consideration. Many boarding schools eradicated the use of these traditional ways and forced their Indigenous Americans to adapt to new, often foreign, ways of healing through organized religion and discipline.

An issue of healing becomes important to the discussion of handling the psychological symptoms experienced at the *Indian* boarding schools. Many researchers recognized that Indigenous Americans believed that healing was meant to happen at a collective level rather than individualistic which was forced upon them (Evans-Campbell, Walters, Pearson, & Campbell, 2012; Rasmus, Allen, Connor, Freeman, & Skewes, 2016; Dell & Hopkins, 2011; Chong & Lopez, 2008; Stanley, Swaim & Dieterich, 2017). Western and individualistic methods of treatment have not been received well from Indigenous Americans and other collectivistic groups. Overall, mental health services have not been successful for these populations and it is speculated that therapists are avoiding collective modals of treatment due to not being trained to practice in such a

way. Since the historical trauma experienced by Indigenous American families happen at a community level, interventions should be given with this in mind (Evans-Campbell, et al, 2012). How can we expect to reach a collectivist group of people experiencing similar psychological symptoms at an individual level? As such, many Indigenous American groups would benefit from collectivistic methods of treatment.

In discussing the breadth of psychological distress experienced by Indigenous Americans, we must realize how profound the loss of cultural identity can be for an individual. Through the process of assimilation at the boarding schools, teachers and school officials felt it was essential to teach an Indigenous American how to be a successful individual motivated by American ideals (in their perception) rather than the traditional and collectivistic ideals which they felt held them back (Adams, 1995). Further, Americans thought the traditional way of living deterred efforts of colonization and technological/agricultural advancement (Churchill, 2004; Adams, 1995; Fear-Segal, 2007; & Trafzer, et al, 2014). Many of the articles referred to the psychological distress an Indigenous American endured through the loss of their culture.

The founder of government boarding schools impressed the message of cultural eradication by applauding a message at a graduation, "Let everything that is *Indian* die within you! You cannot become truly American citizens, industrious intelligent, cultured, civilized until the *Indian* within you is dead," (Adams, 1995, p. 274). As such, the fact that colonization came at the price of Indigenous American culture makes this an important concern for psychological and cultural identity. The price that many children paid for the eradication of culture came through the methods of physical discipline and traumatic submission to authority. One account from an anonymous student showed them

putting their nose to a circle on the chalkboard for using their Indigenous American language for a distressingly long amount of time. They learned that their culture was wrong and psychologically bad. In a study exploring the links between loss of cultural identity and substance use, many tribal elders felt bad for what has been lost of their traditional ways of believing and instilling cultural strength. It was sensed that colonization had contributed to a loss of historical practices they cannot impart upon their children, grandchildren and subsequent generations (Myhra, Wieling, & Grant, 2015).

If we think about indicators of acculturation, we recognize that marginalized groups find intense and distressing difficulty in feeling the need to assimilate to a new culture and abandon their culture of origin (Lafromboise, Albright, & Harris, 2010). Urbaeva, et al. (2017) further discuss this loss of cultural identity in recognizing that the adaptations forced upon Indigenous Americans created a sense of confusion of norms and rules in a cultural context. Indigenous American students were expected to follow new rules, roles, and norms which were very different from their ways of thinking and believing. It was then suspected that the differences in these cultural norms created dual identities which were confusing to acculturate and adapt. It then becomes important to recognize how intense the dual cultural identities truly were for Indigenous Americans as they were told that their culture of origin was wrong, bad and *savage*. The loss of cultural identity then is felt between generations thus negatively impacting family relationships.

My Family's Story

Throughout the process of studying the historical trauma from the *Indian* Boarding School System, I have realized that this research is important not only to survivors of *Indian* Boarding Schools but to children and grandchildren of those survivors. As I said, I am the first generation not to attend *Indian* Boarding Schools and I was raised by my mother who went to various boarding schools in the Northern Plains. This led me to an emotional journey of research into my own family. Two generations ago my grandfather, George Duane Charging, grew up in a thriving Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara community named Elbowoods in North Dakota. He was sent to the Fort Berthold *Indian* Mission residential school as a child because his parents could not afford to keep them at home. Later he was able to attend high school in Elbowoods near his family. He was talented in basketball and felt supported by his family and school. The community supported the basketball team which led to a state championship. The winning game became a controversy for years because players on the opposing team won it according to the points, but there were players on that team who were older than the high school age. Thus, it became a controversy. They were finally awarded the championship in 2002 and the history books were changed.

After school, he was drafted into the second world war and was sent to Europe. It was said that he was greatly affected by the war as he experienced post-traumatic symptoms and began drinking to cope with those feelings and distressing experiences. It was said that he walked in the living quarters of Adolf Hitler. Meanwhile, in the US, the Elbowoods community was flooded by the creation of the Garrison Dam in North Dakota. So many families were relocated to allotted portions of land throughout North

Dakota. My Grandma Gracie (my grandfather's sister) was a respected elder in our Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara family and community. Through a documentary, she stated...

I am one of the last Hidatsas to have lived in the style of the older ways. My people became schooled in the new ways of the white man's society. My son and his children farmed and ranched on the reservation land above the river valley. Sometimes I come here to sit looking out on the big Missouri near my birthplace. In the shadows I can still see the *Indian* villages with smoke curling upward from the lodges and in the rivers roar, I hear the yells of the warriors, the laughter of the little children as of old. Today the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara live on the Fort Berthold reservation as the Three Affiliated Tribes. The elders are teaching the young people the old ways that have not been lost. My people have seen much change, both good and bad. With the help of the creator and his gifts to us, we have survived and will continue to survive if we maintain our respect with the earth, (Henry, personal communication, 2005).

My grandfather and his family were relocated after the flooding of the Elbowoods community. The creation of the Garrison Dam in North Dakota was meant to be a *glorious* structure to prevent flooding of communities near the Missouri River. The price of this progress was my family's thriving life in the safe and tightly knit community in Elbowoods as it was in the path of the flooding from the Garrison Dam. When my grandfather returned from the war, he was forced to relocate his parents' home and start a new chapter in his life somewhere he did not know. As I mentioned, many Indigenous Americans feel tied to their ancestral and tribal lands so for my family to move

themselves to new land was probably a traumatic process. Somewhere under Lake Sakakawea in North Dakota is the community of Elbowoods where so many found trusting and comforting familial relationships. My grandfather's brother, Kenneth, was missing in the Korean war as a prisoner of war for three years. This was very difficult for the family as they had no idea where he was and whether he was alive. When Kenneth Charging was able to return after the Korean war ended, he was greatly affected by the trauma and torture he received during his imprisonment.

George then met my grandmother, Beatrice Giddings who was an army cadet nurse, when visiting at a hospital. They married and birthed eleven children. He was hopeful that he could sustain and support his family. Times were hard though and his post-traumatic symptoms became too much to handle so he became a severe drinker and was physically and emotionally abusive to his family. My grandmother made the decision to send all of their eleven children to *Indian* boarding schools to lessen their time around his negative ways and to help them receive the resources they needed. Because the children were not around their father, they did not learn about their tribal identity. Due to the colonizing policies, George did not feel that his culture was important to his kids. As a result, many of the kids felt confused when they would return home from school and not able to communicate with their relatives.

Two generations later, I am one of the first generations not to attend *Indian* boarding schools. I am a light-skinned Indigenous researcher trying to figure out my cultural identity and heritage. I am always asked to explain my connection to Indigenous American studies. Much of my confusion of cultural identity comes from my mother who did not learn about her culture from the broken relationship with her father and Mandan,

Hidatsa and Arikara relatives and the harsh assimilation policies of the *Indian* boarding schools. Recently, I was at a funeral in my family where my aunt and uncle were discussing their father. My aunt said that she was sure that because of the war, forced relocation and colonization, my grandfather had no control over how he was and how he experienced his negative coping methods. My uncle heavily disagreed saying that there was absolutely no excuse for the abuse he perpetrated upon his family. I sat and listened to their argument thinking how important this was to the current research focus. I could ask any one of my aunts and uncles about my grandfather and the answers would be the same—unsure and negative.

The other side of my cultural identity is found in my father, a Yankton Sioux man who has attachment issues at birth which severely impacted the way he saw his family. He was raised by his Grandmother Victoria, who was an incredible woman, but he never really understood and accepted that his biological mother abandoned him at birth due to her young age and his biological father disappearing. He lived his life feeling negatively towards his biological mother and after we lost Grandma Victoria, he tried to relate to her. It was never reciprocated the way he wanted, and it sent him in a downward spiral to this current day. He lives alone after divorcing my mother and does not wish to have a relationship with me or my siblings. It is very clear to me now that the attachment insecurities he had were so difficult for him and impacted the way he lived his life and his family relationships. I have struggled significantly in losing that special relationship I had with my father and for some reason, he does not feel the same.

The attachment difficulties that colonization created for Indigenous people seem endless in the way that my family evolved. After all of this research, I now recognize

how it has impacted me in my own life—I am a woman raised by two possibly insecurely attached individuals. Luckily, I recognize the strength that lied within my mother as she was able to reframe her negative experiences growing up and build a strong family where she was the sturdy glue that held us together. She became a very strong and securely attached mother who continues to provide for her children and grandchildren.

Furthermore, one of my uncles told me that he was not really sure of the definition of a family and what role his mother or father were to play in his life. He recounted the many dormitories and cafeterias he sat in and wished for someone to help him (S. Charging, personal communication, 2018). I am also reminded of a moment where my mother and uncle talked about how they did not receive many hugs from their parents and felt very confused about their family. As a mother now, I give my children all the hugs they need and deserve; I help them process their difficult emotions and I am teaching them our culture over time.

Researcher Positionality

The entire reason for this dissertation is to help my family realize that the experiences they had in the *Indian* boarding schools were important and meaningful. While I have a deep-seated objection to the entire goal of the boarding schools, I am cognizant of the incredible strength that the survivors, my mom and her siblings included, show in their daily lives. Even though my mom and her siblings were separated during their education and formative years, they make it a priority to stay connected and be supportive of each other and their families. This research journey has not been the easiest as it was marked with profound loss which has affected the secure attachments that I formed in my life. My father also neglected his role as father and husband in our family.

One day he decided that he was done being a father and this impacted me more than I realize on a daily basis. I placed him on a pedestal from the start. As such, my own attachment was severely impacted as I was trying to be a secure attachment figure to my own children. I find myself relating very closely to the research that I am doing. It is also making this possibly relevant to many other children and grandchildren who descend from *Indian* residential schools and historical trauma. From a cultural perspective, Indigenous American families are there for each other through those difficult times in our lives and I can attest to that as an Indigenous woman in a strong family which is still here despite colonization.

Additionally, my educational training was forged with a heavy emphasis on attachment and family systems. I remember sitting in a class learning about the attachment theory and how babies grew with the emotional care and responsiveness of their parents and relatives. I loved the idea that as parents and caregivers, they were responsible for helping their children know their culture, how to regulate emotion and handle stressful situations. They learn how to trust those who love them and deserve that trust. I now have two little ones of my own who experience a range of emotions and I find myself lucky to be a part of that. They use me as a source of comfort and love when they need help. I hold them when they are sick, when they have fallen and hurt their knees. What an amazing gift our attachment has provided all of us.

Those children who were ripped from their families to attend school, during a time in their lives when they needed the most comfort and love, become pinnacle to the field of research on this topic. They had to create new ways of comforting themselves in the cold and lonely dormitories which accompanied a host of traumatic experiences from

educational assimilation, harsh physical labor, and abuse when trying to remember their own tribal ways. Many Indigenous Americans have been told to be tough, independent and “just get over it.” Our culture is meant to provide us with ways to handle difficulty and sources of strength, but we have generations of children who lost that. The importance of this research becomes paramount.

Lastly, to say that this research process has changed me is an understatement. I fully immersed myself in historical documentation, personal accounts, social science research and Indigenous American research conferences. There were times where I had to close the book and breathe. There were times when I told my mother I was sorry for what happened because she never told me about the negative things that she may have experienced. To say that Indigenous American survivors are strong and resilient seems like an understatement as well. I sat at the first Boarding School Healing Coalition conference in Carlisle, Pennsylvania recently and felt immense pain for what I was hearing. I walked on the same grounds as those children who were taken from all over the country and forced to become *American* and told that there was something inherently bad about who they were and where they came from. I was told at the conference that we are supposed to help our people in decolonizing the messages they received. A 99-year-old beautiful survivor raised her hand during my presentation and said, “how do I help my family now?” In that moment, I was speechless. In trying to help her, I told her to embrace those special moments and celebrations that her family held sacred. I then asked her to think about a couple questions which I found to be great in this exploration, what makes your family special? And what are you proud of in your family?

How do we create change in a way that helps Indigenous American families handle the negative things that colonization created? How do we create healing for those children at Carlisle who never got to leave? I walked by graves that said, “Unknown.” America truly needs to recognize the trauma that they inflicted upon the entire Indigenous American population. Children died in the pursuit of *American greatness*. I wonder how this truly impacted the psychological wellbeing of those kids that survived those boarding schools.

This follows me as I embark into this field of research. To say that I am not biased will never be true which I feel is obvious to any reader. Alternatively, I am confident to say that this bias created the fire in me to commit my life to exploring this area of uncharted research. It is because I am so determined and passionate to help Indigenous people that this research is becoming a priority after every conference presentation and publication.

Nevertheless, I will approach each step with a sense of neutrality and respect for those survivors. There will never be a point where a survivor will feel like I am being deceptive or committed to exposing the negative aspects of boarding schools. There may be positive experiences where survivors are able to say that they appreciated their teachers for the trade skills they were taught as it helped them when they had their own house. I feel that I was led to this research by my ancestors to explore it further and make a small impact on the field of Indigenous research. My friend and research collaborator, Bertha Brown, told me that she was drawn to help me because it was in the spiritual embers she saw one day. I am holding onto this spiritual guidance and ancestors’ assistance with every step of the research process and journey.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this qualitative narrative and phenomenological study is to explore attachment indicators in Indigenous American families that have been impacted by *Indian* boarding schools. The research questions are the following: What kinds of attachment-related indicators are shown in indigenous children who attended boarding schools? How do *Indian* boarding school experiences contribute to an adult's ability to attach to other family members? Lastly, how did the boarding school experience impact intergenerational relationships formed by Indigenous children, parents, and grandchildren?

I have selected to merge the Indigenous decolonizing research methodology with a qualitative phenomenological approach in this research because it gives Indigenous Americans the most respect and allows them to be heard. In the Indigenous studies that I examined, researchers emphasized the importance of implementing story-telling approaches with Indigenous Americans to help them feel comfortable enough to tell their story. In utilizing both phenomenological and Indigenous research methodology, it was hoped that the Indigenous knowledge gained would contribute to a deeper level of understanding towards the essence of the boarding school experience's impact on attachment. For much of history, their voice has not been important, and their language even dismissed as inferior. A qualitative approach within this framework will enable these knowledge sharers to have opportunities to amplify their perspectives and experiences. One study suggested that many meanings could be inferred from one single quantitative question and recommended that open communication could further explore this question and ask the participant to explore it further (Langdon, Golden, Mayfield

Arnold, Maynor, Bryant, Freeman, & Bell, 2016). Based on the purposes of this research study, a qualitative approach was implemented.

First, the phenomenological approach implies that through these interviews, the knowledge was explored to determine the essence of my knowledge sharer's experiences at the boarding school and among their family (Creswell, 2013). It was also pertinent to explore the shared experience in boarding schools and how it influenced critical family relationships. These stories and experiences were then examined to produce shared meanings and significance. In essence, the knowledge provides "very accurate descriptions of reality, with very little interpretation other than, perhaps, organizing sections of materials according to a few themes," (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 50). It is through this perspective, I give these very real, and profound stories a chance to be heard.

Additionally, it is paramount to discuss the importance of narratives and language for Indigenous Americans. During a time of historical loss, many groups lost their ability to use their own language. When they attended *Indian* boarding schools, they were expected to learn and use the English language only and would get harshly disciplined if they spoke their own language (Adams, 1995) so when many studies focus on the importance of a cultural group that uses their storytelling abilities to continue their culture, it becomes essential then to use qualitative methods to amplify those voices. Quantitative approaches may miss opportunities to hear these powerful and important attachment experiences of Indigenous Americans. "Within the culture, traditional knowledge is cultivated through many methods, one of which is stories. For traditional American *Indian* persons, stories impart traditional knowledge, connect the past with the future and provide 'coherence to experience...provoke being, and affect lives,'" (Hill,

Pace, & Robbins, 2010); Robbins & Harrist, 2004, p. 26). The power of narrative storytelling goes back generations and generations for Indigenous Americans, so it only makes sense to facilitate this through qualitative narrative research studies.

Indigenous research methodology involves decolonizing the western approaches to social science research (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Tuhiwai Smith (2012) describes this by saying, “They [Indigenous populations] share experiences as peoples who been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives, even after it has formally pulled out,” (p. 7). Research has been done unethically with Native American populations to the excess of being inhumane (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2012). It becomes essential that any research done must be done with Indigenous Americans involved in the planning, so they understand and accept my purpose and that there is no deception involved.

Additionally, there have been times where people brought illness to the reservation, so tribal approval is essential in the planning stages of the research. As such, I have to be cognizant of the correct research board approvals within each tribe I work with now and in the future. I also want to be vocal with the tribal collaborators and involve them with any study that I conduct. Through the interviews, I created a semi-structured interview which gave me a guide; however, I gave the knowledge sharers extensive space to shape their own experiences and narratives. It was important to allow them the capacity to tell their stories as described by Indigenous research methodology. The phenomenological methodology was important in exploring the key themes and meanings.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to identify Indigenous American adults who have specifically attended an *Indian* boarding school in the Northern Plains region. I attained approval from the tribal college institutional review board to conduct narrative interviews with 31 knowledge sharers, in both groups—survivors who attended boarding schools and their descendants who were raised as a product of those experiences in the boarding school. I was able to meet and interview people from 9 different tribes affiliated with this reservation. The purposive sample of knowledge sharers led to 23 participants from the reservation's primary tribe, two individuals from two different tribes and one in 6 other tribal affiliations for a total of 31 individuals interviewed (some had dual tribal identifications). Most of the sample was female (n=23) and the mean of the age of the entire sample was 56.5 years old. For survivors, the mean age was 64 with 16 of the 18 survivors had parents and 5 of 18 grandparents who had attended boarding school. Among the descendants (mean age of 47) there were 11 of the 13 with parents and 11 of the 13 with grandparents who had attended boarding schools (see Table 1 for sample demographics). This study interviewed three generations of knowledge sharers. All interviews were conducted individually with one knowledge sharer, the interviewer and 15 of them with Bertha Brown present. Overall, 16 of the 31 were interviewed face-to-face in a physically safe location at the reservation and others (n=15) were either living outside the reservation (n=14) or preferred to be interviewed remotely to prevent any possible risk of COVID-19 transmission (n=1). Bertha was present during two of these remote interviews. The following table shows the salient demographics of the knowledge sharers:

Survivors' Data			
	Mean age	Mean Years in Boarding Schools	Gender
Survivor (n=18)	64	8	F=14 M=4
Only parents attended boarding school (n=12 of the 18)	63.5	8.29	F=7 M=5
Only grandparents attended boarding school (n=1 of the 18)	70	12	F=1
Both parents and grandparents attended boarding school (n=4 of the 18)	62.25	7.25	F=3 M=1
First generation to attend boarding school (n=1 of the 18)	63	5	F=1
Descendants' Data			
Descendants (n=13)	46.77	NA	F=11 M=2
Only parents attended boarding school (n=2 of the 13)	39	NA	F=1 M=1
Only grandparents attended boarding school (n=2 of the 13)	52.5	NA	F=2
Both parents and grandparents attended boarding school (n=9 of the 13)	47.22	NA	F=8 M=1

Table 1: Demographics of Knowledge Sharers

Additionally, it is important to identify that knowledge sharers came from families throughout the reservation. The primary method of recruitment for 19 of the 31 knowledge sharers was through referrals by Bertha Brown. She knew the individuals who attended boarding schools and often knew if they had adult children or grandchildren that we could invite to participate. The other 12 knowledge sharers were recruited from a social media tribal group forum. An invitation to participate was posted on the forum, with tribal consent, and they contacted the interviewer via telephone or messaging. To set up the interview I communicated with them through social media messaging or by telephone to tell them more about the study. If they still wanted to participate, we then set up a day and time to conduct the interview by telephone.

From a cultural perspective, indigenous people believe that they are all related. Pihama and Cameron (2012) remind us that...

We link to people we may never have met before. We link on an ancestral level. We link on a spiritual level. We link on a tribal level. These connections keep our relationships, our collectivity, our language, and our knowledge alive. And they remind us we are responsible for one another and for all we live alongside of on this *Papatūānui*, great Mother earth, (p. 226).

As such, through the recruitment process, Bertha Brown insisted that we identify that all are related. For the purposes of qualitative demographics, I will identify that among the knowledge sharers' interviewed, there were seven families which were directly related according to a western defined perspective. One family had four participants, a sister and brother, the brother's spouse and their daughter (n=4). The sister, brother and brother's

spouse were all boarding school survivors and the spouse was the only boarding school survivor who did not have parents nor grandparents that had attended a boarding school. Three different families included the mother and her son or daughter (total n=6). Three other families contained aunts or uncles and their nieces (total n=6). The rest of the participants were individuals with no other family members participating.

The tribal approval is important as many anthropologists recognize the need to establish a respectful and sensitive role in communicating with Indigenous Americans of any tribe (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board (IRB) also reviewed this study to ensure ethical guidelines were being followed. The questions involved in this qualitative narrative interview were approved by the IRBs as well (questions are included in appendix 1). I anticipated that the IRB might have concerns for the emotional wellbeing of the knowledge sharers due to the stories that might emerge from these interviews. As such, I made sure that the knowledge sharers understood that these questions might bring up emotions that they may have suppressed or forgotten to protect themselves from the traumatic experiences they may have had at the *Indian* boarding school. The informed consent form assured them that they may stop the interview at any time and that culturally relevant services will be referred to them should they need it. Following the interviews, Bertha Brown, a dedicated historical trauma healer, was a part of the debriefing process to help those knowledge sharers should they experience any kind of distress.

Procedures

The data collection was initially planned to occur on March 23, 2020, but it did not happen. A week or so prior to this date, the world was hit by a strong and fatal virus called coronavirus which created a pandemic that we are still experiencing 8 months later. Immediately, the Office of Research and Economic Development (ORED) instituted a ban on all in-person research. I tried to remain patient and optimistic that the pandemic would hopefully subside enough for research to resume. It took a few months, but ORED called off the ban on July 6th, and on a case by case basis, research was reviewed to understand that the research would be conducted following CDC (Center for Disease Control) guidelines to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. As such, I submitted an in-depth plan to indicate the level of safety I ensured my knowledge sharers, Bertha Brown and myself.

I then had to buy facemasks, hand sanitizer, antibacterial wipes, and even gloves if anyone requested them. Luckily, my husband and I were able to pack up the camper and remain in there away from possible spread and prevent bacteria transmission in hotels. I planned and planned and packed quickly so we could leave right away and travel to the reservation. Bertha Brown and I were able to start interviews the next day and throughout the two weeks, I was able to conduct 16 in-person interviews and the rest were collected remotely by phone (n=15). In this study, I met with knowledge sharers at the college library which provided a safe and quiet place to converse. The safety of this location was an important consideration as I needed to ensure that their physical safety was a close concern. The CDC recommended, and ORED required that facemasks and socially distant space of 6 feet was followed to protect against the coronavirus in this

pandemic time of our generation. As each person arrived at the library at the tribal college, they were given facemasks, water and the informed consent form. The space was wiped down between each visit.

Bertha Brown was present during 13 of the in-person interviews and 2 of the remote phone interviews. She provided the knowledge sharer with an introduction to who I was as an indigenous researcher and the purposes of this exploration. She then told them about her role in the study in that she would be available to talk with them if they encountered any emotional distress from discussing their experiences. It is important to note even those who were interviewed without Bertha's presence were provided contact information for her historical trauma healing and encouraged to contact her if they felt any distress due to the interview.

We first talked through the informed consent form and began recording each interview. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to explore their positive or negative experiences in the *Indian* boarding schools and family relationships. These questions (Appendix 1) were meant to discover what kinds of dynamics have occurred as a result of the attachment losses they may have suffered being forced to attend the *Indian* boarding school. As I mentioned in the methodology, all knowledge sharers had the opportunity to follow through with their narratives and storytelling. After the interview was over, I thanked each knowledge sharer whole-heartedly and gave them their \$15 gas gift certificate to a nearby gas station. Upon completion of the interview, knowledge sharers were asked if further culturally created historical trauma healing services would be helpful if they encountered emotional distress. It would be understandable if they experience emotions while they discuss this extremely sensitive trauma they may have

endured. My marriage and family therapy background also allowed me to monitor for overall emotional wellbeing during the interview. Only a few of the knowledge sharers experienced some tears during the sharing and all of these occurred during the face-to-face interviews when Bertha Brown was present to provide traditional methods of support, however, none of them expressed a need to receive further support but they often expressed gratitude that she was there. We always ensured that they left in a calm and positive way. The face-to-face interviews were conducted at the tribal college library in a private room set aside for our use during my visit to the reservation. After each participant left the room, I wiped down the table and chairs completely to prevent any person-to-person transmission before we also left the room.

For the remote interviews (n=13), the interview began much like the in-person process by going over the informed consent form. I received their verbal permission and then sent them a link to an online informed consent form for them to sign at their remote location. Once the informed consent was digitally signed we commenced with the knowledge sharing conversation and once it was completed, I expressed my gratitude for letting me hear their stories. I told each person I would send them a gift card for their time. At the conclusion of the interview I asked them how they were doing and made them aware of Bertha Brown's historical trauma healing capabilities should they need any further processing of this interview.

Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed by myself. I used thematic analysis where I examined the interviews line by line to discover the major themes or codes that emerge from the data. In qualitative methodology, I chose to utilize the Strauss and

Corbin (1998) method of two phases of coding—open and axial. This method makes the most sense in organizing the information in a systematic manner. During the open coding process interviews from survivors and descendants were done separately. During the axial coding process comparisons were made to delineate the degree to which the codes were specific to survivors or dependents. The overall themes will be articulated in separate survivor and descendant results.

I used the open coding to pull out the important lines of text from within the data. In this phase of the analysis, I read through the interviews three times. Contributing to this understanding of the data also included reflecting upon the interviews during the transcription process. I then read through all of these transcripts and highlighted important phrases that stood out as meaningful passages. With initial highlighting done, I entered the texts into the MaxQDA software. I was then able to electronically code and organize similar topics among the highlighted expressions. There were 16 different topical codes. Examples of these codes are: “coping methods” and “culture”. Using the software, I was able to quantify the frequency of those key codes. It was clear from the data that decisions had to be made to narrow the codes to the remarkable and frequent themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Axial coding was the next stage of this process where I was able to identify the themes which seemed relevant from the group of codes. This helped me to identify the key areas of analysis. Axial coding isolates the one core phenomenon and arranges the significant codes around that phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I was then able to detect possible causal factors that illuminate other meaningful processes that were possibly related to that core phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Examples of the axial codes

which I began to explore were “coping methods”, “trust”, “trauma”, etc. With separate axial codes for survivors and descendants I was able to compare the themes and it was clear that the intergenerational overlap between themes made more sense to articulate cohesively by using the same theme but present the data in terms of survivor experience and descendent experience. The final five themes will be revealed more clearly in the next chapter containing the results. This then assisted in helping to make those meaningful related processes transparent. With the themes identified, I brought those results back to the attachment theoretical framework. This combination of phenomenological results and attachment indicators are considered in depth in the discussion section.

I was in communication with my advisor and research collaborator, Bertha Brown, to merge the data and compare findings in a method called constant comparison (Creswell, 2018). It was essential also to utilize the method of triangulation to increase the quality and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings. It helped account for my individual biases as it relied on the similarities between myself and other people after coding the interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

A method which I found beneficial from other qualitative researchers is keeping a reflective journal to discuss experiences and feelings I was having as I experienced the process of data collection and analysis. This is a recommended practice called bracketing to refrain from assumptions or biases I may be having as I conducted my research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Moustakas (1994) recognizes that this is a way to “set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things. We invalidate, inhibit and disqualify all commitments with reference to previous knowledge and experience, (p. 85).

In refraining from allowing my experiences to impact my thoughts and perceptions about this exploration on boarding schools, I reflected upon my family's story and my own researcher positionality which you just read in the preceding section. Creswell (2013) realizes that is beneficial how, "researchers who embrace this idea when they begin a project by describing their own experiences with the phenomenon and bracketing out their views before proceeding with the experiences of others," (p. 80). I feel that my experience during the dissertation process was something important to include in the results. Through the lived experiences and stories, I am learning about how it impacts my own cultural and professional development. As I have revealed, my story was important in this journey.

From the findings, I was able to find the essence of these shared experiences in the boarding schools to show those critical themes and categories that I created from the stories. This study also served as a foundation for action-oriented research. Public policy needs to be informed to help confront these traumatic experiences and help restore Indigenous American emotional, cultural and mental wellbeing. As indicated, Indigenous American families can become inundated with those overwhelming feelings of isolation, depression, and suicidal ideation thus breaking their family ties. This phenomenological study helped to identify those positive and negative attachment indicators and explore the need to help Indigenous Americans cope with their mental and emotional difficulties with more positive means.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The results were inspiring and so many important messages emerged from the knowledge sharer's experiences. There were five themes identified through the data analysis: 1) Abandonment and Trauma, 2) Individual Coping through Emotional Suppression, 3) Finding Family in Chaos, 4) Self-Worth, and 5) Personal Strength of Knowledge Sharers. These themes will be presented with supporting information and quotes in both survivor and descendant contexts. Additionally, it is important to distinctly say that while the intergenerational focus was used in the analysis phase of this study, survivors' and descendants' experiences were similar. Family systems researchers would attest and identify that while the difficult processes and events we experience may be individual, they impact and exist in a systemic manner. What happens to one family member will impact others in that family (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Minuchin, 1974). Nevertheless, all themes are organized to consider both survivors' and descendants' memories separately.

Abandonment and Trauma

This theme was unexpected as the questions to both survivors and descendants were strategically worded positively and never asked specifically about traumatic experiences so as to not trigger painful experiences (see appendix 1 for complete list of questions). Unfortunately, trauma was the theme that was mentioned the most out of all the codes identified from the knowledge. As a researcher, I allowed them the comfort and safe space to share their stories that were sparked by my questions. It became clear that overall, the experiences that survivors went through in the boarding schools and growing

up with parents who had attended boarding schools shaped the way that they developed as parents. Eleven of the 13 descendants then reflected on the times where their parents used the harsh disciplinary practices that they believed were learned by growing up in the boarding schools.

Survivors' Experiences

Descriptions of trauma were intertwined with memories of family and support. This is usually how the trauma stories arose during the conversation. When asked to share a memory when someone comforted them the memories were usually about the absence of support and then the sharing of extremely painful of times. Stories of pain and trauma were often intertwined with a lack of support at the boarding school. The absence of nurture and care became its own type of trauma for the survivors. One described it in this way. "There was never, never, never anyone that truly cared, that showed me that they cared...I felt truly abandoned because my parents always went their own way. Nobody to truly, you know, depend on."

While the presence of trauma was a difficult part of the interviews for some of the knowledge sharers, it resoundingly had the most coded instances. The conversations typically began as survivors talked about the trauma and pain around abandonment, loneliness and difficulty with separation from their families. There were 28 stories during the interviews about abandonment and loneliness. Some of them recalled times where they would lie in their bed and miss their families. A survivor thought about his feelings of the first days of being in the boarding school in the following excerpt:

My experience when I first went, I was lonely... But it, I guess it teaches you to grow up or something. You know, you're away from your parents, and you're away from the home setting...

Another moment of sense of loneliness and abandonment ironically came when I asked a survivor what they were proud of as a survivor of the boarding school in the following quotation:

That I'm okay, it didn't take me down. I may have suffered the loneliness of not having anybody from my family, the separation, but it didn't crush me. It didn't. I see other family members, it crushed them. It crushed them to where they can't get out of the past and they stay in that memory and self-inflict and abuse.

This statement also shows resilience in relation to abandonment but also demonstrated that this survivor saw the struggles other family members experienced as an outcome of the abandonment and trauma they experienced at the boarding school. Another survivor described coping with the loneliness by silently crying during the mandatory evening quiet time and wishing things were different for them.

Some of the survivors (n=16) reported that since their parents also grew up in the boarding schools they weren't nurturing either, so they felt abandonment from their parents for much of their childhood. They believed this feeling of abandonment was both from being sent to the boarding schools but also because they were raised by an adult who had grown up in the boarding schools. One survivor, when talking about what it was like to be raised by someone who grew up in boarding schools, recalled a difficult memory relating to abandonment:

My mother would drink and then she would leave. She would leave with people in cars, and we didn't have vehicles. So, one time me and my two brothers chased that car all the way about probably, about 10 miles. We chased that car and we lost it. We turned around and went home. But it was things like that that I remember about her, you know, gut wrenching.

It is a telling account given that this was the memory this survivor shared when asked about the most meaningful memory she had of her mother. Through that painful example, not only was abandonment and neglect evident but this survivor also shared the impact of seeing their parent cope through drinking alcohol.

Additionally, survivors shared many examples of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Some survivors reported that the abuse was bad at the boarding school with 14 unsolicited stories of abuse. Others talked of the abusive treatment at home with 20 stories shared. Showing the level of pain of this, even though they talked about how difficult and horrible the boarding school was, 10 of the survivors remembered that they looked forward to going to the boarding schools because abuse at the school was less traumatic than abuse at home. One survivor said, "If it's the bullies that I gotta go up against, rather than going home, that's what I would do....I want to stay, get away from this house. I don't like getting beaten up every day." Notice the choices this survivor was making to choose bullies, which they later described as physically and emotionally abusive over family that were abusive. As indicated above, there were more mentions of abuse at home than at boarding schools.

Results revealed that while physical abuse was a common theme among boarding schools, home life was just as difficult. Interestingly survivors preferred the physical abuse at the boarding schools because at least it wasn't at the hands of a family member. They also acknowledged that it was likely behaviors their parents learned at boarding school that led to such harsh treatment. Throughout the knowledge shared, both survivors and descendants, 64.5% indicated that they had been abused at home with 58% having parents who attended boarding schools. Additionally, 32% of that 58% had grandparents who also attended boarding schools, demonstrating the intergenerational impact.

The last area of trauma that was discussed was the incidences of sexual abuse, including rape and molestation. This type of abuse warrants separate mention because it happened in higher numbers at the boarding schools, even though there was also mention of it occurring at home. There were 16 unsolicited stories of sexual abuse shared throughout the interviews. Reports of this abuse at the school came at the hands of priests, nuns, and other children while at home from parents or other relatives. A survivor explained that her daughter told her quite bluntly that she wanted to have the control over "giving up her virginity rather than it being taken from her" and didn't want it to be forced upon her like it was at the boarding school.

Sexual abuse was often talked about in conjunction with witnessing domestic violence between their parents. Traumatic acts of sexual abuse (14 mentions) and poor relationship dynamics, like domestic violence either in their parents or in their own romantic relationships, were experienced through 11 memories and witnessed by many of the knowledge sharers.

Descendants' Experiences

One descendant reported that making sense of their parents boarding school experience was hard because their parent didn't like talking about it. While reflecting on the impact of not discussing the trauma that their parents and grandparents may have experienced in the boarding schools or at home, they made the following observation:

I think the more we talk about it, and not be silent because when we take that silence, I think there was a point in time they did that for survival and to be able to survive in the past. But I think now we have to speak up and if we don't speak up against that, how some of these systems are operating, and that is not being respectful. It's not helping our people.

The interview questions did not ask anything about trauma and abuse and were designed to be as positive as possible but, in talking about their experiences, abuse presented itself 24 times throughout the descendent interviews. A descendant when talking about the impact of their parents boarding school experience said it was hard because their parents didn't want to talk about it, but they knew it impacted them. One person expressed it in this way:

I know that for a lot of them, those memories are too painful to even talk about. So, in a way, part of my family history will never be spoken about. It's not my place to say that or to insist that they share those traumas. But in a way, it leaves a big gap in our identity, not knowing those things and I would like to be able to share what my great grandparents experienced but, all I can tell my kids is that they went through a lot of suffering.

For descendants, 11 of the 13 talked about how they also experienced abuse which most of them saw as a result of their parents' time in boarding school. Descendants also shared 11 instances where they were felt abandonment as their parents. One descendant recognized that as an adult, she learned how to process her emotions and knew how to work through the difficulty she had experienced in her adulthood. This was remarkable because it was not the way that she was taught to handle, or rather, ignore her emotions.

Additionally, descendants reported physical abuse from their parents (24 mentions). They also reported hearing memories about or witnessing their parents and grandparents abuse while growing up which was discussed 29 times during the interviews. One descendant articulated that so much of the abuse she received was from her father was because of what he experienced at the boarding school, "my dad was a survivor of that because I mean, he was left untreated. He never got help and by him doing that, it ruined his life. It didn't ruin it, just, he carried it on. And we suffered for it." In essence, he transmitted the toxic and harmful discipline and abuse he received to his children. The trauma had occurred for at least two generations for that family. Another descendant remembered then how her mother would justify her father's behavior because of the boarding schools she said:

My mom would take us for a drive, and she was like, you gotta excuse your dad. He went through a lot like she was apologizing for his actions, but it wasn't her place to be apologizing for him and for her, codependency kicks in again as she wanted to make us all happy."

In this way, the abuse was not reconciled and essentially enabled by their other parent.

Abandonment and Trauma Summary

In summary, as you can see in the questions, none of them asked about trauma or abuse. To hear 21 of the 31, 68%, knowledge sharers, both survivors and descendants, bring up their abusive experiences while discussing their childhood at boarding school and home was a startling statistic. Overwhelmingly, the trauma is something that has not been talked about for a lot of my knowledge sharers since it was indicated 20 times throughout the interviews that the trauma has not been shared and reconciled in families. Additionally, as a researcher in this exploration, I found it interesting that when asked the question “*Can you share a meaningful memory that you have about your parents in your childhood?*” 58% of the knowledge sharers recalled a negative experience. For survivors, 12 of the 18 had a negative experience as their most meaningful memory and 6 of the 13 descendants recalled harmful experiences. This was the first question and could be interpreted either way—positively or negatively. The higher occurrence of negative experiences could have implications toward their identity as an Indigenous person.

Individual Coping through Emotional Suppression

As I mentioned above, while individuals interviewed had some positive and important relationships in their lives, due to time at the boarding school, interactions with these individuals was often few and far between. Because most of the relationships that were caring and nurturing occurred outside the boarding schools and they spent so much time at the schools, they had to learn personal ways of coping. This section is about a specific dynamic that played out as they tried to figure out their own coping mechanisms.

This was particularly true for survivors, but the ripple effect of the boarding school induced coping was also described by descendants.

Survivors' Experiences

The survivors talked about the isolation from supportive adults caused by the boarding school. Another resounding theme (23 mentions) emerged throughout the interviews with survivors was learning how to embody independence as a means for survival. This was a unique theme because it was discussed in a way that displayed how it was learned in the boarding schools and then embodied intergenerationally. Independence was often a method to survive those stressful times in their lives due to the possibility that survivors had few people in their lives they could rely on. It was profound when a survivor recognized the skill of surviving due to the concerning high number of traumatic events for many Indigenous groups. One survivor described the resilience of enduring the difficulties with personal strength in this way:

One time I was telling my grandkids and I said, even though I experienced this at boarding school, look at the back of it, all the hurt, all of our history. I told them to look at that Sand Creek Massacre. Look at Fort Robinson, Wounded Knee. We must've been running all our lives as far back because I can't remember, we must have been running from white people. So just name it, we're never at peace, always having to be on guard and always having to, you know, watch our backs. We're never comfortable, always looking around and make sure somebody's not gonna hurt you. Always gotta be on the defense.

It was interesting to hear her recognize this about her Indigenous culture and be able to share this with her grandchildren.

These kinds of feelings were expressed through these interviews, some survivors remembered that they did whatever they could to survive the hard times at the boarding schools which often involved an independent focus rather than collective (17 memories). Equally, survivors recognized how they may have experienced instability of their home life due to their parents always running. This was talked about 19 times during the interviews. A survivor told me how even when they were with family they felt alone, “We never had a stable home. We were just living everywhere I mean even in the shells of houses that have no running water, no outhouse, nothing...for some reason my mom was just, she was always on the run.”

Thirteen of the 18 survivors shared that they were forced to be independent to get through life’s challenges during the difficulty of those hard times at the boarding schools. One survivor described the way their parents taught them to cope by thinking this way: “The compassion and the understanding and the love and forgiveness and all of that was pushed to the back of who they were as a spiritual being. And survival became the...the focus.” They had to figure out how to regulate their difficult emotions the best way they knew how, often without guidance from anyone, which inherently meant learning to be independent. One survivor remembered that in the following excerpt how she adapted this particular mentality:

You're born, you suffer, you hurt like hell and if you're strong enough, if you live to get to graduation, you graduate, you get a good job and then you die. It's like you were a human *doing* not a human *being*.

For this particular survivor, I was able to interview her daughter and I distinctly remember her saying how strong her mother was and this became a direct result of that strong and independent focus. Survivors emphasized that the surviving became doing whatever they could do at the time to help them get through the hard times that were often present.

Survival was the focus of their time at the boarding school. The basic needs of food, water, shelter, and clothing were provided by the boarding schools but, emotional regulation was not taught to the children who resided there. One survivor described the focus of boarding school teaching in the following way: "When you would talk to those matrons (nuns), whatever you call them, they just went by rules and they were strict. You had to listen to them, you couldn't do anything else." The majority of the 18 survivors talked about being punished for being sad or expressing emotions. So not only was it not taught, but it was also punished to have emotions. Emotional regulation was not as important in boarding schools.

They acknowledged that when left to one's self to figure out how to manage struggle some negative methods surfaced. Alcohol was a common negative method of coping as it was mentioned 41 times during the survivors' interviews; other impulsive methods were explored like unhealthy sexual behaviors and suicidal ideation. Alcohol became a powerful form of avoidance for many of these knowledge sharers. It was easily

accessible, and they often saw it modeled as a coping method. They witnessed their parents coping with their hard times with alcohol and felt like they could not receive help for their own difficulties. A survivor recalled this about her childhood, “I was really close to my brothers, one of my brothers specifically. But we weren’t healthy though. We drink and we partied a lot so the family dynamic at home was work hard and play hard.” The drinking became an unhealthy coping method which was transmitted and learned intergenerationally.

Interestingly, many of the survivors recognized that they went to boarding schools by choice to avoid the chaos that existed at home. They expressed 20 memories about how they preferred to be struggling at the boarding school than being around their parents’ chaotic home lives. A survivor recalled this about a time where she tried to ask for help from her parents, “A lot of times they would be drunk, we tried to talk to them, and they didn’t care. There was no emotion or nothing. They didn’t...it’s just like, we weren’t there.” The lack of emotion that was remembered by this survivor about her parents became a part of their family identity which was largely related to that survival mentality. Survivors discussed how they learned to be independent out of necessity, but it was clear from their facial gestures and tone that despite the difficulty in being independent, this was a source of pride for them. Regardless, of what came their way, they would be able to provide for themselves and be independent. A survivor remembered how her mom emphasized independence in the following life lesson:

I guess my mom always instilled being independent, like don’t ask anybody for help or you know, if you’re gonna get it, work hard for it. I can see that she

always put that on me. So, I can say that everything I worked for, I've done it by myself and my kids are in college now and in their own apartments.

Another link to this data was how a few survivors processed how they perceived their difficult times of survival at the boarding schools and realized that they felt relieved about not needing to send her children to boarding schools. One survivor in particular remembered that because she was given the option, she chose to keep her children home. Similarly, some survivors were able to bus their kids to the day school and keep their children at home that way. One survivor said that her daughter asked her why she would not let her go away to school in the following example: "I choose not to send my kids there because they shouldn't have to *handle* it. They shouldn't have to *survive* high school. That's what it was for me, it was survival." Another survivor expressed a memory of when she had the nerve to finally ask her mom why she sent her to boarding school:

I asked my mother, "how did you feel when you sent your kids to boarding school?" This was after I became an adult. I said, "do you have any idea what we used to go through when we were growing up?"

And she said, "No, everything was a forced thing, you know, that we had to send you guys to boarding school."

I said, "who said that?"

She said, "the law told us that all kids had to go to school and they had to board because there was not enough gas to go back and forth, the buses couldn't bus them."

I said, “is that the only reason?”

“That’s what they told us,” she told me.

I asked her, “how was it for you as a mother? When I have kids, they’re not even gonna set foot in a boarding school, I’m not sending my kids to a boarding school.”

And she said, “why? You learn a lot when you go to boarding school.”

Like this survivor, grappling with questions about coping and trying to understand why they went through boarding schools was common.

It was evident through all these interviews that so many of them, both survivors and descendants by extension, had to be independent to survive and get through what they experienced. They had to ensure their own safety, that was their focus. Thus, emotional suppression was another method that became necessary for both survivors and descendants to uphold that safe and individual attention. A survivor remembered how hard it was for her to express love for her mother who was also a survivor of a boarding school:

This one time my sister and I dared each other when I was about 10 years old and she was 12 to tell my mother that we loved her and both of us were scared. We dared each other to be the first one that would go tell her I guess; we wouldn’t have to do the dishes or something. But it was a really big deal to tell my mother that I loved her. Because there was no affection in my home. There was no I love you. There were no hugs. My mother didn’t know how. She just didn’t know how.

This statement shared by one of the survivors voiced how emotional expression was complicated for Indigenous families as a result of the emotional suppression. Survivors discussed 22 different memories about how survival was the focus rather than understanding their own emotions. During each interview with survivors, they were asked, *how did they comfort you when you were having a hard time?* The expression of emotion and affection often did not exist for these knowledge sharers. A common theme among boarding school survivors is that they did not hear, *I love you* and *did not have hugs*, and had difficulty being affectionate with their own relationships in their lives.

They were asked, *what kinds of things helped you cope with emotional stress in your childhood? How did your parents respond to you when you were upset?* While they were at the boarding school, survivors remembered that they had to cope with those hard times the best way that they knew how and since they were left to themselves to figure out self-regulation, that often led to avoiding thinking and feeling. They would pretend that the experience did not happen and suppress their negative feelings away since emotions were often punished. This was identified 19 times throughout the shared knowledge from the survivors. As I indicated previously, some were able to talk with their siblings or friends at the boarding school when they needed help.

There were some descriptions of positive moments of emotional expression where parents showed concern and love for their kids and missed them while they were at the boarding school. A survivor said that she tried to make up for not being so affectionate with her children by always hugging her grandchildren and told the following memory: “I’m always holding them, and I say, wait here, I gotta give you a hug.” Favorably, 15 of the 18 survivors had discussed ways that they see how boarding schools impacted the

way they parented their children so they could identify that as adults, they were able to communicate better with their children and have very close relationships. Another survivor recognized his own difficulty and was able to reverse it for his own children:

I know that my kids, our kids had more, they were more involved with the family. As a dad, I was more involved with them rather than telling them, “you’re stupid, you’re dumb, you’re not gonna do anything, you’re not gonna amount to anything.” I was always saying to them, “you know, you can do everything, you just keep going.” Study with them. Just tell them you love them and hold them. If they want to go for a walk, go for a walk, anything!

Essentially, some survivors were able to begin new and loving ways of expressing affection to the next generation. Other instances shared by survivors’ comment on how they were able to recognize the anger that had been suppressed for so long and in getting older, they were able to reflect on that anger. Through many healing ceremonies, treatment, and higher acceptance to mental health services, they were able to process those emotions that had been stifled. Overall, when asked if they could go to their parents when they had difficulty, quite simply, a survivor said, no.

Descendants’ Experiences

It became evident that across the generations of knowledge sharers, that when faced with those difficult trials, they were forced to rely on themselves and utilize independence in protecting their wellbeing in that effort. A descendant mirrored this by saying, “I’m often called kind of emotionless. That’s technically not a bad thing but a lot of times it is. A lot of things don’t faze me, I think, why should I care about that?” In

essence, he used his lack of emotional expression to protect him against hard times since he learned that from his mother. It was revealed that 8 of the 13 descendants reflected upon their emotional regulation through their narratives. Many reported that emotions, comparative to survivors, did not exist and were not meant to be explored or helped in their family homes. There were descendants who realized that they could not express their emotions due to being called weak or those emotions being used against them later. This tells me that the emotional suppression was in fact transmitted intergenerationally for most of the knowledge sharers. One descendant male remembered this about emotional suppression:

So much of that has been broken for us as children. There's really no one to blame anymore but our own selves. I would say, how do I take care of this within me? How do I nurture my own self, even though my mom or my dad or my grandparents weren't capable of nurturing? How do I nurture myself?

Notice how the description of self-regulation was related to independence for survival. In many instances, descendants recognized through 14 memories shared in the interviews that they had to figure out how to help the trauma they experienced through therapy, or bonding with their siblings where they could commiserate about the strict and rigid responsibilities placed on them. Another descendant remembers this when she would talk to her cousins about their similar expectations in the following memory:

We could just sit there and talk about abuse, joking about it, laughing about it, knowing that they went through the same hurt that we did. It was a form of

understanding and connecting with another without going into deep detail...a form of release.

Equally, a few descendants reminisced on how their parents were there for them during the important times in their lives or they were there to talk with them when they had hard times at school. One descendant talked about her later times in life with her mother as an adult. She remembered the following:

I think the best times that I have with my mom is when she just openly tells me about her life as a kid or something growing up. It's like a memory she has that she hasn't thought about in a while. I'm there to hear it.

There were memories where descendants reported that while they felt that communication was impacted by their parent's boarding school experiences, they were able to reverse that cycle of expression with their own children. This was made evident by 10 of the 13 descendants in their interviews. They were able to hug their children and help them embrace their emotions. One knowledge sharer said that difficulty of emotional expression was "**the Indian way**" but she adamantly refuted that by stating, "**NO, it's the boarding school way.**" They said that when they recognized this, they began really talking about the hard stuff with their parents and their children. A descendant recalled how he experienced love from his parents. He remembered how, "No, I love them. They love me. It's just that they weren't very good at it a lot of times." As mentioned, descendants experienced very difficult times as the son or daughter of someone who grew up in the boarding school. They talked about following many of the same negative coping methods they saw modeled by their parents like alcohol, marijuana,

or unhealthy sexuality; this was talked about 12 times during their interviews. The intergenerational transmission of coping independently through the method of emotional suppression overwhelmingly impacting the majority of the knowledge sharers.

Finding Family in Chaos

The overall implication surrounding family relationships was different for the knowledge sharers. Overwhelmingly, I discerned that for each person I interviewed, they adapted by trying to seek out a positive person in their lives to depend on during difficult times. These accounts often mixed the struggle with the strength. Many survivors and descendants recounted good memories of family. Additionally, I want to remind you that the definition of Indigenous families can be complicated for western cultures to identify. A child in an indigenous community can find love and security with others like siblings, grandparents, aunties, or another relative if their parent is not accessible emotionally. I will talk more about the experiences that both survivors and descendants shared.

Survivors' Experiences

Survivors talked with honor and respect about the individuals they could trust and look to for help and support. To begin, it was widely experienced that available family relationships are positive sources of love and comfort. Survivors indicated that grandparents were and continue to be positive relationships in this strong cultural group. A frequent comment (40 mentions) from survivors was how much they trusted their grandparents. Grandparents were the most frequent groups mentioned in relation to love and nurture experienced by those interviewed. They were declared as the important people that they could trust and wanted to be with to provide some safety. Along with

receiving comfort and security from their grandparents, they learned so much of their culture. There were mentions of some parents being very loving to their children. Some of these familial memories that were experienced intergenerationally were mentioned in the following excerpts from a survivor remembered a happy memory with his grandmother: “I always enjoyed being with my grandmother. She would come and babysit us while she did her beadwork. I was very close to my grandmother, I think, more than I was with my mom.”

Another survivor recalled a funny time with his father and brothers that highlighted the complex nature of defining family in the native culture in the following excerpt:

My dad was telling us stories. One time he told us about all of our relatives on the reservation. He went like this, “we’re related to them, we’re this to them, they are our cousins, that’s my mom’s sister, and so on.” Me and my brothers walked up to jump in the bus. We looked at each other and I said, “Man, we can’t marry anybody on the reservation!” So, all three of us boys married someone outside of the reservation!

A survivor remembered a time she was sick at the boarding school which was meaningful because it showed her parents caring about her wellbeing:

My parents, I don’t know how they found out [I was sick], but they came and sat with me. I thought, oh good, I get to go home. But I always remember that happening. It was a pain to pretend to be sick, but that was one of the things I

remember that stood out like I mattered, you know? It was something I think about sometimes.

Prodigiously, grandparents were mentioned as the amazing people that they could trust and wanted to be with to provide some safety. Along with receiving comfort and security from their grandparents, they heard so much of their culture. One survivor recalled a night where she could not sleep and cried and cried for her grandmother, so her parents took her to her grandmother's house late in the night to help her to feel better. Lastly, in many instances, siblings formed very strong bonds as they were sometimes sent to the same school and they could see each other. Interestingly, 17 of the 18 survivors discussed memories of their siblings during their childhood. Siblings were usually placed in the same boarding schools so they could maintain those relationships. Also, at home, they would help each other. It was observed through these stories and memories that when a child could not be with their parents and relatives, they could find trusting relationships with their siblings in the same boarding school. Such times of positive secure sibling relationships were discussed in the following experiences where a survivor remembered this when she remembered how her sibling helped her at the boarding school:

I was crying for my mother and she [her older sister] would be there. And she would come and comfort me and hug me and hold me and you know, she was like a mother to us because she did that with my younger brothers too. She would comfort them.

Another survivor recalled how much fun she had as a child with her brothers which seemed significant when thinking about the important family relationships she could recall at that moment:

And for most of the time, it was really good because I was into school. But I was also a tomboy because I had only brothers and cousins that were all boys. So I played mostly with boy stuff, you know, cowboys and Indians or crawling around in the dirt with homemade cars made from bark from the trees and we didn't, you know, we didn't have toys and so I have really wonderful memories as far as the childhood part with my grandparents and being there protecting us.

Few survivors talked about positive experiences (5 different memories) with their parents. A survivor recalled how her mother would always asked about her time at the boarding school, “my mom would always ask me, well, what did you learn? So, I would try to remember what I learned. When I go home, I would tell and she’d be so excited for me to tell her...” One survivor was able to recognize that by her parents making the decision to send them to a boarding school simply showed her that this was them showing that they cared deeply for their wellbeing. They showed their love by ensuring that she had her needs met in the boarding school. These examples portray that despite the separation the boarding school caused, there were loving and positive memories between parents and children.

Additionally, many of the knowledge sharing survivors frequently recalled how much they loved their grandparents. The positive and happy emotion was so evident when they began talking about those memories. It was clear by seeing the smiles on their

face when they recalled these memories, and they were excited to tell these stories. It was found that 17 of the 18 remembered how much their grandparents were there for them during times where their parents may not have been for whatever reason. They were instrumental in teaching them so many important things in their culture. One survivor remembered how she relied on her grandfather to be there for her and he showed it by visiting her at the boarding school in the following memory:

My grandfather was the one that came to see us. And he would come over and check us out from the boarding school and take us to town. He would buy us clothes, shoes, snacks, whatever we wanted and then he would take us back.

Many survivors remembered the important messages that would serve as life lessons from their grandparents or they were taught how to hunt, bead, pick berries, or simply how to forgive.

Descendants' Experiences

Descendant's experiences were similar in that they needed to find family members which may or may not have been their parents. Since 11 of the 13 had parents that attended boarding schools, they could have experienced similar negative experiences as their parents did in the boarding schools. Conversely, all 13 descendants talked about their special relationships with their grandparents. A descendant remembered how her grandfather showed his acceptance of everyone in the following quotation: "Just seeing who my grandpa was and the respected individual he was, as a human being, and the kind of friends that he had...Wow, look at all these people that are here and my grandma's

feeding these people!” It was clear that his positive and accepting ways were still important and appreciated two generations later.

Another descendant recognized the life lesson that her grandmother showed her by leaving her toxic marriage showing that the abuse which occurred for a family was stopped in that generation which became evident in this memory:

She left her husband because he was an alcoholic and I don't think she knew it at that time, but she told us and showed us through her strength as a woman, as a mother and grandmother that she did not want to be in that kind of relationship anymore and she and her family deserved better. As a granddaughter of her, I recognize the courage and strength that must have taken for her to do that.

Descendants recalled that they were able to learn positive ways of coping with the hard times from their parents or grandparents depending on which generation I was talking with. One example of the positive coping mechanisms was to pray to their creator to guide them in their right and true path. Similarly, a survivor remembered how despite the difficult trauma she had experienced, she could cope positively in her adulthood.

I've come to let go of things that happened to me as a child. That's not who I am. My issues are not who I am. They happened to me, some were in my control and some are not. So, I've really learned to pray a lot and seek the creator for comfort and gratefulness and that he loves me just the way I am.

Another example of positive coping learned from parents and grandparents was to embrace their cultural ceremonies to help them get through those hard times; these memories were mentioned 20 times throughout the knowledge shared. They recalled how

they learned things like beading, powwows, singing, going to a sweat lodge, or simply talking with their family.

Self-worth

The link between self-worth and the messages that survivors and descendants heard or experienced became an identifiable theme in this exploration. This was another theme which emerged from this exploration.

Survivor Experience

Personal identity deeply impacted so many survivors' of boarding schools that it came out many times. Specifically, this was a spiritual message which seemed to appear daily for many survivors in the catholic boarding schools. A survivor talked about how the boarding school environment impacted his self-perception in this way:

It was not a good place, not friendly. I ended up in the dorms and more structure—pray, pray, pray, you're going to hell, you're gonna burn in hell! We were baptized. I didn't know what it meant. But I was still being told I was gonna burn in hell. You know, I was still bad. I was evil and I should be afraid—afraid of not burning in hell was what kinda probably straightened me out. And the Catholics at that time instilled a lot of fear in us. Of us being bad and no good and evil and all that negativeness put on us even though we had no idea, you know, what God, who God was and then having to pray and nothing ever explained. It was just always told on us to pray.

So many things stand out to me in that excerpt which was told to many of my own family who attended the catholic boarding schools—how they were bad and evil people.

Through 16 memories, survivors reported these messages they received from the boarding school said more about who they were as an Indigenous person. Like this survivor indicated, even though she did everything they told her to, she still thought she was still “*gonna burn in hell*”. It felt more like something about who she was rather than about something she did. Another survivor related a similar thought:

The part that I didn't appreciate in the Catholic boarding school was we had to go to mass every day. I did not like doing the rosary because we had to be on our knees. If you understand the Catholic religion, it's those little beads, I don't know how many there are, but it's like one bead at a time. One prayer at a time. I say now that I am a surviving Catholic. That's how I like to see it and I don't go to church anymore because, you know, they killed it in me.

Earlier, sibling relationships were discussed as a positive experience for both survivors. Conversely, many of the survivors talked about how they were forced to grow up a little earlier than they should have due to the absences of parents from their lives; this was mentioned 16 times throughout the knowledge shared. One survivor remembered how she was always responsible for caring for her siblings when her parents were not available.

I and my brother, being just a whole lot younger, I remember having to, make sure that he ate and there was a house here, my aunt lived there. And so, I will take him over there. That must have been before we went to the boarding school,

because I will get him up on the porch and I will push him in the door, and she would feed him.

Additionally, it is clear that many of the experiences that boarding schools brought to survivors forced them to grow up sooner than they should have. This could have been attributed to the fact that many of these survivors had parents who also attended boarding schools, so it became an intergenerational pattern for at least two generations in this exploration. A survivor realized this through their memories:

I worried every day for things that I shouldn't have been worried about. Because I was a kid. I was a boy. But when you see something that tells you that there is sin and your childhood as a boy comes and goes and you become a man. I've had things happen that were so, they were totally different that I don't think anybody experienced there. So, I'm not sure anybody has.

These statements speak to the difficulty survivors had when trying to develop personal identities given the types of messages they received at the school. These messages weren't only about what they did but were about who they were.

Descendants' Experiences

Throughout the knowledge shared by the descendants, even though they may have experienced the intergenerational trauma from their parents who went to boarding school, they still were able to respect and honor them for who they were as indigenous people. This had powerful implications for their self-worth and that of their parents. Knowledge was shared (15 times) that informed about times where they honored their indigenous familial bond and were able to continue to have a strong relationship with their parents.

One descendant discussed an incident where she heard her mother tell her a difficult story of a death at the boarding school her grandfather attended:

Shock as it may be, I just gave my mom a hug, even though she didn't, she's not usually a hugger. But she was really vulnerable when she told me that and I knew I just needed to give her a hug and I said, I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do to change that but, I'm so sorry.

The experiences that her mother had to go through in the boarding schools and with her own parents showed how profound it was that she was able to tell her daughter the accurate truth and they were able to comfort each other through the revisiting of this traumatic story. Another descendant showed such amazement towards her mother for who she was as a single and strong indigenous woman:

She's strong. She's really tough. Like usually, people just don't mess with her and I'm really proud to be her daughter and she keeps me safe and I don't know, I just have this bond with her still. I guess it's because she's my mother but I always defend her and protect her. I do everything I need to and for her because she's been through a lot more than I can say. I'm thinking she even went through more before she even went to that boarding school and I think her dad, from that experience, he took it out on her too and everyone, like all my uncles and my aunt. It just got passed down a little, but I can tell she broke it because she did do parenting classes. She doesn't drink anymore, she goes to AA and NA, and does the right thing. She tries to become a better person. I respect her for that because

that's hard. I see a lot of my friends with alcoholic and drug addict parents that are struggling and so, I really respect her for that, for becoming a better person.

Secondly, I want to show honor to the depth of insight by the knowledge sharers. Some descendants verbalized such incredibly inspiring messages in how they viewed themselves as indigenous people. There were at least 35 messages from them where they talked about how they took the learning from their tribe and applied it to their own lives through prayer, journaling, relating to others and understanding their own mental health through the hard times. One descendant revealed how when she was conquering her mental health struggles, she had the following realization:

I started doubting myself and my ability as a parent. And so he [a spiritual healer] was reminding me that it's not me and you know, it really is nonnatives when they came over and they had, they brought doubt into this land. And that's not good to doubt ourselves. So, I recognize this now.

Another descendant talked about how in her role in helping people at her tribe that vulnerability is so important in the following way:

There's this vulnerability that we are lacking. We don't realize that vulnerability is courage because you put your armor down and you're standing there as this Holy Spirit in front of everybody. That is my hope for us as people to just say, this is truly who I am in this earth suit. Here is my Holy spirit and I'm showing this to you. I'm offering this to you to connect and how often do we do that? We're not there yet. We're still so fear-based and ego-based and whatever. But I hope in my next lifetime that we have evolved more in that direction.

Personal Strength of Knowledge Sharers

I want to end this chapter with identifying an observational theme I experienced throughout the knowledge sharing process. It was evident to me as an overall feeling that I had as a researcher in the experience—pure awe for that person in front of me or on the other end of the phone. I identified in the first chapter the survivance that Vizenor (2008) aligns with indigenous populations which endured the difficult circumstances they encountered.

Survivors' Experiences

I usually ended the interviews with *what about you gives yourself pride in all that you learned about yourself as a boarding school survivor?* Not one of them had difficulty in responding and I could see and hear them inhaling and smiling and proceeding with how proud they were of themselves. So many of them were able to say that they are so proud that they held onto their culture and they made it through all of that; I can think of 30 messages at the moment of their pride in being indigenous. Survivors were able to recognize if they became a strong grandmother or grandfather because they endured so many difficult times. Some survivors recognized that despite what the teachers had executed to try to eradicate their culture, it made them even more determined to hold onto it and teach it to their children and grandchildren someday. One elder survivor had this to say about perseverance:

I always plan on going to Arizona because I want to see my grandchildren. I want them to remember me. I never had grandparents so I do what I can to get there.

That's always the plan. It reminds me of that cartoon, I don't know if you know of

it, you might be too young to remember. It was this mouse and he said, every day he was gonna take over the world. Pinky and the Brain! I'm that mouse!

This was a moment where we all (the surviving elder, Bertha Brown and myself) laughed together since this honored elder survivor saw herself as a powerful mouse who was capable of doing what she desired in life with the help of her creator. Two survivors had stories of how they met their significant others at the schools they attended and while the relationships were not the greatest, they focus on how they got their beautiful children so it was meant to happen.

There was so much pride in my 18 knowledge sharers when they talked about their ceremonies and how they have held onto their language despite methods to take them away from them. One survivor reflected on how language should be embraced by the people in their tribe:

I've heard older women, older than me, that don't speak or understand our language and they live right here. I said, how come you don't understand, you know, it baffles my mind that they made that choice. They made a choice and basically that's like survival because they had to. Our parents having to learn to try to be white, having to try to live that lifestyle now didn't work. We will never be white, never another nation, we will always be as we are, we need to be how we are, our own selves. We can't try to be another, try to follow another way. I think a lot of people are starting to realize that because I see a lot of young men starting to sing in our language and starting to find somebody that's going to help

them learn how traditional things are. They are seeking that, and I feel really good about that.

Descendants' Experiences

Similarly, descendants were asked *how they were proud of their parents and/or grandparents for being survivors at the boarding schools*. I heard such messages of gratitude and appreciation for their parents. A descendant spoke so warmly and inspirationally about their grandparents who had attended boarding schools:

I just respect their tenacity, you know, their experience, the ability to weather the storm. There's a lot of things that were thrown at my grandparents, you know hard lives that they lived through and they just never gave into it. I didn't think about how it was, like "oh poor pitiful me", it wasn't, "fix me, rescue me"...it was well, life can be hard and you just gotta step up and you got to do it.

I think about how even though they may have encountered extremely negative messages of how to perceive themselves, they took that and changed it to images of resiliency and strength in their culture.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

When thinking about the research question about the impact of *Indian* boarding schools on attachment, there were clear examples in the data to indicate that yes, boarding schools impacted attachments intergenerationally. As indicated in the literature review, the breadth of research that has been conducted on *Indian* boarding schools has largely been historical and largely excluded the family perspective. While many incredible personal and historical document testimonies have been amassed to explain the experience of *Indian* Boarding Schools, little has explicitly pointed out the family impact of that system. I ask you to recall the research questions of this qualitative exploration: What kinds of attachment-related indicators are shown in indigenous children who attended boarding schools? How do negative and positive *Indian* boarding school experiences contribute to an adult's ability to attach to other family members? Lastly, how did the boarding school experience impact intergenerational relationships formed by Indigenous children, parents, and grandchildren?

Research indicates that attachment between a caregiver and child determines how they create the mental model relating to others and handling the difficult experiences in their lives (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016; Lovenheim, 2018). This study looked at how the lived experiences of indigenous people who went to *Indian* boarding schools and their descendants affected the characteristics of their relationships. As indicated, there is little research literature on attachment experiences for indigenous populations especially in the context of assimilation in the boarding schools.

I will be framing this in consideration of each of the research question outlined in the methods section. First, **what kinds of attachment-related indicators are shown in Indigenous children who attended boarding schools?**

Trust is an important indicator of attachment. The understanding gained through analysis of this data suggests that trust was impacted by the intergenerational trauma experienced at the boarding schools. Thoughts of “Am I safe?” and “Am I lovable?” (Ghosh Ippen, 2009) were overarching questions which the knowledge sharers struggled with. Trust was a difficult topic to discuss for many of my knowledge sharers. During each interview, the uneasiness of this family dynamic was clearly visible when talking about who they depended on. One question that frequently brought up this uneasiness was, *can you think of a memory where you learned that you could trust someone?* The thematic content this question induced was often reported as trauma and abandonment, ineffective coping strategies and how they grappled with identifying family they could rely on. This was a common theme among both survivors and descendants—trust was violated throughout their lives. One survivor mentioned that she could not say the “t-word” until they were years into their adulthood after they had attended therapy. As discussed in length, trust served as the entire foundation of an attachment for a child (Levy & Orlans, 2016). Without trust for a person in their lives, they have no one to be that safety and security in their difficult experiences. Levy and Orlans (2016) emphasize that:

A hallmark of attachment disorder is lack of trust in caregivers and self. The child’s core belief (negative working model) about caregivers is ‘I cannot trust that caregivers will keep me safe, fulfill my needs, or love and value me.’ The

child's core belief about self is: 'I cannot trust that I will ever be safe; my needs are not valid; I do not trust that I am capable, lovable, or worthwhile,' (p. 201),

Whether in the descriptions of the extent of trauma or the difficulty of finding supportive family members or even the struggle with not having anyone to lean on when they were suffering. The frequency of struggles with trust as an issue of concern for knowledge sharers was the highest among the attachment indicators. This was also a question that prompted them to pause and think about for a while or on a couple of occasions they even seemed surprised by the question.

Emotional regulation was deeply impacted whether from time in the boarding school or from parents who were emotionally unavailable due to their own time in boarding schools. The anger, sadness, other feelings and the associated unhealthy individualistic methods of coping were pushed down then and were even seen as a “**native way**” of experiencing emotion. Then, through the parenting, the suppression of emotional expression may have developed into the family identity. Emotional suppression held a clear link for the knowledge sharers in this study. So many of my knowledge sharers said that they were taught not to experience their emotions or quite simply, ignore them and pretend it never happened. Some survivors talked about how they would get punished if they would not stop crying so they had to find ways to cry without anyone else knowing. Those messages and experiences were carried with them as they went on to have their own children. If they were not taught how to regulate those difficult emotions, they would not be able to help their child process their distressful experiences. Survivors talked about how in the boarding schools, they could not show their emotions in fear of getting harsh discipline or being targeted by other children. One

descendant remembered that he could not go to his parents because he did not trust them with his emotions in fear that could be used against him.

Another coping method that had a negative impact on survivors was the methods of suppression of emotions experienced at difficult times. This then becomes the coping methods that were transmitted intergenerationally to descendants. Further research can help explore the links for Indigenous populations using negative coping methods when they do not have other ways of handling those difficult emotions. So many of these survivors and descendants commented on using alcohol as their most frequented method of coping with the stress they experienced. Those that overcame this struggle were extremely proud of their long-term sobriety and strength in conquering their addiction, but many commented on the learned intergenerational pattern of using alcohol to cope.

Teaching culture seemed to be affected for some and not affected for others. It is essential to mention that because so many of my knowledge sharers resided on that reservation, they were active in their culture and were able to attend most ceremonies. So, the fact that some held onto their culture was not surprising because of the intense focus on education, history, and ceremonies in their tribe. Conversely, for descendants and even some survivors who did not live on their reservation and lived in an urban context, they had difficulty holding as closely onto their culture. In providing a close and secure attachment with a family, you must be around them enough to learn the culture from them. As I indicated, emotional regulation and coping methods are often dependent on how the caregiver defines their cultural identity. In essence, Indigenous people off the reservation are going to have to work a little harder to incorporate their culture into their family. For the majority of my own life, I have lived in an urban city, away from my

relatives and reservation. I too experienced this difficulty learning my own tribal identities throughout my life.

Attachment informs how a caregiver teaches culture to their child. As aforementioned, the way that a caregiver will teach their safety, emotional regulation and coping methods are increasingly dependent on their cultural beliefs. Teaching culture was another theme that was warmly mentioned from many of my knowledge sharers. My research collaborator, Bertha Brown, told me so much about their tribe, culture, land, and history. So many of my knowledge sharers talked so positively about how education was always emphasized and encouraged as it was seen as a tool that would help their people collectively. Some reflected on how they were taught how to pray to their creator, and if they trusted in him and their ancestors, they would be answered.

The second research question was: **How do *Indian* boarding school experiences contribute to an adult's ability to attach to other family members?** When thinking about how we securely relate to others in our families and other relationships, trust is a foundation of that ability. Overwhelmingly, trust was heavily influenced by the issues of separation from important family members, feelings of abandonment, and so many talked about extreme loneliness in the boarding school. Every survivor talked of yearning for a special family member who they may have had a bond with prior to being sent to the boarding school. So many of them had urgent concerns with trusting anyone in their life due to the previously mentioned issues. The highest reported theme among survivors and descendants who were interviewed was that of abuse either in the boarding school or at home with their families.

As Ghosh Ippen (2009) posed, how would we answer those questions of *am I safe* and *am I loveable*? As you will remember, the Ghosh Ippen model (Figure 3 below) looked at the combination of three factors: attachment, trauma, and culture. I ask you to think contextually about how trauma would impact a child's ability to attach to others in their families. As you will see though the Ghosh Ippen model, if a child has been abused by their parent, the child's ability to receive the discipline and parenting would be negatively perceived. Remember that Haskell and Randall (2009) emphasize that when a child experiences trauma, their mental model of attachment is altered because they fear certain things from that person.

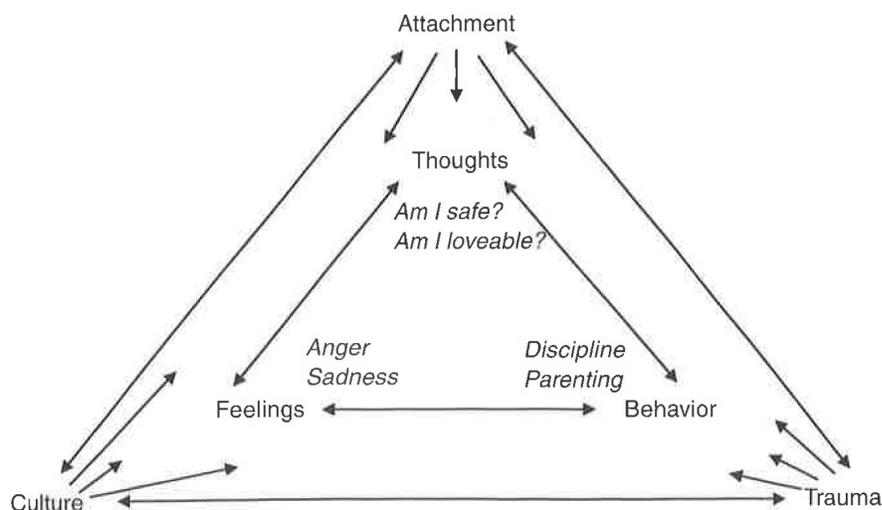


Fig. 3: Ghosh Ippen Model of Attachment, Trauma and Culture

When a child experiences abuse, trust becomes very hard to form with that person or anyone looking or acting the same as that perpetrator in that child's life (Levy & Orlans, 2016). This is a profound and deep issue for Indigenous families who have family members with trust and abandonment issues. Bertha Brown always talked about how in her historical trauma healing perspective, "that hurt child becomes that hurt adult who may be walking by her at the post office, working at their hospital, or serving in a

leadership role in their government”. She realizes that their thinking and decision making are critically affected by their unresolved trauma. A descendant recognized the need to uncover so much of this that leads to future growth and possible reconciliation:

We need to help people to understand that we’re still suffering trauma from those generations. If the Catholic school would or that residential school in particular, or any would just acknowledge, acknowledge what they’ve done and how it affected our people and get our tribe to understand that we’re still suffering the consequences of a lot of that stuff.

The huge number of traumatic acts became the worst part, but incredibly eye-opening.

As discussed previously, abuse can violate one’s sense of trust in their being. When our bodies experience any kind of traumatic or abusive experience, it forces the brain to turn off our ability to form attachments; rather, it pulls that child into a survival or adaptive mode which helps them protect themselves. Quite simply, they have to create new responses in their brain to answer the new question, *how do I protect myself from this happening again?* (Atwool, 2006). So, the perpetrator of this abuse violates that child’s ability to trust in them. That child was hurt by that person before, so how could they form a sense of security in that caregiver? As such, this happened at a concerning high frequency above other themes in this exploration.

Violations of trust cut away pieces of their innocence and changed who they were as children. It was clear that they wanted to share it to continue to heal from it. It begs the question in my mind about how an Indigenous child who experienced cyclical trauma would form a safe and secure attachment with anyone as a result. A descendant described

the way they saw the abuse that was perpetrated on children in the boarding schools by religious leaders who ran the school by saying:

How did they become so twisted? How did they become so evil because to me, it's evil and not in the religious sense of the word but there's something dark and hidden...I became hypervigilant from what it did to my family.

The intergenerational pattern of being suspicious of strangers was learned by this descendant due to her grandmother being abused in the boarding school. In essence, both attachment and culture are heavily impacted by the negative and developmental changes that trauma can cause. Thus, an Indigenous child who experienced trauma in the boarding schools or with their parents would deeply influence the way that they attach to others in their family or with others at the boarding school. These messages can become a cultural message if it is happening for a large group impacted by the same trauma. Results indicated that the boarding schools had that traumatic impact on parenting for children who went on to become parents.

Conversely, you will recall that those very important and special grandparents and parents were held sacred by many of the knowledge sharers overall. So, there was this divide of the good as well as the bad memories. The good memories were strong indicating that they did have positive and trusting family relationships. "I remember my mother bending over and telling me that she loves me, and she kissed me on my cheek" and "My father, it was a good memory, my father talking to us. He told us about his history, where he lived and where we come from." A survivor talked about her positive

memories of her grandparents because she realized that she did not feel the same at her parents' home,

I still wondered, how come I used to feel really comfortable at Grandma's place? Nothing like that went on cuz my grandparents never experienced that kind of stuff. It was always really comforting, and you know, homemade meals. You know, it was to me, that was nothing wrong. We did a lot of fun things like they would tell us stories at night. We would go berry pickin' and help my grandpa gather wood and it was a really fun thing.

The last research question asked **how did the boarding school experience impact intergenerational relationships formed by Indigenous children, parents, and grandchildren?** There were areas of contention towards intergenerational relationships and transmission of traumatic patterns. To say that boarding school caused much of the family abuse that occurred for my knowledge sharers is probably an understatement. There may or may not have been others who did not feel comfortable sharing this information. A survivor reflected on this by saying, "my dad always said, if I went through it, you can." It became traumatically obvious that *this* is the core impact of boarding schools for Indigenous families. Remember that Diamond, et al (2014) recognize the difficulty for a child to build a secure attachment with a parent who is also experiencing their own attachment traumas like abuse, abandonment, depression, etc. It implied the intergenerational impact of caregiving from a survivor to their child after they experienced abuse from those schoolteachers and matrons who were supposed to care for him. The harsh discipline and traumatic abuse from school officials and other children at the boarding school became the caregiving methods that a child could have then passed

along to the next generation. Additionally, recall that Van Ijzendoorn and Bakerman-Kranenburg (1997) recognize the high probability of parent's early attachment experiences becomes their internal working model of how they parent. It will then highly influence the infant's attachment experience.

Through this analysis, the theme of emotional suppression was significant. This suggests that there is potential and need for further research to understand how the messages given children at the boarding school led to the emotional suppression. As a survivor stressed when talking about stifled emotions in her family and how they rarely expressed affection, "my family said it was the native way, no, it was the boarding school." As the literature indicated, attachment is largely transmitted through the culture of a caregiver and their family. Look back to how Chisholm (2017) identifies that the beliefs that an infant will learn is "inherently specific to the culture," (p. 286). Another survivor mentioned how even though her emotions were stifled in the boarding school, she lets herself cry now. She helps her children express their emotion and talks about it with them:

I chose to go to college and educate myself so that I can better explain, or I can better listen to them instead of being a dictator. I wanted to make sure they knew they could come to me and I would listen.

Statements like that show how she did not allow poor emotional regulation to continue. She wanted to stop the intergenerational transmission of poor coping and be able to help her children create positive coping methods with their difficult times.

The intergenerational transmission of how family members show emotion and affection towards each other was deeply impacted by survivors learning this in the boarding schools. The method of emotional suppression then led to unhealthy coping methods which was observed by children in the family. It was revealed that alcohol was a common coping method for Indigenous survivors struggling with the difficulties they experienced. As such, it would not be surprising if that was how children learned to cope; descendants spoke about how they also struggled with alcohol abuse. Recall that literature recognizes that the importance of understanding the societal constructs of culture is heavily indicative of the way that attachment indicators are learned (Bornstein, et al, 2008). In this context, the negative coping methods were largely transmitted intergenerationally through their cultural messages. It is also important to note that the negative coping with the historical trauma largely impacted the family discord of Indigenous families (Stevens, et al, 2015; Urbaeva, et al, 2017).

Contrarily, through the higher presence of mental health assistance in their generation, descendants were able to get help with their difficulties with counselors, friends, or through religion. Often nature and exercise were a common coping method which is easy to understand when you look at the scenic beauty of their reservation. One descendant remembered that in journaling and writing her thoughts and feelings, she used it as a release. She explained that she did it “to give an opportunity to others that they’re not the only ones that have had that experience or have had that general, not just personal experience, but the generational experience.” There were so many that also went to different forms of treatment like therapy, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, wellbriety groups, women’s wellness, and even on their reservation, they have groups for

elders to get together and speak only in their language. Overall, the intergenerational transmission of prayer and ceremony of culture was proudly expressed in working through their difficult times. As I indicated earlier, survivors who went through treatment for their addictions were able to have more positive relationships with their children and grandchildren.

Lastly, despite trauma being a toxic intergenerational pattern mentioned by both survivors and descendants, many indicated how they were able to stop that cycle of trauma and abuse. A few of them talked about how they became stronger parents to the next generation. Bertha Brown, the tribal collaborator, was able to reflect that so many of them helped heal their broken attachments and become a “human *doing*” not a “human [simply] *being*.”

These factors of attachment contribute to one’s Indigenous self-worth. Overall, boarding schools had a significant negative impact on a child’s perception of themselves and in relation to others. Recall how Brown, et al (2016) emphasize that Indigenous people may feel trapped in the negative stereotypes and messages thus, they may convince themselves that they are powerless to alter that mentality. The negative messages alone from boarding schoolteachers and officials were overly negative along with punitive methods of punishment and abuse to then be a severe detriment to a child’s Indigenous identity and self-worth. Many survivors recognized the deep contradiction which existed between their two realities—at home on the reservation and at the boarding school. Some remembered that if they were too planted in their culture at the boarding school, it translated negatively on the way they were treated. Additionally, some realized that they never really understood the spiritual differences between the catholic boarding

school that many of them attended near their reservation and their own cultural spirituality. The trauma that many of them experienced at the boarding schools and at home created a sense of contention towards their confusion of realities. This then contributed to a lot of the descendants acknowledging that they were not really taught the culture from their parents despite wanting to learn. A descendant spoke about this:

I do the best I can with my kids. I don't want them to experience the reservation either. It's tough though because at the same time I don't want them to be completely, I always felt a disconnect from my culture. I always felt separate from, I grew up close to my mom's reservation and the native kids didn't like me. But ultimately, I feel like it ended up being the best thing for me. I can't...both of those things can exist at the same time. It seems contradictory but there it is.

Ultimately, this was an aspect that many descendants respected their parents and grandparents for—despite the difficulty they may have experienced, they were able to hold onto their language. This was so true when I could see it so vividly at their tribal college and reservation.

Additionally, many talked about how their self-worth was impacted by taking on adult-like roles and responsibilities. It would be understandable in a collectivistic culture, family members would help each other with raising children but, it seemed problematic when so many survivors followed up these sentiments with statements like, “why did I do that?” and “I shouldn't have been worried about things like that.” Another survivor remembered having to care for her mother and help her through hard times by saying, “I was my mom's hero.” Remember that Krauthamer, et al (2015) stress that when

parenting is negative and not supportive of children, it can influence their emotional development. If we are thinking about this from an attachment perspective, it should have been the other way around. In forming a bond of safety and security with our caregiver, we should feel like he or she is the hero in our world—that person is there to comfort us through those hard times, where we are not quite sure how to conquer them.

The intergenerational transmission of this toxic messaging and traumatic methods unfortunately were quite evident throughout the knowledge shared. Despite that many survivors verified that they became more independent and prouder of holding onto their Indigenous identity. They realized that they made it and they are still a proud Indigenous man or woman in their tribe. I also want to emphasize how every one of my knowledge sharers were amazing people despite the attachment difficulties they may have experienced. The incredible strength that they exuded made me inspired to keep going with this. I kept reflecting with my collaborator, Bertha Brown, on how they were iconic in my eyes; I would be lucky to have half of their strength.

Implications and Future Directions

I want to emphasize that the need for healing is essential for indigenous families impacted by boarding schools. As I mentioned, if the traumatized child is not healed and trust is created again, that pain and re-experiencing of trauma may still happen. The implications are profound in amplifying the necessity for traditional healing of indigenous groups with what has been historically strengthening for their tribe. In the meantime, there are a couple methods of healing I want to bring forth as it has been used with indigenous people who struggle with historical trauma. First, I show appreciation for

the methods of Bertha Brown in how she wants to help her people with the historical trauma healing certification she has worked hard to achieve. Through her methods, she was trained by Dr. Ruby Gibson at the Freedom Lodge. She uses somatic archaeology and generational brainspotting to help individuals who have endured trauma in their communities and/or in their families.

Gibson (2008) developed a way of helping people to find the stories and difficult histories that have been hidden in their bodies. This model of healing involves understanding the remnants of those difficult memories in the “cells, muscles, blood and bones,” of our bodies. During my visit with Bertha Brown, I was able to understand the impact that specific difficult contextual processes were impacting my body and it opened my eyes to things that needed some exploration. Secondly, Gibson utilizes a method she learned from Dr. David Grand (2013) called brainspotting which is a way of understanding the neurophysiological spots of our body that causes pain. Gibson has further adapted the method in identifying that our previous seven generations can influence the inherited trauma and pain one might feel.

Another method of intervention has been identified by Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart through her discovering that the trauma groups of indigenous people have endured is the *historical trauma* that we must understand to heal from (Brave Heart, 1998). Through her Takini Institute located in the Black Hills of South Dakota, she practices under the vision that “We are all survivors and no one is above another. We are all teachers and learners,” (Brave Heart, Indian Health Services Presentation, May 24, 2018). She goes on to identify that in healing from historical trauma, we must understand the trauma, release our pain, transcend the trauma and finally confront the trauma and

embrace our history (Brave Heart, 1998). It is through these steps that indigenous people and families can resolve the grief and pain they feel from the trauma their group has collectively suffered.

Many knowledge sharers mirror these interventions by stressing the importance of how Indigenous families must always know the history of their family and in knowing this, they know where they have been and what they have experienced. Additionally, the family history shows the strength and resiliency of their family. I had the honor to talk with descendants of prominent tribal members and they felt very proud of who they were and how much their ancestors had done for their tribe. One survivor expressed that when you are working with Indigenous groups or families, you must be aware of the following:

You don't know the complete context of that person unless you know the tribe, the history of the tribe like how recent the traumas were with the government. I think those make a big difference. I know where they live, where they come from, know who their parents are. You should know what their iconic moments are in their history. Those are the things that make people stay in one place.”

Furthermore, so many of the survivors indicated the immense need to know their language and healing ceremonies so they can heal together as a group. One descendant recognized that so much of their healing exists in their language.

Additionally, in knowing about the true and accurate history of a family, their traumas are given voice. A survivor reflected this when they were asked about the intergenerational pattern of not healing their trauma and suppressing their emotion...

Many things trigger that person as it taps into their trauma of their hurt child and so they'll lash back just like children. That's what's happening and it's always happened. Until people really realize that you know, that's when really that's the catalyst for change right there—heal your inner child, that hurt child.”

Again, that message of healing the hurting experiences becomes essential in helping one's wellbeing and in turn, their family wellbeing.

Many knowledge sharers indicated that future steps in research should help to fully realize the depth of systemic oppression that has and continues to exist for Indigenous people. As we have realized as a nation that the systemic racism really has never gone away for African American people, the *Black Lives Matter* movement illuminates the racist messages that this political climate has uncovered. Many of my knowledge sharers voiced how they also experienced this oppression and racism in different contexts. Along this journey, I researched the language used in the boarding school policy which provided the justification in requiring this assimilative system. The language talked about how Indigenous people were wild, dirty, vile, and their spiritual beliefs were evil. This kind of language was still very present for a survivor who remembered how the nuns would force them to clean themselves aggressively and sometimes in a painful way. She painfully recalled, “Jeez, they must've thought we were really dirty, scrub us, you know, that must have been their thought...those nuns would come along with those hard bristle brushes and scrub. Some of those kids' feet and fingers would just bleed.”

So much of these negative messages were underlying and influencing their daily interactions and experiences. This then implies that it heavily contributes to the negative perception of themselves in their mental model. This impacts how they form their attachment and cultural identity. Some other survivors told about how even going to stores and restaurants, they would get racially profiled and receive negative treatment. One survivor identified specifically, “I pray that one day when my baby is an adult, she’ll be able to say that it just felt good to go to Walmart and not be profiled. Or to just be accepted for who she was and never accepted by the color of her skin.”

Lastly, in understanding their true histories, family ancestry, and tribal ceremonies, they are educating themselves and improving the strength of their cultural identity and helping their community. I was moved by how my knowledge sharers had advanced beyond their addiction by learning more about their emotional and mental wellbeing. For so many of the survivors, it involved going to treatment, therapy, and learning about their own ceremonial healing and living accordingly. While I continue to learn everyday along this journey, I recognize how I still have so much more to learn. My children often ask if I’m going to be in school forever; this amuses me because they see my doctoral program as never ending. I always tell them that I will be learning every day at school and my job someday. I want them to be lifelong learners as well. I have felt so fulfilled and proud to say that I love to learn. I do not want them to ever say they know everything. No one should. To this end, my knowledge sharers want their people to get their education to put themselves in places where they could use what they learn to make small differences for their community. Further work needs to be done to explore the impact of education on ameliorating the effects of Indian boarding schools.

All of these future directions become quintessential in my next steps. As I indicated, more true and accurate histories need to be researched and realized. So many times, I will be teaching a room of undergraduate students where only 2 or 3 hands go up when I ask, who has ever learned about the *Indian* boarding school system? If we are going to make changes for the future, our historical curriculum needs to be more representative and accurate about Indigenous education. Additionally, through this, I emphasized the need to fully understand the historically accurate ways that each tribe's families relate and attach with each other. In exploring attachment research, I do not want to impose any kind of theoretical framework developed by western approaches. This was never my intent. I merely wanted to use the attachment framework to identify experiences of family relationships impacted by boarding schools in light of those attachment indicators. It serves as a process that has been detected among other collectivistic cultures worldwide. As such, more research needs to uncover the historical familial processes of each tribe to reclaim these extremely important cultural factors.

My Dissertation Journey

I was blessed to meet all of my knowledge sharers; I felt as though I was the lucky throughout the data collection journey. I honor each one of them and appreciated their willingness to share their very special and important journey with me. I say this because it was astounding to me that anyone would have harmed any one of them as children. It was hard to listen as each of them, without prompting, told their experiences with traumatic situations, and my heart broke each time for them. As you're reading this, I am sure you can understand how difficult it would be to remain an objective researcher. Along this personally life-changing educational journey, I had the extreme fortune twice

to hear Frank LaMere, an activist who devoted his life for the closing of the liquor stores in White Clay, Nebraska, prior to his passing in 2019. He lived by his mantra, “Nothing changes unless someone is made to feel uncomfortable! Nothing changes unless we make ourselves uncomfortable,” (UNMC newsroom, 2019). I kept this close in my mind throughout this difficult journey. I was often asked why was this my topic? *Isn't it depressing?* I realized prior to this PhD program that I needed to learn more about the trauma in order to make any kind of change, the kind of change many knowledge sharers want in their community. Much of our society sweeps the negative and hurtful trauma under the rug because it is too hard to talk about. When I heard Frank LaMere in 2016 talk about how we need to talk about the trauma to begin the healing, it motivated me to keep going.

I have processed the breadth of this knowledge for so long that it seems overwhelming to understand how so many factors are being affected by colonization and the boarding schools. Between the survivors and descendants, there were multiple suggestions for future steps. In forcing myself to focus more clearly on the intent and purpose of this study, I must impress the critical need to help families relate better to each other overall. It seemed as though so many survivors and descendants expressed the difficulty in knowing how to express emotion and how to communicate honestly with each other. The negative messages and processes that were learned in the boarding schools have been reversed for so many, but it is the other majority who are still struggling from those experiences who need the most help. When I was younger, I remember driving through White Clay, Nebraska where I saw so many Indigenous men and women walking the main street with bottles in their hands. I remember wondering

why they did this, why did they look so sad and angry? I realize now after all of this research that it is possible they are those people who still haven't healed that hurt little child inside. It becomes critical that in knowing more about cultural family histories and ceremonies, those children could start to heal.

Limitations and Context

The research trip was changed from its original timeline in accordance with the coronavirus pandemic. On March 16, 2020, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Research Compliance Services and Institutional Review Board suspended all in-person research and non-essential travel in the efforts of a *stay at home, flatten the curve* order to reduce coronavirus person-to-person susceptibility. This pandemic impacted people in many ways on a global scale-most importantly, it impacted overall family emotional wellbeing. The focus of physical safety was the utmost concern; however, families were encouraged to stay at home, learn and work from home, and relate to each other on a constant basis. This was new and unknown, so everyone had to be patient and understanding. In the context of this dissertation, my hope and perseverance were tested. How many doctoral students have said that they had to postpone their data collection trip because of a global pandemic? As I write this, the pandemic has hit a second wave and people are encouraged to stay home. Nevertheless, there was a small window of time where in-person research and travel were approved on a case by case basis. CDC guidelines, discussed in the methods section, was emphasized and followed during the data collection trip. Extreme care and safety were absolutely implemented due to the compromised health status of elder knowledge sharers.

Due to the COVID-adapted interviews, some in-person and remote, it was not possible for Bertha Brown to be present for all 31 interviews. As indicated, Bertha was present for 13 in-person and 2 remote interviews leaving 16 without her present. While no explicit differences were seen in the interviews she attended vs those she did not attend, it is possible that it may have altered interviews. During the interviews, I acknowledged that they only knew of me by association with Bertha and I appreciated their engagement in sharing their stories. Prior to asking the questions, I introduced myself including sharing that I was as an Indigenous person with family connections to boarding schools. I expressed my belief that I was a learner in this process, and they were the experts sharing their journey. Nevertheless, it is unclear how Bertha's presence affected the knowledge sharers' engagement in telling their stories. No clear differences were seen in the interviews with compared to those without her presence and given that, the results were meaningful it did not seem to limit depth or quality of the data but is still a variable that needs to be considered.

Additionally, sampling methods of specific age ranges were not possible due to the time constraint and availability of people during the pandemic. In its planning stage, I was going to interview 10 survivors who attended boarding schools, ages 60-80, 10 descendants or survivors, ages 40-59, and descendants, ages 19-39. In actual and limited timing of this knowledge journey, I was forced to change to interview people who expressed their desire to help this study which ended up totaling 18 survivors and 13 descendants. This was slightly different than the original plan of different age ranges. After all of this, the ages of descendants and survivors ranged from age 19-80 which I found to be quite representative of different generations. I was able to interview three

generations but, I was very respectful and accepted anyone who expressed interest in helping me. I wanted to show them how deeply I appreciated their willingness to share their knowledge with me. As you may have saw from the sampling, there were fewer males in this exploration. Nevertheless, I felt very fortunate that it happened as it did—the plethora of information was more than I expected.

Lastly, I need to recognize my positionality in this. At times, I had difficulty in remaining objective and a neutral researcher. I recognize now that I will never be that person. I cannot change my own identity which was created by people who went to boarding schools. My life experiences and family relationships shaped me into this person I am today. Knowing this deeply impacts how I completely devote myself to understanding it more. I wanted to let each knowledge sharer know who I am and what led me to this educational journey. At appearance, I do not look like I have a tie to boarding schools which has always been a source of difficulty with my Indigenous identity. I wanted them to be able to understand my connection and how truly devoted I am to use the strength that I have in doing research in small ways to help Indigenous families. But, while it may have been a limitation for me in knowing and experiencing the results of boarding schools, I view it as a tremendous strength in making this exploration more meaningful to its entire purpose. More specifically, it ended up making this exploration incredibly meaningful to my own developmental journey.

Conclusions

This qualitative phenomenological and Indigenous research methodological study explored the meaning and essence of Indigenous people who attended boarding schools

and the family relationships and experiences of those survivors and their descendants. Its intent was to explore the research question, what was the impact of the *Indian* boarding school experience on Indigenous family attachment? After recognizing and researching the colonizing and assimilative impact of boarding schools in the history of our country, I was able to understand how this contributes to Indigenous attachment today. One must recall the importance of colonization and the historical trauma of different Indigenous groups in truly understanding the survivance that so many tribes show. I am continuing to learn and hope to always be in that learning role as I spoke about in the implications.

I then formed the proposal of how I would go about doing this critical exploration with respected and honored knowledge sharers. I met Bertha Brown along this journey and together, we discussed how the interviews would look. We worked together and obtained the approval of the tribe and university. We formed a sisterhood throughout this journey and I now can confidently understand that my ancestors brought her into my life. With the tribal and university approval, despite the coronavirus pandemic, I conducted socially distant and physically protected qualitative semi-structured interviews that asked questions about those important attachment theoretical indicators like trust, emotional regulation, coping methods and teaching culture. As I mentioned, the process of interviewing, transcribing and analyzing this information truly changed my life.

Results indicate that Indigenous populations experienced difficulty in how they formed trusting relationships. This was made evident by knowledge sharers recognizing how trauma and abuse impacted their ability to trust-indicating many trust violations. Additionally, they spoke of issues of abandonment and extreme loneliness which have huge implications for difficulty to form that safe and secure base of comfort. Results also

showed that they had to cope independently which usually included stifling and shaming emotion in the boarding schools. Furthermore, knowledge sharers indicate that largely, they were in survival mode and emotions were less important. In reducing the negative emotions, many knowledge sharers engaged in negative coping methods like substances and impulsive behavior. These patterns of living in a survival type of mentality and coping by ignoring emotion were recognized as the *native way* in caregiving and largely passed on to subsequent generations. Knowledge sharers were able to hold onto their culture and through attachments with grandparents, they were able to learn their language and participate in ceremonies. This contributed greatly to the attachment indicators discussed: trust, emotional regulation, coping methods and teaching culture. Lastly, I realized through the course of these interviews that every one of these knowledge sharers were phenomenal people full of strength and pride for who they were as Indigenous people. I felt inspired by their stories and how one survivor told me how she coped with hard times:

I've come to learn to let go of things that happened to me as a child. That's not who I am. My issues are not who I am. They happened to me, some were in my control and some were not. So I've really learned to pray a lot and seek the Creator for comfort and gratefulness that he loves me just the way I am.

I learned things about my own family in this journey as I had never known that my grandfather attended boarding schools. Our family did not know this until we read through his journal that he completed at an alcohol rehabilitation program near the end of his life. It changed the definition of my passion in doing this. It became more about understanding how his choices and inability to process his difficult emotions had harmful

impacts on my mother's generation and subsequently, myself. I realized how it truly impacted me two generations later. I was forced to then understand how his strained and non-existent relations with my mother and her siblings created the people I see today and love wholeheartedly. Additionally, my eyes were opened to my own father's difficult and disorganized attachment and how this impacted his perception of himself and in others.

Equally, as a product of a boarding school survivor, I have been told that I may appear emotionless at times. When I was in my marriage and family therapy master's program, I was told that I had little affect and had difficulty in effectively relating to others. This was not the first time I had heard this. It was seen as a weakness by someone in a position of power and this impacted my progress in my program. I think back now about how my experience could have been different had my culture been considered by that faculty member. As I mentioned, so many of them sought out ways to heal from their trust issues and learn about how their emotions were important and meaningful. Those hurt children who do not get help in managing those bottled up emotions, then go on to use negative coping methods to continue to ignore those emotions.

Ultimately, I am the product of two people who were deeply impacted by colonization and assimilation experienced in the boarding schools. Quite honestly, it strengthened my own Indigenous identity. My own experiences and messages were mirrored in some of my knowledge sharers and I found some peace in hearing it from someone else. This light-skinned Indigenous researcher is among the first generation in her family to not attend a boarding school, but also, she is the first to receive a doctoral degree.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions (for descendants - children of those attended boarding schools)

Demographics:

- Typical demographics: age, gender, current relationship status, past significant relationships, have children/how many, current and childhood
- What tribe do you identify with?
- Did your parents attend boarding schools?
- Did your Grandparents attend BS?
- Do you know what type of boarding school your family members attended, i.e. ran by a group or by the govt?

Semi Structured Interview Questions: (a couple examples of potential follow-up questions are listed to illustrate focus of follow-up)

- Parent/child relationship – Can you share a meaningful memory about an interaction with a parent.
 - What did happy times look like in your childhood with your parents?
 - Is there something that you experienced that you believe was a result of your parents attending boarding schools?
- Trust - Can you think of a memory where you learned you could trust someone?
 - If no, can you think of a memory where you learned people could not be trusted?

- Today, how do you feel you do at trusting people in and/or outside of your family?
- Coping Methods – Who comforted you or helped you when you were having a difficult experience? If so, how did they do to comfort you?
 - Were you able to go to your parents with difficulties/problems?
 - What kinds of things helped you cope with emotional stress in your childhood?
 - How did your parent respond to you when you were upset?
- Later impact of boarding schools - Give me an example of why your current family is special.
 - How do you think your current family is affected by your parents/grandparents boarding school experience?
 - While you were growing up did your parents/grandparents talk about their experience in the boarding schools?
- Resilience – What would you want your children to know about your parents boarding school experience?
 - How do you think boarding schools shaped your parents/grandparents?
 - In what ways do you respect your parents/grandparents for having experienced boarding schools.
 - In many senses, the intent to eradicate Native American culture was unsuccessful, you are still here, as a *tribe* man/woman, is there anything we should think about to instill that tribal presence in the future?

Interview Questions (for survivors - those that attended boarding schools)

Demographics:

- Typical demographics: age, gender, current relationship status, past significant relationships, have children/how many, current and childhood
- What tribe do you identify with?
- Did your parents attend boarding schools?
- Did your Grandparents attend BS?
- At what age did you leave for the BS?
- How many years did you go to the BS?
- What years were you there?
- Was there a group that ran the boarding school or was it govt run?
- If the school was residential, during the school year, how many months did you spend at the BS?
- Were you able to go home during the school year while you were attending the BS?
 - If so, how often and how long did you get to stay?
 - Aside from going home were there other times that you saw your parents?

Semi Structured Interview Questions: (a couple examples of potential follow-up questions are listed to illustrate focus of follow-up)

- Parent/child relationship – Can you share a meaningful memory about an interaction with a parent.

- What did happy times look like in your childhood with your parents?
- While at school how often did you talk to your parents? What were the conversations like?
- Trust - Can you think of a memory where you learned you could trust someone?
 - If no, can you think of a memory where you learned people could not be trusted?
 - Today, how do you feel you do at trusting people in and/or outside of your family?
- Coping Methods – Who comforted you or helped you when you were having a difficult experience? If so, how did they do to comfort you?
 - After leaving the boarding school, were you able to go to your parents with difficulties/problems?
 - What kinds of things helped you cope with emotional stress in your childhood?
 - How did your parent respond to you when you were upset?
- Later impact of boarding schools - Give me an example of why your current family is special.
 - What has your relationship been like with your own children?
 - How do you feel that the boarding school affected the way that you raised your children?
- Resilience – What positive thing would you want your children to know about your boarding school experience?
 - What about yourself gives you pride?

- What have you learned about yourself as a survivor of the boarding school you attended?
- In many senses, the intent to eradicate Native American culture was unsuccessful, you are still here, as a *tribe* man/woman, is there anything we should think about to instill that tribal presence in the future?