

**AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF NATIVE WOMEN
IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this interpretive study was to explore Native women's experiences in post-secondary education, in order to assist in developing a greater understanding of the needs of Native women who were students in post-secondary community college programs. Data was collected using semi-structured interview. The thematic analysis method was a continuous emergent activity that looked for sentences or phrases that reflected the participants' view of their college experience. Participant profiles created from the students' own words, generated in the interview transcripts, framed the data analysis. As the participants talked about their college experiences, threads of commonality emerged from the transcripts. From these common themes, there was an attempt to find similarities and differences in the lived experiences and views of the participants. From the collapsing of the preliminary themes, five emergent themes became apparent. They were drive or determination, support, being Native, culture shock, and personal experiences. Several shared experiences enabled each of the participants to be successful. Drive or determination, support from family, peers, and administration, and positive feelings of self-worth were factors in making their college experience a successful experience. Several experiences acted as barriers to success and enjoyment of the college experience. They were poor self-worth, racism, cultural shock, and personal problems. Implications include the need for further research to examine drive or determination and its impact on students' success, to ascertain how additional administrative support will increase success, to examine the question of racism and to determine how this can be positively overcome in our post-secondary institutions, and the need for good personalized orientation and Native support services.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Problem

Introduction

Retention has become an issue in all levels of education for Native students, particularly in post- secondary education. Wright (1998) asserted that, "First Nations people of Canada are seven times less likely to graduate from university as are members of the general population" (p. 85). A college in Northwestern Ontario frequently includes retention issues on the agenda and many of the staff has indicated their frustration in trying to resolve this problem. Recently, more Native women were registering in post-secondary programs. However, there seemed to be significant numbers of Native women dropping out before graduation. Statistics obtained from one community college in Northwestern Ontario, during the fiscal year, 1999-2000, indicated that the dropout rate was 46%. This finding suggested the need for a study to explore the experiences of a sample of Native women students, in a Northwestern Ontario community college.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore Native women's experiences in post-secondary education, in order to assist in developing a greater understanding of the needs of Native women who were students in post-secondary community college programs.

Questions guiding the study included:

1. What are Native women's experiences in post-secondary education?
2. What experiences helped Native women to be successful in post-secondary college programs?

3. What experiences acted as barriers to success for Native women in post-secondary education?

Rationale

In my examination of the literature, I found retention and attrition issues to be frequent topics of interest and research. Personal observations indicated that the majority of Native women are facing enormous personal, social, racial, emotional, and educational barriers that make it difficult for them to realize their dream of a diploma or degree.

Wright (1998) indicated that of Native people graduating from high school:

...fewer than 23% go on to college and only 24% of those earn degrees.

These rates are significantly below those of the general population and indicate the serious problems facing First Nation leaders as they encourage their members to seek post-secondary education. The response of post-secondary institutions to this problem reflects limited understanding of the First Nation perspective. (p.85-86)

This research provides an enhanced understanding of the experiences Native women face and may facilitate instructors, professors, and administrators in providing enhanced programming and support for their students. First Nations may also benefit from the findings of this study as it will help them understand what Native women face in educating themselves. As well it may enable them to offer the support services necessary for Native women to be more successful.

The study also helps illuminate the experiences of the participants in post-secondary education, and clarifies their understanding about which barriers become insurmountable, why, and when, causing these students to leave before they completed

their program. This information may assist post-secondary institutions in their development of culturally relevant programming and in dealing effectively with school retention and attrition issues.

The present body of literature about Native women's educational issues has been written mostly from a non-Native perspective. This research contributes to the present body of literature, as it is written from the viewpoint of a Native woman.

Personal Ground

I am the executive director of an Aboriginal Health Access Centre. As a part-time college professor, I have experience teaching Native women in Business, Early Childhood Education, and Social Counseling programs. I believe that I am qualified to conduct this study, as I am a Native woman from a First Nation community. I bring a Native woman's perspective to the present pool of research.

Definition of Terms

NATIVE WOMAN, refers to a person who pursuant to the Indian Act of 1985 is registered as an Indian, or is entitled to be registered as an Indian (Government of Canada, 1985).

POST-SECONDARY education is defined as schooling after high school, and specifically to college level education (Merriam-Webster, 1993).

Limitations

The limitations of the research include the following:

- The findings of the study may not be generalizable to other communities, institutions, cultures, or groups of people.

Delimitations

The delimitations include:

- This research is limited to the experiences of Native female students and my observations. There is no consideration of the perspective of the administration of the college.
- Only one college campus was used as the population base for the study.
- This study deals exclusively with women who have First Nation status.
- This study deals exclusively with post-secondary education.
- This study is limited to a college in Northwestern Ontario.

Assumptions

- It is assumed that the group of students studied can provide insights into the lived experiences of Native Women students, in post-secondary education, in Northwest Ontario.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature

In my examination of the literature, little research was found on the lived experiences of Native women in post-secondary education. Areas that have been explored include adult education, women issues in education, Native women students who were successful, and Native issues in education. Although there is a great deal of research related to women's issues in education, very little exists that deals specifically with Native women. In the last decade, adult education had also come to the forefront. This is a broad-based area that does not touch directly the issue of Native women and the barriers they face in post-secondary education. Recently some research had surfaced in the area of Native people in education. This covered all ages from primary grades to post-secondary education. However, only a small part of the research dealt with issues related to Native women at the post-secondary level. This study deals with Native women's experiences in post-secondary education and contributes to the body of literature about Native women's issues.

The literature was organized by topic and relevance to the study. It was organized under the following headings: adult education, educational needs of Native adult students, and women in post-secondary education.

Adult Education

Fraser (2000) completed a study on the lived experiences of senior students returning to university. This study helped establish the framework for the present study on Native women in post-secondary education. In this study Fraser selected six senior

students who were over the age of sixty and explored their lived experiences at a regional university. She created participant profiles “from the students’ own words” (Fraser, 2000, p.1). The author instructed the reader to “listen to the individual voices of the participants and cautioned not to view their comments as representative of their gender” (Fraser, 2000, p.1). Her study provided insight into phenomenological research and helped establish the framework for the present study on Native women in post-secondary education. The use of participant profiles and writing the research in the participants’ own words were ideas borrowed from the Fraser (2000) study.

Wiesenberg (1992) did a quantitative study on adult learners. She studied 111 non-Native adult learners and 18 Native adult learners. She was interested in comparing the learning styles of visual and verbal learners. All participants were assessed for their learning style preferences. Visual and verbal learning styles were examined. Her findings indicated that a number of cognitive variables affect learners’ ability in their quest for new information. Her conclusions revealed that cultural background might have a direct bearing on the way learners process information. The author stressed that her findings support an instructional model that was focused on analogical pictures to improve learning for low visual and low verbal learners.

Anderson (1996) explored “situated learning” and its influence on education, and asserted that “situated learning emphasizes the idea that much of what is learned is specific to the situation in which it is learned” (p.5). He clarified that in the past, situated learning had focused on comparing the school and the workplace. He argued that greater emphasis should be placed on the actual relationship between “what is learned in the classroom and what is needed outside of the classroom” (Anderson, 1996, p.5).

Anderson stressed that certain skills practiced in real-life situations do not necessarily generalize to school situations. As is the case with many adult learners, Anderson affirmed that learning is a social phenomenon. Anderson (1996) stated that what is needed to improve learning and teaching is “to continue to deepen our research into the circumstances that determine when narrower or broader contexts are required and when attention to narrower or broader skills are optimal for effective and efficient learning” (p. 10).

Stephen and Beaudet (1998) wrote an article, which indicated that “Canada, like other industrialized countries, has felt the combined impact of globalization of trade, the crisis of restructuring of the economy, and the scientific and technological revolution” (p. 143). The authors stated that these changes have had an affect on policies in post-secondary educational institutions. They believed this had shifted the focus in adult education from educational issues to a concentration on the economy and employment: “The sequence of recessions since the 1980’s...have contributed to a massive increase in structural unemployment and poverty, mainly among young people... immigrants... women, native peoples, and older workers”(Stephen & Beaudet, 1998, p. 144). They examined environmental change and their impact on women.

...our social and cultural environments have been equally transformed. Yet these changes receive less attention or are simply underestimated, particularly when they concern the impact on social organization of the advances by women, of demographic change, and of community efforts to improve local development and revitalize the democratic conditions of social life.

(Stephen & Beaudet, 1998, p.146)

The authors stressed that adult learners look for results from educational institutions that are pertinent to their job expectations.

In his review of theoretical perspectives on school to work transitions, Rudd (1997) argued that expectations of young adults going into the work force have changed dramatically in the last 20 years. Without a post-secondary education, full-time employment is not as readily available. He stated that “social characteristics such as class, gender, and ethnicity remain significant...emphasizing...the actions of young people as individuals need to be considered too” (Rudd, 1997. p. 258). The author claimed that black females have always aggressively sought an education. Rudd (1997) specified that adult learners must learn to “cope with verbal and physical abuse, overcoming racist literature/curriculum, countering the low expectations of teachers...”(p. 270). The author drew the reader’s attention to the complexity of the college student’s life.

Much of the research in adult education focused on styles of learning, learning needs, social and cultural environments, and future job expectations of the students. These specific issues did not address the learning needs and cultural environments of Native students.

Educational Needs of Native Adult Students

Collier (1993) indicated that her findings about Native learning did not support the claims of earlier researchers. Some of the research had claimed that Native students had a different learning style from non-Native students. Collier (1993) stated that “strategies reflect good teaching in general and suggested that by becoming more sensitive to the needs and perspectives of Native students, post-secondary instructors will

also become more sensitive to non-Native students” (p. 117). Collier (1993) also affirmed that “much more work needs to be done on the teaching and learning of Native students at the post-secondary level” (p.117).

Te Hennepe (1993) discussed the experiences of Native students with regard to negative responses in anthropology classes that are taught from a non-Native perspective. She examined the “connection with Indian control of Indian education” (p. 193) and explored the negative reactions. Her findings are enlightening as she stated “that anthropology classrooms are political sites” (Te Hennepe, 1993, p. 208). Te Hennepe (1993) ascertained that Native students not only speak with authority about their reactions, they also speak with authority about Native issues. Respect emerges as a major issue when research is conducted about Native peoples. It is imperative that respect is the key in presenting these issues to Native students.

Klassen and Carr (1997) examined the perceptions of white and minority teachers concerning antiracist education in the Toronto Board of Education. Their qualitative study was composed of a random sample questionnaire mailed to 352 secondary school teachers, a targeted questionnaire to 119 racial minority teachers, and in-depth interviews with 22 racial minority teachers. Their findings explored five topics where different perspectives emerged between white and racial minority teachers. These different perspectives included views of antiracist education, support for employment equity, racial minority teachers as role models, roles of principals in antiracist education, and the treatment of racial minority teachers. “Racial minority teachers face greater barriers than white teachers in the education system, barriers that hamper full recognition and importance of racial diversity in education” (Klassen & Carr, 1997, p. 68). Their findings

provided insights into the fact that “validation of lived experiences around race is a key to enhancing the educational experiences of all students” (Klassen & Carr, 1997, p. 79). Their study examined lived experiences from the perspective of minority teachers and does offer some valid insights. However, this was a singular viewpoint that did not illuminate the perspective of Native students within the Toronto Board of Education.

Wright (1998) examined the experiences of Squamish Native College students in British Columbia. His concern was for keeping Native students in college and his paper examined the advantage of the tribal college as opposed to existing post secondary institutions. He stated that “the First Nations people of Canada are seven times less likely to graduate from university as are members of the general population”(Wright, 1998, p. 85). Wright asserted that colleges and universities do not understand the real reasons for lack of success among Native students. They attributed this lack of success to acculturation issues. His was to ensure school attendance by providing a Native alternative. As well, he maintained that programs at colleges and universities need to be modified to better assist and suit the needs of Native students. Wright explained that “an alternative is tribal colleges, which provide evidence of an increase in student achievement when First Nations people manage their own educational experience. The two-year retention rates...are significantly higher for students in tribal colleges” (Wright, 1998, p.86). The author’s work with the Squamish Nation of British Columbia discovered that Native leaders want to see traditional colleges come up with stronger relationships with the Native communities. The striking of a partnership “could result in a productive opportunity for their students” (Wright, 1998, p. 92).

Smith-Mohamed (1998) studied the enormous under representation of minorities in post-secondary faculties. Five institutions were identified for the study and 30 students were recruited to participate. She advocated for the need of minority students to have appropriate role models in faculty members as she looked at problems that Native students face from a different perspective. The advent of more Native faculty members would facilitate a smoother transition for Native students and equip them to be more successful in their programs. The author examined enrollment rates of Native students and questioned as to why the enrollment rates were so low. Smith-Mohamed (1998) claimed “as with other minorities, fundamental issues such as lack of support (financial and moral) and teacher/counselor discouragement of educational aspirations have been attributed to the severity of the problem” (p. 247). The author also stressed that resistance to higher education, by Native people, has its roots in the residential school ignominy. Citing a study by MacKay and Myles (1989), which examined Native student dropouts from Ontario schools, the author examined negative relationships with teachers and the impact on the dropout rate. These students claimed “the teachers do not understand them; that they neither motivate them to learn, nor encourage them when they have difficulty; that they cannot count on their teachers to help them with the problems encountered in school” (Smith-Mohamed, 1998, p. 248). The author concluded her article by stating that there had not been any serious “form of professional development for faculty to expend their knowledge and awareness of Native culture, issues, history, and language” (Smith-Mohamed, 1998, p. 250). She strongly advocated for professional development that will better equip faculty who work with Native students.

Wilson (1992) conducted an ethnographic study among Sioux Indian students in a Canadian Prairie high school. Wilson (1992), studied the factors created by moving Native children from elementary schools, on their reserves, to secondary schools located off their reserves and in primarily largely white populated areas. Her study described how Native children responded to a school environment that lacked an understanding of the Native culture and previous school environment. She stated, “members of minority groups must have a say in the process and the product of their education” (Wilson, 1992, p. 53). This author was thorough in her examination of this transition from reserve to city school and she especially focused on the perspective of the Native children. Wilson (1992), linked the work in related fields and pronounces “it is not enough to know that Indian students are disempowered, and that they are disempowered primarily by the macrostructure of the system and by gross cultural misunderstandings on the part of the school personnel” (p. 54).

Satzewich and Mahood (1995) conducted historical research that examined the residential school system with a look at the Indian Agent. In previous decades, the Indian Agent was the government representative who had the power to make decisions on behalf of Indian Affairs with regard to Native issues in his locality. The authors compared and contrasted the Indian Agent from the perspective of Indian Affairs and from the perspective of the Native students who were residents of the school system. By looking at such different perspectives, the authors hoped the reader will see the Indian Agent in their role and responsibilities, rather than one extreme view or another. The Indian Affairs Branch held one view of the Indian Agent. Indian Affairs considered “this view of the Indian Agent as a benevolent patriarch contrasts sharply with that held by Basil

Johnston” (Satzewich & Mahood, 1995, p. 45). The opposite view perceived Indian Agents as “petty tyrants who ruled over mini-fiefdoms and who were bent on destroying the spirit and initiative of Indian people” (Satzewich & Mahood, 1995, p. 45). Pressure to turn away from residential schooling was brought forward by Native leaders who were concerned about the undermining of family and community life.

Hookimaw (1998) dispelled some of the myths surrounding lack of education and the social situation of Native people. She stated that the reverse is more typical. The author asserted, “the situation we Native people are in is partly due to that very “education”, which, as a continuation of residential schools, is still breaking down our cultures and our societies” (Hookimaw, 1998, p. 159). The author stressed that Native students will be more successful with their post-secondary education when it has grown out of the culture of the Native people. She stated, “life on the reserve, with the many social problems, is not seen as a good life, at least not by non-Native people and by those Native people who have left their traditions behind” (Hookimaw-Witt, 1998, p. 160). “A lot of problems that Native people have today came out of Residential School; psychology problems. And we passed our problems on to our children” (Hookimaw-Witt, 1998, p. 160). The article focused on the legacy of the residential school system. Not only was there physical and emotional abuse, but there was also “an onslaught on our culture and identity through the content taught in school and the way it was taught” (Hookimaw, 1998, p. 160). She stressed that it is the very educational system itself that has, at least in part, been responsible for the “destruction of our cultures and the loss of self-esteem and thus has contributed directly to the problems in our community today” (Hookimaw, 1998, p. 160). The author accentuated the uniqueness of individuals and

their culture. She stated that “only man of all living creatures is able to challenge his reality and to ask for a deeper meaning, justice, freedom, and good—whether individual or collective” (Hookimaw, 1998, p. 170).

In their paper Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) examined the implications of differences in perspective between institutions and Native students. They stated that Native people have been highly under-represented as graduates of colleges and universities. They affirmed that educational institutions have made excuses and define the problem in terms of “low achievement, high attrition, poor retention, weak persistence, etc., thus placing the onus for adjustment on the student” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p.2). Although the support services offered by universities and colleges have been well intentioned, the attrition rates have not improved. The authors stated, “in Canada, in 1986, only 1.3% of the First Nations population had completed a university degree, compared to 9.6% of the general population” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 2). But if the educational institutions will look more closely at the perspective of the Native student, the problem will focus more on the need for a “higher educational system that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 4). The authors stressed that through respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility, the Native students will be empowered to participate in higher education.

Dickerson, Neary, and Hyche-Johnson (2000) studied the learning experiences of Native American graduate nursing students. They utilized a phenomenological design of Heideggerian hermeneutics. They stated that although educators have attempted to

improve the success rates of Native students, the problem is that “minority student attrition rates, especially concerning Native American students, continue to be a concern for all disciplines, including nursing” (Dickerson, Neary, & Hyche-Johnson, 2000. p. 195). Their findings demonstrated the emergence of four themes. The “relational themes included, the Native American student’s worldview, academic environment, faculty/student relationship, and strategies for survival” (Dickerson, Neary, & Hyche-Johnson, 2000, p. 189). The authors stressed the importance of educators understanding the perspectives of Native students. Many students stated feeling isolated or on the periphery in the university.

Hoover and Jacobs (1992) suggest that “as many as 75% of American Indians who begin college leave prior to graduation” (p. 1). The authors employed a questionnaire to get feedback from Native college students, about their understanding toward success in college. Hoover and Jacobs (1992) emphasized that “secondary schools should evaluate their procedures to ensure...their efforts to help students” (p. 6). The authors accentuated that positive attitudes of students toward their abilities to succeed, assist students in succeeding.

More research is emerging on Native issues in education. This research, however, covers a very broad spectrum that deals with Residential School issues, elementary school issues, secondary school issues and post-secondary school issues. There appears to be little research that deals with the issues Native women are currently facing in post-secondary education.

Women in Post-Secondary Education

Gender issues in post-secondary education tend to deal more specifically with unfair hiring practices, sex roles, and stereotyping. Literature searches in this field did not expose any studies that dealt with Native women students and their lived experiences in post-secondary education.

Mackeracher (1984) studied women in post-secondary education, as she considered a compelling need to improve learning opportunities for women in Canada. She asked the question “why are only 2 percent of the under-educated female adult population participating in educational programs”? (Mackeracher, 1984, p. 7) Her assumptions were that perhaps the educational programs were not meeting the specific needs of women. As well, she assumed that perhaps certain factors were preventing the majority of under-educated women from attending educational programs. These factors “can be related to the women, the programs, the culture within which women and programs are located...” (Mackeracher, 1984, p. 21). In her conclusions, she stated that the “major needs of women are educational, psychological, and financial” (Mackeracher, 1984, p. 30). Another factor that emerged as a barrier to women’s regular attendance in a program, was the lack of child-care services. Mackeracher (1984) suggested that there was a definite need for further research on the participation of under-educated women in post-secondary programs. She also stated there is a definite need for longitudinal studies of women who participate in these programs.

Coulter (1996) affirmed that “feminist research has had a noticeable effect on education policy makers” (p. 433). She stressed that female educators have been instrumental in ensuring that policy makers address issues of women’s equality. The

author stated; “By 1987 every Canadian province had guidelines for textbook selection and an evaluation grid designed to eliminate sex bias in learning materials” (Coulter, 1996, p. 434). Many policies have been developed to address concern over a lack of enrollment by women, in the science, technology, and trades. Coulter (1996) stated that some types of programs “rarely take account of the very real material circumstances and barriers young women will face” (p. 451). The author emphasized that the wrong approach has been utilized. She asserted that women should be challenged to overcome the obstacles they face.

In her article, Kimura (1997) examined the educational and hiring policies of educational institutions. She examined the allegation that white males exclude women from the science and engineering fields by creating a climate, which makes women feel uncomfortable. The author suggested that, while this may have been the predisposition in the past, the “evidence suggests that, currently, women in Canada are being hired in academic institutions at rates higher than would be expected from the number of qualified applicants” (Kimura, 1997, p. 239). The author stated that career selection for women was based on factors such as “self-selection, reflecting, different talents, different emphasis on the importance of family, and different occupational preferences from men” (Kimura, 1997, p. 239).

Wallace (1998) stipulated that “educational organizations were gendered both in their demographic distribution of roles and in the values which continue to reproduce the gendered “scripts” which define those roles” (p. 14). She examined the educational norms that exclude women from the higher levels of bureaucracy. The author questioned why men appear to have more access to power and prestige. She maintained, “attempts

to address inequities between the sexes in educational systems have met with limited success” (Wallace, 1998, p. 29). The author stated that women have been under-represented at the managerial level of our educational institutions. She also indicated that if one examined the lower levels of hierarchy, women will be found in abundance as aides and clerical/secretaries. She suggested that being a wife and mother has often excluded women from engaging fully in public life, whereas it has been societies expectations that men would engage fully in public life. Smith-Mohamed (1998) stated that these differences between males and females are “socially constructed, value-laden, and gendered narratives which define possibilities and constraints for both men and women” (p. 259).

There is a large body of literature on women in education. It focuses on issues such as barriers to education, feminist research, the hiring policies of educational institutions, and females having less access to power and prestige.

Summary

A thorough search of literature brought to light many issues regarding barriers women face in postsecondary education. It also focused on Native issues that dealt with everything from residential school issues to schools on First Nation communities. There was a limited amount of relevant research related to the topic of Native women’s lived experiences in postsecondary education.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

The problem of this research lends itself to a qualitative study. The purpose of this study was to explore Native women's lived experiences in post-secondary education.

Questions guiding the study included:

1. What are Native women's experiences in post-secondary education?
2. What experiences help Native women to be successful in post-secondary college programs?
3. What experiences act as barriers to success for Native women in post-secondary education?

Creswell's perspective on qualitative studies serves as a basis for the present research.

Creswell (1998) suggested that researchers "use a qualitative study because of the need to present a detailed view of the topic" (p.17). Additionally, this study provided an opportunity to "study individuals in their natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p.17). This view of research meets the needs of this study.

Research Design

The study was conducted using a qualitative design. A qualitative research strategy was appropriate for this study because it helped establish understanding of the experiences of these Native women students. Creswell (1998) indicated, "qualitative research is an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different

textures, and various blends of material” (p.13). Creswell (1998) examined the nature of qualitative research and indicated that the researcher was the device of data collection. Qualitative research occurs in a natural setting where the researcher “gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language” (Creswell, 1998, p.14).

Creswell (1998) stated, “phenomenologists explore the structures of consciousness in human experiences” (p.51). He maintained, “qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” (Creswell, 1998, p.15). The emphasis is on the present rather than the past or the future. The researcher strives to construct a holistic portrait of the views of the participants (Creswell, 1998). This research approach helps the researcher discover and understand the experiences of the key informants.

To ensure that the real feelings and experiences emerge from the interview, the interviewer establishes a trust and rapport with the informants. Professional interview skills guarantee that questions are not leading or restrictive. Validity relies on the skills of the interviewer.

To ensure high quality interviewing, I worked closely with my supervisor. Central questions were used that were “open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional” (Creswell, 1998, p.99). These allowed for questions that address the major concerns that need to be determined. Topical questions covered issues such as “What are the underlying themes and contexts that account for the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p.101)? These questions look for information that would assist in the description of the set of circumstances (Creswell, 1998). Effective interviewing relies on planning principles

such as a work plan, controlling the process and the pace of the interview, and careful analysis of the data affected good interviewing.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to a qualitative approach. A qualitative inquiry design lends itself to further critical analysis (Patton, 1986). It helps uncover the meanings people attach to their actions. It can also create a perspective of daily life in which conflict and contradictions reside (Patton, 1986). Several disadvantages also emerge. Qualitative studies sometimes reflect socially and culturally shared significance, not necessarily personal. It might not reflect the person's issues, but rather those of the society or of the culture (Patton, 1986).

Selection of Participants

The population from which the participants for this research were selected, was drawn from one of two community colleges attended by students from the ten First Nation Communities, in our region. To determine the number of potential participants at this particular college, I approached the Office of the Registrar and spoke directly with the Dean. An explanatory letter was sent (Appendix A) inviting interested students to participate.

The criteria established for selection was six to ten Native women who were either presently enrolled in a post-secondary program or had recently graduated from this post-secondary institution. Additionally, the criteria stipulated that the respondents be Native and that they be women. Seven women were selected using a snowball or chain type sampling. This type of sampling identified cases of interest from people who know people (Creswell, 1998). Creswell (1998) asserted, "The important point is to describe

the meaning of a small number of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon” (p.117). All key informants were voluntary participants.

Ethical Considerations

A cover letter (Appendix A) explained the purpose and significance of the study. It explained the interview procedure, issues of confidentiality, and the reporting of the findings. All participants were required to sign a consent form (Appendix B) that stipulated they could voluntarily withdraw at any time, there was no apparent risk of physical or psychological harm, and confidentiality was ensured. All data collected will be securely stored for a period of 7 years. All participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from each of the participants.

Data Collection

The data was collected using semi-structured interview. For data collection, the interviews were audio-recorded. The recorder was set up beside the participants, during their interview. The length of the interviews varied depending on the participant. Some interviews were only 40 minutes long and some were almost 90 minutes long. The tapes were transcribed and the lines numbered on each transcript. These numbers served as reference points for the creation of participant profiles and for data analysis.

This study incorporated a series of questions that were developed in advance. Concise, clear, focused questions that are easy to answer ensured an understanding of the experiences of these women. Van Manen (1994) stated, “as we interview others about their experience of a certain phenomenon, it is imperative to stay close to experience as lived. As we ask what an experience is like, it may be helpful to be very concrete”(p.62). It was essential to encourage participants to tell their story in their own words.

Data were gathered through the use of focused interviews with each participant and the use of five guiding questions. Probe questions (Appendix C) were utilized to encourage the flow of the responses, to explore each participant's feelings and to clarify what the participant was trying to say. The questions for the participants were:

1. Tell me about your experiences as a Native woman college student.
2. Describe a typical day as a college student.
3. What experiences have you liked and disliked as a college student?
4. What experiences have helped you be successful as a college student and what experiences have hindered your success?
5. What would you like to see changed if you were asked to give advice?

Responses to these guiding questions were embedded in each participant's transcripts and profile. Their responses were found within the analysis and interpretation of this report. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality pseudonyms were used to protect the participants. Emergent themes were explored within the context of the responses from these guiding questions.

Each interview continued until the saturation point had been reached. When the participants felt they had nothing more to say, the interviews were concluded. In two instances clarification was required and follow-up sessions were arranged. I modeled my interviewing technique after Van Manen (1994). He stated "in both uses of the conversational interview it is important to realize that the interview process needs to be disciplined by the fundamental question that prompted the need for the interview in the first place" (Van Manen, 1994, p.66). Keeping the focus on the research question enabled me to gather information in a manner that prevented chaos and confusion (Van

Manen, 1994). Van Manen (1994) states that “before embarking on a busy interview schedule one needs to be oriented to one’s question or notion in such a strong manner that one does not get easily carried away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere” (p.67).

Primary sources of data were taken from the experiences of the key informants and observations in the field. When necessary, notes were made to record observations or reflections while analyzing data or reviewing the transcripts. Rothe (1993) advised that interaction between the interviewer and the participant was essential for a successful interview. The interviewer must realize that she is the main instrument and must remain as objective as possible. She must be an adaptable and flexible implement who can utilize her skills and strengths to fortify the interview process (Seidman, 1991).

Interviewing gave me a better understanding of the Native students’ experiences that may not have been as informative if another method, such as survey, had been utilized.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis method requires a need to organize and interpret the data from the transcribed interviews and from the observations in the field. This data analysis was a continuous emergent activity. This analysis looked for sentences or phrases that reflected the participants’ view of their college experience. Both positive and negative experiences were examined and sentences or phrases were highlighted after reading and re-reading the transcripts. Van Manen (1994) stated, “we may note that certain experiential themes recur as commonality or possible commonalities in the various descriptions we have gathered. The task is to hold on to these themes by lifting appropriate phrases” (p.93).

As participants responded to the questions in the interview guide, they gave the researcher a picture of what their college experience was like for them as individuals. They branched out into personal discussions about their experiences talking about what they liked and disliked about the college experience and what they felt may have hindered them or what may have helped them be successful. Each participant interview concluded with their advice to the reader about what would make the college experience more enjoyable.

The guiding questions served as an initial sorting mechanism for the data. Then within this framework words and phrases were identified that helped classify the experiences of the participants and helped sort these experiences into common categories or themes. The research questions were a means of categorizing data for analysis. They helped illuminate what experiences were helpful and what experiences created barriers.

The interviews were transcribed and the data analyzed. The analysis started with a complete description of the experience (Creswell, 1998). There was an attempt to portray the actual experience of the key interviews of the women students. This was accomplished by looking for statements, from the interviews, about how the participants experienced the problem (Creswell, 1998). It is the focus of the researcher to list “out these significant statements (horizontalization of the data) and treat each statement as having equal worth, and works to develop a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements” (Creswell, 1998, p.147). In horizontalization of the data, a researcher divides the original transcripts into statements. Creswell (1998) affirmed that these statements or “units are transformed into clusters of meanings expressed in psychological and

phenomenological concepts...these transformations are tied together to make a general description of the experience” (p.55).

There was an examination of the information for views that were shared and views that were different. There was an attempt to find if it was possible to account for differing views based on characteristics of the respondents or some other factors.

Direct quotations were used, where applicable, to illustrate the findings. These statements were grouped into components or units. The researcher “lists these units, and he or she writes a description of the “textures” (textural description) of the experience—what happened—including verbatim examples” (Creswell, 1998, p.150). Care was taken to ensure that there was a balanced representation of the elements. Through reflection, I constructed an overall description of the worth and “the essence of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p.150). The data, generated by a qualitative method, can be enormous. After getting a sense of the data, I checked the quality of information that had been collected. To ensure secure storage of the data, copies were made and kept in a fireproof safe.

The next step in the analysis was to make a table for each participant that separated out their positive experiences (things they liked) and their negative experiences (things they disliked). I also separated out the experiences that they believed helped them be successful and the experiences they believed hindered their success. This resulted in seven tables with each participant’s phrases and statements regarding their experiences.

As the participants talked about their college experiences, threads of commonality emerged from the transcripts. Each of the seven participants discussed negative and positive experiences that were similar to the other participants. The categories for the

negative experiences were *culture shock, isolation, low self-esteem, racism, financial difficulties, negative personal experiences, lack of support services, and family responsibilities*. The categories for the positive experiences were *personal drive or determination, family and peer support, positive feelings of self-worth, and administrative and staff support*.

With qualitative data, there is a need to organize and interpret the data from the transcribed interviews and from the observations in the field. This data analysis is a continuous emergent activity. There is a need to ensure that the data analysis is presented to others so they could verify and validate the results for themselves. Creswell (1998) stated, “validity refers to the notion that an idea is well grounded and well supported” (p.208). The study describes any patterns or linkages found in the information and I looked for competing themes or explanations. The data was analyzed by the thematic analysis method (Van Manen, 1994). Van Manen (1994) asserted that “theme analysis refers then to the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work” (p.107). The analysis focused on similar structures that made up the experience and represented emergent themes. Failure to find strong evidence for alternative explanations increased confidence in the original findings and explanations.

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation of the Findings

Once the data had been collected, it was necessary to have a general review of the material collected. This required many readings of the participant transcripts in order to “obtain a sense of the overall data” (Creswell, 1998, p.140). At this point it was important to “look closely at the words used by participants in the study, such as metaphors they use” (Creswell, 1998, p.140). The next step was to reduce the data by means of visual tables as this gave a sense of what was being said and helped highlight potential categories or themes (Creswell, 1998).

From this examination of views, preliminary categories or themes were selected to organize the participants’ transcripts. From these categories or themes, there was an attempt to find similarities and differences in the lived experiences and views of the participants. Finally, there was an attempt to describe any patterns or linkages found in the information and a search for competing themes or explanations.

Analysis of Participant Interviews

Creation of Participant Profiles

These preliminary categories were used to frame the participant profiles. These profiles included the words and the feelings of the participants, providing the reader with sketches of the seven participants and their own perspectives. Each participant was

invited to choose a pseudonym in order to secure anonymity and these pseudonyms were used exclusively throughout the data analysis.

Order of the Profiles

The participant profiles were presented in the order in which the interviews were conducted. Each transcript was analyzed individually, and not according to within-group and between-group differences. The profiles were presented in the following order: Diane, Taylor, Summer, Grover, Petunia, Christina, and Precious. Direct quotes are used, where applicable, to illustrate the findings. Care was taken to write a textual description of each participant's experience. Care was also taken to ensure a balanced representation of the elements. Through reflection, I constructed an overall description of the worth and gave a flavor of each participant's experience (Creswell, 1998). In the participant profiles, each preliminary category was addressed starting with the negative experiences and then dealing with the positive experiences. At the end of each profile readers have a picture of the participant's identity.

Table 1, below, introduces the participants. *Column 1* gives the self-selected pseudonyms of the participants. *Column 2* gives the age of each participant. *Column 3* gives the marital status of each participant and *Column 4* gives their educational level.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participants	Age	Marital Status	Educational Level
Diane	37	Married	3 rd year Honors and Bachelors of Social Work
Taylor	21	Married	Post secondary diploma in E.C.E.
Summer	49	Common-law	Post secondary college diploma in Native business
Grover	21	Single	Post-secondary diploma in E.C.E. and a Certificate in Office Admin.
Petunia	35	Married	Post secondary diploma in E.C.E.
Christina	39	Common-law	Post-secondary diploma in E.C.E. and computerized accounting
Precious	26	Single	Post-secondary diploma in E.C.E.

Profile of Diane

Diane was the first participant that was interviewed. She is still working on her Bachelors of Social Work.

Negative Experiences:

Culture Shock: Diane reflected on her college experiences with some regret over the many times that she had begun programs and quit. She does not consider her early college experiences successful for several reasons. She had just moved to town from an isolated First Nation community and “was experiencing culture shock...being isolated and then coming to live in Fort Frances” (Diane p.1 1.5-6). She stated that she lacked the life skills necessary to make the adjustment to living off the reserve. Diane affirmed “I

had to learn everything on my own, there was no support from the community” (Diane p.1 1.18-19). She had come from a reserve community that did not have the structure expected of her for college and for living in town and the issue of culture shock was a barrier to her success in college.

Isolation: Diane’s lack of success in completing a college program was affected by her feelings of isolation and loneliness. She stated that “I was 26 the first time I tried college and just gave up everything and I was living alone” (Diane p. 1 1.13-14). Lack of support from her First Nation community also increased her feelings of isolation and frustration as she tried to do everything for herself.

Feelings of self worth: Several factors contribute to Diane’s poor self-concept. She identified alcohol as an issue. Diane contended that “again alcohol was the only way I could cope with my feelings...alcohol was a big thing that got in the way of my education which caused me to have low self esteem” (Diane p. 1 1.9-13). Several times throughout the interview, Diane indicated that she had no confidence in herself and that she carried a lot of shame because she had failed so many times with her college endeavors. She declared “I never wanted to reach out for help until I needed it, I don’t know if it was pride or being embarrassed” (Diane p. 1 1. 23-25). Diane’s feelings of low self-worth impacted on how she felt others viewed her and illuminated her feelings about racism.

Racism: Diane indicated that one of her professors made her uncomfortable with his jokes about Native people. Her professor would say things like “what are they crying about now or using Native people as an example of being looked after by the Government” (Diane p. 2 1. 9-10). Diane believed this was a blatant form of racism and

was very offended with this professor's negative comments regarding Native people. When she discussed the issue of this professor and racism, the passion in her voice caused me to understand that this was a very powerful negative experience for her.

Financial Difficulties: As a mother and wife, Diane's financial responsibilities were a factor in her not completing college programs. She stated that "due to financial difficulties...I quit again to work full time" (Diane p.2 1.23-24). Diane stated she had to work to help support the family. Since her First Nation community would not help her with financial support, she had to quit school so that she could work full time. Lack of adequate funding was a definite barrier to her success.

Negative Personal Experiences: Because of the isolation and culture shock, Diane got into frequent drinking and ended up quitting in the first semester. She remarked that "alcohol was a big thing and got in the way of my education and caused me to have low self esteem and I never had a lot of confidence in myself" (Diane p.1 1.11-13). The following year she quit drinking and enrolled in a social work program. However, she ended up in a new relationship and that became the focus of her life. Again schooling suffered and she ended up quitting. Diane affirmed that, "it was like coming from an alcohol addiction into a relationship where I was so totally focused on the relationship" (Diane p. 1 1.32-33). Again, this experience impacted negatively on Diane's success.

Family Responsibilities: When Diane first started school, she had to leave her daughter with her ex-husband. This caused tremendous feelings of resentment and frustration as she said, "It was just after my separation and I just didn't know what to do with myself" (Diane p. 1 1.16-17). In her second marriage, Diane had her daughter to look after and 3 stepchildren.

“At that time I had Stephanie with me and trying to look after three other children and with him working shift work, I ended up with four children and that was hard. I wanted to be a good mother, I wanted to be there for everyone, but I just couldn’t” (Diane p.2 1.15-18)

Diane’s family responsibilities acted as a barrier to her success in college.

Positive Experiences:

Personal Drive or determination: Diane emphasized that she believes she will be successful this time in completing her course of study because she now has drive or determination. She enjoyed living in town and did not want to give up. Diane verified “I had high hopes of succeeding” (Diane p. 1 1.22-23). Quitting drinking had also helped enable her to focus on graduating. She believed quitting drinking and getting the support she needed helped her focus on the good things in her life, like succeeding in school. “My goal is to graduate in 2003...I feel good about the course.” (Diane p. 3 1.4-5). She stated “I feel good where I am at in my life and I am confident to finish the program” (Diane p. 4 1.20-22).

Family and Peer Support: Support was another key issue for Diane. Although she did not have the support of her community, financially, she does have the support of the education counselor and this had been a factor in continuing her career aspirations. Peer support was also a factor for Diane. She stated that, “most of the students there are Aboriginal women and it is really helpful because most of us are in recovery of some sort and it helps...just talking about your personal experiences and feelings” (Diane p. 3 1.7-11). Opening classes with a circle discussion and prayer had also been supportive for Diane as “it is positive for me because I have gotten to know the other students quite well on a personal level” (Diane p. 3 1.17-18). Treatment for co-dependency and

alcohol had also provided support for Diane. Peer and family support were significant factors in Diane's positive college experiences.

Positive Feelings of Self Worth: Compared to her earlier college experiences, Diane has developed more positive feelings of self worth. She asserted that "today I feel I can stand up for myself, for what I want, in a positive and constructive way" (Diane p. 4 1.17-19). "I feel good about myself, I feel good about where I am at in my life" (Diane p.4 1.20-21). Diane's positive feelings of self-worth also helped her look at the college experience in a more positive manner. She even perceived the college administration and staff as more supportive than she had believed they were initially.

Administrative and staff support: Diane talked about a couple of professors that she believes acted as barriers to her success as a college student, but overall felt that her professors had been supportive. She stated that "most of our professors ...have cultural awareness" (Diane p.3 1.18-19). To Diane this was an important factor in her sticking with her present program. Cultural sensitivity or awareness has aided her in feeling comfortable in her class and with her course of studies and Diane appreciated the willingness of the professors to become more culturally sensitive.

Profile of Taylor

Taylor was the second participant to be interviewed and she was also one of the youngest of the participants.

Negative Experiences:

Culture Shock: Taylor was a 21-year-old married woman who went to college right out of high school. She experienced a type of culture shock because she found college "a big change from high school" (Taylor p.1 1.14). She was very involved in high school with

playing volleyball and with cheerleading. When she went to college she found there were not the extracurricular activities and she did not like being so inactive. College was more academic and she found that her inactivity caused her to gain weight. Another aspect of culture shock was the lecture format of teaching delivery. Taylor stated that, “I liked college but I didn’t like lectures and taking notes” (Taylor p.1 l. 28). Culture shock triggered Taylor’s feelings of isolation from other students who had been better prepared for the college experience.

Isolation: Taylor talked about issues of isolation while she was attending college. She attended a local college, but her fiancé went away to college. Taylor insisted that “my fiancé being away made me lonely and that made it hard. His courses weren’t offered at the local campus and he had to go to Thunder Bay” (Taylor p.3 l.18-19). This issue of isolation was a major factor in her college experience. Because Taylor’s fiancé was so far away, she lacked his support and companionship for the more difficult aspects of the college experience. Isolation could have been a major barrier for Taylor if she had not had the support of her family and fiancé.

Racism: Taylor’s perception of racism comes from how she believed non-Natives view Natives. She stated that, “I have this thing about being late. I didn’t want to be late because Natives seem to be late more than non-Natives—I didn’t want people labeling me as one of those late Natives” (Taylor p.1 l.22-27). Although Taylor did not place a lot of emphasis on being Native, she was concerned that others might perceive her as Native in a negative manner. She maintained “I didn’t like the fact that some of the Native students slacked off. I didn’t want people to think I was the same, just because I’m Native. I had to try harder with my work to prove myself just because I was a Native

woman” (Taylor p.2 l.19-21). Taylor believed that this aspect of racism negatively impacted on her college experience.

Negative Personal Experiences: Becoming overweight due to inactivity was one of the negative personal experiences that Taylor mentions. She talked several times about her high school sports and how she missed having sports in college. Another negative experience she mentions was that she “was really sick that last semester. I had mono” (Taylor p.3 l. 7-9). She was also planning a wedding in the last semester and she coached cheerleading in the evenings. “That was pretty hectic” (Taylor p.3 l.16).

I guess those things could have hindered me if I let them. But I didn’t.
I wouldn’t let my being sick keep me at home. I was on the Dean’s
list for the first 3 semesters and didn’t want to blow it. (Taylor p. 3 l.11-13)

She had a good outlook about the negative aspects of her college experience. She felt that they could possibly have hindered her success, if she had let them.

Lack of support services: Taylor stated that an Native support service would have been a big advantage for Native students. She also believed that since the campus was so small, some of the support services were generally lacking for students. Taylor stated that the college needed a good library and a bigger computer room to accommodate the number of students who were there.

Positive Experiences:

Personal Drive or Determination: The drive to do well in school was a big factor in Taylor’s success. She stated that, “I knew I needed a good education to get a good job” (Taylor p.1 l.6). She stressed that preparing herself for a successful future was very important to her. Her fiancé also felt strongly that a good education was essential for both of them. Taylor proclaimed that “he was supportive of my going to college. We

both wanted a good future with good jobs. We think alike that way” (Taylor p.3 1.4-6).

Taylor’s personal drive and determination was a major feature of her positive college experience.

Peer and Family Support: Peer support was a factor in Taylor’s success. She stated that, “I got to meet a lot of people of different cultures. I made some good friends with people who had similar goals” (Taylor p.1 1.16-17). She also liked classes where they could discuss and interact. Taylor affirmed that “I think I learned a lot from personal stories” (Taylor p.1 1.29). Staff was supportive and she believed this helped her college experience be successful. Taylor stated that, “I found most of the instructors friendly and made me feel welcomed” (Taylor p.2 1.5). “My teacher helped a lot” (Taylor p.3 1.3). Family support was also mentioned. Her fiancé was supportive of her going to college, even if it meant they had to be away from each other. The support she received from peers and family helped Taylor enjoy her college experience, and as a rule, viewed it as a positive experience.

Positive Feelings of Self-Worth: Taylor is a confident, happy, young woman. She attributed her confidence to her success in sports while in high school. She acknowledged that, “sports were a big thing for my success. They gave me confidence” (Taylor, p.2 1.25). She also stated that being involved in her community gave her the self-assurance to stand up and talk in front of strangers. “Confidence helps me make friends easily. It helped me do well in school” (Taylor p. 2 1.30). Taylor won the dean’s medal for highest achievement in her graduating class with a 4.0 average. She also attributed her success to being a well-organized person.

Administrative and staff support: Taylor said that having a small class size was a definite advantage as they all received more one-on-one help, “I liked small classes where we could discuss and interact” (Taylor p.1 1. 28-29). Friendly instructors who made her feel welcomed also made her college experience a positive one. Instructors who were willing to help students with their schoolwork also made it easier for Taylor to have a successful college experience.

Profile of Summer

Summer was the third participant to be interviewed and being one of the older women in the group, brings personal insight into her college experience.

Negative Experiences:

Culture Shock: Summer refers specifically to her experience with culture shock.

I have experience with culture shock from moving from a First Nation Reserve to the city. I got lost in the city when I first went to college. I don't think I ever totally got over it because I was still learning about city life and it was a good thing I had a friends with me and both her and I experienced almost the same thing. (Summer p. 1 1.2-7)

Culture shock was the first issue that Summer raises as a negative experience for her and her whole dialogue was blended with references to culture shock. Orientation was done over the phone and she believed this was very inadequate in preparing her for her college experience. It could have been a major barrier to Summer's success as a college student.

Isolation: Summer was isolated from her family while she attended college. She went to see them on weekends and would be in school during the week. She had a foster child who was only two years old when Summer started college. She stated that, “I found that so hard. I would come home on weekends but when I left she would cry” (Summer p.4

1.16-17). For Summer, being isolated from her family was a very negative experience and impacted on how she felt about herself as a mother.

Low Self-Esteem: Summer believed that culture shock and her not being able to adjust successfully impacted negatively on her feelings of self-worth. She declared “I found it big and very confusing when I got there, to go get books and all that, it was scary. I almost didn’t go” (Summer p. 1.9-11). Summer made several references to the fact that she was scared and that she found this a very scary experience to begin something so new. Low self-esteem and the feelings of being overwhelmed in her new environment are barriers that could have hindered Summer’s success as a college student.

Racism: The issue of racism or being treated differently because she was Native, came up quite often for Summer. She declared “it was hard adjusting because of the way people talked to you, they seemed to know that you were an outsider, like you’re from the bush” (Summer p.1 1.20-22). She found this a negative experience and she said that this perception of racism towards her was not only from non-Natives. She found that urban Natives appeared to treat her different, as “anybody in Thunder Bay, even the urban Indians, seemed to know you were from the bush” (Summer p.1 1.26-27). Summer spoke with passion on this issue and it was evident that this was negative experience that could have hindered her success in college.

Financial Difficulties: Banking was a new and somewhat intimidating experience for Summer. She declared “banking, the financial part of it, making arrangements to make payment for our rent and having our money transferred to another bank...I didn’t know anything, how to do all this stuff” (Summer p.2 1.2-5) This was a smaller barrier for

Summer's success, but her drive and determination enabled her to learn what she needed to know to survive in a different environment.

Family Responsibilities: Family responsibilities were a big issue for Summer. It had a tremendous impact on her ability to enjoy her college experience. Her foster child was only two and could not understand why mommy had to leave her every weekend to return to college. She asserted that, "after my second year, her behavior changed for the bad, probably because of my being away and not being there for her" (Summer p.4 1.18-19). Summer spoke passionately about this experience and it potentially had the capacity to become a very strong barrier to her success.

Positive Experiences:

Family and Peer Support: For Summer, if she had not had peer, administrative, and family support, she probably would never have graduated from her college program. It was this positive support that enabled her to be successful. She stated that, "there were a lot of people from up North and they were in the same boat we were in" (Summer p.2 1.15-16). "The ones that were new, we kind of stuck together, once we found each other" (Summer p.3 1.2-3). It was comforting to Summer to find other Native students going through the same thing and it helped for them to join together. She stated that students that were coming out from the First Nations for the first time stuck together through the whole course because they were all experiencing the same thing. Peer support was a positive factor in Summer's successful completion of her course of studies. Family and spousal support was also a positive aspect of her college experience and was what helped keep her there until graduation. She affirmed that, "my husband was pushing me to get my education" (Summer p.4 1.23). "He is the one, he is my support person. My being

able to talk with people about my problems helped too, I had a lot of support” (Summer p.4 1.30-31). Peer and family support were essential to Summer’s success as a college student.

Positive Feelings of Self-Worth: Summer learned to feel more positive about herself as she learned to adjust to living in a city and to adjust to college. She announced that “I drew a map of where I was supposed to go and I practiced finding the rooms on registration day...I wrote my subjects down and stapled them in my locker” (Summer p.2 1.17-20). “I guess we managed to find out for ourselves, I guess, I learned how to work a calendar system” (Summer p.1 1.27-29). Positive feelings of self-worth impacted in an affirmative manner on her college experience.

Administrative and staff support: Positive administrative and staff support from the college also assisted Summer in being successful. She stated that, “our Aboriginal coordinator was very helpful, he is a Native from the other side of Thunder Bay...he helped us a lot. He told us where to go if we ever needed help” (Summer p.2 1.24-27). The residence for Native students also provided much needed support for Summer and the other Native students, as “we had our own rooms and bathrooms...they provided computers for the students and they had a laundry facility” (Summer p.3 1.11-14). The camaraderie of students sharing household chores and working together on assignments gave Summer a sense of belonging. She remarked, “they provided a desk for your homework and they also told us where we could go to do research” (Summer p.3 1.20-21). “All the Native support for students was good” (Summer p.3 1.32). Summer stated that once she got over the initial culture shock and learned to adjust to a different lifestyle, that she enjoyed her college experience. “It was fun...I got involved in the

exercise programs, the sauna, exercise rooms, we were able to use that at our leisure”

(Summer p.4 1.4-7).

Profile of Grover

Grover was the fourth participant interviewed and was the other young student in the group.

Negative Experiences:

Culture Shock: Grover started her college experience right out of high school. She believed the college experience to be overwhelming initially as it was quite different from her high school experience. Her peers had mainly been non-Native students and “it was kind of scary because I was not used to being around Natives a lot...because in high school you had a mixture of non-Native and Native people so I was kind of intimidated when we first started...” (Grover p.1 1.2-5). Culture shock was a barrier for Grover and had the potential to negatively impact on her college experience.

Racism: Although Grover was a Native woman from a First Nation community, she was intimidated by the fact that she was taking an all Native ECE program. She had always been in classes that consisted of a mixture of races and “it was an all Aboriginal class for ECE and it was kind of scary because I was not used to being around Natives a lot” (Grover p.1 1.2-3). Her past experiences with Natives were not as positive as they could have been and it affected her perception of what it was going to be like to be in an all-Native class. She stated that, “I wasn’t too sure if I could do it and I was uncomfortable with Native people because they were always fighting with one another, it seemed like to me” (Grover p.1 1. 10-12). Her perception of being Native and associating with Natives was a barrier for her, at least initially.

Financial Difficulties: Because Grover lived at home while attending college, financial difficulties did not have an impact on her. She did say that financial difficulties were an issue once you completed college, “as soon as you get out of college and start looking for a job and you have bills and responsibility, but in school you have limited responsibility,...but when you get out it really hits you” (Grover p.2 1.9-12). For Grover living at home was positive financially for her, but now that she is working and living on her own, she has started to understand the financial responsibilities of being independent.

Negative personal experiences: Alcohol negatively impacted Grover’s college experience. Due to drinking and driving she ended up in a serious car accident and it took months for her to recover fully. Although she continued with her college courses as best she could, it made it much more difficult for her. She stated that, “when I got in my accident, I was not too sure if I wanted to come back, I had a lot of emotional and physical pain and guilt about drinking and driving” (Grover p.3 1.12-14). “I kind of had a memory block after my accident and it was hard to come in once a week with the pain, but everybody understood and after a while things became easier” (Grover p.3 1.21-23). Because the school accommodated Grover by allowing her to do the majority of the work at home and because of peer support, she was able to complete her final semester and graduate with the rest of her class. She reflected on the fact that “the students who were there they helped by giving me their notes when I need them for the final exam and the teachers were very understanding” (Grover p.3 1.15-17). In retrospect, Grover acknowledged how her drinking was a negative barrier for her success as a student and had it not been for the students and administration, she would not have been successful in completing her course of studies.

Lack of Support Services: Grover only mentioned the fact that it was frustrating to have nowhere to do research. She declared that, “we all had these research projects to do and nowhere to get the research from” (Grover p.2 1.24-25). Grover and one other participant mentioned the need for a good library and computer access in order to achieve their research requirements. Lack of a good library and adequate computer access had the potential to become a barrier for success.

Positive Experiences:

Family and Peer Support: Initially, Grover found it intimidating to attend college. What helped was the fact that she recognized a few of her classmates as people she knew from high school and that made the transition a little easier for her. She stated that, “I knew some people when I first started out so that made it easier to come to school” (Grover p.1 1. 8-9). “However, it was a good experience, and I got to know a lot of women. I think women are more bonding people than judging people” (Grover p.1 1.13-14). As Grover became acquainted with these women, she found that coming to class was a pleasurable experience. Grover stated that, “I got to know everybody in my class and got pretty close with them and actually had fun going to the course” (Grover p.1 1.15-16). “I really liked going to class to see everybody, whether they were smiling or mad, it was like a family” (Grover p.2 1.40-41). “I think that’s why we were successful, because we trusted and helped one another rather than having a competition thing” (Grover p.3 1.8-9). Support from family and friends also aided Grover in being successful with this program. She especially found her mother’s support after the accident, very helpful as she would probably have given up and not graduated. She

remembered that “it was hard to do my work and every time I opened my books I brook down but my mom encouraged me” (Grover p.3 1.23-24).

Positive Feelings of Self-Worth: Grover found that her college experience initiated her growth as an individual and helped to develop good feelings about herself and her abilities. She asserted that, “I actually grew over there more because of what I learned from first going to college and I learned more about speaking up for myself...that actually made me feel good because I could stand up for myself” (Grover p.1 1.33-39). Improved feelings of self-worth were instrumental in making her college experience a positive one.

Administrative and Staff Support: Grover loved her school experience and because she is still quite young (21), she sees herself spending many more years advancing her education. She stated that, “for me I like going to class and I like being in school and I like being challenged, even though some days they really lecture in a monotone voice, but I didn’t mind it” (Grover p.2 1.3-5). She attributed part of her success to spending at least five minutes a day talking to each one of her teachers. Because of her accident, certain accommodations had to be made for Grover, and she believed that administration and teaching staff were outstanding in their ability to accommodate her and to help her reach graduation.

Profile of Petunia

Petunia was the fifth participant interviewed and brings a mother’s heart to her interviews.

Negative Experiences:

Culture Shock: Culture shock was one of the first issues that Petunia brings to light.

She stated that, “after coming from Lac La Croix it was hard for me to feel comfortable with a group, even though it was multi-cultural” (Petunia p.1 4-5). She found that she was not prepared for the transition from a First Nation community to town.

Racism: Petunia believed that her college experience was colored by racism. She stated that, “I felt they looked down on me as a Native, even though I tried my best to fit in. I thought I was as smart as some of them but I felt they thought differently of me” (Petunia p.1 1.5-7). Petunia wanted very much to fit in with the rest of her non-Native classmates and was discouraged that she never accomplished that. She declared that “I was by myself and there was a certain group in the classroom and they would talk amongst themselves and I felt on the outside” (Petunia p.1 1.11-13). “Some people say there is no racism, but there is” (Petunia p.1 1.16). For Petunia, racism or her perception of racism was a barrier to her successful enjoyment of the college experience.

Financial Difficulties: For Petunia, the financial difficulties of going to school and being a full time mother and breadwinner were very hard. She stated that, “The financial part was hard, especially with kids and a family. Finances were the hardest thing” (Petunia p.2 1.1-2).

Negative Personal Experiences: Petunia recalled some of the negative personal experiences she went through. As a researcher note, she does not go into a lot of detail about those particular experiences, but this researcher had first hand experience of them. She was in an abusive relationship and actually ended up in a crisis home with her children for a month. She recalled, “Nothing really hindered my success. Maybe some

of my personal problems, but I was able to get beyond them” (Petunia p.2 1.9-10).

Although negative personal experiences had the ability to act as a barrier for her success, Petunia’s personal drive and determination helped her overcome this barrier.

Family Responsibilities: For Petunia, the family responsibilities of being a parent and a student were very hard on her. She stated that, “I tried to be as quiet as I could when I first woke up because if the kids got up they would want to come with me and they would cry” (Petunia p.1 1.20-21). “Sometimes I would take the kids to the daycare but that was hard on all of us, we would all cry, but I kept thinking that I wanted a better life for them” (Petunia p.1 1.23-25). If any one issue could have hindered her success, this was probably the most overwhelming for her.

Positive Experiences:

Personal Drive or Determination: Petunia’s drive to graduate, get a good job, and make a better life for her family was paramount in her successful completion of her studies. Even though there were several major factors that could have hindered her success, her drive and determination helped her successfully complete her program. She asserted that “I was happy to finally finish a program” (Petunia p.1 1.8-9). “I kept thinking I wanted a better life for them, that I wanted to get my education and have a regular income, I didn’t want to live on welfare so I would work as hard as I could” (Petunia p.1 1.24-26). At that time in her life, Petunia was not drinking and felt she had a “better attitude and a clearer mind” (Petunia p.1 1.27-28).

Peer and Family Support: Petunia noticed that the support of fellow students is a feature of her success. She stated that, “I felt more close to this class, that I could talk to them about my personal life, I felt like a family in that class and I could trust everybody there”

(Petunia p.1 1.29-3). The warmth with which Petunia spoke about the support of her classmates, made it clear to me, that she found this to be a very positive experience at college.

Administrative and Staff Support: Smaller class size helped Petunia to get the one-on-one help that she needed. She stated that, “just having extra help made things easier. Being in a small room compared to the cities big rooms makes people come together more and they listen more” (Petunia p.1 1.34-36). In addition, Petunia emphasized that staff support and encouragement was very important to her success. She declared that “I really liked this last course, the instructor was more understanding about me being a mom, when I had personal problems and it was a lot easier when someone was understanding” (Petunia p.1 1.32-34). Friendly and helpful instructors also enabled Petunia to have a positive college experience.

Profile of Christina:

Christina was the sixth participant to be interviewed and was also one of the older, more mature women in the group.

Negative Experiences:

Racism: Racism was an outstanding issue for Christina. It tainted her college experience and when talking to her, some feelings of bitterness still emerged. Christina was especially angry with the Manager of the college as she feels he did nothing to help ease the racial tension she was feeling from other, non-Native students.

One of the negative things that I went through at the college would be the Manager of the college and the experiences that we as Native women have experienced from many of the student council, that was one thing that really

upset me. I really felt that college campus was promoting prejudice, because every time we would bring forth concerns they were totally disregarded.

(Christina p.1 1.23-27)

Christina was concerned about how non-Natives perceived Natives and was very annoyed with one student who would come in late. She was concerned that others would think all Natives could not be on time. Christina stated that “one thing I didn’t like was that at every opportunity, one of the girls was taking advantage of their education, they would come in late and that didn’t promote good educational ethics” (Christina p.2 6-8). She was offended when this particular student attended classes just to get a check and didn’t like others to perceive this as taking advantage of a good education. She verified that “we as Native people get our funding and we should be taking good advantage of that...it really irritated me when some people were going to school to collect a cheque and not taking their education seriously” (Christina p.2 1.8-11). Christina did not let racism become an insurmountable barrier for her.

Negative Personal Experiences: While attending college, Christina’s eldest son became very ill with cancer. She did not place a lot of emphasis on this because it is very painful for her. He just passed away this past summer. She stated that “nothing really hindered my success but I did go through some very negative personal experiences while attending the program” (Christina p.2 1.31-32). She at one point even talked about quitting, but her son encouraged her to stay with the program as he was very proud of her. “At one point I actually felt like quitting, because my son was sick, and I felt guilty but I hung in there and I’m really happy about the success with that program” (Christina p.2 1.32-34). Having to depend on another student for rides was also hard on Christina. She did not

like to be late, but often was late due to the tardiness of her ride. She asserted that “getting to the college was kind of a barrier in itself because I was riding with another student and she would always be late, I’m really time management oriented and I hate being late for classes” (Christina p.1 1.31-33). Again, Christina did not allow these negative personal experiences to become insurmountable barriers to her successful completion of her course of studies.

Administrative and Staff Support: Christina did not like the fact that the ECE course she took was compacted from a two-year course to a year and a half. She was also frustrated because she had feared the course might be terminated after the first semester as several students dropped out in the first semester.

I was in a classroom of initially 10-12 students and by the end of the first semester we only had 7 and at that time the program was in the process of being axed and because I wanted to take this program for years I jumped at the opportunity to take it. Given that there were a few students who were not going to pass at Christmas time, I was asked to assist other students by providing my notes, etc. which was fine with me, the only reason I did that was that the other two students who were going to come on board in January so that they would have access to the first semester notes. (Christina p.1 1.5-12)

Christina felt she never got the recognition she deserved for her extra efforts. She affirmed that “when I think back on that I don’t think I would ever do that again. I never got the acknowledgment that I felt I should have got” (Christina p.1 1.12-14).

Positive Experiences:

Personal Drive or Determination: This ECE program was very important to Christina. She had wanted to take it for years and was very excited when it came to her community. “I wanted this program for years” (Christina p.1 1.7). Although Christina has some negative college experiences, she talks very highly of her college experience. She stated that, “from an educational level, I really enjoyed that program” (Christina p.1 1.16). “All in all I really liked my experience in ECE. The women in the course really supported one another and overall it was a good experience” (Christina p.1 1.28-29). Being a good role model for her children was also a driving factor in her success.

I have always been interested in furthering my education and I also wanted to be a role model for my children, to demonstrate to them the importance of an education, the importance to succeed at something you really want.

My children saw that every night when I was studying and they were really proud when I graduated. My goals really helped me be successful. (Christina p.2 1 24-30)

Peer and Family Support : Although Christina felt she had issues with the manager of the college, she felt that staff were very supportive.

I especially loved our instructor, she really made the program easier in terms of the manner of which she taught us. She really gave us a lot of encouragement. She was really good to us students in terms of providing the appropriate information...we as Native women were all experiencing some negative things and she was always there for us, giving us support and guidance. (Christina p.1 1.16-22)

Peer support was also a factor in Christina's success. She pronounced that "the women in the course really supported one another and overall it was a good experience" (Christina p.1 1.28-29). Family support, especially from her children also was a mitigating factor in her success.

Positive Feelings of Self-Worth: As an older student, Christina possessed a lot of confidence and positive self-feelings that comes with years of maturity. "Given my age at the time I took this program I had already been a mother for over 20 years" (Christina p.2 1.24-25). Christina's confidence and positive feelings of self-esteem enabled her to have a more positive college experience.

Administrative and Staff Support: Christina mentioned several times throughout her dialogue that certain staff members made her course more enjoyable. She stated that "normally our instructor would give us a brief overview about what we were doing, she was well organized, she always gave us the information beforehand and told us what her expectations were" (Christina p. 1 1.35-37) "Not too many professors or instructors go out of their way in that fashion" (Christina p. 1 1.37-38)

I enjoyed the courses, it wasn't all work, work, work and we did have some fun in some of the courses and again it was due to the instructor, trying to bring variety into the program and ensuring we are having fun and that we are receiving the education that we are supposed to.

(Christina p.2 1.2-5)

Profile of Precious

Precious was the last participant interviewed and as a single mom brought an inspirational perspective to the study.

Bad Experiences:

Racism: As with all the other participants, Precious believed that racism colored her college experience.

I felt we were a minority group because we were Aboriginal. There was a student council body and it just felt as though we were the back of the group, we weren't fully included. They would ask us opinions but then go ahead and do what they had already decided. (Precious, p1 1.23-26)

Precious believed that non-Natives treated them differently and this was an unpleasant experience for her.

Family Responsibilities: For Precious, a single mom, family responsibilities influenced her college experience in a negative way. "My son was 2 years old and when I started the program I was pregnant and had my baby just a few weeks into the program and so when I got back to class it was pretty hectic" (Precious p.1 1.12-14). Just getting her two babies ready for daycare and ensuring their needs were taken care of added a lot more stress to her day, before she even entered the doors of the college. "I brought the two year old to daycare and getting to class I was seldom late" (Precious p.1 1.14-15). Even though her family responsibilities were paramount, she did not let it hinder her success.

I would say being a single mom hindered things but I overcame that.

Dawson was born just a few weeks into the program and in January he went to daycare but he wouldn't take a bottle so I would have to

go and nurse him during my lunch hour and I look back and wonder how I did it. It was always frustrating because the college was at one end of town and the daycare was on the other” (Precious p.2 1.16-20).

Positive Experiences:

Personal Drive or Determination: Precious acknowledged that her determination to complete this course of studies was one of her key success indicators. She stated that, “I felt I was called to work with children...it was something natural for me ...my heart is with children” (Precious p.1 1.8-10). Another aspect of her drive was that she knew once she graduated, that she would be much more successful in getting a good job. She affirmed that “I also knew that after receiving my diploma, that I was going to get work” (Precious p.1 1.29-30). As an organized individual she set goals for herself and goes out and accomplished them. She announced that “my college experience really helped me get a job” (Precious p.2 1.8). Enjoying the college experience also aided Precious. “I really liked being at school, learning, just gaining knowledge, it was really nice” (Precious p.2 1.11). Precious attributed her success to “drive to know that I could succeed kept me going” (Precious p.2 1.21).

Family and Peer Support: The class was supportive of each other and Precious credited her success to this support. She proclaimed that “I also found encouragement through my class” (Precious p.2 1.21-22). “In the class that I was part of, we were so accepting of each other, it was nice to know that I wasn’t going to step on anyone’s toes, for being late or bringing my baby to class” (Precious p. 1 1.16-18). “It was nice to have other people to share our struggles with, not just school work, but our lives as well, we were real with

each other” (Precious p.1 1.20-21). Precious acknowledged that it was through this peer support that she had a very successful college experience.

Administrative and Staff Support: A good instructor also helped make her college experience an enjoyable one. She stated that “my instructor...really helped me...encouraged us...always had positive things to look at...was never nagging, just encouraging to go to class” (Precious p.2 1. 23-24). Again, support was a factor for a positive college experience. Administrative and staff support was a key to Precious’ success.

Comparisons of Categories

The data from each of the individual tables was analyzed using the thematic analysis method (Van Manen, 1994). From this analysis, several positive experience and several negative experience themes emerged. In order to track similarities and differences, I placed all the positive experience themes on a table with the name of each of the participants and all the negative experiences on a table with the names of each of the participants. This section of the report describes the categories. Similarities and differences for all participants were then explored.

The positive and negative experiences of these participants gave a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Native women in post-secondary education. The guiding questions for the participants served as a common basis to initiate dialogue. Each participant was asked to tell about their experiences as a college student; to describe a typical day as a college student; what experiences they liked or disliked; what experiences either helped or hindered their success; and what they would like to see

changed if they were asked to give advice. Each participant's experiences were their own, yet many similarities emerged.

Positive Experiences

Four themes emerge in which the participants shared common positive experiences. They were personal drive or determination; support from friends, family, peers; positive feelings of self-worth; and administrative and staff support. Table 2 below, illustrates the shared experience of drive or determination.

Table 2, Drive or Determination as a Good Experience

Participants	DRIVE OR DETERMINATION
Diane	-did not want to give up -had high hopes of succeeding -quit drinking -goal to graduate in 2003 -told myself I will finish this program -confident to finish program
Taylor	-knew I needed a good education to get a good job -important to me -Jamie and I both knew we needed a good education -we both wanted a good future with good jobs
Summer	
Grover	
Petunia	-happy to finish a program -kept thinking I wanted a better life -I wanted to get my education and have a regular income -didn't want to live on welfare -not drinking so had a better attitude and a clearer mind
Christina	-wanted to take this program for years -really enjoyed the program -always interested in furthering my education -opportune time -wanted to be a role model for my children -my goals
Precious	-felt a calling to work with children -natural for me—knew I would get work -I set goals -college experience really helped me get a job -liked being in school—liked learning

-my drive to know I could succeed

Five of the seven participants' statements indicated that drive or determination was a factor in making their college experience a good experience and enabling them to be successful. Comparing all participants, there were similarities. Even though individually their experiences were different, drive or the determination to succeed emerged with these participants. Diane and Christina both reflected that they were determined not to give up. Precious and Christina attributed the successful completion of their program to setting goals.

Taylor, Petunia and Precious all accredited their success to knowing they needed a good education to get a good job. Not living on welfare and having a job with a good future were determinants for these three women. Five of the participants recognized education as a solution for a better life. Taylor stated that both she and her fiancé recognized the need for a good education to have a good job. Petunia did not want to raise her children on welfare and she stated that she wanted a better life for herself and her family. Precious said that she knew she would get a good job once she graduated from college.

Even though Grover does not specifically mention drive or determination, her love of school and enjoyment derived from the college experience, implied that determination was a factor for her. Summer also did not specifically mention drive or determination, but it had to be a factor in her education, as she would never have left her family if she did not have a picture of a better future for them.

Table 3 below, illustrates the shared experience of family and peer support as a positive experience.

Table 3, Support as a Positive Experience

Participants	Support from Peers and Family
Diane	-lots of supportive students -we had to stick together -liked meeting new people
Taylor	-got to meet new people -made good friends with people who had similar goals -learned from personal stories of peers -Jamie was supportive
Summer	-had a friend with me and both her and I experienced almost the same thing -a lot of people from up north—they were in the same boat we were in -we stuck together -husband was supportive -talked to people about problems
Grover	-knew some people in the class—made it easier to come -got to know a lot of women -women are more bonding, less judgmental -like a big family -support from family, friends, classmates -trusted and helped each other -mom encouraged me
Petunia	-felt close to this ECE class -could talk to them about my personal life -felt like a family -understanding, encouragement, support from students
Christina	-women in this class really supported one another -my children saw that every night I was studying and they were really proud when I graduated
Precious	-class was supportive of each other -nice to have other people to share our struggles with -I liked the girls—we had each other -class gave encouragement

All seven of the participants concurred that support from peers and/or family was a mitigating aspect of their success with their programs. Even though they all experienced frustrations and disappointments in their college experiences, support from other students and from family seemed to make them more apt to complete their program of studies. All seven participants mentioned they had peer support and that this was part

of their good experiences. Grover called her relationship with her class bonding and like a big family who could be trusted and who helped each other out. Petunia also referred to her classmates as family who were understanding and supportive. Both Diane and Summer stated it was wonderful to have other students who were supportive of each other and both mentioned that they stuck together for mutual support. Taylor, Petunia, and Precious stated that it was nice to have fellow students to share with, not just school issues but personal ones as well. All three believed that they grew together as a group because they had a relationship built on trust and support.

Four of the participants talked about their families being supportive of them. Spousal support was important to Taylor and Summer. Summer said that her husband's support was a major factor in her sticking with her program. Had he not been supportive, her guilt about leaving her young one would have probably caused her to quit. Christina talked about how her children were supportive of her and her desire to be a good role model for them. Grover mentioned that her mother was encouraging after her accident and was instrumental in keeping her in the program.

Table 4, below, illustrates the shared experience of positive feelings of self-worth as a positive experience.

Table 4, Positive Feelings of Self-Worth

Participants	Good Feelings of Self-Worth
Diane	-today I can stand up for myself in a positive and constructive manner -I feel good about myself, where I am in my life
Taylor	-my sports gave me confidence -I liked being involved in the community -I could stand up and talk in front of strangers -I had confidence -confidence helped me in school
Summer	-learned to work a calendar -drew a map -got organized
Grover	-got to know myself, who I was, how outspoken I could be if I wanted -learned more about speaking up for myself
Petunia	
Christina	-my age -my being a mom for over 20 years
Precious	

Five of the seven participants believed that feeling good about themselves was important to their success as a college student. Initially Diane lacked confidence and even ended up quitting a few times. For this present course of studies she feels different about herself and is confident to finish and graduate. Taylor also talked about having confidence because she was involved with sports and with her community. She also stated that confidence had helped her be successful in college. Taylor affirmed that her organizational skills helped make her feel confident in her abilities. When Summer first went to college she was overwhelmed and lacked the skills to discern success. Because she was resourceful she was able to get organized and make the transition easier for herself. Her organizational skills helped give her the confidence to see her schooling through to completion. Grover believed that the college experience helped her grow into

a more self-assured individual who was finally able to speak up for herself. Christina declared that her age and years of experience as a mother gave her the confidence to do well in college.

Table 5, below illustrates how administrative and staff support was part of the participants' good experiences.

Table 5, Administrative and Staff Support as a Good Experience

Participants	Administrative and Staff Support as a Good Experience
Diane	-good to have support from professors -some professors had cultural awareness
Taylor	-classroom size was small—more one-on-one help -liked small classes we could discuss and interact -most instructors were friendly and made me feel welcome -teachers helped a lot
Summer	-Aboriginal coordinator was very helpful -residence cooked suppers, provided computers, desks, laundry facility -college had a track and gym -computer professor was supportive
Grover	-loved school -loved being challenged -spent time talking to teachers everyday -good support from teacher and ECE program -made allowances for my circumstances -teachers were understanding
Petunia	-instructor was understanding about my being a mom -helped with personal problems to have someone understand -smaller class—made people come together –they listen more
Christina	-loved our instructor—she made the program easier in terms of the manner in which she taught us -she gave us encouragement -she provided appropriate information -gave us support and guidance -instructor was organized -always expressed expectation -brought variety in the course
Precious	-instructor really helped us—encourage us

All seven of the participants stated that positive administrative and staff support was essential for their success as college students. Two participants, Taylor and Petunia commented on the small classroom size as a desirable factor in their college experience. Taylor stated that the smaller classroom size enabled them to get more help from the instructor and also allowed for a better camaraderie between students. Petunia felt that the smaller classroom size helped people listen to each other and be closer to each other. All seven commented on the fact that having an understanding and helpful instructor also made a lot of difference. Instructors who were concerned about the students as individuals rated high for each of the participants. Instructors who were encouraging, positive, understanding of personal issues, and supportive were positive features in the success of these participants.

Other administrative issues were mentioned by a few of the students as important to their success. Having an Aboriginal Coordinator was extremely beneficial for Summer as he helped her with the transition from First Nation community to college. Diane believed that professors who had some cultural awareness of the Native culture were more supportive.

Two participants found that living in town was beneficial to their college experience. Both Diane and Taylor commented on their ability to live close to the college as a positive college experience.

Negative Experiences

Nine themes emerged in which the participants share common negative experiences. They were culture shock, isolation, negative feelings of self-worth, racism, financial difficulties, negative personal experiences, lack of support services, family

responsibilities, and lack of administrative and staff support. Table 6 , below illustrates the shared experience of culture shock.

Table 6, Culture Shock

Participants	Culture Shock as a Bad Experience
Diane	-coming from FN community to town -lack of life skills for living off reserve -hard to learn everything on my own -felt had to live by other people's rules -no structure on reserve
Taylor	-big change from high school
Summer	-moving from reserve to city -got lost -orientation was done over the phone
Grover	-in high school you had a mixture of Native and non-Native -intimidated at first
Petunia	-after coming from Lac La Croix, hard for me to feel comfortable with a group even though it was multi-cultural
Christina	
Precious	

Five of the seven participants experienced a form of culture shock to one degree or another. For Taylor and Grover it was a culture shock to come from a high school setting right into college. They believed they were not adequately prepared for the transition from high school to college. For Diane, Summer, and Petunia it was a different type of culture shock. They all came from isolated First Nation communities and moving to town to attend college was a very difficult thing for all three. Diane stated that she lacked the life skills for living off reserve as there was no formal structure on reserve and there were formal structure expectations while living in town. She thought she had to live by other people's rules because they were not the rules she was used to in a small isolated community. Summer believed she was ill prepared for the transition from

reserve to town. She even got lost in the town. Orientation was done over the phone and it did not prepare her for her college experience. For Petunia, she was not prepared for the way people would treat her because she was Native. Even though she tried to fit in, she felt she was different from the others and found it hard to find a position with the other students. Table 7 below, illustrates racism as a negative experience for all of the participants.

Table 7, Racism as a Negative Experience

Participants	Racism as a Negative Experience
Diane	- didn't like it when a professor was always making jokes about Native people
Taylor	Didn't want to be late—Natives were labeled as always being late -some students slacked off -didn't want people thinking I was the same just because I was Native—had to try harder to prove myself
Summer	-when people talk to you they seem to know you're an outsider from the bush -even the urban Indians seem to know you were from the bush
Grover	-scary because it was an all Aboriginal class—not used to being around all Aboriginals -high school was a mixture of cultures -wasn't sure I could do it -they were always fighting with each other
Petunia	-felt looked down on because I was a Native -tried my best to fit in -felt like an outsider -some people say there is no racism, but there is
Christina	-Manager of the college -student council -felt campus was promoting prejudice -our concerns were disregarded -one student would come in late—taking advantage of a free education
Precious	-we were a minority group because we were Aboriginal -not fully included on student council -at the back of the group

All seven of the participants believed that racism negatively impacted on their college experience. Racism or allegations of racism may be too strong of a term to label what these participants went through. If there was racism it was subtle and covert. Only one incident actually appears to be more obvious. It might be better to look at how they perceived themselves as Natives and how they considered others to perceive them because they were Natives. It obviously impacted on all of them. Was it necessarily racism or their perception of racism?

Diane was the only participant who may have had proof of racism. Comments made by one of her professors about Natives always crying or complaining about something or using Natives as an example of being looked after by the government, could be construed as racism. This was very hard for her to talk about, but she felt it was important to mention. Taylor and Christina were very concerned about how others saw them as Natives. They did not want to be labeled or stereotyped because others may have had negative images about Natives. Both Christina and Precious sat on student council and feel that they were only there in a token capacity. They perceived that the other student council members did not want them there and did not value their opinions. Summer, Grover, and Petunia felt initially they could not fit in with other students as they felt they 8, below illustrates the shared negative experience of financial difficulties.

Table 8, Financial Difficulties

Participants	Financial Difficulties as a Negative Experience
Diane	-quit school because I couldn't afford it -felt I had to work to help support the family
Taylor	-lived at home—no expenses—easier than for others
Summer	-banking—the financial part of it -didn't know how to do all that stuff
Grover	-as soon as you get out of college you have bills and responsibilities
Petunia	-financial part was hard especially with kids and a family -finances were the hardest
Christina	
Precious	

Five of the seven participants comment on the financial difficulties of attending college. Taylor and Grover both lived at home and did not experience any major difficulties with finances while at college. Grover commented on how it was the bills and responsibilities after you get out of college that were overwhelming. Taylor commented on how she felt fortunate that she could live at home; as she saw how hard it was for other students. For Diane, finances played a big part in her not being able to complete schooling. She felt she had to work to help support her family. Summer was overwhelmed with the banking and financial aspect of going to college. She had never had much experience with how to do all the banking transactions. For Petunia, the financial difficulties were the hardest part for her.

Table 9, below illustrates the shared negative personal experiences of the college experience.

Table 9, Negative Personal Experiences

Participants	Negative Personal Experiences
Diane	-I was drinking a lot -then I quit school -co-dependency—focused on a relationship and not school -needed healthy skills to be okay with self and not rely on others
Taylor	-became overweight due to inactivity -no sports -really sick the last semester—mono -planning a wedding and coaching cheerleading—hectic
Summer	
Grover	-drinking and driving -accident -memory block from the accident and lots of pain -didn't get a driver's license before college
Petunia	-personal experiences—hindered success
Christina	-riding with another student made me late for classes -son was very sick—made me feel guilty
Precious	

Five of the seven participants stated that negative personal experiences, at the time they were attending college, impacted on their enjoyment of the college experience. Alcohol was a factor for both Diane and Grover. Diane ended up quitting and Grover felt like quitting. It was the encouragement of peers, family, and staff that kept her going until the end. Taylor missed the sports from high school, which helped keep her active, and in shape. She was also very sick in the last semester and would drag herself to class so that she wouldn't miss the Dean's List. Petunia ended up in a crisis home for women who were abused and missed a month of school. She managed to come back, catch up, and graduate with the rest of her classmates. Christina's son was sick with cancer and she considered quitting. He encouraged her to stay with the course and graduate as he was very proud of her.

Table 10, below illustrates how family responsibilities were a shared negative experience.

Table 10, Family Responsibilities as a Negative Experience

Participants	Family Responsibilities as a Negative Experience
Diane	-Stephanie was living with her dad -lots of feelings of resentment -Steph and 3 step-children to look after—wanted to be a good mom
Taylor	
Summer	-foster child was only 2 when I went to college -found that hard -go home on weekends -when I left she would cry -her behavior changed for the worse because of my not being there for her
Grover	
Petunia	-would get ready for school -kids would cry -and want to go with her -had to do homework and take care of son -kids would cry and I would cry
Christina	-son was very sick
Precious	-son was 2 and I was pregnant -had a baby a few weeks into the program -daycare made me late for class -single mom -had to nurse on lunch hours

Five of the seven participants found that family responsibilities acted as a barrier to their enjoyment of the college experience. All five are mothers. The two who did not cite family responsibilities (Grover and Taylor) are not moms. For Diane family responsibilities were hard, as she wanted to be a good mom. Christina also wanted to be a good mom and a good role model for her children. Summer, Petunia, and Precious have small children and this impacted on their ability to do homework and impacted on their enjoyment of school because of guilt and extra stress.

Table 11, below, illustrates how the lack of administrative and staff support was a shared negative experience.

Table 11, Lack of Administrative and Staff Support

Participants	Lack of Administrative and Staff Support
Diane	-didn't feel there was the support—when I asked for help -it was almost like I should know
Taylor	-one professor would holler at people who were late -disliked fast tracking
Summer	-hectic registration—finding your way to classes
Grover	-hated when we had to change our schedule to accommodate the school -one teacher was undermining the students -they would feel crappy about themselves
Petunia	
Christina	-hated fast tracking -not acknowledged for the extras done -manager of the college had an attitude toward her
Precious	

It is interesting to note that all seven participants stated that administrative and staff support was important for a good college experience. However, five of the seven participants had negative experiences with individual staff members who made their experience negative. They all commented on the staff and administrators who made their college experience enjoyable, but five also encountered staff or administration that impacted negatively on their experience. It was usually an individual professor or administrator and appears that the majority of staff was great. Diane felt she never got the support from an instructor when she needed extra help. Taylor did not like it when a professor hollered at students who were late. Grover found one instructor was undermining students. Christina felt the college manager was not supportive. Both Taylor and Christina did not like the administrative decision to compress their ECE

program from a two-year program to one and a half years. Grover commented on the fact that as students, they needed to accommodate administration when it came to scheduling. Summer found that administration was not supportive at registration and found it intimidating.

Summary

This study was conducted using a qualitative design so that the experiences of each participant would be told in their own words. Creswell (1998) stated that, “qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter...attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p.15). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain deeper insight into everyday experiences.

To ensure that the real feelings and experiences emerged from the interview, the interviewer had to establish a trust and rapport with the participants. The use of open-ended and topical questions and probes ensured that there was adequate opportunity for the participants to explore their personal lived experiences and that they were safe in doing so.

The participants all spoke animatedly about their college experience. All participants looked fondly on their experience and even though all participants had negative experiences, they believed that overall it was an experience well worthwhile. All participants devoted time to achieve their academic goals, while balancing all the demands of their personal lives.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETATION

Introduction

The purpose of the interpretation was to extend the analyses and present focused observations. The themes were significant because they expanded and illuminated the participants' college experiences, and the realities of the participants' worlds. These realities emerged from the researcher's interpretation of the participants' words and the participants' personal feelings, as they described their college experience. The interpretation was supported through the review of literature.

Collapsing the Literature and the Preliminary Themes

Close examination of the findings indicated similarities among the preliminary themes. This enabled the researcher to collapse the preliminary themes into several emergent themes. The participants' college experiences, both negative and positive could be combined into five emergent themes. The combining process involved not only collapsing the preliminary categories of data, but also collapsing the systematic organization of the literature. Because the preliminary categories of data were congruent with the literature, the collapsing process became a simplified process. First the literature was described in terms of its support for the preliminary categories of data. Then, both the literature and categories were collapsed into the emergent themes for the research study.

From the perspective of *being Native* I was able to hear Native students describe their lived experiences in post-secondary education. From the core theme of *being Native* both positive and negative experiences emerged. From a positive perspective, *drive or*

determination and support surfaced as common incidences for all seven participants. From a negative perspective, *culture shock and personal experiences* emerged as common experiences for all seven participants. Explored in this chapter were the five emergent themes, linked to the data and key literature.

Themes Within the Lived Experience

The themes representing the multiple realities of the participants were examined first. Then literature supporting the emergent themes was also presented. Then a concise interpretation of the analysis of the findings was provided.

Four preliminary themes emerged in which the participants shared similar good experiences. They were drive or determination; support from friends, family, peers; feelings of self-worth; and administration and staff support. Nine themes emerged in which the participants shared common bad experiences. They were culture shock, isolation, bad feelings of self-worth, racism, financial difficulties, negative personal experiences, lack of support services, family responsibilities, and lack of administrative and staff support.

From the collapsing of the preliminary themes, five emergent themes became apparent. They were drive or determination, support, being Native, culture shock, and personal experiences. From these themes, sub-themes were incorporated into the main themes. Support was comprised of both negative and positive experiences of support, such as lack of support services, lack of family, peer, or administrative support, positive family, peer, or administrative support and good support services. Being Native was comprised of good and bad feelings of self-esteem and racism or perceived racism.

Culture shock was comprised of culture shock and isolation. Personal experiences encompassed financial difficulties, alcohol, and family responsibilities.

Figure 1. Emergent Themes

Drive or Determination

Support

- peer support (sub-theme)
- family support (sub-theme)
- administrative support (sub-theme)
- support services (sub-theme)

Being Native

- self-esteem (sub-theme)
- racism (sub-theme)

Culture Shock

- isolation (sub-theme)

Personal Experiences

- alcohol (sub-theme)
- finances (sub-theme)
- family responsibilities (sub-theme)

Drive or Determination

For all of the participants, drive or determination was a factor in their success as a student. Drive or determination was a determinant of success for participants. If drive or determination was evident, then there was a higher likelihood of the participants completing their course of studies.

Drive or determination was an overwhelming factor for success in the post-secondary experience. It was a determinant of success. Duquette (2000) stated that, “the most frequently stated personal quality was goal orientation” (p.138). She stated that, “the two most frequently reported characteristics reported by the participants were goal orientation and persistence” (Duquette, 2000, p.141). Duquette (2000) asserted that “the

findings show that having a strong goal orientation and the personal quality of persistence may have promoted the feelings of optimism and influenced students' decisions to persist in the program" (p.141).

Wilson (1992) held that "the difference in performance is related to unresolved cultural discontinuity, experienced as conflict, which is faced by the students. This conflict leads to lower academic achievement" (p. 54). This present study did not find that conflict lead to lower academic achievement and differed from the Wilson findings in that drive or determination to succeed minimized the effects of conflict on academic performance.

Diane, Precious, and Christina were determined not to give up as they felt it was so important to them to accomplish this life goal. Diane stated that "my goal is to graduate in 2003...I feel good about this course" (Diane p. 3 1.4-5). "I feel good where I am at in my life and I am confident to finish the program" (Diane p. 4 1.20-22). The ECE program was very important to Christina and she "wanted this program for years" (Christina p. 1 1.7). "I had always been interested in furthering my education and I also wanted to be a role model for my children..." (Christina p.2 1.24-25. Precious acknowledged that her determination to complete this course of studies was one of her key success indicators. Precious attributed her success to "drive to know that I could succeed kept me going" (Precious p.2 1.21).

Grover's love of school and her enjoyment of the college experience implied determination and drive. She stated that "I got to know everybody in my class and got pretty close with them and actually had fun going to the course" (Grover p.1 1.15-16). Summer would never have left her family if she did not have a goal of a better future for

herself and her family. The pain she experienced, when she left her spouse and child to go to school, was manifested in her interview.

Five of the participants recognized education as a solution for a better life. (Kirkness, 1999) Taylor stated that both her and her fiancé recognized the need for a good education to get a good job. Petunia did not want to raise her children on welfare and she stated that she wanted a better life for herself and her family. Precious implied that she knew she would get a good job once she graduated from college.

Stephen and Beaudette (1998) believed that the focus has changed in adult education from educational issues to a concentration on the economy and employment. Hoover and Jacobs (1992) emphasized that positive attitudes toward their abilities to succeed, assist students in succeeding. Kirkness (1999) stated that “Indian people continue to believe that education is necessary not only for our survival, but for a meaningful future” (p. 58). The literature supported the findings of this study.

Taylor, Precious, and Petunia all accredited their success to knowing they needed a good education to get a good job and to secure a better future for them. Precious declared that “I also knew that after receiving my diploma, that I was going to get work” (Precious p. 1 1.29-30). The drive to do well in school was a big factor in Taylor’s success. She stated that “I knew I needed a good education to get a good job” (Taylor p. 1 1.6). Petunia’s drive to graduate, get a good job, and make a better life for her family was paramount in her successful completion of her studies. She delineated that “I kept thinking I wanted a better life for them, that I wanted to get my education and have a regular income, I didn’t want to live on welfare...” (Petunia p. 1 1.24-26).

Corbiere (2000) stated that, “we First Nation people want our languages and cultures to flourish, but we also want to participate in the economy” (p.113). Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen (2000) affirmed that, “many students can get jobs in their communities with the education they received from the NS program alone. The vast majority of NS graduates are employed” (p. 175). All of the participants from this study were meaningfully employed at the time of the interview and they attributed their successful job acquisition to their college education.

In summary, drive or determination was a common indicator of success for all seven participants in this study. The literature supported the evidence that drive or determination for a better life was a factor in success for women in college. They stressed that adult learners were looking for results from educational institutions that were pertinent to their job expectations. This study highlighted drive or determination as a major determinant of success.

Support

All seven participants stressed support as a mitigating factor in their success. Support fell into both categories of negative and positive lived experiences. Corbiere (2000) stated that, “another dimension of Nishnaabe knowledge is the maintenance and development of relationships. These relationships are to the immediate extended family” (p.117). If positive support was offered from family, peers, and administration then the post-secondary experience has a higher likelihood of being successful. If negative support or lack of support from family, peers, community, and administration was experienced, then it becomes a barrier to the participants’ success. All seven participants experienced frustrations and disappointments in their college

experiences, yet when positive support was offered they found it easier to overcome these frustrations and disappointments. Duquette (2000) stated that the “third element of the program organization that benefited the student teachers was the community...the students provided one another with moral support” (p.139). The evidence from Duquette’s study validated that peer support was an essential element of success.

Te Hennepe (1993) stated that, “there can be no true Indian education without Indian control. Anything else is white education applied to Indians” (p. 198). Te Hennepe (1993) affirmed that Native students will never achieve a large measure of success unless Natives control the postsecondary institution. Te Hennepe’s findings differ from the findings of this present study, as none of the seven participants ever stated they felt they would have been happier or more successful in a Native controlled college. They all commented that overall, their experience at a traditional college was a positive one. Te Hennepe’s comments appeared too strong for the experience of these particular participants. Racism was an issue for all of the participants, however, none of them considered attending an all Native College. Wright (1998) stated that “colleges and universities often view the lack of success of First Nation students as an acculturation issue” (p. 86). The participants of this present study had a similar view of administration as presented by Wright (1998). Administrators who were sensitive to the Aboriginal culture were more successful in helping Aboriginal students succeed. Dickerson, Neary, & Hyde-Johnson (2000) stated that “student stories revealed their perceptions of a rigid academic environment with a set of specific standards, in which there was only one right way to learn” (p. 192). This present study did not support these findings. Comments by the participants supported the premise that instructors who strive to make the learning

experience an enjoyable one, helped the college experience be successful. Good instructors were not rigid, but endeavored to make learning interesting and pleasant.

Peer support was a mitigating factor for success. All seven of the participants experienced good peer support during their college experience. Grover and Petunia both referred to their classmates as family who were understanding and supportive. Grover stated that “I really liked going to class to see everybody, whether they were smiling or mad, it was like a family” (Grover p. 2 1. 40-41). Petunia found the support of fellow students was an attribute of her success and felt “more close to this class, that I could talk to them about my personal life, I felt like a family in that class and I could trust everybody there” (Petunia p. 1 1.29-30).

Diane, Summer, Taylor, Christina, and Precious each stated that it was wonderful to have other students who were supportive of each other, who could be trusted, who helped each other out, who listened and cared, and who stuck together through good times and bad. Peer support is a key issue for Diane. She avowed that “most of the students there are Aboriginal women and it is really helpful because most of us are in recovery of some sort and it helps...just talking about your personal experiences and feelings” (Diane p. 3 1.7-11). “It is positive for me because I have gotten to know the other students quite well on a personal level” (Diane p. 3 1.17-18). Peer support was also a factor for Taylor’s success. She claimed that “I made some good friends with people who had similar goals” (Taylor p. 1 1.16-17). It was positive peer support that enables Summer to be successful. She stated that “there were a lot of people from up North and they were in the same boat we were in” (Summer p. 2 1.15-16). “The ones that were new, we kind of stuck together, once we found each other” (Summer p.3 1.2-

3). Peer support was also a factor in Christina's success. She claimed that "the women in the course really supported one another and overall it was a good experience" (Christina p.1 1.28-29). Precious also credited her success to peer support. She asserted that "we were so accepting of each other" (Precious p. 1 1.17). "It was nice to have other people to share our struggles with, not just school work, but our lives as well, we were real with each other" (Precious p. 1 1.20-21).

In addition to peer support, family support was an essential factor for their success. Duquette (2000) postulated that, "having a personal support network was the most important variable related to the success of many of the students" (p. 141). It was a factor, that when present was a key indicator of success.

Four of the participants talked about their families being supportive of them. Spousal support was important to Taylor and Summer. Taylor's fiancé's support was instrumental to her success. Family and spousal support was also a positive aspect of Summer's college experience. She explained that "my husband was pushing me to get my education" (Summer p. 4 1. 23). "He is the one, he is my support person" (Summer p. 4 1.30). Duquette (2000) established in her study that "all 14 students reported that family members supported them in remaining in the program...for some married women husbands provided much needed moral and active support" (p.139). Christina talked about how supportive her children were and how proud they were of her when she graduated. Grover's mother was a positive influence in her success. She stated that "it was hard to do my work and every time I opened my books I broke down but my mom encouraged me" (Grover p. 3 1.23-24).

Kirkness examines positive teacher influence on Native students. She affirms that “the review of the type of teacher who has been most successful with Indian students is described as being one who is actively demanding, yet friendly and warm” (Kirkness, 1999, p. 62). Duquette (2000) states that “an important program element that contributed to the persistence of the students was the presence of their mentor teacher” (p.139). All seven participants comment that having an understanding and helpful instructor made a positive impact on their college experience.

Other writers support these findings. Smith Mohamed (1998) talks about the need for minority students to have appropriate role models as faculty members. She states that “as with other minorities, fundamental issues such as lack of support (financial and moral) and teacher/counselor discouragement of educational aspirations have been attributed to the severity of the problem” (Smith Mohamed, 1998, p. 247). She further states that negative relationships with teachers have had a high impact on the dropout rate. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) stress that through respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility, the Native students will be empowered to participate in higher education. Duquette (2000) supports the claim that caring instructors have a positive influence on the success of Native students.

All seven of the participants state that positive administrative and staff support is essential for their success as college students. Smaller classrooms enable them to get more help from the instructor. Taylor claims that “I liked small classes where we could discuss and interact” (Taylor p. 1 1.28-29). Petunia affirms that “just having the extra help made things easier. Being in a small room compared to the city’s big rooms makes people come together more and they listen more” (Petunia p.1 1.34-36).

An instructor that makes the extra effort inspired these participants to pursue success in their courses of study. Taylor states that “my teacher helped a lot” (Taylor p. 3 1.3). Christina observes that “normally our instructor would give us a brief overview about what we were doing, she was well organized, and she always gave us the information beforehand and told us what her expectations were” (Christina p. 1 1.35-37). “Not too many professors or instructors go out of their way in that fashion” (Christina p. 1 1.37-38). A positive professor also aids Precious in her college experience. She states that “my instructor...really helped me...encouraged us...always had positive things to look at...” (Precious p. 2 1.23-24). Aboriginal counselors were helpful in easing the transition to college for several of the participants.

Being Native

This theme emerges from how the participants felt about themselves as individuals and as Natives. Their feelings of self-worth impacted both positively and negatively on their college experience. Duquette (2000) states that “reasons cited by the student teachers for feeling like withdrawing from the program were lack of confidence, fatigue, poor health, perceived lack of support from the coordinators, inability to find babysitters, and personal problems” (p.138). Duquette (2000) also asserts that confidence is essential to assist students in completing their program and reaching graduation. Racism or the perception of racism fell into this category. Whether they truly experienced racism, if they perceived that others felt differently about them because they were Native, then it effected how they felt about themselves as individuals. Racism builds on the sub-theme of negative feelings of self-worth and impacts profoundly on their college experience.

Two of the seven participants talk about a poor self-image and how it affected them negatively. Duquette (2000) in her study, about First Nations student teachers, finds that some students "...lacked confidence and commitment. It is possible that the students who withdrew were not as firmly committed to their goal of becoming teachers" (p.141).

This present study differs from some of the findings of other writers and researchers. Hookimaw-Witt (1998) states that "a lot of problems that Native people have today came out of Residential Schools; psychological problems. And we passed our problems on to our children" (p. 160). "The wrong assumption is that all minority groups strive toward being accepted into society. For me that would only mean assimilation. Why would Native people want to be assimilated" (Hookimaw-Witt, 1998, p. 168)? The findings of this present study do not support the residential school conclusions as most of them are too young to have attended residential schools. However, their parents would have attended residential schools and could have passed their problems on to their children. The findings of this present study contradict the findings regarding assimilation. Many of these Native women found they wanted to assimilate into society and compete for employment on an equal footing.

Diane had low self-esteem and no confidence in her abilities when she initially started to take college courses. Because of this lack of self-esteem, she quit after the first semester. Diane states that several factors contributed to her poor self-concept. She identifies alcohol as an issue. She states that "again alcohol was the only way I could cope with my feelings...alcohol was a big thing that got in the way with my education which caused me to have low self-esteem" (Diane p.1 1.9-13). Diane states that she

carried a lot of shame because she had failed so many times with her college endeavors. “I never wanted to reach out for help until I needed it, I don’t know if it was pride or being embarrassed” (Diane p. 1 1.23-25).

Summer mentions numerous times that she felt scared when she first started college and that she lacked the confidence, initially, to face this new challenge in her life. Summer asserts that her inability to adjust successfully to college negatively impacted on her feelings of self worth. She states that “I found it so big and very confusing when I got there, to go get books and all that, it was scary. I almost didn’t go” (Summer p.1 1. 9-11).

Marker (2000) states that “Native students can internalize a generic image of what it means to be an Aboriginal person. This can increase their sense of alienation and marginalization” (p.45). Rudd (1997) remarks that adult learners have been learning to “cope with verbal and physical abuse, overcoming racist literature/curriculum, countering low expectations of teachers...” (p. 270). Klassen and Carr (1997) observe that “validation of lived experiences around race is a key to enhancing the educational experiences of all students” (p. 77). Richardson/Blanchet-Cohen (2000) declares that the “research indicates definite obstacles that prevent these groups from reaching postsecondary education. It is clear that racism impedes any approach to First Nation education” (p. 182). Wilson (1992) states that “students were aware of and very sensitive to racial prejudice in the school” (p. 51).

Some differences in this present study emerge from previous writers and researchers. Wilson (1992) states that “reserves are looked upon by mainstream society as being of low-status; therefore students coming from reserves were viewed as being

low-status students” (p. 54). Wilson (1992) also states that “high school personnel are culturally insensitive and do not believe that Indian students are capable” (p. 54).

Interviews with the seven participants did not support these findings.

All seven participants talk about racism or the perception of racism as a negative experience. This was surprising, as although it was suspected to be determinant in their enjoyment of college, the prevalence of racism or the perception of racism was unanticipated by the researcher. If there was racism it was subtle, yet nevertheless, it was obvious to the participants. Diane had the most obvious experience with racist comments made by a professor. He would say things like “what are they crying about now or using Native people as an example of being looked after by the government” (Diane p. 2 1.9-10). Taylor and Christina did not want to be labeled or stereotyped in a negative fashion. Taylor affirms that “I have this thing about being late. I didn’t want to be late because Natives seem to be late more than non-Natives—I didn’t want people labeling me as one of those late Natives” (Taylor p.1 1.22-27). Christina comments that “one thing I didn’t like was that at every opportunity, one of the girls was taking advantage of their education, they would come in late and that didn’t promote good educational ethics” (Christina p.2 1.6-8).

Christiana and Precious did not feel welcome on the student council and found it a frustrating experience to have their opinions undervalued. Christina states that “I really felt the college campus was promoting prejudice because every time we would bring forth concerns they were totally disregarded” (Christina p.1 1.26-27). Precious observes that “there was a student body and it just felt as though we were the back of the group, we weren’t fully included” (Precious p.1 1.23-25).

Summer believes that she was being treated differently because she was Native. “It was hard adjusting because of the way people talked to you, they seemed to know that you were an outsider, like you’re from the bush” (Summer, p.1 1.20-22). Grover and Petunia found that they did not fit in and even though Petunia tried to be part of a group, she was excluded. Grover states that “I wasn’t too sure if I could do it and I was uncomfortable with Native people because they were always fighting with one another, it seemed like to me” (Grover p.1 1.10-12). Petunia affirms that “I felt they looked down on my as a Native, even though I tried my best to fit in” (Petunia p.1 1. 5-6).

This study has illuminated a very serious concern for students in post-secondary experience. Although others have touched on the problem, they have never explored the magnitude of the problem. This is definitely an area that needs further study.

Five of the seven participants believe that feeling good about themselves was important to their success as a college student. Antone (2000) states that “I have come to realize the importance of having a positive self-identity” (p.95). Feeling good about themselves helped the participants push through the barriers and obstacles and press on toward success. Corbiere (2000) cites that “fostering individual self-esteem and pride in one’s ethnicity is inextricably linked to group identity. Fostering a positive self-image and forming a healthy identity are inherent in wholistic education” (p.114). Antone (2000) affirms that “I have come to realize the importance of having a positive self-identity in my own traditions to be able to exercise my voice in the concerns of my people” (p.95).

Initially Diane lacked confidence and even quit a few times. For this present course of studies she feels different about herself and is confident to finish and graduate.

Diane has grown as an individual and little successes have been a factor in her improved self-worth. Taylor believes her confidence and organizational skills were important to her doing well in school. Taylor states that “confidence helps me make friends easily. It helped me do well in school” (Taylor p. 2 1.30). Organizational skills helped Summer to cope with the college experience and she feels it gave her the confidence to do well. She states that “I drew a map of where I was supposed to go and I practiced finding the rooms on registration day...I wrote subjects down and stapled them in my locker” (Summer p. 2 1.17-20). Grover talks about her college experience as instrumental in her growth as an individual and she saw this in her ability to finally speak up for herself. She confirms that “I learned more about speaking up for myself...that actually made me feel good because I could stand up for myself” (Grover p.1 1.34-35). Christiana attributes her success to confidence in her years of experience as a good mother. She states that “given my age at the time I took this program I had already been a mother for over 20 years” (Christina p.2 1.24-25). When all of the participants talk about their feelings of self-worth there is a pride in themselves and their accomplishments.

Culture Shock

The emergent theme of culture shock includes a sub-theme of isolation, as they seem to deal with similar issues. Culture shock and isolation are interconnected and built upon each other. Other researchers support the evidence that culture shock can impact negatively on the college experience. Wright (1998) wants to see traditional colleges come up with stronger relationships with the Native communities. This would help lessen the effect of culture shock for students moving away from their home communities to attend college. Wilson (1992) studies the factors created by moving Native children

from their reserves to schools located off their reserves and in primarily largely white populated areas. “Members of minority groups must have a say in the process and the product of their education” (Wilson, 1992, p. 54). She further states that culture shock disempowers students. Hookimaw (1998) accentuates the uniqueness of Native students and their culture. She states that “the destruction of our cultures and the loss of self-esteem...has contributed directly to the problems in our communities” (Hookimaw, 1998, p. 160). Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen (2000) emphasize the need for a supportive environment to make the transition to university an easier one. They conclude that “some of the issues constitute obstacles for Aboriginal students are: the nature of the K-12 schooling system, low skills development and emotional barriers, stress related to relocating, for example finding housing, moving away from the family, feeling unsupported...” (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000, p.181). This study supports some of the experiences of isolation that these participants were feeling.

This present study differs from some of the findings of other writers and researchers. Wilson (1992) states that “the overwhelming frustration and isolation of students affects their academic performance” (p. 51). The students in this present study were able to overcome their isolation because of drive and support.

Five of the seven participants discuss culture shock in their interviews. Diane, Summer, and Petunia all came from very isolated First Nation communities that lived at a different pace than what they experienced at college and when moving into town. They lacked the life skills for living off reserve and had to learn everything on their own. Diane pronounces, “I was experiencing culture shock...being isolated and then coming to live in Fort Frances” (Diane p.1 1.5-6). Summer refers specifically to her experience with

culture shock. She states that “I have experience with culture shock from moving from a First Nation Reserve to the city. I got lost in the city when I first went to college. I don’t think I totally got over it...” (Summer p.1 1.2-4). Culture shock is one of the first issues that Petunia talks about. She asserts that “after coming from Lac La Croix it was hard for me to feel comfortable with a group, even though it was multi-cultural” (Petunia p. 1 1.4-5). Richardson/Blanchet-Cohen (2000) states that “a main challenge for the students is the transition from a supportive environment...to the university. The students need to be independent and ready for academic demands” (p. 175).

For Taylor and Grover their culture shock was not in moving from a First Nation community to town, but moving from a high school setting to a college setting. They both state that they were not adequately prepared for the transition. Taylor experiences a type of culture shock because she found college “a big change from high school” (Taylor p. 1 1.14). Grover feels the college experience to be overwhelming initially as it was quite different from her high school experience. She states that “it was kind of scary...I was kind of intimidated when we first started” (Grover p.1 1.2-5).

Loneliness and isolation from loved ones was also an issue for Taylor and Diane. Diane verifies that “I was 26 the first time I tried college and just gave up everything and I was living alone” (Diane p.1 1.13-14). Isolation was one of the contributing factors to Diane’s initial lack of success. For Taylor, her “fiancé being away made me lonely and that made it hard” (Taylor p.3 1.18-19). There were times when Taylor considered the loneliness overwhelming and wondered if they were doing the right thing by being so far apart.

Summer, Grover and Petunia also experience isolation, at least initially. Summer has a foster child who was only two years old when Summer started college. Summer states that “I found that so hard. I would come home on weekends but when I left she would cry” (Summer p. 4 1.16-17). Grover observes that “ I knew some people when I first started out so that made it easier to come to school” (Grover p. 1 1.8-9). Whether it was isolation from their community, or family, or other peers it was a negative aspect of their college experience.

Personal Problems

The emergent theme of personal problems includes a myriad of sub-themes that will be discussed below. All seven of the participants experience a varied degree of personal problems while attending college. Although each participant experienced unique personal problems, many of their problems are similar and impacted on their enjoyment of the college experience. Although financial difficulties, alcoholism, illness, and family responsibilities are all different personal experiences; they all are consistent with the lived college experience. Duquette (2000) states that “other reasons cited by the student teachers for feeling like withdrawing from the program were fatigue, poor health...and personal problems” (p.138). Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen (2000) affirm that “although attending a university or college is an important step, completing the program is another...the reasons are various...many of the reasons for low attendance relate to the problems of abuse (e.g., alcoholism)...” (p. 182).

Although their personal problems were vastly different, it impacted negatively on their college experience. One of the things that seemed to help them deal with their personal problems is the support of peers, family, and administration. If they had that

support factor, they seemed to be able to get beyond their personal problems and continue with their education until completion.

The findings of other researchers gives examples of ways personal problems can act as a barrier to post-secondary success. Duquette (2000) asserts that “other reasons cited by the student teachers for feeling like withdrawing from the program were fatigue, poor health...and personal problems” (p.138). Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) state that there needs to be a focus on the need for a “higher educational system that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility over their lives” (p. 9). Mackeracher (1984) states that educational programs are not meeting the specific needs of women and found that the lack of child-care services are a barrier to women’s regular attendance in a program.

Five of the seven participants comment on the financial difficulties of attending college. Taylor and Grover who lived at home, did not have the financial difficulties or responsibilities that the others experienced. For Diane, Summer, and Petunia financial difficulties are definitely a barrier that had to be overcome in order for them to successfully complete their course of studies. As a mother and wife, Diane’s financial difficulties are a factor in her not completing college programs. She states that “due to financial difficulties...I quit again to work full time” (Diane p.2 1.23-24). Summer finds that “banking, the financial part of it, making arrangements to make payment for our rent and having our money transferred to another bank...I didn’t know anything, how to do all this stuff” (Summer p.2 1.2-5). Petunia states that financial difficulties were the hardest part for her. “The financial part was hard, especially with kids and a family. Finances

were the hardest thing” (Petunia p. 2 1.1-2). Although Precious never mentions financial difficulties, it can be presumed that as a single mom, with children in daycare while she attended school, financial difficulties must have been an issue, on occasion.

All seven of the participants believe that negative personal experiences, while they were attending college, impacted on their enjoyment of the college experiences. For two participants, alcohol impacts negatively on their college experience. Diane quits her college program and Grover ends up in a very serious accident, which impairs her ability to give her studies the amount of time and energy required. She almost quit and would have done so except for the understanding and support of her instructors, peers, and her mother. Diane declares that “alcohol was a big thing and got in the way of my education...” (Diane p. 1 1.11-12). Grover confesses that “when I got in my accident, I was not too sure if I wanted to come back, I had a lot of emotional and physical pain and guilt about drinking and driving” (Grover p.3 1.12-14).

Illness impacts on two of the participants. Taylor contracted mono in her last semester and was very ill. Because she had been very successful to that point, her drive and determination to stay on the dean’s list enables her to go to school and do her work even when she does not feel well. She affirms that “I was really sick that last semester. I had mono” (Taylor p.3 1.7-9). “I guess those things could have hindered me if I let them...I wouldn’t let my being sick keep me at home” (Taylor p.3 1.11-12). Christina’s son was diagnosed with cancer and she considered quitting. It was his support for her schooling that kept her there. He was very proud of her when she graduated. She recalls that “at one point I actually felt like quitting because my son was sick, and I felt guilty” (Christina p.2 1.32-34).

Family responsibilities are cited by five of the seven participants as impediments to the successful enjoyment of their college experience. When Diane remarried she took on the responsibility of three stepchildren, besides the responsibility of her own child. She states that “at that time I had Stephanie with me and trying to look after three other children...that was hard” (Diane p. 2 1.15-17). Precious is a single mom trying to raise two young sons on her own. Attending school and ensuring that her son was breast-fed on lunch hours was very hectic for Precious. She recalls that “my son was two years old and when I started the program I was pregnant and had my baby just a few weeks into the program and so when I got back to class it was pretty hectic” (Precious p.1 1.12-14). “I would say that being a single mom hindered things but I overcame that...Dawson wouldn’t take a bottle so I would have to go and nurse him during my lunch hour” (Precious p.2 1.16-18). Summer had to leave her 2 year old to attend school in another community and it affected the behaviour of her child who started acting out, to protest her mother’s absence. She recollects that “after my second year, her behaviour changed for the bad, probably because of my being away and not being there for her” (Summer p.4 1.18-19). Petunia finds that caring for her small children left little time for homework and she experiences a lot of guilt about leaving them while she was in school. Petunia asserts that “sometimes I would take the kids to the daycare but that was hard on all of us, we would all cry, but I kept thinking that I wanted a better life for them” (Petunia p. 1 1.23-25). Petunia had many personal issues that had the potential of interfering with her successful completion of her college program. Petunia ended up in a crisis home for a month because of an abusive relationship. Even though she missed a month of college, she came back and did everything she could to catch up to the other students. Because of

her ability to overcome her personal problems, Petunia was able to graduate with the other students.

Summary

This chapter has extended the analyses and presented focused observations with a figure to illustrate the collapse of the literature supporting the participants' transcripts.

The themes of drive or determination, support, being Native, culture shock, and personal experiences emerge and define the dimensions of the college experience as described by the participants.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The research question, *what are Native women's experiences in post-secondary education* has been examined quantitative research design based on the experiences of seven Native college students who were selected purposefully from a pool of Native women students at a local college. The aim of the study is to gain deeper insight into everyday experiences. The study was conducted according to university ethical guidelines for research on human subjects.

Summarized in this chapter are the major components of the report, descriptions of the emergent themes and sub-themes, and implications associated with Native women student learners in post-secondary courses.

Summary of the Study

Wright (1998) states that "First Nations people of Canada are seven times less likely to graduate from university as are members of the general population" (p. 85). I noticed that there seems to be significant numbers of Native women dropping out before graduation is achieved. The purpose of this study is to explore the *experiences of Native women in post-secondary education* and through this qualitative study I sought to develop a greater understanding of the needs of Native women who are students in post-secondary community college programs. I also wanted to do a study that would provide a better understanding of the benefits or barriers Native women experience. The findings from the

study may be useful for instructors, professors, and administrators in offering optimum programming and support for their students.

Participant Profiles and Data Analyses were generated and presented in Chapter Four. The profiles serve to acquaint the reader with the participants as well as providing a framework for the data analyses, which is analyzed by the thematic analysis method (Van Manen, 1994). This process involves “recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work”, (Van Manen, 1994 p.78). From the data analysis four preliminary themes emerge in which the participants share similar positive experiences. They are drive or determination; support from friends, family, peers; feelings of self-worth; and administration and staff support. Eight themes emerge in which the participants share common negative experiences. The categories for the negative experiences are culture shock, isolation, low self-esteem, racism, financial difficulties, negative personal experiences, lack of support services, and family responsibilities.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to create the participants’ transcripts. Field notes were made during the data collection and transcripts were analyzed. The first phase of the data analysis consists of a search for statements, from the interviews, about how the participants experience the problem. In the second phase significant statements are listed ensuring that every participant’s statement is viewed “as having equal worth, and worked to develop a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements” (Creswell, 1998, p.147). Then the information is examined for views that are similar and views that are different, within and between the participants’ comments. Preliminary categories or themes are then selected to organize the participants’

transcripts. From these categories or themes there is an attempt to find similarities and differences in the lived experiences and views of the participants, and to describe any patterns or linkages found in the information and a search for competing themes or explanations. Common themes are identified as culture shock, isolation, negative feelings of self-worth, racism, financial difficulties, negative personal experiences, lack of support services, family responsibilities, and lack of administrative and staff support. From the collapsing of the preliminary themes, five emergent themes remain. They are drive or determination, support, being Native, culture shock, and personal experiences.

The Interpretation phase extends the analyses and presents focused observations. The themes are significant because they elaborate on the participants' college experiences by illuminating the realities of the participants' worlds. These realities emerge from the participants' words and the researcher's interpretation of their transcripts. These realities represent the participants' personal feelings, as they describe their college experience.

The literature review includes *Adult Education*, *Educational Needs of Native Adult Students*, and *Women in Post-secondary Education*. These categories inform the current research study and help support the findings. The research questions for this study are:

1. What are the Native women's experiences in post-secondary education?
2. What experiences help Native women to be successful in post-secondary college programs?
3. What experiences act as barriers to success, for Native women in post-secondary education?

Conclusions

What are the Native women's experiences in post-secondary education?

The findings support the premise that although the lived experiences of all participants are unique to each participant, there are numerous commonalities for all seven of the participants. From the collapsing of the preliminary themes, five emergent themes become apparent. They are drive or determination, support, being Native, culture shock, and personal experiences. All seven participants experience these issues as part of their college experience. Each participant's experience is distinctive, yet within these five themes there are shared experiences.

What experiences helped Native women be successful?

Several shared experiences enable each of the participants to be successful in their post-secondary endeavors. They are drive or determination, support, and positive feelings of self-worth.

Drive or determination:

The participants' transcripts confirm findings of earlier research. Five of the seven participants' statements indicate that drive or determination is a factor in making their college experience a successful experience. Diane states that "I feel good where I am at in my life and I am confident to finish the program" (Diane p.4 1.20-22).

Christina states that her "goals really helped her to succeed" (Christina p. 2 1.30).

Three of the participants accredit their success to knowing they needed a good education to get a good job and to secure a better future for them. Taylor talks about how she and her fiancé "both wanted a good future with good jobs" (Taylor p. 3 1.4-5).

Petunia discusses how she knew that her education would give her good job

opportunities. She states that “I didn’t want to live on welfare so I would work as hard as I could” (Petunia p.1 1.25-26). All seven of the participants are presently employed and attribute their successful job acquisition to their completion of a college program.

Stephen and Beaudet (1998) stress that adult learners look for results from educational institutions that are pertinent to their job expectations. Rudd (1997) argues that without a post-secondary education, full-time employment is not as readily available. The findings of these writers support this present study.

Duquette (2000) confirms that “the two most frequently reported characteristics reported by the participants were goal orientation and persistence” (p.141). She further states that “the findings show that having a strong goal orientation and the personal quality of persistence may have promoted feelings of optimism and influenced students’ decisions to persist in the program” (Duquette, 2000, p.141). Kirkness (1999) emphasizes that “Indian people continue to believe that education is necessary not only for our survival, but for a meaningful future” (p.58).

Wilson (1992) states that “the differences in performance is related to unresolved cultural discontinuity, experienced as conflict, which is faced by the students. This conflict leads to lower achievement” (p. 54). The findings of Wilson’s (1992) study differ from this present study. This present study does not find that conflict leads to lower academic achievement and differs from the Wilson findings in that drive or determination to succeed minimizes the effects of conflict on academic performance.

Support:

All seven participants stress support as a mitigating factor in determining their success. If positive support is offered from family, peers, and administration then the post-secondary experience has a higher likelihood of being successful.

All seven participants mention they had peer support and that this was part of their successful school experiences. Without peer support Summer states she would never have completed her studies as “the new students that were coming out from the First Nations for the first time, we stuck together through the whole course because we were all experiencing the same thing” (Summer p. 2 1. 17-18). For Grover support is an important factor in her college experience being a successful one. She states that “the students who were there they helped me by giving me their notes when I needed them for the final exam...” (Grover p.3 1.15-17). Petunia finds the support of fellow students is a feature of her success. She asserts that “I felt more close to this class, that I could talk to them about my personal life, I felt like a family in that class and I could trust everyone there” (Petunia p. 1 1.29-30). Precious credits her success to the support of her classmates. Precious claims that “in the class that I was part of, we were so accepting of each other, it was nice to know that I wasn’t going to step on anyone’s toes, for being late or for bringing my baby to class” (Precious p.1 1.16-18).

The literature corroborates the issue of peer support as a mitigating factor for success. Corbiere (2000) emphasizes that “another dimension of Nishnaabe knowledge is the maintenance and development of relationships. These relationships are to the immediate and extended family” (p.117). For many of these participants, their classmates become extended family and they are often referred to as feeling like a big

family. Duquette (2000) stresses that the “third element of the program organization that benefited the student teachers was the community...the students provided one another with moral support” (p.139). The evidence from the literature validates that peer support is an essential element of success.

Four of the participants talk about their families being supportive of them.

Christina talks about how her children were supportive of her and how her desire to be a good role model to her children was a factor in her success. She states that “I wanted to be a role model for my children...they were really proud of me when I graduated” (Christina p.2 1.24-25, 29-30). Grover discovers that her mother’s support is especially important after her accident. She declares that “it was hard to do my work and every time I opened my books I broke down but my mom encouraged me” (Grover p. 3 1.23-24).

Duquette (2000) supports the premise that family support is an essential element for success in the post-secondary experience. Duquette (2000) explores the premise that “all 14 students reported that family members supported them in remaining in the program...for some married women husbands provided much needed moral and active support” (p.139).

All seven of the participants state that positive administrative and staff support is essential for their success as college students. Two participants discover that the smaller classroom size makes it easier to get the extra help they need. Taylor comments that “I liked small classes where we could discuss and interact” (Taylor p. 1 1.28-29). Petunia believes that the smaller classroom size helps people to listen to each other and be closer to each other. Petunia states that “just having extra help made things easier. Being in a

small classroom compared to the cities' big rooms makes people come together more and they listen more" (Petunia p.1 1.34-36).

All seven participants talk about how an understanding instructor, who is concerned about the students as individuals, makes the college experience more enjoyable. Summer comments that "our Aboriginal coordinator was very helpful, he is a Native from the other side of Thunder Bay...he helped us a lot. He told us where to go if we ever needed help" (Summer p. 1 1.27-29). Christina discovers that when her instructor made the extra effort to be encouraging and understanding she was able to have a more positive post-secondary experience. She states that "normally our instructor would give us a brief overview about what we were doing, she was well organized, she always gave us the information beforehand and told us what her expectations were" (Christina p. 1 1.35-37).

Kirkness (1999) cites that the "Type IV teacher is a teacher whose style is demanding and elicits a high level of intellectual participation. The type IV teacher tended to be highly success" (p. 61). The review of the type of teacher who has been most success with Aboriginal students is described as being one who is actively demanding, yet friendly and warm (Kirkness, 1999). The literature confirms the assertion that support from family, friends, peers, and administration is an essential element of a successful college experience.

Te Hennepe (1993) states that "there can be no true Indian education without Indian control. Anything else is white education applied to Indians" (p. 198). Te Hennepe (1993) declares that Native students would never achieve a large measure of success unless Natives controlled the post-secondary institution. This differs from the

findings of this present study, as none of the seven participants ever stated they felt they would have been happier or more successful in a Native controlled college. They all comment that their experience was, in general, a positive one. Te Hennepe's (1993) findings are rigid and leave little room for Native students who want to compete on an equal footing in "white" society. These participants did achieve a large measure of success in a traditional institution that was not Native controlled.

Positive Feelings of Self-worth:

The third shared experience of success is positive feelings of self-worth. Five of the seven participants state that feeling good about themselves is important to their success as a college student. Initially Diane lacks confidence and even ends up quitting a few times until she started in this most recent program. She proudly states that "today I feel I can stand up for myself, for what I want in a positive and constructive way...I feel good about myself...where I am in my life" (Diane p. 4 1.17-19, 20-21). Taylor also talks about having confidence because she was involved with sports and with her community. She affirms that "my sports were a big thing for my success. They gave me confidence" (Taylor p. 2 1.25).

Duquette (2000) affirms that "reasons cited by the student teachers for feeling like withdrawing from the college program were lack of confidence..."(p.138). Duquette (2000) also states that confidence is essential to assist students in completing their program and reaching graduation. Corbiere (2000) cites that "fostering individual self-esteem and pride in one's ethnicity is inextricably linked to group identity. Fostering a positive self-image and forming a healthy identity are inherent to wholistic education" (p.114). Antone (2000) observes that "I have come to realize the importance of having a

positive self-identity in my own traditions to be able to exercise my voice in the concerns of my people” (p.95). The literature supports the argument that positive self-esteem is an essential factor for success.

The Wilson (1992) study illuminates some different findings from this present study. Wilson (1992) states that “reserves are looked upon by mainstream society as being of low-status; therefore students coming from reserves were viewed as being low-status students” (p. 54). Wilson (1992) also states that “high school personnel are culturally insensitive and do not believe that Indian students are capable” (p. 54). Some of the participants maintain that lack of cultural sensitivity is a hindrance that they had to overcome.

What Experiences Acted as Barriers to Success?

Issues of poor self-worth, racism, culture shock, and personal problems were potential barriers to the participants.

Poor Self-worth:

All seven participants address their feelings about themselves as Native women as potential barriers to their success. For Diane issues of alcohol abuse make her feel bad about herself and really affect her self-worth in her initial college experience. She states that “alcohol was the only way I could cope with my feelings...alcohol was a big thing that got in the way with my education which caused me to have low self-esteem” (Diane p.1 1.9-13). In her initial college experience, Petunia felt isolated from the non-Native students in her classroom. It made her feel bad about herself. She declares that “I was by myself and there was a certain group in the classroom and they would talk amongst themselves and I felt on the outside” (Petunia p. 1 1.11-13). Precious also felt excluded

and it promoted negative feelings of self-worth. She recalls that “they would ask us opinions but then go ahead and do what they had already decided” (Precious p.1 1.23-26).

The literature supports the idea that a poor self-concept can negatively impact on the college experience and act as a barrier to success. Antone (2000) states that “I have come to realize the importance of a positive self-identity” (p.95). Duquette (2000) in her study about First Nations student teachers finds that some students “...lacked confidence and commitment. It is possible that the students who withdrew were not as firmly committed to their goal of becoming teachers” (p.141). The literature supports the argument that a poor self-image can affect students and can act as barriers to their successful completion of the course of studies.

This present study differs from some of the findings of other writers and researchers. Hookimaw-Witt (1998) states that “a lot of problems that Native people have today came out of Residential Schools; psychology problems. And we passed our problems on to our children” (p. 160). “The wrong assumption is that all minority groups strive toward being accepted into society. For me that would only mean assimilation. Why would Native people want to be assimilated” (Hookimaw-Witt, 1998, p. 168)? The findings of this present study did not support the residential school conclusions, as most of these participants are too young to have attended residential school. However, most of their parents would have attended residential school and issues from that experience were in all probability passed down to their children. The findings of this present study contradict the findings regarding assimilation. Many of these Native

women participants state they want to assimilate into society and compete for employment on an equal footing.

Racism:

All seven participants affirm that racism negatively impacted on their college experience. Racism or allegations of racism may be too strong of a term to label what these participants went through. If there was racism it was subtle rather than obvious, except in Diane's case. Comments made by one of Diane's professor's could certainly be construed as racist comments. He would say things like "what are they crying about now or using Native people as an example of being looked after by the Government" (Diane p. 2 1.9-10). Taylor's perception of racism comes from how she feels non-Natives view Native people. She asserts that "I had this thing about being late. I didn't want to be late because Natives seem to be late more than non-Natives-I didn't want people labeling me as one of those late Natives" (Taylor p. 1 1.22-27). The issue of racism or being treated differently because she was Native is an issue with Summer. She states that "it was hard adjusting because of the way people talked to you, they seemed to know that you were an outsider, like you're from the bush" (Summer p. 1 1.20-22). Petunia observes that "some people say there is no racism, but there is" (Petunia p. 1 1.16). Racism is an outstanding issue for Christina. She says that "I really felt the college campus was promoting prejudice, because every time we would bring forth concerns they were totally disregarded" (Christina p. 1 1.26-27).

Marker (2000) states that "Native students can internalize a generic image of what it means to be an Aboriginal person. This can increase their sense of alienation and marginalization" (p.44). Richardson/Blanchet-Cohen (2000) declare that "the research

indicates definite obstacles that prevent these groups from reaching postsecondary education. It is clear that racism impedes any approach to First Nation education” (p. 182). The literature clearly supports racism as a barrier to a successful college experience. Many researchers have illuminated the problem of racism. Further research is needed to illustrate ways to overcome racism in our educational institutions.

Culture Shock:

Five of the seven participants experience culture shock to some extent. For Taylor and Grover it is the culture shock of coming from a high school setting right into college, with inadequate preparation for the transition. Taylor states that she found college a “big change from high school” (Taylor p.1 1.14). Grover announces that she was “kind of intimidated when we first started...in high school you had a mixture of non-Native and Native people” (Grover p. 1 1.3-5).

For Diane, Summer, and Petunia it is a different type of culture shock. They all came from isolated First Nation communities and moving to town to attend college was very difficult for them. One of the first issues that Petunia brings to light is culture shock. “After coming from Lac La Croix it was hard for me to feel comfortable with a group, even though it was multi-cultural” (Petunia p. 1 1.4-5).

Richardson/Blanchet-Cohen (2000) affirm that “a main challenge for the students is the transition from a supportive environment...to the university. The students need to be independent and ready for academic demands” (p. 181). Richardson/Blanchet-Cohen (2000) conclude that some of “the issues that constitute obstacles for Aboriginal students are: the nature of the K-12 schooling system, low skills development and emotional barriers, stress related to relocating, for example finding housing, moving away from

family, feeling unsupported..." (p. 181). This study confirms that culture shock is a barrier for Native students.

This present study differs from some of the findings of other writers and researchers. Wilson (1992) states that "the overwhelming frustration and isolation of students affects their academic performance" (p. 54). These participants found isolation a hindrance to their initial enjoyment of the college experience. However, the students in this present study were able to overcome their isolation because of drive and support and were successful in the completion of their course of studies.

Personal Problems:

All seven participants experience a variety of personal problems while attending college. Although their personal problems are varied, they impact negatively on their college experience. Five of the seven participants comment on the financial difficulties of attending college. For Diane, financial difficulties are initially a factor in her not completing her first programs of study. She states that "due to financial difficulties...I quit again to work full time" (Diane p. 2 1.23-24).

All seven of the participants state that negative personal experiences, while they are attending college, impact on their enjoyment of the college experience. For two of the participants, the misuse of alcohol acts as a barrier to their success. Alcohol effects Grover's college experience in a negative manner. Due to drinking she ends up in a serious car accident and because it took her months to recover fully, she almost did not graduate. She explains, "when I got in my accident, I was not too sure if I wanted to come back, I had a lot of emotional and physical pain and guilt about drinking and driving" (Grover p.3 1.12-14).

Illness affects two of the participants and has the capacity to be a negative barrier for them. Taylor contracts mono in her last semester and is very ill. She affirms that “I was really sick in that last semester. I had mono...I guess those things could have hindered me if I let them. But I didn’t” (Taylor p.3 1.11,16). Christina’s son was diagnosed with cancer and she also considers quitting at that time. She explains that “at one point I actually felt like quitting, because my son was sick, and I felt guilty but I hung in there...” (Christina p.2 1.32-33).

Family responsibilities are cited by five of the seven participants as barriers to the successful enjoyment of their college experience. Diane states that “at that time I had Stephanie with me and trying to look after three other children and with him working shift work...that was hard” (Diane p.2 1.15-17). Precious is a single mom trying to raise two sons on her own and attend school fulltime. She declares that “my son was 2 years old and when I started the program I was pregnant and had my baby just a few weeks into the program and so when I got back to class it was pretty hectic” (Precious p.1 1.12-14).

The literature supports how personal problems can act as a barrier to postsecondary success. Duquette (2000) asserts, “Other reasons cited by the student teachers for feeling like withdrawing from the program were fatigue, poor health...and personal problems” (p.138). Mackeracher (1984) discusses a compelling need to improve learning opportunities for *Women in Post-secondary Education*. She maintains that certain educational programs are not meeting the specific needs of women. She identifies educational needs, psychological needs, financial needs, and lack of child-care services as barriers to women’s regular attendance in a program.

Implications

From this qualitative study of the lived experiences of Native women in post-secondary education, five main implications emerge. The innate drive or determination that characterizes each of these women is a positive factor in their success as students. This drive or determination for a better life is a determinant of success and adult learners are looking for results from educational institutions that are pertinent to their job expectations. For Native women, a good education is necessary, not only for their survival but for a meaningful future. Further research is necessary to examine how drive or determination can impact positively for students' success and how educators can help facilitate the students toward this success.

The second implication is that support from family, peers, and administration is an essential factor for success. If positive support is offered from family, peers, and administration then the post-secondary experience has a higher likelihood of being successful. If there is lack of support, then it becomes a barrier to the participants' success. Smaller classroom size enables the participants to get more one-on-one help from the instructor. Friendly and supportive instructors who are understanding and helpful also help students feel supported. Native support staff or counselors are also viewed as positive support factors in easing the transition to college. This implies the need for further research to ascertain how additional administrative support will increase the likelihood for success with students. Studies that examine the present practices of post-secondary institutions and look for ways to enhance present practices will be beneficial research to determine methods of increasing student success.

This third theme of Being Native emerges from how the participants felt about themselves as individuals and as Natives. Feelings of self-worth impact both positively and negatively on their college experience. It is very surprising to me that all seven of the participants felt that they experienced racism to some degree or another. Racism or the perception of racism impacted on all seven participants. Whether they received overt racist attitudes towards them or whether they perceived that others felt differently about them because they were Native, it impacted negatively on their college experience and effects how they feel about themselves as individuals. Further research is necessary to examine the question of racism and to determine how this can be positively overcome in our post-secondary institutions. Further research is needed to assist Native students in overcoming low self-esteem and enable them to be a positive factor in overcoming racism in our post-secondary institutions.

The fourth implication that emerges is culture shock and isolation as a barrier for many of the women who completed their programs and is probably a factor or barrier for women who did not complete their course of studies. Lack of life skills for living off reserve and not being adequately prepared for the college experience is a barrier for these participants. This focuses attention on the need for good personalized orientation and Native support services or counselors in our post-secondary institutions. First-rate orientation programs will enhance effective strategies for student success.

The last implication that emerges is that participants experience personal problems that have to be overcome in order for them to be successful. Each participant is unique in their problems although lack of finances and lack of support came up frequently in the transcripts. This focuses attention on the need for strong counseling and

support services in each of our post-secondary institutions. If positive support is available, the participants appear to be more successful in dealing with personal issues and more successful with their program of study. Family responsibilities such as child rearing add to the stresses of day-to-day schooling. Many of the participants believe it would be advantageous to have daycares on campus so that they would not feel so isolated from their children, while they are attending classes. This focuses on the need to advocate with the funding sources to understand the advantages of daycares on campuses.

These five themes can be brought forward into a new framework to guide further research. What can be learned from these experiences of the seven participants that will guide further research?

The first aspect that can be learned from these Native women is listening to the voices of Native women students. Further qualitative research is needed where the researcher is listening to what Native women have experienced and what they believe would help them to be successful and to overcome the barriers they encounter in college or university. They know what will work for them and what will not. Pivotal events in their post-secondary experience will either enhance the learning experience or hinder it. Intense research is needed to assist post-secondary institutions in understanding what will enable students to be successful and especially what will facilitate Native women in their successful completion of a post-secondary course of studies. Such research would illuminate the meaning of learning to Native women, what enables them to be fulfilled at college or university, and how post-secondary institutions can facilitate a better learning environment for them.

The second aspect of a framework for further research is the need for classroom research in college courses to examine the environment and its effect on the academic performance of Native women students. Do Native women learn better with courses that are culturally appropriate? Do Native women learn better when they have Native counselors to help them deal with personal and academic problems? Do Native women learn better when the classroom size is smaller as opposed to large theatre style classrooms? Do Native women learn better when instructors are invested in their students as individuals and take the time to interact with them on a warmer, friendlier level? Are daycares on campuses an essential element for the success of Native women in the post-secondary experience? This research could include input from faculty, administration, Native women students who are successful and graduate and Native women students who were not successful. A final need, based on research, would be policy development and implementation to address the learning needs of Native women students. There is a large potential for further research around issues faced by Native women students, how colleges and universities can play a positive role in the success of these students, and how partnerships with Native communities and leaderships may lead to a better understanding of Native students in our colleges and universities.

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APPENDIX A:
COVER LETTER

Dear Participant:

My name is Marlis Bruyere and I am conducting a study, for my Master of Education thesis, on the lived experiences of Aboriginal women in post-secondary education. Through this research, I hope to gain a greater understanding of the needs of Aboriginal women who are students in post-secondary community college programs.

The intent of this research is to identify any barriers or issues that may be keeping Aboriginal women from being successful graduates of a post-secondary community college program. This study will also focus on what lived experiences have helped some women be successful in completing their course of study.

To accomplish this goal, I would like to interview you and let you talk about your experiences as an Aboriginal student in a post-secondary program. The interview will take approximately an hour.

All information gathered during the interview will remain confidential and securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. All answers are acceptable, as there is no right or wrong, lived experience.

Should you agree to participate, your anonymity will be assured by assigning you a pseudonym. This is a voluntary study and you have the right to withdraw at any time. I do not anticipate any risks to your participation in this study.

The data will be used so that colleges will have a greater understanding of the experiences of Aboriginal women as students of their facilities. When this study is completed, you may have a copy of this study by sending me a written request.

Sincerely,

Marlis Bruyere

APPENDIX B:
CONSENT FORM

My signature on this sheet indicates I agree to participate in a study by Marlis Bruyere, on Lived Experiences of Native Women in Post-Secondary Education. It also indicates that I understand the following:

1. I am a volunteer and can withdraw at any time from the study.
2. There is no apparent risk of physical or psychological harm.
3. The data I provide will be confidential and I will be assigned a pseudonym.
4. I will receive a summary of the study, upon written request, following the completion of the study.
5. Raw data will be securely stored for seven years as required by Lakehead University Research Guidelines.

I have received explanations about the nature of the study, its purpose, and procedures.

Signature of Participant

Date

Phone number

Signature of Researcher

Date

Phone number

Appendix C:

Guiding Questions for Participants

1. Tell me about your experiences as a Native woman college student.
2. Describe a typical day as a college student.
3. What experiences have you liked and disliked as a college student?
4. What experiences have helped you be successful as a college student and what experiences have hindered your success?
5. What would you like to see changed if you were asked to give advice?

Researcher Probes

1. Tell me about your experiences as a Native woman college student.
 - a. Motivation?
 - b. Beginning courses?
 - c. Where are you now?
 - d. Student organizations other?
 - e. Positive? Negative?
2. Describe a typical day as a college student.
 - a. Study time? Assignments? Projects? Reports? Group work?
 - b. Non-Native classmates? Other Native classmates? Faculty?
Administration?
 - c. Family responsibilities? Family support?
3. What experiences have you liked and disliked as a college student?
 - a. Courses? Faculty? Administration?

- b. Classmates support? Family support? Administrative support?
- 4. What experiences have helped you be successful or hindered your success?
 - a. Courses? Faculty? Administration?
 - b. Personal Issues? Family Issues? Supports?
- 5. What would you like to see changed if you were asked to give advice?
 - a. Time-lines? Deadlines? Scheduling?
 - b. Student support organization?
 - c. Communication with faculty? Contributions to class?