

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE AGONY OF NAVIGATING WESTERNIZED COLLEGES

### *Uncertain Admission*

*They all, in their own way, ask the question,  
Who are you, who are you?  
I have to admit to them, to myself,  
I am Indian.  
Frances Bazil, a Coeur d'Alene 1965*

### Introduction

Eva Marie Garroutte (2003) reminds us that the question of "real Indianness" is more prevalent and disconcerting today. She explores how people move within the multiple definition of "Indianness" with regard to the success and failure of crossing cultural borders, especially cultural boarders that exist within an educational framework. The sole purpose of this study was to understand the complexity of American Indian culture within the confinements of an education journey.

This study had no intention of pitting one educational system against another, but illustrates the challenges described by the participants. Brookfield (1995), in his book *"Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher,"* examines critical reflection through the process of looking at assumptions. He refers to "reflection as hunting assumptions"

(p. 2). The ability to understand assumptions gives meaning and purpose to who we are and what we do.

I originally believed that the purpose of my study was to discover through student and faculty dialogue: (1) What role does "culturally appropriate curriculum" play at *Big Lake Tribal College*? (2) Is a "culturally appropriate curriculum" the catch-all response needed for looping a linear, Westernized postsecondary educational system? However, in reflecting upon my original research questions, process, and analysis, I find that my own linear educational enlightenment has perhaps created a tunnel vision approach. I realize that a more appropriate research question may be, "How does being American Indian impede or enhance your educational journey?" I understand more thoroughly that a "culturally appropriate curriculum" is not at the forefront of the student's educational perceptions.

Chapter Five focuses on the first of two emergent themes that evolved from the participants' understanding of their educational journeys. The research participants involved in this study have at some point during their educational journey felt the angst of "Looping Linear." The angst of which I

speak is the tension between "looping" American Indian inclusive culture and the "linear" dominant Western culture in the attainment of education.

The first theme concerns the construct of being American Indian in a Westernized educational institution--of being an *outsider* from day one. The issue of being American Indian in a dominant environment is a significant impetus that impacts the Tribal College students' educational experiences. Their endurance of *otherness* that places them outside the educational taxonomy creates an ongoing discourse for this chapter which focuses on the angst of cultures. This theme integrates student and faculty beliefs and a relationship that illustrates American Indian culture within a Westernized educational context, all of which continue to struggle against each other.

### **The Vernacular of Hegemony: Educational "Outsiders"**

The learning engagement of American Indian students endures continuous cultural disconnects. This is one of the many obstacles that American Indian students face throughout their educational experiences. This disconnect often occurs at the beginning of an American Indian student's educational journey. The American Indian students of *Big Lake* Tribal College illustrate how academic success is sometimes compromised and hindered because of these disconnects.

As educators attempt to facilitate optimal learning and teaching environments for diverse populations, the American Indian student's experience is pertinent in this endeavor. From an educational lens, the necessity and ability to comprehend and relate to how American Indian students traverse boundaries successful--or alternatively, how barriers impede the educational and institutional contexts--are steps in understanding the hegemonic role of a Westernized schooling influence and dominant ideologies.

My goal was to converse with the students about their elementary and secondary school experiences, wondering if identity has played a significant role during their early years of schooling. The following discourse will unveil how the continuous marginalization of American Indian students through a Westernized institutional structure defines their place and perpetrates a universal false identity of "Indianness" on the general population and on the American Indian students' own identities. The cultural definition of an American Indian identity based on a stereotype produces a dominant standard that reflects hegemony and ideology and a white perspective of what an Indian person should look like, be like, and know. It also portrays the attitudinal change of student perspectives in relationship to their attendance at a Western college setting compared with their current perspectives while attending a Tribal College.

Freire (1970) illustrates how the "culture of silence" is a direct product of ignorance and lethargy based upon hegemonic domination and paternalism. He found that dominant societies minimize a population's situation rather than equip or encourage its people to deal with the realities of the world (p. 30). American Indian stereotypes and ignorance manifested by teachers and school administrations, sanctioned in the name of education, continue to solidify and perpetuate this "culture of silence," thus creating a taxonomic structure of educational disenchantment that exists today, not only for the *Big Lake* Indian community but also nationwide for American Indian people.

#### "Outsider" Construct

Brookfield (2005) points to Foucault's reference regarding the "culture of silence" as the power of a dominant community to determine who is allowed to join and at the same time sets standards for judging good and bad contributions (p. 137). Unfortunately, at an early age a person has limited options in responding to the powers that influence the "culture of silence," school personnel, and teachers. However, the taxonomy construct and the impact of school interactions leave an indelible imprint upon the recipient's memory. Rosemary, Jasmine, and Sky, *Big Lake* Tribal College students, share their perspectives from their K- 12 educational experiences.

*Rosemary:* In Kindergarten there was a little Indian table, we were not allowed to play with any non-Indian kids. The teacher always assumed that we were lying or taking other kids' stuff if they could not find it. Or - cheating if we got a better score on our tests. All through grade school I got that, and then I thought it would be different in high school, but then it was really not...it was actually kind of worse. (Interview, May 12, 2004)

Jasmine, another *Big Lake* Tribal College student out of high school for a few years, relates similar experiences from a Catholic school perspective. She portrays a picture of alienation and naming that stains of her earlier years of education.

*Jasmine:* In Kindergarten, the Nun, our Kindergarten teacher, made all of the Native students sit at a table together, separated from everyone else. The table was at the back of the room. Going to the public school was not much better; I tried to stay close to my Native friends because everyone categorized us as maybe *bad* Natives. If one Native student got a bad reputation--they categorized all Native students as *bad* people. (Interview, September 21, 2004)

Anishinabe student, Sky, who was born and raised in the *Big Lake* Indian Community, remembers her own awakening to the differences as named by others during the educational process. Sky talks about the pain of being *different*, the *other*, and references the naming ideologies that are a continuous and a burdensome part of her educational journey.

*Sky*: It wasn't until I went to grade school, high school, and beyond into my college years that I understood I was *different*. It was then that I realized I was of another race, another culture, and separate from *the norm*. I was never taught these differences until they were pointed out to me in my interactions at school. In grade school I was teased for being Native American. The boys would pull my long black braids and call me "Injun." I was called stupid, dirty...it was assumed that I carried lice, since "all the Indians did." (*Sky*, personal communication, September 21, 2004)

As young female American Indian students, their ability to work through a hegemonic Westernized educational system is incomprehensible. Hegemony is created through a process, and in these particular cases the strength of physical estrangement and negative descriptive language denotes their unacceptability for membership into the educational taxonomy--a privileged realm.

Rosemary, Jasmine, and Sky clearly expressed their understandings regarding the implications of classroom and school alienation. They know their physical and verbal banishment from the educational realm is directly related to their ethnicity as American Indians—as *outsiders*. Even today does the Westernized school system continue to perpetuate the "culture of silence" by ensuring selective membership? The student interviewees believe that it still exists for them and their children.

The dominant society's significant misunderstanding and unclear interpretation stems from its limited knowledge of the American Indian taxonomic structures that define Tribal membership. The inner taxonomic structure that exists today, not only for the *Big Lake* Indian Community but also for virtually all federally recognized tribes nationwide, is uniquely specific to American Indians. "Blood quantum" refers to the distinction and criteria of being considered a tribal member based upon the ancestral lineage of the family. While blood quantum percentages differ from tribe to tribe, the *Big Lake* Constitution specifies that a child must have at least one quarter or more *Big Lake* Indian blood to be considered for tribal membership.

The original taxonomy of alliance and marriage based upon blood quantum has been a long-standing mechanism for bringing American Indians into imminent and abiding relationships. Unfortunately, as one draws near to those who are alike, the extent of their otherness is thus diminished;

taxonomic outsiders will continue to perceive the *otherness* through a mystic and romantic lens, leading to the possibility of exploitation.

Skin color plays an integral exploitation venue. Dominant culture creates and perpetuates this distinguishing classificatory system through a self-determined visual observance. As Garrouette (2003) points out, the entanglement of Indian identity is encapsulated not only within the premise of blood quantum but also in the outside perception of skin color, which plays a significant role in the context of "Indianness." Physical attributes can contribute to a limiting or broadening factor when non-Indians define themselves or interact with another American Indian person.

Willow is a *Big Lake* Tribal College student. For Willow, skin color has been a lifetime issue with the constant bombarding questions about her skin tone. She has felt the angst of emotions ranging from anger, disbelief, and finally to the power of tolerance, which led her to become the teacher. She now finds humor in many of her situations and uses those moments as teaching opportunities.

*Willow:* I was raised and taught and have always known that I was Native American, but was stigmatized with the label as being a "black American." This would get me into a lot of trouble because I was always saying, "No, I'm not, this is who I am, and this is what I was taught." But everybody was always trying to label me as something else. People's first initial look at me is, "No, you're African American." And I'm like, "No, I'm not." They finally give up in exasperation and ask, "Well, what are you? My appearance or my complexion may say that I am African American, but Native Americans come in all different colors. People up here are not used to seeing dark Native Americans. (Interview, March 17, 2004)

Willow has a strong sense of personal values and traditional beliefs that precipitated her decision to speak out about cultural uniqueness. Willow emphasizes that the question of cultural uniqueness and value cannot be answered if, as a People, the silence remains. However, the silence must be broken not only among American Indian people but also among the dominant culture.

What has escaped many dominant eyes or what dominant society has refused to acknowledge is the victimized person of color. The mere fact that white supremacy serves as a philosophical mission of exploitation and oppression should not go unnoticed. Even today the color of a person's skin still gives way to physical violence. Foucault (1977) speaks of the gentle ways in punishment, the use of methods that invade the conscious and subconscious minds (p. 107). But what are the effects of physical violence that encase the body of the condemned--the body of color? The angst of drawing meaning from violence consists of emotional scars brought about by the repetitious infliction of ontological

wounds. The lifetime of wounds festers and replicates the image of dominance that filters through society.

American Indian College student, Sally Brunk, wrote *Skin on Skin* (Appendix A) after her encounter with Skinheads. At that time she was attending Haskell Indian Junior College.

I remember a flash of black boots

I remember the words

"Dirty stupid squaws, get out of our state!"

"All you stupid squaws need haircuts!"

then I saw the flash of a switchblade

gleaming in the hot September sun

Sally's excerpt from her poem captures the horror and implausible belief that freedom from tyranny of racial exclusion and domination is achievable. Her poem speaks volumes not only about her own experience but also for other American Indian people who have encountered similar experiences. The connection between having their voices heard in the attempt to change perceptions and the connection between American Indian values is a strong and critical component among the interviewed Tribal College students.

#### Relationships: Enhancing the Outsider Belief

The power in the meanings of verbal and active encouragement, or the lack of encouragement, creates a status quo knowledge base that supports the power relationship. Brookfield (2005) illustrates Foucault's work in stating that, "Whatever a society accepts as knowledge or truth inevitably ends up strengthening the power of some and limiting the power of others" (p. 136). Repressive power constrains the possibility of being and it coerces the learners as they develop their voices towards self-confidence.

Several *Big Lake* Tribal College students reflect on their teacher/student relationships. For most it presents negative and painful memories. The actions of the numerous disbelievers have left deep impressions on the lives of the students interviewed. Reed tells of his experiences as an *outsider* based not only upon the number of minority students in attendance but also by the lack of encouragement to participate in the educational system.

*Reed:* Looking back, I don't feel that the teachers were concerned about me, they did not really care. There were only two of us that were non-white in high school. He and I became friends. The white people were encouraged to study more--they were more nurtured towards their society. (Interview, March 16, 2004)

Rosemary questions her educational ability based upon what teachers were preaching to her and her sister. At the time her ability to fight the constant emotional spiral of negative images and scenarios fashioned by others took its toll upon her inner spirit of resiliency.

*Rosemary:* A high school teacher was always telling me that I was never going to be anything--kind of like "why do you try?" He also told my sister that she was nothing more than a dead fish floating down the river. At first I wanted to prove them wrong after initially getting mad or whatever. You know, but then it's like--you just kind of lose faith in yourself after awhile. (Interview, May 12, 2004)

In a classroom setting a few students learn the lesson of mimicking the dominant society's behavior. Jasmine sees how the game is being played and becomes a player herself. While it eases the *outsider* label, it does not provide the high school encouragement she needs to consider college as an educational option.

*Jasmine:* The high school teachers themselves did not seem to treat me differently. I think some of the teachers liked me because I was a "suck up." I guess you could say that I "played the game." I saw other students doing it and they were doing well in class. When I was in high school I never thought I would go to college. I thought, "I am not going to college." And none of my Native friends ever talked about it either. (Interview, September 21, 2004)

The *Big Lake* Tribal College students focus a large portion of their dialogue on their negative Western educational experiences. These experiences relate to prescriptive assumptions that challenge or confirm existing power relationships within a Western educational institution, as seen from an American Indian perspective.

Sadly, throughout the interviews students never mention enlightening moments of undergraduate assistance from faculty or staff at Westernized educational institutions. In the case of Willow, her professor identifies her as *Creole*, terminology that he could never explain coherently to Willow.

*Willow:* My *Somewhere* University experience was difficult - it was really difficult. I had an English teacher tell me "You write with a Creole style." This was the first time I had ever heard writing referred to as Creole. I know my ethnic appearance might seem Creole, but what did he mean by that comment? I asked, and he replied, "You do not write like the other students in my class. You speak a certain way and write differently." I asked him if he could assist me in changing this or develop my skills in a way that I

could verbalize and also get my point across on paper. I never really got a straight solid answer from him. I went through the motions in this English class and got through. I would find myself trying to explain to the teacher my predicament and he would say, "Well, go to the study hall and get a tutor." I would ask, "Ok, if I get a tutor and bring this back to you, will you take the time to read it?" Most of the time I found that the teachers--they treat you differently--it is like, "Well, you have made it this far, you should know what to do." But I am here to learn, if someone would assist me. (Interview, March 17, 2004)

It is little wonder that American Indian students continue to pursue higher education. This incident depicts one small sample of the incredible labeling and marginalization of American Indian students that is occurring today.

#### Expert "Outsider"

Brookfield (1995) explains that teaching innocently means thinking we always understand exactly what we are doing and what effect we are having. Teaching innocently means assuming that the meaning and significance we place on our actions are the same meanings that students take from them. "At best, teaching this way is naïve. At worst it induces pessimism, guilt, and lethargy" (p. 1). I see Sally Brunk's poetic literary interpretation *Authority Figure* (Appendix B) of educational life as giving astounding breadth to the continuous Westernized college experiences of American Indian students--the feeling of entrapment as a result of the effects of *teaching innocently*.

"the intellectuals think it's fascinating, interesting  
to be "Indigenous."  
I'm looked at as a specimen, rarity, lab rat,  
THE authority on Native issues, sovereignty, treaty rights,  
Mascots, language, trickster stories, traditions  
of EVERY tribe in the country  
yeah...that's me"

The struggle for American Indian students to experience shared meaning with the less knowledgeable faculty in Westernized educational institutions often drives the students to throw their hands up in despair and disgust, as Sky's narrative illustrates.

*Sky*: At my *Somewhere* University the professor actually thought I knew about all the other Native cultures. After I turned in one of my papers for American Literature class,



the professor asked if I could tell some Creation stories...since we were talking about non-Native Creation stories and the like. I looked at him in utter shock. I could not even say anything, because I was shocked that he would flat out ask me. It is traditional and respectful to first give tobacco and then ask someone about conveying Native stories. This professor had no idea, he thought I could just whip out Creation stories--oh, yeah, the Navajo think this and the Apache that. He really thought that I would just know all these things. I found this over and over again at all the schools I have been to. I don't know if people just believe that we are born with this worldly knowledge or what? I sat the professor down because I figured this was the only way and if he did this to another Native student they might not have been so calm. I did explain that this was not the proper way to ask someone about Creation stories. I explained that these types of stories are usually told in the wintertime and an Elder is the storyteller. I offered to give him some names so that he could ask respectfully. This has happened to me many times. I do not get as upset as I probably would have five years ago. I am not sure if I have just gotten used to the situations and I am not so touchy because I have heard it so often. It has taken me a long time and lots of bad experiences to be cool and calm and not overreact.

It is not just the professors but also the students. They will go off on these wild conversations and it is so frustrating. When I meet new people, they are like, "Oh, you are Native American," and then they start asking the craziest things. I am just like, "I have no idea what you are talking about." There was this instance in a Native class I was taking. We were watching the movie "Dances with Wolves." The actors are talking Sioux and my non-Native friend turns to me and asks, "What did they say?" I tell her, "I don't know--I am not Sioux!"

Sometimes even the professors teaching the Native classes look to me to verify what they have just said. I am not the Professor, they should know the answer! Don't look to me to say, "Yeah that was right!" I do not see these situations changing; they will just continue to happen in *Somewhere* Colleges and Universities everywhere. (Interview September 21, 2004)

It is evident based upon the Sky's narrative that American Indian students within a Westernized educational system seem to be experiencing a falsely manufactured concrete existence that replicates dominant ideologies. The flip-flop from *outsider* to *expert* seems to legitimize the mystic and romantic lens through which the dominant society views American Indians.

Not only is this ongoing student/teacher process continual and repetitious but it also creates emotionally draining consequences for American Indian students. One might ask the question, "Exactly who is the teacher?" I posed this question to Sky, "How does this intense inverted teacher/student relationship make you feel?" Sky reiterates that the emotional toll is high. Sky is working two jobs and going to college full time. To top that all off, there is the additional burden of educating faculty and students from the *Somewhere* institution.

*Sky:* I have not gone to college in consecutive years; I would take a year and then get frustrated and take two off. I think that I got mentally exhausted sometimes, to the point where I could just not take another semester. (Interview September 21, 2004)

From Sky's and other students' comments I can see there is definitely a struggle within them as to how long and how often, as American Indian students, they must be responsible for educating the educators.

#### Auxiliary "Outsider" Factors

Past history as an *outsider* has taught her that it is best to blend in; not to call attention to herself. Jasmine's sense of classroom expectations and response to sharing in the class's work reflect her fears of acceptability that she internalized during her early days of schooling. Her sense of sharing herself through homework is not a consideration because it meant opening herself up to ridicule and criticism.

*Jasmine:* On the second day of class at my *Somewhere* University I was put on the spot in a classroom of 60 students. I was in shock--in total fear. I did not know what to say and I could just have fainted! I never showed people my work, my writing especially. I did not feel confident that I was using the right words or if I had something wrong. (Interview, September 21, 2004)

The *outsider* syndrome is well ingrained in her self-identity and is particularly uncomfortable. To circumvent the situation is to leave the door open to classmates and faculty to question her academic ability, and yet her own questioning has the exact same effect.

In all the interviews the American Indian students try to infiltrate the Westernized higher educational system to obtain assistance with academic and personal issues. Rosemary relates that the lack of interaction with fellow students and faculty on campus creates an unbelievable isolation factor for her.

*Rosemary:* I attended *Somewhere* University that was about one hour from my home here at *Big Lake* Indian Community. There were so many people and all of sudden I felt pushed back down again as a "minority." Plus pretty much everybody just kept to himself or herself. There were not really any Native students, and the Native courses did

not seem cultural or traditional. One day I was talking to my instructor at the *Somewhere* University and I was trying to explain to her how it was with my life and schedule and everything that was going on. I told her all this and the fact that I was moving too--and, you know, she did not even blink--she did not care--I do not even know if she heard me, to tell the truth. (Interview, May 12, 2004)

Her unresponsive encounter with *Somewhere* faculty brings her to the realization that this particular higher educational setting was neither advocating nor acknowledging her cultural needs. It is certainly not creating an attitude of lifelong learning. Rosemary soon left the college.

Whether the power is inherent, as seen by Jasmine, or embedded in the issues that Rosemary perceives, there is no doubt that the experiences correlate with the Westernized educational mesh that covers the inter-workings of higher education. These prescriptive assumptions confirm the existing power relationships perpetuated within Westernized educational institutions.

These students portray a maze of significant and varied belief systems that are continuously held in front of today's American Indian students—a reflection of what others believe they can or cannot accomplish in their quest for education. Unfortunately the reflections are more likely to paint a negative picture, a landscape of the dominant society's undisguised beliefs.

#### Faculty Perspectives

The following Tribal College faculty members share their perspectives on the relationship and emotional hardships American Indian students experience while attending a Western educational system.

*Cassia:* Many of our students have been previously discouraged by Westernized education--for a variety of reasons and factors. Students have a strong cultural belief and value system with their families. It is the pinnacle to their life structure, and this means the extended family. This belief and value system is a contra-culture to dominant society. The Western institutions do not care if you have a sick child at home, you come to class regardless. (Interview, April 14, 2004)

Cassia points out that a student's ability to find his/her way through the Westernized educational system is the angst between American Indian culture and an institutionalized culture where self-identity and family responsibilities are not a consideration. Tribal College faculty interviewees speak of American Indian students who attempt to negotiate the Westernized college system alone. Cassia feels that the students have little to no control over the outcomes, and unfortunately they are not often successful.

*Flora:* Students want to learn and they want to learn who they are as a people, this includes our Tribal and non-Tribal students. If a college has 9,000 students and none of them care about who they are and how that background plays a role in where they are today and what role they play in the future, how are they going to make a difference? I think colleges have to realize that students are there to learn book knowledge but also to learn about who they are. (Interview, March 16, 2004)

Flora emphasizes the ongoing differences between the Westernized college system and culture as well as the gap between American Indian students who want and need to know who they are as a people. Many college institutions are unable to recognize and respond to this issue. Both students and faculty feel that the majority of Westernized colleges ignore the American Indian identity issues.

#### "Outsider" Reversed

*Big Lake* Tribal College reflects the faculty make-up of numerous Tribal Colleges across the nation, with a higher percentage of non-Native professors than Native. It is apparent that the vernacular power of *outsider* can impact the non-Native teachers who populate Tribal Colleges. Like the *outsider* American Indian students, non-Native teachers often feel displaced and alienated from the educational taxonomy; members of a community that does not represent the community it serves. A non-Indian (Caucasian) Tribal College faculty member relates that it is not always the spoken messages that tell the tale of difference, but the unspoken as well.

*Blade:* I notice with some of the Native students that they will totally-- some of them-- will totally ignore me as if I am not there. I am standing there and they only see the other Native person and talk directly with them. I am getting used to it and I do know their history, so I try to not take it personally or get offended. But it does kind of bug me; I try to make a point of introducing myself. I still get a sense, especially with Native men, of *animosity* or something close to that. I am not always sure of the cultural boundaries with regard to the Ojibwa people, so I feel a little odd at times. (Interview March 17, 2004)

This particular faculty member had only recently moved into the *Big Lake* Indian Community. Therefore, his relationships with tribal members were limited and there was minimal trust between him and tribal members. Thus, his *belonging* assumption was correct. He was considered an *outsider*--not only from an ethnic viewpoint but also because he did not belong to the geographic area. Blade's racial membership (Caucasian) and newness to the community precluded him from Tribal College and community taxonomies, even though Blade had spent significant time teaching among the Upic Tribe in

Alaska. The operative Tribal taxonomy at *Big Lake* did not correspond to his Upic inference. Whether American Indian or non-Native, risks and insecurities will persist within the closest and most durable of social relations. Not only does a logical taxonomy structure encode and legitimize socio-taxonomic orders, it can conversely delegitimize and deconstruct those same perceived socio-taxonomic guidelines under similar settings.

The incongruity that Blade experienced replicates the diligent sentiments that American Indian people have long verbalized: American Indians are tribally unique and one size does not fit all. Brookfield (2005) references Myles Horton's description of another teacher in search of identity: "No matter how sincere a White teacher might be, she lacked the racial membership to feel 'the elementary passions of the people' which was precondition of her being trusted by the people" (p. 110).

The insight garnered from the *Big Lake* Tribal College American Indian students and Blade as *outsiders* reiterates the notion that one cannot evade the thematic burden of identity whether individually or collectively. The *Big Lake* student dialogues and interactions within an educational system highlight the ongoing marginalization ideology with which the American Indian students must contend on a daily basis. As long as racial stereotypes and racist versions of American Indian understanding persist as the "truth," exploitation and violence will be the shroud that constructs Indian people as ideological targets.

### Conclusion

*Big Lake* Tribal College students and faculty members' perspectives of schooling experiences, past and present, provide insightful illustrations of the continuous and contemporary realities associated with an educational process.

The research data relates a parallel discourse of high school factors that impede American Indian students' educational experiences that are repeated at a traditional Western college. The students see themselves as *outsiders*, referring to the definition of skin color and the naming ideologies that are continuous and burdensome premises that infiltrate their educational journeys. This hegemonic maze impedes higher educational learning for American Indian students. Students feel a sense of educational abandonment when the faculty fails to care, to listen, or to find ways of assisting them to succeed as students.

The isolation factor is also extremely high for the students. They continuously reiterate that Western educational institutions do not represent their cultural values, and this makes them feel incongruent within the institution and the student body. In particular it was evident that the faculty had limited knowledge of, and lacked empathy for, the American Indian cultural dynamic that places family

obligations at the forefront of their life priorities. And if they do recognize this fact, the faculty seems to express nominal concern. The isolation impetus continues to perpetuate the notion that as American Indian students they do not belong in the academic world and their differences cannot be understood. The arduous process of socializing and making personal connections is a definite deterrent to establishing a sense of educational community for students and conflicts with their cultural beliefs and values.

Mention is made of current Native Study programs in Western educational institutions based in the geographic vicinity of the *Big Lake* tribal community. The outcomes of these discussions were surprisingly lukewarm. The American Indian students feel that these programs do not reflect their cultural values, and in many instances they do not hold the program in high esteem; a few thought it was a good beginning for the colleges.

The study once again directs attention to today's reality--the fact that many scholarly academics have myopic tunnel vision when it comes to being knowledgeable about American Indian culture and traditions. And to make matters worse, the ongoing unfortunate alienation factor that develops when faculty oversteps the cultural boundaries with American Indian students flourishes. The assumption that Western educational classrooms represent safe havens for American Indian students during their educational learning process is terribly inaccurate. In fact, the power dynamics that infiltrate the classroom can increase the authenticity of the dominant society's beliefs and values when left unmonitored. The structure of a classroom setting can conceal the imbalance of power and exclude many by marginalizing student voices that cannot interpret or maneuver through the distortion.